Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the STAAR Alternate
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About STAAR Alternate

1. **Question:** What is STAAR Alternate?

   **Answer:** The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness Alternate (STAAR Alternate) is an assessment designed for students receiving special education services who have the **most significant cognitive disabilities** and are unable to participate in the other statewide assessments even with substantial accommodations and/or modifications. Unlike other statewide assessments in Texas, STAAR Alternate is not a traditional paper or multiple-choice test. Instead, the assessment involves teachers observing as students complete state-developed assessment tasks that link to the grade level or high school course Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum. Teachers then answer a series of questions in the Texas Assessment Management System, delivered through PearsonAccess, to evaluate student performance.

2. **Question:** Why must students with significant cognitive disabilities be assessed with a state-developed assessment?

   **Answer:** Statewide assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities are a **federal requirement**. According to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a federal education law previously known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), all students must be provided access to the general education curriculum. Additionally, all students must be assessed on this curriculum with a state-developed assessment. According to federal law, **there are no exemptions** to these requirements regardless of the severity of the student’s disability. STAAR Alternate is the assessment that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has developed to meet these requirements and the diverse needs of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

3. **Question:** What type of instruction do students assessed with STAAR Alternate receive?

   **Answer:** Students designated by their admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committees to take STAAR Alternate will continue to learn the skills they need to be as independent as possible in adulthood, as outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). In addition, teachers are required to provide opportunities for students to participate in instructional activities linked to the grade-level or high school course curriculum that have been adapted in scope, complexity, materials, methods of presentation, and response.
styles appropriate to their needs. Students designated for assessment with STAAR Alternate should receive instruction in the TEKS curriculum through prerequisite skills linked to the grade-level student expectations.

4. **Question:** How can students be assessed on grade level?

**Answer:** The state has developed two key resources for accessing the grade-level and high school course TEKS curriculum: TEKS Vertical Alignment documents and TEKS Curriculum Framework documents. These resources are useful in targeting skills for instruction in the TEKS. In addition, the Standardized Assessment Tasks for STAAR Alternate were developed by the state in accordance with these documents to ensure alignment with the grade level and high school course TEKS curriculum. Teachers of students designated to take STAAR Alternate who instruct students on the prerequisite skills linked to each of the essence statements will be appropriately accessing the grade level or high school course curriculum for instruction and assessment purposes. These resources are available on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt.

5. **Question:** What are the specific features of STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** STAAR Alternate has been designed with the following features:

- Four essence statements assessed per subject; all state developed and required
- More rigorous standardized assessment tasks at three levels of complexity developed from state-selected prerequisite skills
- Three state-developed predetermined criteria for each assessment task
- Online submission of student performance at any time during the STAAR Alternate assessment window
- Online automated scoring with higher point total opportunities based on teacher evaluation of student performance
- Documentation forms locally stored, according to district guidelines, by 7:00 PM (CT), April 20, 2012
- Mandatory training including four online training modules with qualification activities for each module
### 6. Question: What are the key differences between TAKS–Alt and STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAKS–Alt</th>
<th>STAAR Alternate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers must have viewed modules 1-4 and passed the qualifications for TAKS-Alt modules 1-3 before administering the assessment.</td>
<td>Teachers must view and pass the qualifications for the new STAAR Alternate modules 1-4 before administering the assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were provided five opportunities to pass each of the TAKS-Alt qualifications at 80%.</td>
<td>Teachers are provided only two opportunities to pass the new STAAR Alternate qualifications at 80%. After additional training with a supplemental support provider, the teacher may be given one more opportunity as determined by the support provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment tasks within a subject could be selected at different complexity levels.</td>
<td>Only combinations of Level 3 and Level 2 tasks will be allowed within a subject. Students being assessed with Level 1 tasks must stay at all Level 1 tasks for that subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transition tasks were identified.</td>
<td>Tasks are identified as transition if the task relates to how the skill would be used in the community once the student leaves public school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one student action was demonstrated for each predetermined criterion.</td>
<td>Students must demonstrate all actions listed in each predetermined criterion to receive credit for demonstrating the predetermined criterion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one response mode for each predetermined criterion could have been listed.</td>
<td>Only one response mode per verb in the predetermined criterion can be identified and the student must demonstrate that one response to get credit for the predetermined criterion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of primary and generalization observations was determined by the teacher to capture a fair, typical student performance.</td>
<td>Only two completed observations are allowed for the primary observation and only two completed observations are allowed for the generalization observation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization could be demonstrated with a change in personnel, materials, or environment.</td>
<td>Generalization can only be demonstrated with a change in materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No changes in materials for the primary observation were required from those used during instruction.</td>
<td>The assessment observation must use new materials than were used during instruction to make sure that students are demonstrating skills and not just repeating the same response they gave during instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three points for a prompted Demonstration of Skill performance were given.</td>
<td>No points for a prompted Demonstration of Skill performance are given.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For generalization, one point was given for each predetermined criterion that was performed without prompting.</td>
<td>For generalization, points will be given for each predetermined criterion if the skill is performed with cueing (one point) or is performed independently (two points).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No documentation for a No Response Observed (NRO) designation was required.</td>
<td>Page 1 of the documentation form for the one attempted observation per subject is required for all NRO designations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. **Question:** What STAAR Alternate assessments are students required to take in grades 3–8 and high school?

