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NEWS RELEASE

Teachers, students gear up for STAAR

JULY 20, 2011—As students and teachers statewide prepare for the state's new accountability instrument, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), this school year, the curriculum is unchanged, an important factor in relieving anxiety for students, particularly freshmen.

“Much of the focus for our June 1-3 staff development was on preparing our teachers to instruct our students at the level of rigor needed to be successful on STAAR,” said Tammy Lind, director of staff development and accountability for Comal ISD. “The test is changing, but the state curriculum the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are not. We are confident that if we help our teachers understand the level of rigor in the statewide curriculum, which they have, then the test will take care of itself.”

This year's incoming freshmen are the most impacted by the STAAR, Lind said, because their performance on the tests affects graduation. Students in grades 3-8 are also affected, but not at the same "level of urgency."

Comal ISD has about 8,500 students in grades 3-9.

The fundamental difference between STAAR and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the former statewide assessment, is that STAAR/End of Course Exams "will test content students studied that year, as opposed to testing content studied over multiple years," according to information from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). "Doing so will strengthen the alignment between what is taught and what is tested for a given course of study."

These end-of-course (EOC) exams will address the statewide curriculum for the given course, as opposed to the high school level TAKS assessments, which address the curriculum from multiple courses.

"If we teach our curriculum at the depth and complexity it needs to be taught, we will not have to worry about the STAAR," Lind said.

TEA believes the STAAR will better measure the academic performance of students as they progress from elementary to middle to high school.

Discussion about the implementation of STAAR began last spring. Lind has spoken to parents at district and campus events; principals are gearing up for continued discussion at parent nights and campus events this fall and the district's PTA leaders are on board to

assist with parent information nights.

Freshmen orientation this August will include information for students and parents about the EOC exams, she said.

Some of the changes to the STAAR include:

- In reading, greater emphasis will be given to critical analysis than to literal understanding;
- In writing, students will be required to write two essays rather than one;
- In social studies, science and math, process skills will be assessed in context, not in isolation, which will allow for more integrated and authentic assessment of these content areas; and
- In science and math, the number of open-ended items will increase to allow students more opportunity to derive an answer independently.

More information about the STAAR may be found on the district website, www.comalisd.org, the TEA website, www.tea.state.tx.us, and at your child's campus.

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