

Summary of February 2023 ESSA Amendment Comments

Summary of Comments Received and Agency Responses

English Language Proficiency (ELP)

1. As 2023–24 will be the first year that TELPAS writing online is part of the composite score, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) should use 2022–23 as a baseline and not use the proposed evaluation of two of three domains.

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) denied a waiver in 2018 requesting a one year pause on ELP evaluation due to TELPAS that year. As such, TEA is proposing the evaluation of ELP at the domain level for 2023 accountability to meet the requirement in ESSA to evaluate the progress of Texas' emergent bilingual (EB) students toward achieving English language proficiency. This proposal allows us to exclude the TELPAS writing online in the evaluation of ELP until we can collect baseline data. Composite ratings will be assigned for 2022–23 TELPAS but will not be included in the evaluation of ELP in 2023 accountability. These composite ratings will be used in our data analysis to determine if future amendments to ELP targets are necessary for 2024 and beyond.

2. The increase in ELP targets, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, is too high.

ELP targets had to be evaluated and reset to align with the adjusted 2023 methodology. TELPAS data were modeled, by school type, using the proposed methodology. The 2023 interim targets are based on the 2022 statewide average, for each school type.

Student Group Targets and Points

3. The change to STAAR cut points is too harsh on campuses and will significantly impact campus and district ratings. This will also lead to negative public perception of public schools. The targets for elementary schools are harder than those for high schools.

The 2023 STAAR performance targets and cut points in the accountability system, including Closing the Gaps, are unchanged from 2017 baseline data. To account for the impact of COVID-19 and the STAAR redesign, Academic Achievement used the original 2017 baseline dataset at Meets Grade Level and further disaggregated targets by school type. Targets were set on actual student group statewide averages, by school type.

4. Having different standards by race is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Requiring fewer African American and Hispanic students to reach the highest levels of mastery in order for campuses and districts to earn an A means campuses and districts will respond accordingly when distributing limited resources.

TEA's goal is to have all students increase 50 percent in the Meets performance level by 2037–38, thereby closing the gap for all student groups. In setting this benchmark, TEA is maintaining the expectation that we should hold all student groups to the same expectations of proficiency growth over the course of this plan. The interim benchmarks, based on 2017 statewide performance, by each student group, creates achievable yet aggressive progress checks for all student groups to achieve to ensure that they are making meaningful improvements towards the long-term goals.

5. There is a big difference between missing a target by two points and missing by 20 points. While growth is being addressed in the graded point system, it looks like schools that narrowly miss the target are still going to be treated the same as schools that miss the mark by a mile. I'd like

Summary of February 2023 ESSA Amendment Comments

to see the schools within a certain range of the targets get points. Perhaps 2 points – Did not meet interim target but showed expected growth toward interim target *OR* achieved a score within three points of the interim target.

As the focus of ESSA is on ambitious State-designed long-term goals, with interim measures toward the goals, TEA is in alignment with USDE guidance that growth toward targets is a requirement. Meeting the target or showing growth is a requirement under ESSA. If a group remains stagnant below the interim target, or their performance slides backwards to the point they are below the interim target, they are flagged as not meeting expectations as they are not progressing toward the long-term goal.

6. While we support moving from a yes/no point system to gradated point system, we believe that the weight of the challenge of earning a 4 in the gradated system should be equivalent to that of earning a Yes in the current system. This higher standard to a 4 is compounded by simultaneous proposed changes in the number of student groups to be included and changes in minimum group size. The 0–4 points methodology should weight 3 such that if all indicators in the domain scored 3s the scaled score would be an A - 100. Student groups earning 4s should receive extra points.

The focus of ESSA is on ambitious State-designed long-term goals, which in Texas is to reduce achievement gaps by 50 percent. The first set of interim targets is 2017 baseline data which grants campuses five years to demonstrate growth toward long-term targets before the targets increase. TEA disagrees with a methodology that would award a campus an A while none of its student groups have closed existing achievement gaps.

Additionally, Closing the Gaps scaling factored in the 4 as having demonstrated performance equivalent to closing a gap. Scaling was set based on actual statewide averages, by school type, using the 0–4 point methodology. Just as in other parts of the system, the expectations were set based on how Texas schools are performing which means that C is anchored around average performance for schools, and A performance is set equivalently to excellent performance of actual schools in Texas. This means there are currently schools in Texas where achievement gaps between student groups have been reduced considerably. These campuses had one or more groups that received 4s in the modeled data which equates to current highest-level performance (A) in Closing the Gaps.

7. The federal graduation rate targets are too high for alternative campuses. We continue to be identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) based on our graduation rate.

TEA worked extensively with the USDE to seek alternative measures within Closing the Gaps for dropout recovery campuses. Unfortunately, ESSA does not permit alternative standards for any school type, including the 66.7 percent CSI graduation rate cut point.

8. TEA should run 2023 as a transition year with a hold-harmless accountability due to the STAAR redesign.

ESSA requires annual evaluation of disaggregated student performance. Unlike previous changes to the state summative assessment, which historically have increased the rigor of the assessment, the STAAR redesign does not increase the rigor of the test. Instead, the STAAR was redesigned to make the test more tightly aligned to the classroom experience. The redesign does not mean the test will be harder. The same rigorous statistical processes used to ensure that the test is measuring the same thing each year will be applied during the redesign of STAAR.

Summary of February 2023 ESSA Amendment Comments

However, the redesign does mean that in many grades, the RLA test will include writing for the first time. Based on the addition of writing and the impact of COVID-19, TEA has proposed keeping the same baseline used when setting 2017 cut points for STAAR proficiency.

