

School districts are preparing for STAAR tests

The new testing is called STAAR - State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness. The first STAAR tests will be administered March 26.

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By [Joe Gulick](#)

The latest generation of state standardized student testing is coming very soon — and with less clarity than Texas school districts would prefer.

The new testing is called STAAR — State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness. The first STAAR tests will be administered March 26.

When the school year began in late August, school districts knew almost nothing about STAAR, said Lisa Leach, the Lubbock Independent School District's assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

The first sample questions for STAAR tests were not released by the Texas Education Agency to districts until October.

The first guidelines about

STAAR end-of-course (EOC) exams, which will be taken by ninth-graders this year, didn't come out until after school started, Leach said. EOC rule changes were still arriving as late as December, she said.

Standardized testing this year is a confusing situation that begins with three different types of tests:

- Students in grades 10 and 11 will continue to take Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests, Leach said.
- Students in grades 3-8 will take STAAR tests.
- The biggest change is for ninth-graders, who will take STAAR end-of-course exams. They will continue to take them for courses they will take in the next two years.

Counting toward
the grade

Beginning with this year's freshman class, students will take 12 end-of-course exams by the time they finish the 11th grade.

“These are course-specific tests. A ninth-grader in algebra I will take an algebra I end-of-course exam. A ninth-grader in geometry will take a geometry exam,” said Macy Satterwhite, chief academic officer of the Lubbock-Cooper ISD.

The Texas Legislature increased the significance of the end-of-course tests by requiring them to count as 15 percent of the students’ final grades in the courses, Leach said.

It is the first time in Texas history standardized test scores have been made part of the course grades, Satterwhite said.

“You can imagine the stress of those ninth-grade teachers,” Satterwhite said.

Not to mention the parents.

Last week, former state Rep. Jim Dunnam, D-Waco, attended a Texas House Public Education Committee meeting about STAAR.

He told the Texas Tribune he came to the committee hearing because his daughter’s report card didn’t have semester grades for some classes.

Dunnam told the Tribune he was confused until someone reminded him he voted for House Bill 3, making 15 percent of his daughter’s GPA dependent on the test she’ll take in May. They’ll know what her GPA is as a ninth-grader sometime during the fall of her sophomore year.

The 12 courses requiring end-of-course testing are English I, English II, English III, algebra I, geometry, algebra II, biology, chemistry, physics, world geography, world history and U.S. history.

Some eighth-graders take algebra I in middle school. Leach said they will take end-of-course tests, just as the ninth-graders who take algebra I will take them.

Students will be given the end-of-course assessments at the end of the school year, and they will have two other chances to take them if they fail the first or second tries, Leach said.

The second chance will be during the summer, and the third chance will be at the end of the following fall semester.

Summer school classes will be scheduled to help those who do not pass, Leach said.

“Every student who doesn’t pass will be expected to attend summer school,” she said. “But we won’t get the grades until the second week of June.”

What’s on the test?

Even though local school officials are guessing about what the actual tests will be like, they are working to pass along what they do know about the tests to parents as well as students.

The Lubbock ISD prepared a STAAR brochure for parents dealing primarily with end-of-course tests, Leach said. Lubbock-Cooper has also sent information to parents, and Frenship is sending parents a letter.

The districts have scheduled informational meetings about STAAR and included information about the tests on their websites. Satterwhite noted the Texas Education Agency has information about the tests on its website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/>.

Darryl Flusche, assistant superintendent of curriculum & instruction for the Frenship school district, said Frenship has aligned curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grades reflecting the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards set by the Texas Education Agency.

Frenship's strategy is to teach to the high end of the standards at every grade level, he said.

"If we ensure our kids can be successful at the most difficult parts of the curriculum, we're going to be just fine," he said.

Satterwhite said the STAAR tests have brought school districts together so administrators can share the information they have.

Lubbock-Cooper is working with the Frenship, Levelland, Roosevelt, Tahoka, Ropesville and Southland school districts, she said.

The LISD also has worked with other local districts to develop common ground, Leach said.

Lubbock-Cooper purchased a database with STAAR-like materials from the Region 1 Education Service Center, which is in the Rio Grande Valley, Satterwhite said.

Teachers and administrators are using the data base to prepare benchmark tests for STAAR and end-of-course testing to be given to students, she said.

They hope the benchmarks will prepare the kids for the real tests that will be coming soon, Satterwhite said.

"The most important thing is to teach them the concepts behind the questions," she said.

(The Texas Tribune contributed to this story.)

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