

End of Course Exams

Action Requested:

1. Students should be required to take a total of four EXIT-STAAR exams in the four foundation areas to ascertain their post-secondary readiness.
2. If a student demonstrated success in dual credit (passing grade) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses (grade 3 or higher on test), or IB exams he/she should be exempt from EOCs in the related core content area.
3. Permanently eliminate the requirement for a school district to count the EOC grade as 15% of the final grade.

Background:

Moving quickly from an executive order in 2005 as “voluntary testing” into active legislation in the 80th session, graduates are now required to take fifteen (15) End-of-Course (EOC) exams in order to graduate from high school. Intended as a phase-out of TAKS and into STAAR testing, the EOCs are taken in each foundation content area, and the number of EOC tests a student is required to take depends on the graduation plan the student is pursuing:

- English (English I, II, and III, each of which is broken into two exams: writing and reading);
- Mathematics (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II);
- Science (Biology, Chemistry, and Physics); and
- Social Studies (World Geography, World History, and United States History).

Graduation requirements: To graduate on the Recommended or Distinguished High School programs, students must:

- Take all 15 EOC tests,
- Earn at least the minimum score on each EOC test, and
- Earn a cumulative score on the EOC test in each subject area.

15 Percent Rule: State law mandates that school districts adopt a local policy requiring a student’s score on the EOC exam to count toward 15 percent of the student’s final course grade. Commissioner of Education Robert Scott delayed implementation of the 15 percent provision during the 2012-13 school year as part of the transition to the new STAAR testing system. Commissioner Michael Williams recently announced that he would delay the implementation of the 15 percent provision during the 2013-14 school year. This is the first time that a student’s performance on a state assessment is not only a prerequisite for graduation but will also count towards the student’s grade point average (GPA). The GPA, in turn, affects course-credit determinations and class-rank calculations, which traditionally have been based on local district policy.

Retests: If a student does not meet the minimum score on an EOC assessment, the student must retake the exam until passage occurs. In addition, students may retake an EOC exam for any reason, and districts are required to provide accelerated instruction to any student who fails a STAAR or EOC exam.

Rationale:

- *Drop out rate increases* - Requiring students to pass every EOC (up to 15) in order to graduate will increase the drop out rate as multiple failures accumulate. A student who fails the freshman End of Course exams will be challenged even more to pass subsequent tests at the next grade level.
- *Lost instructional days for the students who failed the previous year's EOC(s)* - High school students must pass five EOCs per year for each of 3 years. If a student fails one or more EOC tests, they are pulled out of their current class for remediation and then again for retesting days. The student loses instructional time in their current class while preparing for the retest. This puts the student behind in their regular course work while preparing for the retest.
- *Summer work schedules* – Students who have failed one or more end of course exams may choose to participate in the district's summer remediation program. However, they are required to take the retest offered in the summer. The maximum number of days that these retests are offered is found in the chart below. A student who is working full-time during the summer will have to secure time off of work in order to retest. This could amount to a significant number of days of lost wages and staffing impact for employers.
- *Instructional focus* - Teachers struggle to maintain classroom instruction and the curricular pace when some students are pulled out to receive remediation. It is a challenge to give the remaining students quality instruction and catch the other students up when they return.
- *Lost instructional days for incompatible courses* – Many instructional days are lost due to the EOC tests that must be given in non-related courses. For example, the freshman World Geography EOC test is given to freshmen taking the AP Human Geography. The junior-level English III EOC test is given to junior students taking AP English II, GT/AP English III, IB English I, or Dual Credit English. Class time is suspended in these rigorous classes in order to prepare for the incompatible exam. In addition, high percentages of students are already demonstrating success in dual credit, AP, and IB classes. Passing a dual credit class or earning a score that meets or exceeds the AP and IB criterion should exempt a student from the incompatible end of course exam.

Percentage of AP and IB exams that met or exceeded the AP and IB criterion

Test	Allen	Coppell	Frisco	Highland Park	Lewisville	McKinney	Northwest	Plano	Richardson
All AP & IB	61.0%	72.2%	70.3%	68.1%	72.1%	60.9%	53.0%	76.0%	55.7%

Source: Texas Education Agency AEIS report (2011-2012)

- *Lost opportunity for students to pursue interests or a career path* – Some students may be placed in mandatory remedial classes if they do not pass an EOC. This class becomes the student's elective choice. A sophomore could lose 1-2 periods (i.e. electives) for a remedial class. A student's love for learning disappears as they feel the discouragement of failing an end of course exam and cannot even take electives to pursue an interest or career path. Students are carrying the burden in a system that was intended to help students to be successful.
- *Unmet employment needs* - Tom Pauken, the Texas Workforce Commissioner Representing Employers, states that Texas has a shortage of skilled technical workers to replace the graying workforce. Human beings have different interests, talents, and learning styles. However, our current system is designed such that the students most likely

to benefit from technical training will not get it. Course options that provide industry-recognized certification programs are unavailable to many because the current system channels would-be highly paid technicians into schedules that feature a lack of hands-on experiences so that they can focus on their tests. Students should have the opportunity to take ownership in their education and focus on their strengths instead of adhering to one-size-fits-all mandates from outsiders. Allowing this flexibility will fill an unmet employment need in Texas.

- *Alternatives* – There are additional ways to monitor and measure outcomes: sampling techniques at certain grades to save limited instructional time and education dollars, online portfolios, NAEP scores, ACT-plan, PSAT scores, grades and passing rates, graduation rates, college-acceptance rates, dropout rates and student surveys. Also show students are college-ready by college acceptance, and/or ACT/SAT scores, or show they are career-ready by obtaining an industry-recognized vocational certification prior to graduation.
- *Quality of grading standardized tests* – Pearson, the state’s assessment provider, is advertising on Craigslist for college graduates to score standardized assessments at either a flat rate of \$12/hour or a piece rate. A lot is riding on the grading of a subjective Writing end of course exam. In fact, 40% of all students in Texas failed the first and second administration of the Writing end of course exam this year. (see Exhibit E) Are we confident in the skill and proficiency of the talent that is hired through a Craigslist ad to grade such an important test in a student’s educational career?
- *Personal education plans* - Developing a course sequence that supports a student’s success is not necessarily supported by the statutory requirements associated with End of Course exams.

Fiscal implications:

The estimated five year cost for the current state testing program to Pearson is \$498 million.

- Reduces budget required for substitutes to cover the classes while teachers administer tests and retests
- Reduce the state’s initial testing and retesting costs by reducing the number of tests and retests taken
- Reduce the state’s testing costs by reducing the number of tests taken by offering exemptions to successful AP, dual credit, and IB tests.
- Reduce the district’s accelerated instruction cost
- Motivates students to stay in school to receive a diploma
- Additional staffing costs for test and retest days