**Federal Regulations Cause Testing Changes**

A change made at the federal level two years ago regarding testing of special education students is becoming reality. And quite understandably, there is now frustration among teachers and parents of students receiving special education services in Texas.

First, a quick history lesson: In August 2013, the United States Department of Education released a change to federal regulations that would preclude states from using assessments based on modified academic achievement standards in federal accountability calculations. The federal government’s rationale behind this decision is based in a philosophy that all students, including students with disabilities, need to be held to the same high expectations in order for them to achieve at high levels.

Up to this point, Texas has been one of only a handful of states across the nation that administered an assessment such as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) Modified. In the majority of states, all but the most severely cognitively disabled students have been assessed using the same general assessment as non-special education students.

I should note that our state continued to use STAAR Modified even as the federal government warned us that its use would soon be disallowed. In fact, it was Texas’ use of and reliance on STAAR Modified that, in part, resulted in the state’s low rating last year in the federal government’s new rating system for special education.

So as a result of this federal mandate, students receiving special education services in Texas who have previously taken the STAAR Modified assessments will now take the regular test with or without accommodations. That change officially begins this spring.

Since we first received word from the federal government, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has worked to inform school districts about this significant change. Agency staff has had ongoing outreach in the form of presentations at various meetings and conferences, as well as regular correspondence to testing coordinators in districts and charters across our state. The change has been referenced in some TEA news releases, including this one in August 2013 (<http://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/News_and_Multimedia/Press_Releases/2013/TEA_provides_school_districts_and_charters_more_information_regarding_HB_5_transition>).

Although this change has been two years in coming, the shift is creating some frustration. As I have travelled the state over the last two years, those who were well aware that this transition was coming made their concerns known to me. I share the feelings being expressed by parents and teachers of students receiving special education services in Texas about this change.

This was certainly not a shift sought by TEA or anyone at the state level. This mandated change is coming from Washington D.C., not from Austin.

While students formerly assessed with STAAR Modified will now be required to be assessed with the general STAAR assessment, several testing accommodations will be made available to these students. Information regarding currently allowable [accommodations](https://tea.texas.gov/node/103703) is available on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website.