**Answer:** Students enrolled in grades 3–8 should take the following assessments:
- Grade 3 – Reading and Mathematics
- Grade 4 – Reading, Mathematics, and Writing
- Grade 5 – Reading, Mathematics, and Science
- Grade 6 – Reading and Mathematics
- Grade 7 – Reading, Mathematics, and Writing
- Grade 8 – Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies

Students taking STAAR Alternate in high school must take the assessments for all enrolled high school courses listed on the Minimum High School Plan (MHSP). Students eligible for STAAR Alternate must take the following end-of-course assessments sometime during the time they are enrolled in high school:
- English I, II, and III
- Algebra I
- Geometry
- Biology
- U.S. History
- World History or World Geography

The ARD committee must review the courses on the MHSP and determine which course requirements will be addressed for the upcoming school year. The actual name of the course can be determined by the campus; however, the official alternate course PEIMS code must be used for enrollment. During the year, students must receive instruction for the selected course that is based on prerequisite skills linked to the general education course TEKS. The prerequisite skills linked to each knowledge and skills statement can be found in the “STAAR Alternate TEKS Curriculum Framework” documents. Teachers should focus on the content associated with the essence statements selected by the state for that administration. Students are required to take the corresponding assessment after instruction has been provided. Once students have completed a high school course and associated assessment, the testing obligation for that course will have been met.

8. **Question:** Are high school students required to take all the STAAR Alternate assessments even though some previous high school TAKS–Alt assessments may have been completed?
**Answer:** High school students are required to participate in all STAAR Alternate assessments some time during high school. The ARD committee can determine which courses and corresponding assessments will be taken in a given year. For the 2011-2012 administration, previous TAKS–Alt high school assessments can count toward the STAAR Alternate testing requirements.

- English I (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 9 reading)
- English II (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 10 ELA)
- English III (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 11 ELA)
- Algebra I (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 9 Math)
- Geometry (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 10 Math)
- Biology (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 10 Science)
- World Geography or World History (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 10 Social Studies)
- US History (Met with TAKS–Alt Grade 11 Social Studies)

Students are required to take either World Geography or World History; however, if a student is enrolled in both courses during high school, he or she must take both assessments.

9. **Question:** Do homebound students or students in residential settings who meet the eligibility criteria for STAAR Alternate have to be assessed?

**Answer:** Yes. All students must be assessed by one of the statewide assessments. **No exemptions** are given for homebound students, students who are medically fragile, or students in residential settings. A test administrator must be designated for each student by the district. The test administrator will conduct the STAAR Alternate assessments following the same steps and guidelines as specified for any test administrator implementing STAAR Alternate.

10. **Question:** Will there be a STAAR Alternate Validity Audit in 2011–2012?

**Answer:** Yes. The audit, which is a review of the documentation forms completed by teachers to record STAAR Alternate observations, will be held in the summer of 2012. A sampling of the forms is collected from selected districts across the state. Teachers serve on audit committees and review the forms to determine if the documentation supports the evaluation that the teacher gave the
student and if the complexity level of the task was maintained during the observation.

11. **Question:** Will there be a STAAR Alternate Interrater Reliability Study in 2011–2012?

**Answer:** No. The interrater reliability study designed to provide evidence that STAAR Alternate allows for reliable observation and evaluation of student performance on the TEKS is in development but will not be held in the 2011–2012 school year. To evaluate the reliability of STAAR Alternate, two educators provide evaluations of the same observation for the same student performing the same assessment task. By having two observers independently evaluate the same student during the same assessment task at the same time, the extent of agreement between the two observers in terms of how the student was evaluated can be determined.

**Choosing STAAR Alternate as a Student’s Assessment**

12. **Question:** Which students can participate in STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** STAAR Alternate has specific participation requirements that must be met for a student to qualify to take the assessment. The student must be receiving special education services, have a significant cognitive disability, and be unable to participate in the other statewide assessments, even with substantial accommodations and/or modifications. The admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee must review the five eligibility criteria outlined in a new state-required document “STAAR Alternate Participation Requirements” and provide evidence to justify that the student meets the criteria. The student must meet all five eligibility criteria in order to qualify for STAAR Alternate. The above mentioned document as well as the document “Assessment Decision Process for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness Alternate (STAAR Alternate)” is available on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

13. **Question:** What is the role of the ARD committee in making decisions about STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** Using the state participation requirements for STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate, the ARD committee will need to determine which state assessment is appropriate for an individual
student. If STAAR Alternate is designated, the ARD committee may review the state-required essence statements for the student’s enrolled grade or end-of-course assessment and determine the appropriate supports needed for instruction and assessment. These accommodations and modifications will become the basis for the preplanned presentation supports, materials, and response modes that test administrators document on page 1 of the documentation forms and provide during the assessment observations. For grades 3–8 the committee will assign the enrolled grade level and corresponding required subjects to be assessed. For high school the committee will determine which high school course selections and corresponding assessments will be assessed for that year. However, it is not the responsibility of the ARD committee to select the complexity level of the assessment task for each essence statement. This responsibility lies with the student’s teacher.

14. **Question:** Can students qualifying for special education services with an eligibility code of learning disabled take STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** No. Students who receive special education services with an eligibility code of learning disabled are not eligible for STAAR Alternate. Before a student qualifies for a learning disabled eligibility code, an assessment specialist must first rule out a cognitive disability which would not allow the student to meet the STAAR Alternate requirements.

15. **Question:** Can a student who is able to write qualify for STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** Yes, if the ARD committee determines that a student has a significant cognitive disability and meets all five eligibility criteria. The student may be able to perform some writing tasks, such as tracing words, copying spelling words, completing worksheets, or even writing simple phrases or sentences. However, the student would typically be evaluated by methods other than what he or she can independently produce on paper, such as manipulation of objects or activation of a switch to indicate responses.

16. **Question:** Are students who are enrolled in the same grade level for multiple years required to retake STAAR Alternate each year?