Student Groups and Super Groups

9. Rethink the consolidation of four subgroups into the High Focus group and the use of the two lowest-performing racial/ethnic groups from the prior year. While we appreciate that disaggregated subgroup data would still be collected, this consolidated reporting could mask the real and distinct challenges and growth that these different student subgroups experience. Concern was voiced that Texas is the only state using supergroups.

The proposed change could result in inconsistent scoring trends across school years and unclear data for important student subgroups. The lowest-performing groups can change from year to year.

The proposed changes to consolidate student subgroups' data for accountability leave schools less accountable for these students' educational performance and progress. Obscuring data for student subgroups presents problems for assessing school accountability for all students.

For some districts, including the Economically Disadvantaged students in the High Focus group will include a majority of the All student group. This will not increase the focus on students in the special education current EB, homeless or foster groups and might decrease the focus that was there for special education and current EB in the previous system.

The reduced minimum size of 10 is too small.

TEA acknowledges the changes proposed to the Closing the Gaps domain require a paradigm shift on what it means to "hold districts accountable" for every student group. TEA seeks to narrow the focus of Closing the Gaps to the lowest performing student groups in Texas. During the years spent researching potential adjustments to Closing the Gaps to amplify the focus on our most at-risk groups, TEA consulted staff at numerous state agencies to seek best practices that could benefit our students. A number of states use super groups in an effort to increase the number of students for which each campus is held accountable. The two most common uses of super groups focus on (1) historically underserved students and (2) students in the bottom 25 percent or 30 percent of achievement within their school.

Texas data trends reveal campuses' lowest performing racial/ethnic groups rarely fluctuate. During refresh data analysis, TEA analyzed 2018, 2019, and 2021 STAAR performance data which demonstrated more than 94 percent of campuses had the same lowest performing racial/ethnic groups over all three years. Over 54 percent of these campuses had the same two groups and 40 percent had the same single group that remained stable (some campuses only met minimum size in the one group over the three years). The remaining six percent of campuses had racial/ethnic groups remain stable two of the three years analyzed. These data spotlight alarming and persistent performance gaps across Texas.

The Closing the Gaps domain methodology holds districts accountable for a subset of the groups through the Closing the Gaps rating where super groups will be used to generate points toward a rating which is also used to make CSI determinations. Districts are held accountable for disaggregated student groups through Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) and Additional Targeted Support (ATS) determinations where each group's performance is evaluated, assigned

Summary of February 2023 ESSA Amendment Comments

0–4 points, and reported publicly. Campuses with student groups who are consistently underperforming are identified for school improvement.

With the reduced minimum size of ten and use of super groups, disparities in student group outcomes will be amplified, not obscured. The focus shifts to these groups without the previous 14 groups distracting from gaps. Larger student groups are reflected proportionally in and have a direct impact on the Student Achievement and School Progress domains; the goal of Closing the Gaps is to focus on the lowest performing groups in order to drive improvements to close gaps.

Disaggregated data for each of the following student groups will be reported and evaluated within Closing the Gaps. Additionally, district Closing the Gaps reports will include all district students, including those that move between campuses during the year.

- *All students*
- *Seven racial/ethnic groups: African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, white, and two or more races*
- *Economically disadvantaged*
- *EB students/English learners (EL) (current and monitored through year 4)*
- *Special education*
- *Foster*
- *Homeless*
- *Migrant*
- *Continuously enrolled*
- *Former special education*

10. *Rethink the methodology for identifying the two-lowest performing racial/ethnic groups by focusing on a racial/ethnic group’s distance from target versus performance.*

As a key element of ESSA is to measure progress toward making significant progress in closing statewide proficiency gaps, TEA stands by the proposal to focus on the performance of the lowest-performing student groups in Academic Achievement in order to close these gaps.

Questions and Answers

1. *Previously, the ELP methodology evaluated several years of prior scores. Why is this changing and evaluating only 2023 compared to 2022?*

Since 2020, the availability of TELPAS composite scores for EB students varied due to the interruptions caused by COVID on instruction and TELPAS administrations. In order to capture data for EB students, a multi-year methodology was used to include as many EB students in the state’s evaluation as possible. As we move away from the impacted numbers, the multi-year evaluation is no longer necessary.

2. *If two-point growth measures the necessary improvement to the next interim target, shouldn’t the denominator be six as the next target will be evaluated at the end of the 2027–28 school year?*

Yes. TEA updated the two-point growth calculation to a six to reflect the growth necessary between the 2022–23 and 2027–28 school years.

Summary of February 2023 ESSA Amendment Comments

3. Is ATS identification reverting to the prior methodology where it is not a subset of TSI?

No. ATS identifications will continue to be based on the subset of TSI identified campuses.

4. Based on a review of information that we received recently, my concern is that EB student/EL reclassification criteria may not be adjusted based on this amendment proposal.

Given the release date for the TELPAS Writing scores, LEAs will have a 30 calendar day extension in the Fall of 2023, to allow LPACs to meet and consider possible Reclassification. LPACs should continue considering all 4 language domains using the 2023 TELPAS Assessment for reclassification purposes. The current [Reclassification Criteria Chart](#) is still applicable for the 2022–23 school year. For additional information, please contact the Emergent Bilingual Support Division www.txel.org.

5. Have the Closing the Gaps component weights for elementary and middle schools changed?

No. The component weighting within Closing the Gaps for all school types remains unchanged.