Linkage FAQ’s

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Does my campus need to complete the linkage process?
If your campus has students that are tested on the STAAR (regular, Spanish, or Alt-2) grades 4–8, the STAAR EOC (regular or Alt-2), or TELPAS (grades 3–8), then yes! Your campus gets to participate in the linkage process!

Do I need to do anything for linkage?
Principals and Support Team members need to participate in the Campus Setup Period, need to monitor progress during the Teacher Linkage Period, and need to review and approve student-teacher linkages during the Review and Approval Period. More information on all these tasks can be found in the Principal User Guide or the Principal Checklist.

Teachers of students in the following grade/subjects need to participate in the Teacher Linkage Period:
- ELA grades 4–8
- Math grades 4–8
- Writing grades 4 & 7
- Science grades 5 & 8
- Social Studies grade 8
- ESL/ELD (student is tested on TELPAS) grades 3–8

More information on the linkage process can be found in the Teacher User Guide or the Teacher Checklist.

Which grades and subjects need to complete linkage? What are the “Expected Linkages?”
- ELA grades 4–8
- Math grades 4–8
- Writing grades 4 & 7
- Science grades 5 & 8
- Social Studies grade 8
- ESL/ELD (student is tested on TELPAS) grades 3–8

- Algebra 1
- English 1
- English 2
- Biology
- US History
I don’t teach anything that requires linkage. Do I need to do anything?
If you are a principal or support team member, please see the Principal Checklist and/or the Principal User Guide.

If you are a teacher or other campus staff member – no! You are excused!

What is linkage used for?
Student-teacher linkages are used to calculate teacher-level Comparative Growth (CG) analyses for both STAAR and TELPAS. The teacher’s CG analysis is used in the Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS).

I have a roster assigned to me that is for a subject/grade I don’t teach. What do I do now?
Teachers cannot delete rosters. Only principals and support team members may delete rosters for a teacher. The teacher should contact a principal or support team member and ask him/her to delete a specific roster. It is usually recommended that the teacher delete all students from the roster that needs to be removed, to make it very clear which rosters require deletion.

I didn’t start teaching these kids until (insert time-period here). Do I have to link them?
If you became the teacher of record for these students on or before April 14, yes, you do need to link them. If you became the teacher of record for these students after April 14, you do not need to complete linkage (although it will not negatively impact you if you do complete linkage). Note that if it was after April 14, the students will not be used in your teacher Comparative Growth analysis, as you will not have had enough instructional time with those students.

I didn’t start working as a teacher until (insert time-period here). Do I still have to do this?
If you became the teacher of record on or before April 14, yes, you do need to complete linkage. If you became the teacher of record after April 15, you do not need to complete linkage (although it will not negatively impact you if you do complete linkage).
What percentage of time should I claim?

It is important that you claim students in a way that accurately reflects campus practice. You can think of linkage in this way:

I teach math to all 80 4th grade students in my building. I am the only math teacher for 60 of these students, so for these ones I provide 100% instruction in math. The Math Specialist on my campus pulls out the other 20 students one day a week, where they learn math. For these 20 students, I provide 80% of their instruction, and the Math Specialist provides 20% of their instruction.

A good rule-of-thumb is that one day a week is 20%. However, it is important to note that the percentage of instruction is a campus-based decision. If you have questions, concerns, or doubts about the percentage of instruction that should be claimed, please talk with a member of your campus support team or your principal.

The percentage of instruction a teacher is assigned to a student is used only to determine whether a student will be included in Comparative Growth analysis. The student is not weighted in the teacher’s analysis based on percentage of instruction. If a teacher is responsible for a total of at least 20% of instruction for a student, that student will be included in the teacher’s Comparative Growth analysis. This means that as many as five teachers could have the same student included in their analyses. Whether a student is in one teacher’s analysis or five teachers’ analyses does not change how much the student “counts” for the teacher. Please see the section on students claimed for less than 100% time for more information.

Help! I have a lot of under-claimed student alerts!

If a student is not claimed at 100%, it does not necessarily mean that an error has occurred. It just means that this requires further investigation. The important rule to remember is that the instruction represented should model the actual instructional practices as they occurred for this student on your campus. Under-claimed students may be acceptable in some situations. Some examples of acceptable under-claimed student alerts include:

- A student was not enrolled in your class for the whole school year.
- Instruction is shared and one of the teachers is not required to complete student-teacher linkages.
The teacher left for an extended period of time during the school year and students were with a long-term substitute who should not be linking students.

The important thing to remember is that alerts are for your information and for your action if necessary. The information presented to you may need to be corrected—or may not. Only you can decide. While all alerts may not be resolved, teachers should understand and be able to explain them.

