

## **Texas Assessment of Knowledge of Skills (TAKS) Vertical Scale and Academic Achievement Standards Review Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is a scale?**

The basic score on any test is the raw score, which is simply the number of questions correct. A raw score can be interpreted only in terms of a particular set of test questions. Unlike raw scores, scale scores can be interpreted across different sets of test questions. Scale scores allow direct comparisons of student performance between specific sets of test questions from different test administrations. A scale score is a conversion of the raw score onto a scale that is common to all test forms for that assessment. The scale score takes into account the difficulty level of the specific set of questions on which it is based. It quantifies a student's performance relative to the passing standards or proficiency levels for such tests as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), Algebra I end-of-course (EOC) assessment, and Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) reading.

### **2. What is a vertical scale?**

A vertical scale refers to a conversion of a raw score onto a scale that is common to all assessments that measure a similar content domain (e.g., mathematics) across different grades. With a vertical scale, a student's scale score in one grade can be compared to that student's scale score in another grade so it is possible to determine how much the student has progressed in that content area.

### **3. In what content areas were the vertical scales developed?**

Vertical scales were developed for English TAKS reading and mathematics in grades 3–8. A vertical scale for Spanish TAKS is also available for reading and mathematics in grades 3–6.

### **4. Why create a vertical scale?**

Under Section 39.036 of Senate Bill 1031, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) was required to develop a vertical scale for assessing student performance on the TAKS assessments in reading and mathematics for grades 3–8.

### **5. What is the advantage of a vertical scale?**

The main advantage of a vertical scale is the ability to interpret year-to-year growth as demonstrated by scale score changes.

### **6. What is the score range of the vertical scale scores?**

The vertical scale for TAKS English and Spanish both have a potential score range from approximately 0 to 1000.

**7. What is the difference between a vertical scale and the scale that was used previously for TAKS reading and mathematics?**

There are three major differences. First, the previous scale for the English and Spanish TAKS assessments ranged from 1200–3300. The vertical scale for English and Spanish TAKS will have a different score range (approximately 0–1000). Second, unlike the previous scale, the vertical scale can be used to interpret year-to-year progress as demonstrated by scale score changes. Third, the performance-level cut points (e.g., Met Standard and Commended Performance) were the same numbers, 2100 and 2400 respectively, on the previous TAKS reading and mathematics scales for all grades. The performance-level cut points will not be the same across grades on the vertical scale.

**8. What are the TAKS assessments that will NOT be transitioning to the vertical scale?**

- grades 4 and 7 writing
- grades 5, 8, 10, and exit level science
- grades 8, 10, and exit level social studies
- grades 9, 10, and 11 mathematics
- grade 9 reading
- grades 10 and exit level English language arts

**9. For the TAKS assessments that will not be transitioning to a vertical scale, which scale will be used?**

For any TAKS assessment that is not transitioning to a vertical scale, the assessment results will continue to be reported on the existing horizontal scale. Students will still need a scale score of 2100 to meet the standard and a scale score of 2400 to achieve commended performance.

**10. If a student attains a vertical scale score in the current grade that is higher than the passing score at a future grade, does this mean the student has “Met Standard” at the future grade?**

No. While it is appropriate to compare vertical scale scores for the same student across grades to evaluate how much progress that student has made, it is not appropriate to compare a vertical scale score for a student in one grade to the passing standard in a grade in which that student has not yet received instruction. The passing scores on the vertical scale are aligned with the TEKS curriculum at each grade and are based upon the assumption that a student will have had instruction in the grade-specific curriculum.

**11. What about a vertical scale for the alternative assessments, the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and the EOC assessments?**

There are currently no plans to create a vertical scale for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills–Alternate (TAKS-Alt). Texas is currently evaluating plans to implement a vertical scale for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills–Modified (TAKS-M) in the future. The TELPAS Reading assessment is currently reported on a vertical scale that ranges from approximately 0 to 1000. There are currently no plans to create a vertical scale for the EOC assessments.

**12. What are academic achievement standards?**

Academic achievement standards (also referred to as performance standards) represent the passing score(s) on a test. On the TAKS test, there are three categories that describe student performance—*Did Not Meet Standard*, *Met Standard*, and *Commended Performance*. The academic achievement standards are the cut scores on a test that divide students into these three categories. A student is considered to have passed the TAKS test if he or she earned a score at least as high as the cut score for the Met Standard performance category.

**13. How are the academic achievement standards set?**

Academic achievement standards are set using a research-based process (commonly referred to as standard setting) that involves committees of Texas educators. The committees review the content standards and the content of the tests to make a recommendation to the state about cut scores that most accurately categorize students into different performance levels. For TAKS, academic achievement standards for most grades and subjects were originally set using standard-setting procedures and were adopted by the State Board of Education (SBOE) in 2002.

**14. Why did Texas recently review the academic achievement standards?**

When a set of academic achievement standards has been adopted for an assessment, the standards apply as long as they are judged to be appropriate for defining student performance levels on the assessment. It is recommended that performance standards be reviewed when a change occurs in the assessment program. Senate Bill 1031 (section 39.036) required the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop a vertical scale for assessing student progress beginning with the 2008–2009 school year for reading and mathematics at grades 3–8. With this change, a standards review was needed to determine if the academic achievement standards across grade levels still made sense when viewed on a vertical scale.

**15. How do the academic achievement standards and the vertical scale relate?**

The vertical scale provides a way for Texas to directly compare the existing academic achievement standards at each grade level and to evaluate their progression from one grade to another. The vertical scale itself does not determine the academic achievement standards and does not alter the academic achievement standards from those adopted by the SBOE in 2002. However, once the vertical scale had been developed, TEA convened several panels of educators to evaluate the appropriateness of the academic achievement standards on the new vertical scale and to recommend changes to those academic achievement standards where appropriate.

**16. What changes in the academic achievement standards did the educator panels recommend?**

The panels recommended changes to the academic achievement standards so that they reflected an appropriate increase in expectations for student performance from grade to grade without lowering those expectations. The recommended changes are summarized in Table 1, with an X indicating where the standards review committees recommended an increase in the performance standards.

**Table 1. Review Committees' Recommended Changes in the Performance Standards**

		TAKS English		TAKS Spanish	
		Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading
Grade 3	Met Standard	No change	No change	<b>X</b>	No change
	Commended	No change	No change	No change	No change
Grade 4	Met Standard	No change	No change	<b>X</b>	No change
	Commended	No change	No change	<b>X</b>	No change
Grade 5	Met Standard	No change	No change	No change	No change
	Commended	<b>X</b>	No change	No change	No change
Grade 6	Met Standard	No change	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	Commended	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Grade 7	Met Standard	No change	No change		
	Commended	No change	No change		
Grade 8	Met Standard	No change	<b>X</b>		
	Commended	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		

**17. When will the new academic achievement standards go into effect?**

The panels' recommended changes to the academic achievement standards will go into effect beginning in spring 2010. Student performance for 2009 will be reported under the current academic achievement standards.