

January 9, 2012
RAISING THE BAR

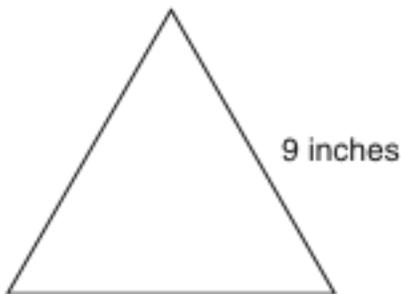
We need to raise the bar. What does that seriously mean? We use it in the school business often, but can we truly provide a definition of what that means? Parents, many of you should have received report cards for the first semester by the publication of this article. Semester exam grade scores might be lower than expected. The information assessed for all students grades 3rd-12th was information that was supposed to be covered during the first semester in the appropriate class. Why are the scores lower than we want? We are raising the bar. Semester exams were prepared according to the STAAR Assessment Blueprints. This helped teachers pick the number of questions and type (griddables) to help prepare students for the format of the state assessment they will be taking in the spring. The information assessed and reported on the report card was covered in class during the first semester. The TAKS test was the state assessment that Texas used for nearly the last decade. The STAAR Assessment will replace TAKS and this assessment will "Raise the Bar." For the first time it will assess the state standards on the cognitive rigor of the verbs. The STAAR Assessment will assess Readiness Standards (approx. 65% of assessment) and Supporting Standards (approx. 35% of assessment) within each subject. There will also be Processing Standards measured within these two standards. For example, in third grade math, the Texas State Standard is this:

3.11 (B) **Use** standard units to find the perimeter of a shape.
(Verb)

The first question is an old 3rd grade TAKS question assessing this standard.

3rd Grade TAKS Release Test Question:

Each side of the triangle shown below is the same length.



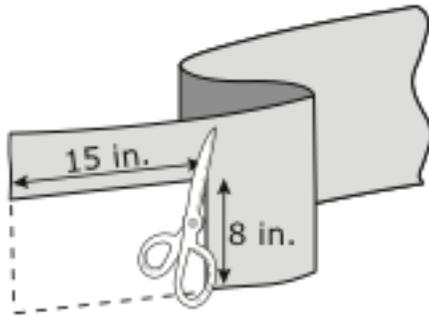
What is the perimeter of the triangle? Mark your answer.

- 81 in.
- 27 in.
- 36 in.
- 18 in.

The following is an example of a new STAAR Question.

3rd Grade STAAR Release Question:

Maria cut out a rectangle 15 inches long and 8 inches wide from a piece of cloth.



What is the perimeter of her rectangle?

- A** 23 in.
- B** 46 in.
- C** 38 in.
- D** 31 in.

The state standards (what the students are expected to know) for each course have not changed, but the bar has been raised with the way the state is measuring them—STAAR. These standards haven't changed. CSCOPE isn't the state standards (TEKS), it is the organizational tool used to communicate the state standards. Whether a school district uses CSCOPE, Kilgo, district adopted, or just trusts teachers to use a notebook of skills, the state standards are the same. How you organize and teach to the cognitive rigor is the difference. The state is "Raising the Bar" on how they will assess students on these skills. This will be STAAR.

The TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills---State Standards) are what every teacher must use and make sure students master before progressing to the next grade level.

The state revises the actual standards for each subject every seven years. The next revision will be math in the next two years. Currently, 3rd grade math has 43 student expectations that students are expected to learn. Nine of these 43 are Readiness Standards and will comprise approximately 65% of the material on the STAAR Assessment. Nineteen of the student expectations are Supporting Standards and will comprise approximately 35% of the material on the STAAR Assessment.

One thing that we don't know about the STAAR is where the state will set the passing standard. Standards for high school courses are supposed to be set in February (2012); however, standards for all other grades are not set to be released until late fall. This is one thing that is really unsettling. School districts know that the assessments will be more difficult in regard to content because the cognitive (thinking) rigor will be at higher level. The bar has been raised and we, San Saba ISD, must adapt. The state made this decision. The main reason the state changed from TAKS to STAAR according to TEA was because the TAKS has outlived its purpose. The TAKS assessment was the minimum (floor) of what students should have mastered before they graduate. Let's look at where the passing standards were set for the respective TAKS assessments in 2011:

Minimum Percentage for Students to "Met Standard" = Passed in 2011

This is what percentage each student would have to make on the respective test to "pass=meet standard".

3rd Reading = 61%

4th Reading = 67%

5th Reading = 71%

6th Reading = 71%

7th Reading = 64%

8th Reading = 72%

9th Reading = 64%

4th Writing = 53% plus a 2 on essay

7th Writing = 50% plus a 2 on essay

10th ELA = 58% plus a 2 on essay

11th ELA = 57% plus a 2 on essay

3rd math = 65%

4th math = 64%

5th math = 63%

6th math = 60%

7th math = 56%

8th math = 58%

9th math = 53%

10th math = 57%

11th math = 51%

8th Social Studies = 43%

10th Social Studies = 50%

11th Social Studies = 43%

5th Science = 75%

8th Science = 66%
10th Science = 60%
11th Science = 52%

The first question I would ask as a parent, “Are we satisfied with our students, or own kids, only knowing these percentages of a subject?” That can’t be our standard. We must feel confident that our students have all the information. It is a must. We don’t know what the “new” passing standards will be, but we must set the bar higher in classrooms to not have to worry about it. We can’t be satisfied with understanding just 50% of the material.

STUDENT ANALOGY

A conversation with students spurred me to provide an explanation of how you raise academic standards with the confidence that the students will eventually be successful. I will use an analogy that compares training to running the mile with preparing for the STAAR Assessments. The world record in the mile set in 1999 by Morocco’s Hicham El Guerrouj at 3:43.13 is far from being attainable. The world record in the mile has progressed from 4:36.5 in 1865 to nearly a minute better in 1999. Amazing!

I would venture to say that if all of our high school students had to go out today and “run” a mile that there would be many different times, and many different attitudes about being asked to do this! I would guess our best would be around a five-minute mile and some would range up to sixteen minutes. If after each time was recorded for each individual student, I will say with confidence that I could devise a plan to have every student post a better time in 90 days. It would require a lot of work and many students would not be excited about running a mile, but if they had to do it to graduate, I believe we could find a way to motivate them. One thing that would be important would be to communicate where the students were in their training. We might not actually time “a mile” every practice, but the training would reflect what they are preparing for. The training would consist of good foundational work (distance) and then work that would concentrate on pacing. These are important skills for all training, athletic and academic. I would make sure to record the workouts and time students training for the mile and set goals. It would require much motivation and inspiration, but if the students put in the work, they would definitely post better times in 90 days. Guaranteed.

We have to explain to our students that the hard work will pay off. The academic scores some received on the semester exams might be the lowest scores they have seen, but if they are a true reflection of the information they know then we know where to focus the energy. Bottom line: we either understand it, or we don’t. And if we don’t, we have to work to get there.