

March 8, 2021

Dear Parents/Guardians,

You have likely heard about the Texas Education Agency's announcement in January that a student must be present at school for the STAAR assessments this spring. That announcement was followed by the Texas Tribune's interview with Commissioner Morath on February 11, which has been reported with conflicting details. I am writing to you in the hopes of providing some clarity regarding this issue.

Among other things, the Commissioner made the following points during his interview:

1. There are a number of federal and state laws that require all 1,202 school districts in the state to administer STAAR and EOC tests. In fact, TEA has posted a one-page listing of all of these laws on their website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/state-and-federal-required-tests.pdf>
2. Logistical constraints prevent the State of Texas from administering these assessments in remote or at-home settings. Therefore, a student must be physically present at school to complete their exam(s).
3. TEA has made a number of adjustments to help school districts provide a safe on-campus testing environment, including the option to expand the test window to allow more time for testing and an option to provide instruction remotely to those not testing (in order to reduce the number of students on campus during testing days).

As a district, we are committed to complying with federal and state laws relating to state assessments. We are also committed to providing the safest environment possible for students and staff on our campuses. While we believe that teacher assessment of learning is the most meaningful form of knowing our students as learners, we recognize that data from tests like STAAR can help us evaluate student progress in learning so that the campus is able to make decisions regarding academic supports, extensions, and even summer school. Thus, we expect all students to participate in STAAR assessments this spring on campus in our safe environments. The campus administration will communicate testing times and dates. If a student is absent the day of a test, he/she is expected to participate in the makeup day for testing. If a student does not take the exam on either their scheduled testing day or the makeup day, it will be counted as an absence.

This year, not participating in a STAAR assessment in grades 3-8 does not affect promotion or retention decisions. However, it is important to know that not participating in End-of-Course assessments (EOCs) at the high school level **does** have implications for students since, under current law, students are required to perform successfully on EOCs to meet graduation requirements. Although many students may have future opportunities to take EOCs prior to graduation, we believe that it is important for students to participate in EOCs at the conclusion of the course while the content is most fresh on the minds of students. Again, you will receive more information from your child's campus regarding details for participating in STAAR/EOC assessments this spring. Please reach out to campus staff if you have any questions regarding spring testing.

I cannot thank you enough for your support throughout this very challenging year.

Sincerely,

Linda Parker, Ed.D.
EMS ISD Deputy Superintendent