**Answer:** Yes, but only those students in grades 3-8. STAAR Alternate assessments at grades 3-8 are considered grade-level assessments;
therefore, students in grades 3-8 who meet the eligibility criteria for STAAR Alternate must be assessed at his or her enrolled grade level—even if repeating a grade. At high school, however, STAAR Alternate assessments are end-of-course assessments. Once the course and assessment are completed, the student has met his or her testing requirement for that course.

17. **Question:** Should Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) be a part of the assessment decision?

**Answer:** No. The ARD committee must choose the assessment that matches the educational needs of each student individually. The assessment decision should not be based on the 1 or 2 percent caps for AYP calculations. The ARD committee should consider the type of curriculum the student is receiving so that the student is prepared for the chosen assessment. Additionally, all eligibility criteria must be met before a student qualifies to take STAAR Alternate.

18. **Question:** What are the differences between STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** STAAR Modified is an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards. STAAR Modified is designed for students receiving special education services who meet the participation requirements. STAAR Modified covers the same grade-level content as STAAR, but STAAR Modified tests have been changed in format and test design. All students who meet the participation requirements for STAAR Modified should take the assessment but only 2 percent of the tested population can count as proficient for AYP calculations.

STAAR Alternate is an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards. STAAR Alternate is designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities. STAAR Alternate assesses content that is linked to the grade-level curriculum through prerequisite skills. All students who meet the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate should take the assessment but only 1 percent can count as proficient for AYP calculations.

For the 2011-2012 school year, TAKS–Alt will no longer be available. All students meeting the eligibility criteria for an assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards should take STAAR Alternate.
19. **Question:** Can a student take STAAR Modified for some subjects and STAAR Alternate for others?

**Answer:** No. A student designated by the ARD committee to take STAAR Alternate must take **STAAR Alternate for all subjects** required for the student’s enrolled grade or high school course. Even though a student with a cognitive disability may have strengths in certain subjects, a cognitive disability is pervasive across all domains. In contrast, each subject area tested in STAAR and STAAR Modified should be considered separately when making assessment decisions, since a student’s skill level may vary across subjects.

20. **Question:** Can an ARD committee change the assessment decision for a student from STAAR Modified to STAAR Alternate or vice versa?

**Answer:** Yes; however, the ARD committee members must ensure that the eligibility criteria for the selected assessment have been met and justified. The decision must be based on a change in instruction. Simply passing or failing a state assessment is not a sufficient reason to justify revising the assessment decision in the IEP.

If the assessment decision for a student has changed from STAAR Modified to STAAR Alternate, careful consideration must be given to the amount of time left in the STAAR Alternate assessment window. The student must be given adequate time to learn and practice the targeted prerequisite skills being assessed on STAAR Alternate. Because STAAR Alternate observations can be repeated up to two times for both the primary observation and generalization opportunity, adequate time for repeated observations also needs to be considered. The district testing coordinator should be notified immediately if a change is made so that the student can be registered for STAAR Alternate in the Assessment Management System.

Careful consideration must also be given to the amount of time left for instruction of the grade level or high school course student expectations if the assessment decision for a student has changed from STAAR Alternate to STAAR Modified. The district testing coordinator should be notified immediately so the student can be unregistered for STAAR Alternate in the Assessment Management System. When the testing date for STAAR Modified arrives, the student should take the assessment.
21. **Question:** Do English language learners (ELLs) eligible and designated for STAAR Alternate also participate in the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS)?

**Answer:** Federal law requires that all students in grades K–12 who are designated limited English proficient (LEP) be assessed annually for English language proficiency. In rare cases it may be necessary for the ARD committee, in conjunction with the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), to determine that an ELL receiving special education services should not participate in one or more TELPAS assessments due to the student’s particular disability. The ARD, in conjunction with the LPAC, should consider participation in TELPAS on a domain-by-domain basis in order to ensure that issues related to the student’s language proficiency are carefully weighed. The reason for the decision not to assess a student in a particular language domain of TELPAS must be well-supported and documented in the student’s IEP and permanent record file. This decision does not affect the student’s participation in STAAR Alternate. A student designated for assessment with STAAR Alternate must be assessed in all required subjects.

**Standardized Assessment Tasks and Complexity Levels**

22. **Question:** What is a standardized assessment task?

**Answer:** Standardized assessment tasks are test items for each subject or high school course tested with STAAR Alternate. The assessment tasks are observable performance tasks that students can execute as the teacher observes. Predetermined criteria, a set of three observable and measurable student expectations that measure the performance on the targeted skills, are included with each assessment task. The predetermined criteria help ensure an accurate observation that focuses on the student’s performance. For each standard being measured, three assessment tasks are provided that vary in complexity from which the teacher can select.

23. **Question:** What strategies should be used to select an appropriate assessment task for a student?

**Answer:** The following information may help teachers when making assessment task decisions:

- Review the “Student Characteristics for the STAAR Alternate Complexity Levels” document located on the STAAR Alternate
Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website to determine which box best describes the student.

- Review the grade-level information associated with each essence statement to learn more about the skill being taught.
- Read each assessment task carefully and check the “Ways to Demonstrate the Verbs Used in the STAAR Alternate Assessment Tasks” document located on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage to get ideas on how a student might demonstrate the predetermined criteria.
- Focus on challenging the student.

After considering the above, a teacher needs to select the task that will most likely reflect student success after instruction. For more information regarding task selection, refer to STAAR Alternate Module 1: Selecting the Assessment Task and to the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

24. **Question:** What is a complexity level?

**Answer:** The United States Department of Education (USDE) requires all states to include a range of complexity levels for assessments as well as progression across grades for students with significant cognitive disabilities. To address this requirement for STAAR Alternate, three assessment tasks for each essence statement were written in descending order of complexity. Prerequisite skills were selected by the state to ensure adequate progress of skill development over time.

