

EDUCATION GALAXY

New Online Testing for Texas: **House Bill 3261**

Over the last couple of years, the Texas Legislature has passed a series of bills with major implications for educators and students throughout the state. Everything from the way tests are administered to the tests themselves—and even how teachers are compensated—is in a state of transition.

One of the most significant changes? The transition to all-online assessments. This is the result of the passage of [House Bill 3261](#), and makes Texas one of the first states to move to all-online assessments (though others are sure to follow).

Here's everything you need to know about HB3261, including the details of the bill, the transition period, additional funding involved, and more. But first— a bit about the trend of evolving the way assessments are given to students around the nation.

A Growing Trend

Texas isn't alone in changing the way they approach assessments and testing. A handful of other states are reportedly considering a move to fully online assessments, while others are changing their plans for test administration in order to allow more children to access testing windows.

Texas is one of the first states to transition to an almost all-online assessment system, though 70% of states are already implementing some level of online assessments. It's also offering STAAR tests at a range of locations designed to help encourage social distancing in the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Chances are that as time goes on, more and more school districts and state legislators will begin to see the value of online assessments and begin moving testing online. This will make online teaching tools more important than ever, as they will help prepare students not only for the content but also the format of assessments they'll be taking.

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About the Transition

In 2020, the state of Texas conducted a Transition to Online Assessments Feasibility Study. The study looked at national best practices in online assessment and also included a survey of state public schools in order to determine their level of readiness for the switch to online testing. Their findings were that 'school systems in Texas generally have the infrastructure in place to fully implement online testing and that a small investment in internet connectivity would be needed for a subset of primarily small and rural LEAs.' Overall, the study found that schools could move to online assessments within a two-year time frame. This two year transition period would allow students and educators time to familiarize themselves with online testing and become more comfortable with online assessments.

The Texas Education Agency will be supporting school systems through the transition by launching the [Transition to Online Assessments Implementation Guide](#). The guide outlines everything that must be achieved before online testing is implemented as well as the next steps, important resources, and recommended minimums. The guide also offers criteria for successful online implementation and support provided by testing vendors and regional service centers.

Another form of support will come in the form of the Online Transition Grant.

The Online Transition Grant

The Online Transition Grant is a \$4 million matching grant approved by the Texas Education Agency and aimed at small and rural LEAs. It will go towards helping these smaller schools and districts increase network infrastructure— namely, high-speed internet connectivity— in order to meet the needs that will come with online testing and assessment. The amount of the grant was influenced by the findings of the feasibility study mentioned above, and will prioritize establishing internet connections, boosting connection, and meeting minimum bandwidth speeds.

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Overview of State Summative Assessment Redesign

Beyond just the move to online assessments, the Texas Legislature also enacted significant changes to assessments under Bill 3906. You can read more in our full article on the bill [here], but core changes in the redesign include:

- A transition to online assessments, supported by the bills, funding changes, and infrastructure support outlined in this article
- A renewed emphasis on non-multiple-choice questions, including the creation of new questions and a requirement that no more than 75% of the points on a state assessment come from multiple choice questions
- Eliminating standalone writing assessments for grades 4 and 7
- Adding writing to reading language arts assessments for grades 3-8
- Incorporating cross-curricular passages into RLA assessments

Resources

The TEA has provided a few extra resources designed to help educators, students, and families prepare for the transition:

- [STAAR Practice Tests](http://www.texasassessment.gov) – available on www.texasassessment.gov, a resource open to the public that provides exposure to the testing tools and accommodations that increase equitable access for all students. Note: currently available practice tests are based on the current STAAR assessment design. Practice tests based on the redesigned state assessment will be available in 2022.
- [STAAR Interim Assessments](#) – free, optional, online tests for public school systems that mirror the summative blueprint and predict students' performance on the STAAR.
- [Texas Formative Assessment Resource \(TFAR\)](#) – free, optional, online tool for educators to create and deliver quizzes, analyze results, and gain real-time feedback as learning occurs.

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Conclusion

If you're looking to get prepared for the transition to online assessments, Education Galaxy can be one of your most essential tools. Our fully online system of test preparation tools and learning modules is designed to provide educators and students with everything they need to excel— and with the transition to online assessments, the Education Galaxy online format is even better equipped to give students the preparation they need to succeed.

Interested in learning more? Request a demo today or contact us for more information.



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