

Texas Classroom Teachers Association



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February 24, 2021

Michael Morath, Commissioner of Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701
Via email

Commissioner Morath,

We have heard from a number of members with concerns about their ability to collect the writing samples required by the TELPAS, largely due to the varied learning environments students are experiencing during the pandemic.

Among the specific concerns we've heard about are that districts are requiring that the writing samples be handwritten or turned in well before the TELPAS assessment window has expired, and questions as to what happens if a student simply refuses or a teacher is ultimately unable to collect a writing sample from a student.

We understand that according to TEA's [TELPAS Rater Manual](#) (PDF posted 10/20/20) "Writing samples may be typed and collected in electronic or printed form provided that spell check and grammar check are disabled for students not eligible for this designated support."

We also understand that TEA's [Spring 2021 Assessment Guidance](#) (PDF updated 1/20/21) provides that the testing window for TELPAS holistic assessments (K –1 and 2 –12 writing) is six weeks (February 22–April 2); as well as that districts have discretion within the testing window to designate the date by which writing samples must be collected, according to TEA's [Grades 2–12 Writing Collection Overview](#) (PDF updated 09/04/20).

However, given the feedback we are receiving from the field indicating widespread misunderstanding, we respectfully ask the following:

- Please issue a "To the Administrator Addressed" letter noting that writing samples are not required to be handwritten, and that districts should give the maximum amount of time allowed via the TELPAS testing window for teachers to collect writing samples.
- Additionally, we ask that the assessment window for the TELPAS holistic assessments (K –1 and 2 –12 writing) be extended beyond the last date of the current assessment window, April 2. In support of this, we note the recent U.S. Department of Education guidance to states specifically calls for assessment of English Learners to be extended beyond the end of the 2020-21 school year "if necessary, to ensure that districts are administering this assessment when it safe for them to do so."

- Last, we ask that TEA proactively address what happens in the practical reality that writing samples simply cannot be collected from students in certain circumstances.

Finally, despite our multiple requests that the STAAR and EOC exams be suspended for this school year, we are clear that you find value in the administration of these tests and plan to proceed. Although progress has been made in eliminating high stakes consequences, for which we thank you, we would appreciate clarification to the school population that these tests are to be used for no purpose other than to gauge student achievement. It would be our recommendation that the tests be explicitly made optional for districts, parents, and students. Teachers have multiple other ways to assess individual student learning.

Thank you for your consideration of our views, and I hope you and your family are well and weathered the recent storm without harm.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeri Stone". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Jeri Stone
TCTA Executive Director

Enclosures
CC: Gov. Greg Abbott