Complexity Level 3 is the most complex task and involves applying knowledge beyond basic recall. Complexity Level 2 is of moderate complexity and involves demonstrating knowledge at a basic recall level. Complexity Level 1 assessment tasks are the least complex and involve responding to knowledge at the beginning awareness level. The predetermined criteria that accompany each assessment task use verbs that are clearly defined and must be implemented as directed to maintain the complexity level of the task.

25. **Question:** Can students be assessed at different complexity levels across their assessments?

**Answer:** Yes and no. In order to provide more rigor as required by Texas legislation, certain complexity level combinations are not allowed. Students assessed with Complexity Level 1 tasks must be assessed at Level 1 for all essence statements for a subject. No Complexity Level 2 and Level 1 combinations or Complexity
Level 3 and Level 1 combinations are allowed on STAAR Alternate. Students may be assessed on a combination of Complexity Level 2 and 3 tasks within a subject.

26. Question: How can assessment tasks be made accessible for students?

Answer: Planning accessibility for students is critical since STAAR Alternate assessment tasks are written broadly to encompass the diverse needs of students with cognitive disabilities. Tasks can be made accessible through the careful use of presentation supports and materials and the identification of appropriate student response modes. The supports and response modes a teacher plans must be routinely used with a student during classroom instruction. More information on this topic is provided throughout STAAR Alternate Module 2: Implementing the Assessment Task and on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

27. Question: How can students with a cognitive disability access grade-level text?

Answer: Students must have access to grade-level text which means that texts should be representative of the types of reading content that students encounter in grade-level classrooms. Once a grade-level text has been chosen, a teacher may use the text as written or may adapt the text to a challenging level accessible to the student. Summaries of an entire book, a single chapter, or key points may be appropriate ways to present grade-appropriate texts. Pictures, objects, or representations can accompany the written text to enhance a student’s understanding but cannot replace the written text. Providing opportunities to interact with text by using dialog, dramatization, or special software may also be appropriate. For further information on grade-appropriate text, refer to the document “STAAR Alternate Guidelines for Choosing Grade-Appropriate Texts for Assessment Purposes” and to a PowerPoint presentation titled “Grade-Appropriate Text.” Both resources can be found on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

28. Question: What happens if a student is unable to demonstrate any observable, measurable response?

Answer: For some students, the Level 1 assessment tasks may seem unattainable—even with instruction and supports. When a student is
unable to show any purposeful change in affect or movement for any of the Level 1 tasks, the teacher has the following options:

- Evaluate the instruction provided
- Evaluate the presentation supports/materials provided
- Evaluate the preplanned response modes
- Confer with other school professionals
- Consider the No Response Observed (NRO) designation
- Call a TEA STAAR Alternate team member for guidance

The NRO designation can be used if a student is unable to display any observable change in affect or movement due to an ongoing medical condition or the severity of the student’s disability.

When the NRO designation is not appropriate because a student does not meet the official description provided by the state, the student must be assessed at complexity Level 1 for all grade level or high school course assessment tasks.

29. **Question:** What happens if a student is able to make authentic responses but is unable to access a task due to his or her disability?

**Answer:** Assessment tasks have been carefully written and cannot be altered by anyone other than a member of the STAAR Alternate team at TEA. Although the assessment tasks have been reviewed and approved by educator committees, it is conceivable that in some rare instances a task as it is written cannot be made accessible using the guidelines for presentation supports/materials and response modes. When a student with multiple disabilities who can provide authentic responses is not able to access the assessment task as it is written without compromising the integrity of the task, the district may call a STAAR Alternate team member at TEA to request special considerations.

**Required Teacher Training**

30. **Question:** What training is required for teachers before administering STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** All training must be completed before STAAR Alternate assessment observations are conducted. All teachers who will be test administrators for STAAR Alternate must view the four training modules and successfully pass all four of the qualification activities. In
addition to the STAAR Alternate training modules, all teachers must receive annual test administration and security training from district personnel and sign the STAAR Alternate oath of test security and confidentiality before beginning the assessment.

Any individual who assists in conducting an assessment observation and is responsible for providing, interpreting, or recording cueing and prompting, assumes the role of the test administrator and must meet all STAAR Alternate and district training requirements before conducting assessment observations, as well as sign the STAAR Alternate oath of test security and confidentiality.

Any adult in the classroom during assessment observations who is not a testing administrator must comply with all confidentiality training provided by the district.

31. **Question:** What are qualification activities?

**Answer:** Qualification activities are a set of questions following each of the four training modules that a teacher must answer and pass with at least 80% accuracy prior to administering STAAR Alternate.

32. **Question:** What happens if a teacher does not score at least 80 percent on each qualification activity after two attempts?

**Answer:** Teachers have two attempts to achieve 80 percent or higher on the qualification activity for each module. If a teacher is unable to pass a qualification activity with 80% accuracy after two attempts, the district will need to determine if the teacher should be provided a third and final attempt after supplemental training support. It is the responsibility of the district to determine who will provide the supplemental training support to the teacher and the content of the training. If a teacher fails the final attempt, the district or campus testing coordinator will determine if the teacher will be allowed to administer the assessment under careful supervision by a district administrator.

33. **Question:** What is supplemental training support?

**Answer:** Supplemental training support is required training for any teacher who has failed two attempts on a STAAR Alternate training module and who the district wants to receive a third and final attempt at passing. Supplemental training support should thoroughly review all the content in the module that was not passed and should require the
test administrator to demonstrate to the supplemental support provider that the content has been understood. The manner and specific details of the support are determined by the support provider. Districts will need to develop local guidelines specifically detailing what they will require the training support to encompass. Here are some examples of strategies that could be included in supplemental support training.

