

The STAAR is Born



How assessments are developed

VOICE-OVER — 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, the questions are tested with large groups of students across the state. But don’t worry — your child is not graded on these sample tests.

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!

Now it’s time for the Texas Education Agency staff, many of whom are former Texas teachers, to select questions from the test bank to use for the STAAR test each year. These questions go through several more rounds of review by content experts. Once the questions are approved by the state, they are ready to be in the STAAR test! The test is given to Texas students, who can now show what they have learned and how much they have progressed from the previous year.

Although it would be easier to simply reuse the tests from year to year, each group of students deserves a special set of questions developed just for them. So the curtain won’t be closed for long as we prepare 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!

