

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) Standard Setting Questions and Answers

STAAR performance standards: What are performance standards and when will they go into effect?

1. What are academic performance standards?

Academic performance standards represent the degree to which students are learning the content and skills required to be taught, as demonstrated by performance on a test. On the STAAR assessments, there are three levels that describe student performance:

Level III: Advanced Academic Performance

Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance

Level I: Unsatisfactory Academic Performance

The academic performance standards are the cut scores on a test that divide students into these three levels. A student is considered to have passed a given STAAR assessment if he/she earned a score at least as high as the cut score for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance. The policy definitions for each performance level are described in more detail at http://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/STAAR_Performance_Labels_and_Policy_Definitions.pdf.

2. When do the STAAR performance standards go into effect?

Performance standards for STAAR end-of-course (EOC) assessments took effect in spring 2012. Following the redesign of the English assessments, performance standards for STAAR English I and English II were set in January 2014 and took effect in spring 2014. The performance standards for STAAR 3–8 were first applied to the spring 2012 administrations.

3. Why are STAAR performance standards being phased in?

A phase-in period has been implemented for STAAR performance standards to provide school districts with time to adjust instruction, provide new professional development, and close knowledge gaps. A three-step phase-in for Level II is in place for all general STAAR assessments.¹

To be eligible to graduate from a Texas public high school, ghis

4. How were the phase-in cut scores determined?

Phase-in cut scores were determined empirically for each STAAR assessment based on the recommended Level II cut scores. For STAAR EOC, phase-in 1 cut scores for Level II were set at 1.0 standard deviation (SD) below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR mathematics, science, and social studies assessments and at 0.5 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR English assessments. Phase-in 2 cut scores for Level II were set at 0.7 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR mathematics, science, and social studies assessments and at 0.35 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR English assessments. Phase-in 3 cut scores for Level II were set at 0.3 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR mathematics, science, and social studies assessments and at 0.15 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR English assessments.

For all STAAR 3–8 assessments, phase-in 1 cut scores for Level II were set at 1.0 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores, phase-in 2 cut scores were set at 0.7 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores, and phase-in 3 cut scores were set at 0.3 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores.

5. Why are there different phase-in standards for the STAAR English EOC assessments than for the mathematics, science, and social studies assessments?

Compared to the phase-in required for the mathematics, science, and social studies assessments, a smaller phase-in was appropriate for the STAAR English EOC assessments. This decision was made based on two sets of data:

- empirical study data that evaluated the relationship between performance on STAAR EOC English assessments and performance on other external assessments (e.g., ACT and SAT) and
 - student performance data that, unlike the other EOC assessments, included student responses to multiple-choice questions, writing prompts, and short answer questions.
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Level III: Advanced Academic Performance

The recommended standard is

- 4333 for Algebra I
- 4576 for biology
- 4440 for U.S. history
- 4691 for English I
- 4831 for English II

Prior to 2014, there were separate English I and II reading and writing assessments (i.e., English I reading, English I writing, English II reading, and English II writing) and unique performance standards for each of those assessments. However, to meet the requirements of House Bill 5, which was adopted by the 83rd Texas Legislature in June 2013, the separate reading and writing assessments were redesigned to combine reading and writing into a single measure with a single test score. To ensure continuity of the performance standards, the standard-setting committee used the separate reading and writing standards as points of reference during the January 2014 standard setting for the redesigned English I and English II assessments.

7. What are the STAAR 3–8 performance standards?

For STAAR 3–8 mathematics and reading, the phase-in 1, phase-in 2, phase-in 3, and recommended performance standards for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance will vary for each assessment because these assessments are reported on a vertical scale, as required by legislation. In addition, the recommended performance standards for Level III: Advanced Academic Performance will vary for all STAAR 3–8 assessments.