- one-on-one review of each page of the module that includes additional clarification from the support provider and opportunities for the test administrator to ask questions
- checks for understanding through questions asked by the support provider or by the test administrator paraphrasing information
- assignment of sections of the "STAAR Alternate Manual for Test Administrators" or other resources found on the STAAR Alternate webpage to be read or studied with a scheduled follow-up session
- performance tasks allowing the test administrator to demonstrate how to execute a step in the administration process such as selecting an assessment for a specific student, preplanning an assessment for a specific student, filling out a documentation form, or evaluating a student’s performance using a completed documentation form

**Administering STAAR Alternate**

34. **Question:** What are the steps for administering STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** After adequately instructing students on targeted skills, a teacher should follow these steps to administer STAAR Alternate:

- Step 1 – Select the assessment task for each required essence statement.
- Step 2 – Determine the best implementation by planning appropriate supports, materials, and response modes for each individual student.
- Step 3 – Observe and document student performance on each predetermined criterion.
- Step 4 – Evaluate student performance and enter the information into the Assessment Management System.
35. **Question:** What does a teacher need to do to prepare for an assessment observation?

**Answer:** Before conducting an assessment observation, a teacher should
- select a comfortable, non-distracting environment for the observation;
- plan for personnel who can assist with the assessment task, if needed;
- review the predetermined criteria and response modes to ensure the focus will be on what the student is expected to do;
- ensure that needed supports and materials documented on page 1 of the documentation form are available; and
- review the “Hierarchy of Cueing and Prompting” document.

36. **Question:** What are the differences between instruction and the assessment observation?

**Answer:** It is important to note that a teacher’s role during an assessment observation is diminished with the focus being on what the student can demonstrate. Here are the differences in three categories.
- **Student-Teacher Interaction:** During instruction, the teacher and students engage in an active exchange that allows the teacher to change strategies, clarify, and directly assist students to perform the task. In contrast, during assessment observations there exists only a limited exchange based solely on the written parameters of the state-developed task and the listed preplanned supports, materials, and response modes.
- **Time Span:** Instruction can occur in stages over time. Assessment observations, however, must be conducted all in one class session with the time allotted specific to the needs of the student.
- **Cueing and Prompting:** During instruction, cueing and prompting are used at the teacher’s discretion to help students learn skills; however, attempts to gradually fade cueing and prompting are recommended. During assessment observations, the teacher should expect an independent response from the student; therefore, cueing and prompting should only be used after wait time is provided, and then with a cue being offered before a prompt if additional assistance is needed.

37. **Question:** What constitutes a change in materials from instruction to the primary assessment observation?
**Answer:** The materials used in STAAR Alternate assessment observations must be different than those used during instruction. The materials must vary enough from instruction so that a student is not just rotely repeating an answer or response from a previous instructional session without truly demonstrating the skill. The changes in materials, therefore, should be **content related**. During the assessment observation a student must provide a different answer to the predetermined criterion or respond to a different experience in the predetermined criteria than during instruction. Because some tasks and predetermined criterion are written specifically for a certain skill, teachers need to plan instruction and assessment in advance in order to make appropriate material changes that do not compromise the content of the assessment observation. For example, when specific skills are to be assessed in the task, it may be necessary to teach the broader concept using a variety of materials in instruction that are not required specifically in the task. For more information regarding this topic, refer to the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

**38. Question:** What must a teacher do during an assessment observation?

**Answer:** During an assessment observation, a teacher must:
- Provide the student with adequate task directions on what he or she is expected to do
- Use all preplanned supports listed on page 1 of the documentation form
- Look for performance on the three predetermined criteria
- See the specific preplanned response modes
- Determine if the observation is fair and should continue
- Provide wait time if the student begins to struggle
- Provide a cue before a prompt if the student continues to struggle
- Provide a prompt only when the student cannot demonstrate the skill with cueing
- Record notes during or soon afterward

**39. Question:** What happens if a student has completed some of the needed observations for STAAR Alternate but then becomes ill and misses the remainder?

**Answer:** In extreme cases, a partial score may be necessary for some students. Partial Score might be appropriate if a student moves into the district after the March 30, 2012 transfer date or if the student
has a medical condition or emergency that results in an incomplete assessment. At least one task must be evaluated in the Assessment Management System for this option to be applied to that subject. Alternate assessment teachers cannot submit an assessment as Partial Score. The Assessment Management System will automatically submit and designate an assessment as Partial Score on the last day of the assessment window if at least one essence statement for a subject has been evaluated. Because the student’s score is calculated on the part of the assessment that was completed and evaluated in the Assessment Management System, every effort should be made to complete as much of the assessment as possible. The partial score may or may not be enough for the student to receive a performance standard of “Satisfactory Academic Performance.”

40. **Question:** How many times can a test administrator conduct an assessment observation on an essence statement?

**Answer:** A test administrator can begin an observation and stop it at anytime if the observation is deemed unfair for the student. However, only two completed observations are allowed for the primary observation and only two completed observations are allowed for the generalization observation.

41. **Question:** What is a completed observation?

**Answer:** A completed observation occurs when the test administrator has observed student performance and recorded data for all three predetermined criteria.

42. **Question:** Can other staff help a teacher administer STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** Yes, other staff may assist the teacher; however, the individual must be trained if he or she assumes the role of test administrator. Depending on the assessment task, the best person to conduct the observation may be the speech therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, auditory or visual impairment instructor, content-area teacher, or a teaching assistant. Any individual who assists in conducting the assessment observation and is responsible for providing, interpreting, or recording cueing and prompting, assumes the role of the test administrator and must have completed all STAAR Alternate training modules, successfully passed the qualification activities, participated in general test security and confidentiality, and signed the STAAR Alternate oath of test security and confidentiality.
Any other adult in the room during an assessment observation must comply with the test security and confidentiality training provided by the district.

