



# NEWS

1701 NORTH CONGRESS AVENUE

AUSTIN, TEXAS

[TEA News Releases Online](#)

June 8, 2012

## **Initial STAAR results released**

AUSTIN – The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR™) results released today by the Texas Education Agency show that passing rates on five rigorous key end-of-course tests ranged from 87 percent on the biology test to 55 percent on the English I writing test.

Just as it did with the TAAS and TAKS tests, the state is phasing in the passing requirements for STAAR. The number of questions students must answer correctly will increase at intervals until 2016, when the final passing requirements will be in place. The purpose of this extended phase-in is to provide students and educators with sufficient time to adjust to the increased rigor of the assessments and higher performance expectations.

Today's results for the first administration of STAAR show what percentage of students passed the end-of-course tests at the first phase-in standard and what the passing rates would have been if the final passing standards had been in place this year. Even at the initial phase-in level, the STAAR passing standards require students to demonstrate more in-depth knowledge, critical thinking, and application skills than did the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The STAAR standards at the first phase-in level are higher than the passing standards for TAKS.

"While we know there is always an adjustment period for students and teachers in a new testing program, results from the first STAAR assessments are encouraging overall, showing that students generally performed as expected or better and that educators focused intensely on the state curriculum. These results give us the opportunity to focus on subject areas that need improvement, and we will continue to work with school districts, teachers and parents to ensure we continue to improve education for Texas students," Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott said. Students who failed a STAAR end-of-course test may retake the test in July.

Students who are in ninth grade or below and who are pursuing the Recommended High School Program or the Distinguished Achievement graduation program by law must meet state-adopted standards on 15 end-of-course tests, as well as pass their courses, to earn a Texas high school diploma. Students following the minimum graduation plan must meet state-adopted standards on 11 end-of-course tests and pass their courses to graduate.

While there is no required course sequence in Texas, most high school freshmen take biology, world geography, Algebra I, and English I.

### **Biology**

Eighty-seven percent of all students who took the biology end-of-course test passed it, and nine percent of those students reached Level III: Advanced Academic Performance, which means they are well prepared for the next course.

If the final passing standards had been in place this year, only 41 percent of all students would have passed biology.

### **Algebra I**

Eighty-three percent of students passed the Algebra I test by reaching Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance, while 17 percent reached Level III: Advanced Academic Performance.

If the passing standards had been fully phased in, however, only 39 percent of all students would have passed the Algebra I test.

### **World Geography**

Eighty-one percent of all students passed the world geography test, and 13 percent achieved Level III: Advanced Academic Performance.

If the final passing standards had been in place this year, only 40 percent of all students would have passed the world geography test.

### **English I**

English I content is assessed using two different tests, one focusing on reading skills and the other on writing skills. Sixty-eight percent of students passed the English I reading test, with eight percent achieving Level III performance. However, only 55 percent passed the English I writing assessment, with three percent achieving Level III on the writing test.

If there had been no phase-in of standards, only 46 percent of students would have passed reading, and 34 percent would have passed writing.

While reading is tested each year on state assessments, this is the first year writing has been assessed at ninth grade. Students were required to write two essays, one literary and one expository. Students earned higher scores on the literary essay than on the expository essay, in which students have to explain a specific topic or issue. The focus of the English I writing test is on the application of writing skills in the context of actual writing tasks rather than on the recognition of correct answers in multiple-choice questions. For this reason the two essays counted for 52 percent of the total score on the writing test.

The [attached chart](#) shows the number and percent of items needed to meet the minimum, Level II, and Level III score requirements at the phase-in and final performance standards for the five EOC tests most ninth graders took.

### **Additional end-of-course tests**

While more than 319,000 students took each of the five tests mentioned above, much smaller groups of students took the other 10 end-of-course tests this year. These testing groups consisted of advanced ninth graders, freshmen who are taking courses in an atypical sequence or upperclassmen who are not required to pass EOC tests to graduate. Because students taking these tests were not representative of the entire student population, the test results for these EOC tests will likely not be indicative of future performance on these tests for the Class of 2015.

Passing rates on these tests ranged from a high of 98 percent on geometry to a low of 38 percent on English III writing.

Complete [score summaries](#) for these tests are available on the TEA website.

### **Phase-in of standards**

Public school and college educators, as well as policy and testing experts, helped the commissioner determine where to set the [passing standards](#). Linking studies that compared STAAR to other tests, such as the SAT, ACT, and TAKS, also helped shape these decisions.

Once the determination was made on the final standards, statistical analysis and professional judgment were used to determine the phase-in schedule for the standards. The Level II passing standards will use a four-year, two-step process. The Level III standard will not be phased in, except for English III reading, English III writing, and Algebra II, which will have a two-year phase-in. The initial STAAR EOC passing standards were set higher than the equivalent TAKS standards.

“In Texas, we have always adopted the approach of meeting students where they are and gradually increasing the passing requirements,” Scott said. “We want the passing standards to be challenging, but they shouldn’t require students to make unrealistic academic gains in one year to achieve them. Some states simply adopt one passing standard, knowing that they will experience high failure rates the first year. But our more measured approach, which gives schools time to adjust instruction, provide staff training, and close knowledge gaps, has worked well for us in the past.”

### **What now?**

If a student did not pass an end-of-course test, he or she will have three opportunities each school year to retake the test. The state does not require the student to retake the class if he or she doesn’t pass the test. However, students who failed the test may be asked to attend summer school; they may also need significant instructional intervention and support during the next school year.

Results are not yet available for STAAR tests for grades 3–8. Raw-score results that show the number of questions students answered correctly will be available this summer, but the passing standards for these tests will not be established until fall 2012. Passing standards for grades 3–8 will be available to districts in early January 2013.

Because of requirements in state law, it was necessary to establish the STAAR passing standards so that they were anchored at English III and Algebra II and vertically aligned backwards through lower-level courses and grades down to grade 3. That made it necessary to set the standards for the end-of-course tests before establishing the standards for the elementary and middle school tests.

Data from complete tests were also needed before standards could be set for grades 3–8. While each test question was field-tested by embedding it in a TAKS test in 2011, the first time intact STAAR tests for those grades were given was this past spring.

### **TAKS**

While students in grades 3–9 took STAAR this year, students in grades 10 and 11 took TAKS. Students in the Class of 2013 and the Class of 2014 must pass the 11<sup>th</sup> grade exit level TAKS to meet their graduation requirements. TAKS has been used as the state test since 2003.

Passing rates for sophomores were 91 percent on English language arts, which is a combined reading and writing test; 94 percent on social studies; 74 percent on mathematics; and 75 percent on science. Most students who failed TAKS failed only one portion of it.

Students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade earned the following passing rates: 93 percent for English language arts; 98 percent for social studies; 91 percent for mathematics; and 94 percent for science.

Information about the Texas testing program is available on TEA's [student assessment website](#).

**TEA does not have scores yet for individual districts or campuses. Contact your local district to obtain those results.**