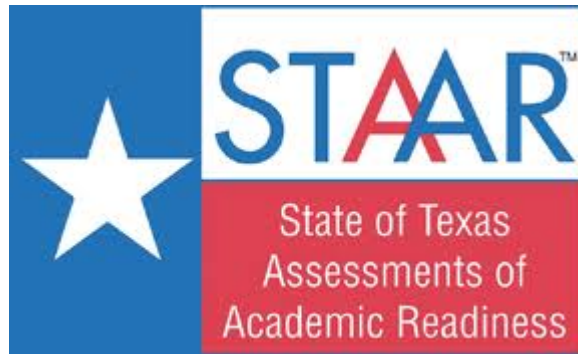


# New STAAR Test More Challenging Than TAKS



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by: Jack Williams

**Implementation of the state's new accountability exam, the so-called "STAAR" test, is just a few months away, and ups the stakes considerably when it comes to what students and educators need to know.**

Dr. Nancy Gregory, who oversees curriculum and instruction at the [Houston Independent School District](#), appears calm as she sits in an office at HISD headquarters. But she admits the new test, which replaces TAKS, is indeed a whole new challenge.

*"It's daunting because we know for a fact across the state that when TEA says the tests will be more rigorous — yes, the tests will be more rigorous."*

Gregory has been part of the state process to vet questions on the new test, which begins at the end of March. She says TAKS has been a good test, but not hard enough in some areas.

*"TAKS is a great improvement over TAAS, but now we have something that is really upping the level of instruction many, many, many levels and that can only be a good thing."*

Students will be expected to answer more complex questions on a longer test that requires more high-level thinking. They'll also have less time to complete it, only four hours per test compared to the untimed TAKS test. Gregory says students will notice a big change in the math and science tests.

*"We will have, for the first time, open-ended questions. So instead of having a question with four answer options, it's just a question. The kids have a grid that they work with and they have some work space and they have to do their own thinking without any hints from answer options."*

Students will also be required to be proficient in expository writing, not just narrative writing. Universities have complained that high school graduates have the narrative writing down, but fall short when it comes to writing in a more informational style.

*"The kids will be writing in 4th grade, sticking with narration, but also writing an expository piece. In 7th grade, narration, but an expository piece. In 9th grade, exposition has been added. In 10th grade, exposition and persuasion has been added."*

*In 11th grade, it's persuasion and analysis. So the kinds of writing that are now required are tougher than what they've been in the past."*

Elementary students in grades 3-8 won't see much of a change when it comes to which subjects they'll be tested on. The changes are more pronounced in high school, where 9th graders will be the first to take the [STAAR test](#) in the spring. Current sophomores and upperclassmen will finish high school taking the TAKS. The new tests will also now be end of course exams each year that count toward a cumulative score that has to be met in order to graduate.

Not everyone thinks the new test is a good idea, including [Gayle Fallon](#). She's the head of the largest teacher's union in Houston.

*"The biggest problem we've got is it's a significant jump in difficulty in a year to be followed by another year where we're seeing the largest class sizes we've ever seen. We're seeing resources disappear on a daily basis. I'm not saying our teachers can't do it, but it's kind of like saying run this race and we're going to tie both your hands behind your back. Now good luck."*

Districts like HISD say they've worked hard to prepare teachers and students for the new test. One thing is still missing. The state hasn't decided on passing standards on the test yet. That should come after the first of the year.