

## A CHALLENGE

The Spring 2023 STAAR test scores show that only 43% of math students and 52% of RLA students met grade level or above.

**Why are half of Texas students scoring below grade level** on tests designed to measure how well they learned the TEKS?

Percent of All Students at Met Grade Level (Spr. '23)	
Math	43%
RLA	52%
Science	46%
Social Studies	50%

Perhaps Texas students are **not learning what is tested** in STAAR!

**Curriculum alignment** refers to students learning exactly what they need to know and do on the tests, so there are no surprises on test day. Sirius resources were designed to **fill instructional gaps** in adopted materials so schools can better align their taught curriculum with how the TEKS are tested in STAAR.

Sirius instructional materials help teachers deliver systematic instruction and practice in **STAAR-tested content, context, and complexity**. And this helps students transfer what they learn—to *show what they know*—in challenging STAAR 2.0 tests.

To some, this could be dismissed as “test prep.” But at Sirius, we are strong advocates for students being taught what they will be tested on. Sirius proudly supports teachers with TEKS-based instruction and practice that focus on STAAR-tested thinking. Because STAAR questions are complex cognitive activities, Sirius adds **depth and rigor** to your core curriculum.

For instance, in math, students need to know TEKS skills and concepts such as adding and subtracting decimals. In STAAR, students must read and solve word problems by navigating new question types, identifying which math operation to use, and applying it correctly. Without experience in solving STAAR word problems, students will be **unprepared and perform poorly**.

### The STAAR-tested **subject-area thinking** includes:

- **RLA**—READING: making fine distinctions among viable answers to identify the best-supported answer; WRITING: using writing craft and mechanics to revise and edit essays and to write essays using text evidence to a prompt
- **Math**—solving word problems, including multistep and application problems
- **Science**—solving application word problems, 50%+ include a stimulus
- **Social Studies**—reasoning through questions, 60%+ with a stimulus

**The challenge is to teach the TEKS to the same depth and rigor as STAAR.**

At Sirius, we believe each subject area’s **STAAR-tested thinking can be learned** through quality instruction and practice. Regular learning experiences transform basic *familiarity* into *fluency*. Fluency frees students’ cognitive capacity to focus on STAAR-tested thinking. In contrast, mindless “drill and kill” does not align with the complexity of STAAR tests. Such “test prep” is indeed a waste of time and money.

## SOLUTION STEPS

First, recognize that STAAR are **challenging thinking tests**—fewer than 50% of Texas students met grade level in RLA and math, and fewer than 20% mastered grade level.

One research-based recommendation is to **teach a more rigorous curriculum** that emphasizes the STAAR-tested thinking, called a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC). Many teachers teach a *low-level*/TEKS curriculum. For instance, students learn and perform well with adding decimals or defining a word from its context, but struggle with more difficult skills, such as solving math word problems or creating a summary of a selection.

Next, we need to **help all students show progress**, as emphasized in the new accountability system. This means STAAR-thinking should be part of a rich all-year-long curriculum that moves more students to *Meets and Masters grade level* (Tier 1). Some students need more support and benefit from scaffolded instruction in the most-important TEKS (Tier 2). And using actionable student data can target unique student needs and keep them progressing.

Teachers need **high-quality instructional materials** that promote STAAR thinking so they can focus on building relationships with students and creating a

thinking classroom culture. Such a growth culture views mistakes as valuable learning opportunities and emphasizes *why* one answer is best rather than *which* answer is correct. Sirius resources facilitate this thinking.

Seeing students become better thinkers is one of the many joys of teaching. But it is challenging to engage students in deeper learning. **Sirius' TEKS resources help empower students** to take on the complex tested reasoning that builds STAAR success.



*“Sirius supplements add depth and rigor to the core curriculum”*

### GOING FURTHER

In *Ethical Test Preparation in the Classroom*, Robert Marzano argues that students need to **learn the tested content and the tested format** or schema.

<https://www.marzanoresources.com/ethical-test-preparation-in-the-classroom.html>

STAAR 2.0 question types require that students build new knowledge frameworks to understand, organize, and navigate the new question formats and thinking. To help students make connections between new question types and what they already know, Sirius created **Getting Familiar with STAAR 2.0** student lessons. Learn more here:

<https://siriuseducationsolutions.com/samplers-and-demos/>