

May 24, 2018

To the Administrator Addressed

Subject: 2018 STAAR Online Testing Issues

While last year, TEA experienced few to no disruptions to online testing, the STAAR Online Testing Platform (SOTP) experienced two separate connectivity events which impacted testing during the 2018 spring administrations. In April, the event impacted students taking the grades 5 and 8 mathematics, 4 and 7 writing and English I tests. In May, the event primarily impacted students taking the grades 3-8 reading test.

Districts with students who were affected by the online testing issues will receive the roster via files that will be emailed from ETS to the primary district testing coordinator later today. The flags for these students will also be available in the final Consolidated Accountability File (CAF) for 2018 and will not be provided in the individual assessment administration files posted for districts.

The decisions outlined in this communication are based on the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) commitment to providing a positive assessment experience for our districts and students, and with the priority of ensuring that those affected are not penalized for system failures.

Online Testing Issues

During the April 2018 administration of STAAR, 41,702 students were testing online. While some districts may have been impacted for up to 3 hours due to login/logout issues, the connectivity slowdown disrupted online testing for approximately 20 minutes. The number of students impacted by the disruption was determined by establishing the number of students either being logged out of active test sessions or not being able to login to a testing session. Of the 278,434 tested students served in special education, 14,673 were testing online and were impacted.

APRIL 2018 STAAR	Districts	Campuses	Total Tests	Students Receiving Special Education Services
Number Affected	868	3,870	41,702	14,673

During the May 2018 administration of STAAR, approximately 29,307 students encountered a connectivity slowdown of approximately 90 minutes. The students impacted by the system slowdown were determined by establishing the number of inactive test sessions lasting longer than 30 minutes and the number of students who logged in more than five times during the event. Of the 278,434 tested students served in special education, 4,594 were testing online and were impacted.

MAY 2018 STAAR	Districts	Campuses	Total Tests	Students Receiving Special Education Services
Number of inactive test sessions	466	1,360	12,747	4,594
Number of logins greater than 5	762	3,119	16,560	6,751

It is important to note that TEA has developed online embedded supports for STAAR to ensure that state and federally required assessments are accessible to every student, including English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities. To achieve this goal, we strive to address students’ needs in the most appropriate manner. Offering online embedded supports allows us to customize the testing experience to address a student’s personal needs and preferences by maximizing the benefits of current technology.

For example, online content and language supports are available to support students who struggle with decoding or who are in the process of language acquisition. These supports include animations or graphic representations (e.g., photographs, artwork) to clarify or simplify vocabulary and concepts. For students with dyslexia or other language processing issues, text-to-speech supports provide an equitable, standardized form of oral administration that is individualized for each student.

Beginning in 2019, content and language supports will be expanded to the STAAR Spanish assessments for grades 3–5. Screen reader support for refreshable braille devices will be available for students who are blind or visually impaired. American Sign Language (ASL) videos will be available to students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. These supports are intended to increase fairness in testing by allowing students to access the state assessments in ways that are more closely aligned with the accommodations they receive in their daily instruction.

Waiving SSI Requirements for Students Impacted by the Online Testing Issues

Students in grades 5 and 8 who were directly affected by either of the online testing issues above and who did not perform satisfactorily on the May 2018 assessment, will not be required to retest during the June 2018 SSI administration. Districts should determine, on an individual student basis, whether accelerated instruction should be offered for students who did not pass the assessment in May. For the 2017–2018 school year, districts are not required to convene grade placement committees based on results from the affected subject test. Instead, districts should use local discretion and all relevant and available academic information (e.g., the recommendation of the teacher and the student’s grade in each subject) to make appropriate promotion/retention decisions for these students.

Accountability Reporting Regarding Affected Tests

For state accountability purposes, TEA will exclude the results of the STAAR tests directly affected by the online testing issues that occurred in April and May 2018. If, however, including the results from either the April or May test administration would positively benefit a district or campus rating, that district or campus will receive the higher rating. The data will remain the

same; only the rating will change. TEA will conduct this analysis prior to the release of the preliminary ratings on August 15.

Additional information about the plan to address this issue in the accountability and monitoring systems for all test results affected by the online testing issues that occurred in April and May will be provided to districts in the next few weeks.

Future of Online Testing

TEA is committed to taking a more focused look at how we develop our online assessment program. It is important that we provide students with learning opportunities that will prepare them for the ever-growing technologies they will face in their future academic and work experiences. Our current assessment services are provided through two separate contracts with ETS providing STAAR and program integration and Pearson providing STAAR Alternate 2, Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). TEA plans to release requests for proposals later this year designed to ensure that we offer our teachers and students an innovative and comprehensive instructional system.

If you have questions about SSI testing requirements, please contact the Student Assessment Division at 512-463-9536. If you have questions regarding reporting or state accountability, please contact the Performance Reporting Division at 512-463-9704.

Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education