43. **Question:** What does a teacher do after the observation is completed?

**Answer:** Once the primary observation is completed and observation notes have been recorded on pages two and three of the documentation form, the student’s performance will need to be evaluated by answering a series of questions in the Assessment Management System (http://www.TexasAssessment.com).

44. **Question:** How does a teacher determine if an observation was fair?

**Answer:** A teacher will need to determine whether a student’s performance during an observation is a typical performance that is accurately reflecting the student’s abilities. At any time during the assessment observation if the teacher feels that the student’s performance is atypical, the task should be stopped immediately before all three predetermined criteria have been completed. Once all three predetermined criteria have been completed during an observation, then the observation is considered fair. A completed observation equals a fair observation. Some reasons for why an assessment observation should be stopped include an inadequate amount of instruction on the skill, an inadequate amount of time allotted for the assessment observation, the inattentiveness of the student, adverse environmental conditions during the observation, and atypical amounts of cueing or prompting needed for the student to be successful.

45. **Question:** When is an additional observation needed?

**Answer:** An observation cannot be repeated for the sole purpose of improving a student’s performance and score. An observation should reflect a student’s typical performance as observed during instruction. If the teacher feels that a student’s performance during an assessment observation is being compromised for some reason, the observation should be stopped immediately. Another observation can be performed at another time. Only two completed observations for the primary observation are allowed per essence statement in STAAR Alternate. Only one of the two completed observations can be evaluated in the Assessment Management System.
46. **Question:** What is required to designate a student’s assessment as No Response Observed (NRO)?

**Answer:** A teacher needs to select one assessment task per subject, complete page 1 of the documentation form by planning out presentation supports/materials and determining response modes, and attempt the observation with the student. If an authentic response is not observed, it is recommended that the teacher try other strategies and confer with other professionals who work with the student to determine if NRO is appropriate.

Once NRO is determined to be appropriate, the alternate assessment teacher should select the NRO option in the Assessment Management System and designate the reason as NRO Reason 1 or NRO Reason 2. All remaining essence statements for that subject are automatically designated as NRO and the Assessment Management System will indicate the Completed status for that subject or course. The alternate assessment teacher can then submit the assessment at any time.

It is a requirement that the documentation form for each attempted task per subject designated as NRO be stored locally per district guidelines for five years.

**Supports and Cueing and Prompting**

47. **Question:** What is the difference between presentation supports that a teacher plans to use during a STAAR Alternate assessment observation and cues and prompts provided after the task begins?

**Answer:** Presentation supports are accommodations that may be used during STAAR Alternate observations if they are routinely used during regular instruction and do not change the integrity of the complexity level or supply the student with an answer. These supports should be preplanned and recorded on page 1 of the STAAR Alternate documentation form in the Preplanned Presentation Supports/Materials section. These supports level the playing field for students with disabilities and allow students to be as independent as possible. The use of these supports does not negatively affect the student’s score. Examples of supports are provided in the document, “Presentation Supports/Materials for STAAR Alternate” on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division.
Cueing and prompting refer to any additional assistance the student may need beyond the preplanned supports. The terms listed in the “Hierarchy of Cueing and Prompting” document are used to describe this additional assistance that may be needed during an observation when the student is unable to proceed as expected or planned. The use of cueing and prompting does affect the score that the student receives; therefore, it is critical that the teacher use this assistance only if necessary.

48. **Question:** How can a teacher determine if the supports he or she has provided have changed the complexity level of an assessment task?

**Answer:** The integrity of the complexity level must be maintained. Preplanned supports and materials cannot modify the assessment tasks so much that the complexity level shifts. A teacher should look closely at the verbs used in the predetermined criteria and refer to the document “Ways to Demonstrate the Verbs Used in the STAAR Alternate Assessment Tasks” for guidance on how to interpret the verbs. If the supports and materials result in a change in how the student will demonstrate the skill that is best described by another complexity level, then the teacher will need to review the necessity of the supports being provided and provide only those that are needed that keep the task at the complexity level for which it was developed. For more information regarding complexity levels, refer to the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

49. **Question:** What is the difference between cueing and prompting for STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** For STAAR Alternate purposes, cueing (general assistance) is an action intended to encourage a student to initiate or continue a task that he or she had previously executed. A cue is a hint or a nudge in the right direction that does not provide a direct answer. Prompting (specific assistance) is an action taken when directly assisting a student with the completion of a task. A prompt pulls the student through each step to the end of the task and leads to a direct answer.

Although the use of the terms “cueing” and “prompting” may vary from teacher to teacher, TEA has developed definitions for various cueing and prompting terms for use with STAAR Alternate in order to provide a standardized tool for the assessment. The “Hierarchy of Cueing and Prompting” lists and defines the terms that must be used when documenting the level of support a student might have required during a STAAR Alternate assessment observation. This document is available at
the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

50. **Question:** Can teachers use different terminology for cueing and prompting in their classrooms?

**Answer:** Yes. Teachers may use whatever terminology they prefer during everyday classroom instruction. For STAAR Alternate purposes, however, the language used must be consistent across the state to ensure a standardized evaluation of student performance. Anyone conducting a STAAR Alternate assessment observation must use TEA’s cueing and prompting terminology that is specifically described in the “Hierarchy of Cueing and Prompting.”

51. **Question:** Is hand-to-hand assistance allowed on STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** Yes; however, any physical assistance that results in the teacher moving a student through a task or predetermined criterion to completion must be counted as a prompt in the evaluation process. In this instance the teacher would be performing the verb in the predetermined criterion and not the student, so the student will not receive any points for the performance on that task or predetermined criterion. It is acceptable to provide physical support to help a student access a task or predetermined criterion. If a student needs the teacher to move a body part or position the student so that the student can access the stimuli, that is not considered a prompt as long as the student is the one who is demonstrating the skill and the support is clearly defined on page one of the documentation form prior to the observation. All prompts, including hand-to-hand assistance, can never be written in as supports on page one of the documentation form.

