



DURÓN'S DIGEST

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Preparing for STAAR

Students will take the first administration of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, better known as STAAR, beginning in March. Great challenges lie ahead under this more rigorous testing system, but we know that by continuing to keep a firm focus on our pointed intention to graduate all students prepared for college and career we can stay on the path of good progress.

In the past four years alone, our students made notable gains in the challenging areas of science and math on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. Though we still have more work to do, I want to point out that the percentage of our students who graduate college-ready in English language arts and math has increased, as well.

Districtwide, our passing rate in science jumped by 20 percentage points – from 52 percent to 72 percent — between 2007 and 2011. In math, the rate increased from 66 percent to 73 percent. We saw the biggest increases among our African American students and students in special education.

Our mission is to graduate all of our students and prepare them for success in higher education. We are doing a better job of keeping them in school. If projections hold true, we will have cut the high school dropout rate in half between the Class of 2007 and the Class of 2011, bringing the rate to 13 percent.

We also are doing a better job of ensuring that students who leave our system are ready to handle college-level work. The percentage of graduates deemed college-ready by the state in English language arts increased from 48 percent for the Class of 2006 to 54 percent for the Class of 2010, the most recent year available. In math, the percentage increased from 35 percent to 44 percent during the same time period.

We have made progress, even as we cut \$64 million from our operating budget over the last five years.

Now, we must hold tight to our intentions as we transition to a new, more challenging testing system for students in grades 3-12. There will be more open-ended questions, versus multiple-choice questions, and tests now will be timed. At the high school level, this year's freshmen are the first to be affected by new graduation rules that come with STAAR's end-of-course exams. Students will be required to pass a minimum of eight end-of-course exams, each of which will count as 15 percent of their final course grade in order to graduate. State assessment results have never before been a factor in a student's final course grade.

Public education is more challenging now than it has ever been, and we are responding. Students are being tested more frequently to gauge learning, and interventions are being developed to fill in gaps. We also continue to move toward excellent instruction in every SAISD classroom with amped up efforts to observe teaching and to ensure that teachers who need or request help in delivering high-quality lessons get it. We have also been working to prepare teachers and faculty for the transition to STAAR, as well as parents, through a variety of efforts, such as including information in school newsletters and holding parent meetings to discuss the changes.

We all want what is best for SAISD students, and we will not rest until our intention becomes our reality: Every single student crossing the graduation stage ready for higher education or a career.

Best regards,