

The STAAR is Born



How assessments are developed

VOICE-OVER — Here in Texas, there is a statewide curriculum because we have high expectations for all our students. The STAAR test was developed to ensure all students are being taught and are learning that curriculum.

Did you know that there's an art to developing a STAAR test? Behind the scenes, a lot of thought and planning is put into each question that goes on the exam. Making sure the test accurately tells us what students have learned over the school year and is fair and appropriate for all children across the state involves a large cast with many talented players.

First, a committee made up of teachers, content experts, college representatives, and school administrators works together to set the scene, outlining the test content based on the state curriculum for each subject and grade. The committee also considers how long the test should take to complete and how many questions should be asked.

When the educator committee has a good idea of what should be on the test, they take a bow and the professional writers enter the stage. Many are current or former Texas teachers. They use their experience of working directly with children to write test questions in ways students can understand.

Once the writers have played their part and all the test questions are well written, more experts join the cast. These experts have made learning their life's work. They review each question to make sure it is the right difficulty level for the children's age and grade.

Then, an educator committee made of Texas teachers takes over. Because they interact with our children every day, they review the questions to make sure they are fair and appropriate and that they cover the state curriculum being taught in class that year. The teacher committees edit, approve, or delete test questions.

Next, a few of these questions are added to each STAAR test as samples to gather data to ensure the tests are just as academically challenging from one year to the next. But don't worry — your child is not graded on these sample questions.

Once tested and approved, all the questions for a STAAR test are stored in something called a test bank. Just like a bank where you keep your money, it is important that our test bank has enough in it. We need plenty of questions to make a complete STAAR test and enough to make sure the test is consistent from year to year. The more in the bank, the better!

For the final stage in the process, Texas Education Agency staff, many of whom are former Texas teachers, select and combine individual questions from the test bank to build a test. Once the test is built, it is reviewed again by content experts to ensure the test is a well-balanced STAAR test. Now the STAAR test is ready to be given to Texas students, who can show what they have learned and how much they have progressed from the previous year.

We repeat the process every year, so the curtain won't be closed for long. Soon we'll be ready to develop next year's STAAR test. New questions will be created, reviewed, and practice-tested so that each class of Texas students has their chance to shine on the STAAR!