52. **Question:** What should a teacher do if preplanned supports for the primary observation were documented on page 1 of the documentation form but were not needed by the student?

**Answer:** Once the preplanned supports have been recorded on page 1 of the documentation form and the assessment observation has begun, the preplanned supports must be provided. It is inappropriate to identify supports that may or may not be needed. If a teacher is unsure as to whether a student will need all of the preplanned supports in the assessment observation, then it is not yet time to perform the assessment observation. The teacher should provide
additional instruction until he or she is confident that the supports listed on page 1 of the documentation form are the ones that the student must have to be successful. If the teacher conducts an assessment observation and does not provide all of the preplanned supports, the observation should be considered invalid. However, if all three predetermined criteria were performed during this observation, this observation would be considered complete and count as one of the two allowed observation opportunities.

**Documentation of Student Performance**

53. **Question:** Can teachers use their own documentation forms or do they have to use the STAAR Alternate forms provided by the state?

**Answer:** The state has developed documentation forms that must be used to document all the necessary information regarding assessment task observations. These forms, titled “STAAR Alternate Documentation Form of Student Performance,” prepopulate with the related reporting category, knowledge and skills statement, essence statement, prerequisite skill, assessment task, and predetermined criteria. A form has been developed for every assessment task and is available at the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website. TAKS–Alt documentation forms can no longer be used and should be discarded.

54. **Question:** Where do teachers record the planning of supports, materials, and response modes to make a task accessible for their students?

**Answer:** Teachers are required to use the state-developed documentation forms to document how the assessment task will be made accessible for the student. The documentation forms include sections with the headers Preplanned Presentation Supports/Materials and Student Response Modes for teachers to use to describe these preplanned components of the observation. The “Template for Planning Assessment Tasks” document is an optional document that has been created to help teachers plan out this section of the documentation forms. The template is available at the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

55. **Question:** When should information be recorded on the documentation form?
Answer: The STAAR Alternate documentation form is a critical part of the implementation of the assessment. The first page of the documentation form needs to be filled out by the teacher prior to the assessment observation. The preplanning that is determined by the teacher should be based on the performance of the student during class instruction. The second and third pages of the documentation form should be recorded either during the observation or immediately after the observation to reflect an accurate account of the student’s performance. If the observation is deemed unfair and is stopped before completion, the teacher should review the supports and response modes and make changes before repeating the observation.

56. Question: What happens to the documentation forms after STAAR Alternate observations?

Answer: After completing all observations for a subject area and filling in all sections of the documentation forms, a teacher will use the forms to evaluate student performance in the Assessment Management System. After that, the forms should be maintained locally per district guidelines for five years. The documentation forms used to evaluate student performance in the Assessment Management System are the only STAAR Alternate documents that need to be maintained within the district. All forms must be given to the responsible party within the district by 7:00 PM (CT) on the last day of the assessment window. No forms will be available on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage after the close of the assessment window.

The Texas Assessment Management System

57. Question: How can teachers keep track of their students’ assessments?

Answer: The Assessment Management System provides a Teacher Assessment Status Roster Report which tracks the progress of the assessments by student for each subject and essence statement. Teachers can access this report by clicking the View Student Evaluation Status Reports link on the homepage in the Assessment Management System.

58. Question: How can teachers ensure that they have done everything to complete STAAR Alternate?
Answer: Throughout the assessment window, each subject area or high school course essence statement will show one of the following four status icons:

- **Red plus sign**—indicates that the subject or essence statement for that student has not been started by a teacher.
- **Blue writing pen**—indicates that the subject or essence statement for that student has been started but not completed by the teacher.
- **Gold star**—indicates that all evaluation data have been entered for the subject for that student. Subjects that are in “Completed” status have data entered for all four essence statements and are ready to be submitted by the teacher.
- **Green checkmark**—indicates that the subject for that student has been submitted by the teacher. No additional work may be done for that subject, and the assessment cannot be changed.

Teachers can also use the “STAAR Alternate Test Administrator (Teacher) Checklist” to determine if everything has been completed. This list outlines the steps that teachers should follow to ensure all parts of the assessment are completed. This checklist is available on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

59. **Question:** Where can teachers go to get more information about the Assessment Management System?

**Answer:** Refer to the following for additional information.

- Resources section within the Assessment Management System at [www.TexasAssessment.com](http://www.TexasAssessment.com)
- Support Services for the Assessment Management System at 800-627-0225

**Evaluating Student Performance**

60. **Question:** How do teachers evaluate student performance?

**Answer:** After instruction has occurred and an assessment observation has been conducted, a student’s performance will need to
be recorded on the “STAAR Alternate Documentation Form of Student Performance.” These notes will become the basis for evaluating the student’s performance in the Assessment Management System. Once the system has been accessed, alternate assessment teachers will answer a series of questions relating to the student’s demonstration of skill and level of support for each of the predetermined criteria.

After saving the evaluation for the primary observation, the system will alert teachers that the student is or is not eligible for generalization. If eligible, another observation on another day must be conducted with a change in materials. After the generalization observation, alternate assessment teachers will need to go back into the Assessment Management System to evaluate the student’s performance for generalization using the same procedures as in the primary observation.

61. **Question:** What is the impact of cueing and prompting on a student’s score?

