

April 5, 2018

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

SUBJECT: Important Updates for the 2018 Spring STAAR Administrations

I am so thankful for the intensive efforts you and your staff have been engaged in all year, working to teach our next generation so they are equipped with all they need to know at each grade level. Next week marks one more step in that process, as the first of the spring 2018 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR[®]) will be administered to assess the depth of grade level knowledge students have learned. I know this can be stressful. I have been listening to district feedback and want to do all I can to help make this a positive experience and reduce stress for students and school district and charter school personnel. To that end, I wanted to highlight three important changes.

Medical Exemptions for STAAR

I have heard from many of you asking why we do not have a medical exemption for STAAR like the one used for STAAR Alternate 2. With the implementation of the new accountability system, we are introducing a new process to identify students who qualify for a medical exemption from STAAR due to a serious medical issue. Once identified, reviewed, and accepted by the agency, these students may be excluded from accountability calculations, so that they do not affect the participation count of a school district or charter school. Additional information is being sent directly to district testing coordinators and will be posted on the student assessment website.

Transcribing Student Responses

Many of you have commented on the strict policy regarding the handling of blank answer documents. I am pleased to announce that student responses recorded in the test booklet may be transcribed onto a blank answer document. Please note that this change is a departure from previous years, as well as information in current test administration materials. Additional information is being sent directly to district testing coordinators and will be posted to the student assessment website.

Classroom Displays During Testing—Reminder

Finally, I am still hearing questions about covering classroom walls during testing. This practice transforms otherwise vibrant classrooms into very sterile, stressful testing environments. As a reminder, we have relaxed our rules around these requirements. While an instructional environment should be maintained during the testing window, it is not necessary to conceal or remove instructional or reference materials in the testing area, classroom, or hallways unless they could provide a direct source of answers for the subject being tested. For example, if a fifth-grade testing room has a graphic of the moon phases, it should be covered or removed during the science test. However, it is fine during the grade 5 math test. When in doubt, talk to your chief academic officer who is familiar with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and can determine the appropriateness of posted materials.

Hopefully these changes are helpful to your students and staff. I want to thank you all for the hard work that you do. I hope next week's testing goes well for each and every one of you. If you need assistance with anything, please call TEA's Student Assessment Division at (512) 463-9536, and that team will be happy to help you.

Sincerely,

Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education