

# Is standardized testing an outdated system?

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**H**as standardized testing finally run its course? This question, accompanied by changes in test scores and a complete pause in 2020 due to COVID-19, has school officials, parents and students revisiting the issue. The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness is required for all Texas public school students from third to 12th grades.

While some hold the belief that these tests aren't a proper measure of a student's ability, others contend that they are integral to measuring school success.

The Dispatch Record reached out to some parents, teachers and school administrators to ask their thoughts on the STAAR testing program and how it can be improved.

Superintendent Rob Moore, who has served in that capacity at the Lometa Independent School District since August of last year, explained the ways STAAR testing bears upon the district – from funding to post-graduation readiness to how teachers are affected by differences in testing metrics.

From a funding aspect, STAAR scores only have a large impact, Moore said, when a student needs additional assistance to pass.

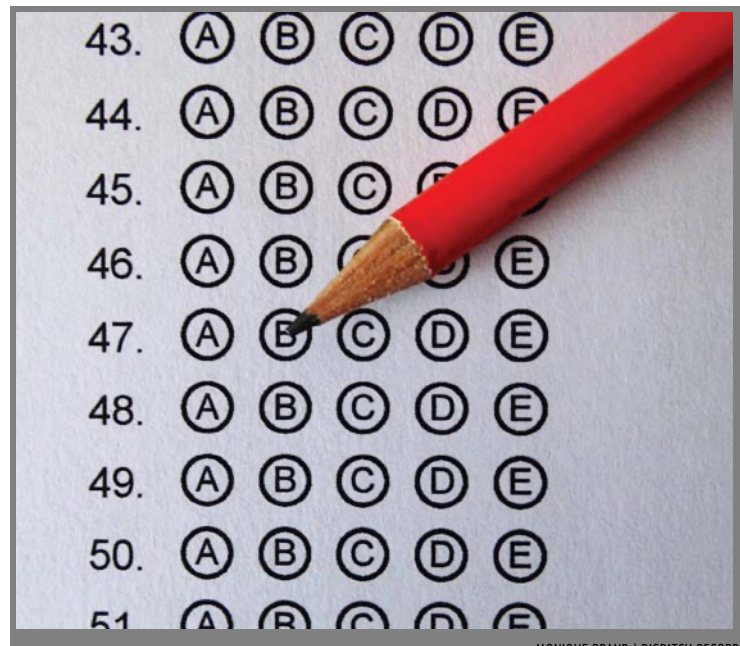
"Lometa, like others, has felt the significant effects of pandemic-related learning loss," the superintendent said. "Schools were not rated in 2020, but in 2021 scores showed a near 15% school-wide drop in every testing category. Extra funding was provided throughout the state and nation in order to address pandemic-related learning loss."

The educational outlook seems to be improving, with some of the academic losses having been recuperated during this year's testing cycle.

"While we do not yet have all of the 2022 data, preliminary results indicate that about half of the learning loss has been recovered among struggling learners," Moore said.

Moore also noted the way STAAR testing can be stressful for students, especially when the district's goal is building productive citizens of the future.

"STAAR treats students in the same grade the same way



**Lometa ISD officials said STAAR testing can be stressful in some cases for students, and the goal of education should be about more than testing.**

with only small accommodations for individual student needs," he said. "Individual students are not statistics; they are children that begin at different points and mature at different rates.

"What becomes most important is that almost all – above 90% -- of Lometa students that graduate have passed 100% of their high school STAAR exams," Moore said. "In Lometa ISD, steps have been taken to shift the conversation from 'passing STAAR' to focus rather on improvement as individuals and members of the educational community.

"STAAR scores are important in our educational system, but we are not educating children to pass a test," Moore said. "The goal of education is much bigger than that. We are preparing children to successfully navigate

their future and become productive citizens with a choice in their own outcomes."

Other community members share in the Lometa ISD mission of "every student, every day," but they feel certain pressures have been affecting students negatively.

Mary Ann Herring, a retired district employee, detailed her feelings about the way the state assessments operate.

"There is too much emphasis put on the STAAR test," she said. "Just go back to the achievement test at the beginning of the year, and teach the subjects. There is maybe some value, but not as much as the state puts on it.

"Kids can't have fun anymore," Herring said. "They worry about the testing. Don't prepare all year for a test. Make learning fun."

The STAAR tests don't affect just Lampasas County students, as Salado graduate Jessie Knight and Lillie Rhodes, from Center Point, also outlined their experiences and why they believe the test needs a rest.

"During my test, I would tend to panic due to the time limits and having issues reading," Knight said.

These constraints played a role in her poor performance on the STAAR and didn't provide as much information on her education as the assessments could have.

"I gained absolutely nothing from taking those tests," Knight said. "I believe that it should work as college courses do. You have tests throughout the year and a final exam."

Rhodes shared a similar sentiment, citing the stress associated with her test day.

"There is so much pressure put into it," she said. "Getting through the test as fast as possible was always my main goal. Getting rid of it completely would help. It's too stressful on teachers, staff and students. Just make sure the grades are good, and use the semester test grades."

At this point, the STAAR assessments remain the state's metric for academic success and influence how students advance in school. While the idea of "teaching to a test" has become an intense topic over the last few years, administrators like Moore and school districts like Lometa ISD that want the best for every student continue to pursue excellence. Teachers and students agree, however, that the test can produce more stress than it is worth.