**Answer:** Teachers are required to plan out the presentation supports, materials and response modes for a student that will allow the student the best opportunity to independently perform the predetermined criteria. If the student is having difficulty performing the skill with the preplanned supports, the teacher should first provide adequate wait time. If the student still does not respond, one or more cues should be provided before a prompt. Any additional assistance beyond the preplanned presentation supports documented on page 1 of the documentation form will deduct points from the student’s overall score. For a complete description of the scoring components, refer to the “STAAR Alternate Scoring Rubric” on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

62. **Question:** Who can enter and submit a student’s evaluation in the Assessment Management System?

**Answer:** Only the alternate assessment teacher to whom the student is assigned for that subject can evaluate and submit a student’s performance based on the observation notes.

63. **Question:** What happens if an alternate assessment teacher shares his or her user ID and password with someone else in the district?
**Answer:** Alternate assessment teachers must keep their user ID and password to the Assessment Management System confidential. This protects student privacy as well as the privacy of the user. Sharing of user IDs and passwords will result in a testing irregularity. The District Testing Coordinator and TEA should be notified if a violation has occurred.

**Generalization**

64. **Question:** Do all students get an opportunity for Generalization of Skill?

**Answer:** No. Students accessing Level 1 assessment tasks are not eligible for Generalization of Skill since student performance is being measured at a beginning awareness level. Students assessed on Complexity Level 2 or Level 3 who demonstrate each predetermined criterion without prompting in the primary evaluation earn the opportunity to generalize the skill. If a student earns the opportunity to generalize the skill, then a generalization opportunity must be provided, recorded, and evaluated in the Assessment Management System.

65. **Question:** How does the primary observation compare with the generalization observation?

**Answer:** The generalization observation measures the same predetermined criteria and utilizes the same supports and response modes as planned for the primary observation. The teacher must present the student with new materials during a generalization observation. The generalization observation must be done on a different day than the primary observation.

66. **Question:** Does a student get extra points for generalizing the skill?

**Answer:** Yes. For each predetermined criterion that is demonstrated independently, the student will earn two extra points. For each predetermined criterion that is demonstrated with cueing, the student will receive one additional point.
Transfer Students

67. **Question:** What is a teacher’s responsibility for assessing a student designated to take STAAR Alternate who enrolls late in the school year?

**Answer:** If a student designated to take STAAR Alternate transfers in to a district from a private school or from out-of-state after the March 30, 2011 transfer date, the receiving district is not required to assess the student.

If the student is transferring from another Texas school district and the student’s transferred data is incomplete, the receiving district does not need to complete or submit the assessment. The Assessment Management System will automatically finalize the assessment as is at the close of the assessment window. Students who are in one district for the October snap-shot date and in a different district at the close of the assessment window do not count for or against either district for AYP.

68. **Question:** What is a teacher’s responsibility when a student designated to take STAAR Alternate transfers out of the district?

**Answer:** If a student designated to take STAAR Alternate transfers out of a district to another Texas district and the teacher has conducted any portion of the assessment observations, the evaluations of those observations need to be entered into the Assessment Management System immediately before or just after the student leaves. Once the evaluation data has been input, the teacher should immediately notify the district testing coordinator of the student transfer so the student can be unregistered for STAAR Alternate, allowing the receiving district the ability to pick up the student account. It is a benefit to the student, and a recommended courtesy, for the sending district to provide the receiving district with the student’s “STAAR Alternate Documentation Forms of Student Performance” for the completed portions of the assessment since this is where the scores will be reported.

If a student designated to take STAAR Alternate transfers out of the district to another Texas district and the teacher has not conducted any of the assessment observations, the teacher should immediately notify the district testing coordinator of the student transfer so the
student can be unregistered for STAAR Alternate, allowing the receiving district the ability to pick up the student account.

69. **Question:** How does the transfer of a student designated for STAAR Alternate affect the district’s AYP?

**Answer:** Scores for students who are in one district for the October snapshot date and in a different district when the STAAR Alternate assessment window closes do not count for or against either district for AYP.

**Scoring and Reporting**

70. **Question:** Once a student has been evaluated in the Assessment Management System, how are final scores calculated?

**Answer:** The STAAR Alternate assessment program includes a scoring rubric which provides an overview of how scores are applied by the automated scoring feature of the Assessment Management System. The rubric includes information on score points awarded for a student demonstrating each predetermined criteria and points for independent, cued, or prompted performances. Additionally, the rubric provides information on the weighting applied to assessment tasks based on the complexity level that was chosen. Generalization of Skill points are also described. The rubric can be used to interpret the final score on the student’s CSR. The STAAR Alternate rubric is available at the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

71. **Question:** When are student scores reported to districts?

**Answer:** STAAR Alternate score reports and CSRs are generated and provided to districts at the same time as the other statewide assessments. These reports are sent to the district testing coordinator, who then disseminates them according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Specific reporting dates are available on the TEA’s Testing Calendar at [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/calendar](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/admin/calendar).

72. **Question:** How does a NRO designation for a student’s assessment affect a district’s AYP?
**Answer:** Assessments designated as NRO in the Assessment Management System by the alternate assessment teacher will not be included for proficiency in AYP calculations; however, students will count as participants. Student assessments designated as NRO do not count as failures and a student’s CSR will reflect the NRO status.

**Standard Setting**

73. **Question:** What are the cut scores for “Accomplished Academic Performance” and “Satisfactory Academic Performance” for STAAR Alternate?

**Answer:** Standards will not be determined for STAAR Alternate until September of 2012.

**STAAR Alternate Growth Measure**

74. **Question:** Will STAAR Alternate have a growth measure?

**Answer:** Yes. Texas legislation requires TEA to measure student progress over time. The growth measure for STAAR Alternate will be the tool used to report growth for students assessed with STAAR Alternate. This growth measure is currently in the development phase. When finalized, growth measure information will be available at the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage of TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.