The Level II STAAR performance standards for grades 4 and 7 writing, grades 5 and 8 science, and grade 8 social studies are as follows:

- Phase-in 1: 3500
- Phase-in 2: 3650
- Phase-in 3: 3850
- Recommended: 4000

8. How were the performance standards for the STAAR EOC assessments determined?

Performance standards for STAAR EOC assessments are based on recommendations from standard-setting committees. These committees—convened in February and March 2012—were composed of both K–12 educators and higher education faculty, and each panelist was an expert in both the assessed content (e.g., biology) and the high school curriculum (i.e., the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills [TEKS]). In addition, a policy committee was convened in early February 2012 to recommend reasonable score ranges within which performance standards should be set. This committee—composed of policy experts, legislative staff, business and workplace leaders, and secondary- and higher-education representatives—used the results of various studies to inform its



determined. Based on the requirements in law that TEA determine STAAR EOC cut scores by looking at a variety of external data, the earliest the performance standards could be established was spring 2012. Given this fact, STAAR performance standards for grades 3–8 could not be set in time to report spring 2012 test scores in the regular time frame. STAAR 3–8 performance standards were first applied to spring 2012 test scores and reported in January 2013.

12. What does postsecondary readiness mean?

According to TEC §39.024(a), postsecondary readiness is the level of preparation a student must attain in English language arts and mathematics courses to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in an entry-level general education course for credit in that same content area for a baccalaureate degree or associate degree program or for certificates or credentials other than baccalaureate or advanced degrees. It should be noted, however, that the measurement of postsecondary readiness through the Algebra II and English III assessments will be only one piece of information that students, parents, and schools will have in making readiness determinations. Algebra II and English III are courses students typically take in grade 11; after students have taken these assessments and potentially met the Level II or Level III performance standards, they will need to continue to take higher-level courses in grade 12 to acquire content knowledge and fully prepare for postsecondary endeavors. Note that the STAAR Algebra II and English III assessments will not be offered during the 2013–2014 or 2014–2015 school years. As required by the Texas Education Code, those assessments will be offered again beginning in spring 2016 on an optional basis.

13. What research studies were used as part of the standard-setting process?

TEA conducted extensive research to support the standard-setting process. Studies focused on creating links between STAAR assessments and other measures of students' knowledge and skills. Some studies focused on comparisons between STAAR assessments and corresponding TAKS tests. Research was conducted to link STAAR grade 7 writing scores and grade 8 reading, mathematics, science, and social studies scores to first-year STAAR EOC assessment scores in the corresponding content areas

15. How were the performance standards for the STAAR Spanish 3–5 assessments determined?

Performance standards for the STAAR Spanish 3–5 assessments were set at the same time as the English

Consider the following scenario as another way to think about this. You are given a ten-question test on calculus, and you answer 7 out of 10 questions correctly, which equals 70%. Another person is given a ten-question test on multiplication and answers 7 out of 10 questions correctly, which equals 70%. Although you both answer 70% of the questions correctly, it would not be accurate to say that both of you demonstrate the same level of mathematics proficiency. Your test covered more difficult content—calculus as compared to multiplication.

Scale scores are a better indicator of a student's mastery of test content. While raw scores on STAAR will be available to students, parents, and teachers, it is important to understand that answering fewer than 70% of the questions correctly on a test does not necessarily indicate poor performance either in terms of scale scores or mastery of the assessed content.

18. Which STAAR assessments are reported on a vertical scale?

Under TEC §39.036, TEA is required to develop a vertical scale for assessing student performance in grades 3–8 for reading and mathematics. A vertical scale allows for a student's scale scores to be compared across different grades for the same subject area. The changes in the student's vertical scale scores indicate the academic progress the student has made over time. The assessments for which vertical scales were developed are STAAR grades 3–8 mathematics and reading in English and STAAR Spanish grades 3–5 mathematics and reading.

19. If a student attains a vertical scale score in the current grade that is higher than the passing score at a future grade, does this mean the student has met the Level II standard at the future grade?

No. While it is appropriate to compare vertical scale scores for the same student across grades to evaluate how much progress that student has made, it is not appropriate to compare a vertical scale score for a student in one grade to the passing standard in a grade in which that student has not yet received instruction. The passing scores on the vertical scale are based on the assumption that a student will have received instruction in the grade-specific curriculum in that subject area.

20. Which STAAR assessments are reported on a horizontal scale?

For any STAAR assessment that is not reported on a vertical scale, test results are reported on a horizontal scale. Horizontal scale scores were developed for STAAR grades 4 and 7 writing, grades 5 and 8 science, grade 8 social studies, and EOC assessments. A horizontal scale converts a raw score onto a scale that allows for comparisons across test forms from year to year for a specific assessment. Similar to vertical scales, horizontal scales maintain the passing standard that students are required to meet in