Help! I have a lot of over-claimed student alerts!
Over-claimed students should be corrected so that instruction totals 100%. In cases where students remain over-claimed upon final submission, the teachers’ instructional claims on a student will be mathematically reduced proportionately until the combined total is 100%. Over-claimed students may be acceptable in some situations. Some examples of acceptable over-claiming include:

- Three (or more) teachers provide instruction for the student for the same months, and the decision was made that all teachers would receive the same percentage. If three teachers are all responsible for instruction, the appropriate percentage would be 33.3% instruction each. Since this percentage cannot be selected in a roster, all three teachers claiming the student(s) at 100% time each would mathematically result in each teacher being attributed with 33.3% instruction for the student(s).
- A student appeared on multiple rosters for the same teacher. The teacher linked the student on more than one roster, at 100% instruction. Since the student is over-claimed, but all instruction is still only attributed to one teacher, mathematical reduction would result in the teacher being attributed with 100% instruction.

The important thing to remember is that alerts are for your information and for your action when necessary. The information presented to you may need to be corrected—or may not. Please see the section explaining when it is not ok to have over-claimed student alerts to help you decide. While all alerts may not be resolved, teachers should understand and be able to explain them.

When is it not ok to have over-claimed student alerts?
Over-claimed students should be corrected so that instruction totals 100%. In cases where students remain over-claimed upon final submission, the teachers’ instructional claims on a student will be mathematically reduced proportionately until the combined total is 100%.
claimed student alerts are not appropriate when the proportional reduction would result in a teacher being “credited” with less than 20% instruction of a student. For example:

Teacher A teaches a student Math for 4 days a week, and Teacher B teaches the same student Math for one day a week. The correct linkage is:
- Teacher A = 80% (student will be included in teacher’s CG report)
- Teacher B = 20% (student will be included in teacher’s CG report)

However, if Teacher A mistakenly inputs 100% time, and Teacher B puts in the correct 20% time, the student is overclaimed at 120%. The resulting reduced proportionality would be:
- Teacher A = 83% (student will be included in teacher’s CG report)
- Teacher B = 17% (student **will not** be included in teacher’s CG report)

In the above scenario, the overclaimed student alert should be corrected so that each teacher receives instructional “credit” for the student.

**Am I affected by students claimed for less than 100% instruction?**
Students are not weighted in the teacher’s analysis based on percentage of instruction for Comparative Growth analysis; they either meet the threshold for inclusion or do not. This means that if five teachers linked Student A for 20% of instruction for the same subject, Student A would appear on *all five* teachers’ reports, and would *count equally* for each teacher’s Comparative Growth Median. It is important that you claim students in a way that accurately reflects campus practice. Claiming a student at 80% instruction does not give you 80% “credit” for that student; the student is either included in your report (minimum of 20% instruction) or not (less than 20% instruction). This means that as many as five teachers could have the same student included in their analyses. Whether a student is in one teacher’s analysis or five teachers’ analyses does not change how much the student “counts” for the teacher.

**I teach special education students only. Do I have to do linkage?**
It is critical that Special Education core foundation teachers in grades 4–12 with at least 7 students per grade level and content area link the students for whom they are responsible for teaching courses requiring linkages. Students who take the Alt-2 STAAR are included in Comparative Growth analyses. So yes, you do need to do linkage if your students take the Alt-2 and if you teach at least 7 students per grade level and content area.
What does “ELA” mean? What is the difference between “ELA” and “Writing”? Teachers responsible for teaching courses identified as “ELA” include teachers of Reading courses, Language Arts courses, or English courses. These courses were designed by the Curriculum Department. Student progress and achievement are measured by the STAAR Reading exam for grades 4–8. Teachers who link students under the “ELA” content area receive a Comparative Growth report for “ELA.”

Teachers responsible for teaching courses identified as “Writing” are specifically 4th and 7th grade teachers where students are assessed using the STAAR Writing exam. Teachers who link students under the “Writing” content area receive a Comparative Growth report for “Writing.”

In some cases, students are assessed using both the STAAR Reading and the STAAR Writing exam for the same course. Teachers are required to provide linkages for two separate content areas – one for “ELA,” and a separate one for “Writing.” Teachers can provide linkage for one of the courses, then copy the completed roster to the other course. Completing rosters in this way will ensure the same students are claimed for both content areas. Teachers who link students under both the “ELA” and the “Writing” content areas receive two Comparative Growth reports – one for each content area.

I teach 7th or 8th grade Geometry, which does not have an EOC. Do I have to do linkage? It is true that Geometry does not have a STAAR EOC. Students who take Geometry in 9th or 10th grade do not have to be linked, because there is no exam associated with that course. However, the State requires students who take Geometry in their middle school years to take the STAAR Math exam for that grade level. So, a student who took Algebra in 7th grade is linked for Algebra to their middle school teacher. That student then would be taking Geometry in 8th grade and is required to take the STAAR Math 8 exam. Therefore, the Geometry teacher needs to link those Geometry students for Math and will receive a Comparative Growth report for Math.

Because Geometry is not a STAAR-tested subject, Geometry rosters are not automatically loaded into the AIM portal for linkage. The principal or a campus support team member will need to create a roster for these classes, and teachers must manually add and link these students.
What do the course symbols mean? Also, what is that purple T?

There are several course designation symbols on the AIM portal, as follows:

- **M**
  - Math roster for grades 4–8; students are tested on the STAAR Math exam

- **ELA**
  - ELA roster, which includes Reading, Language Arts, or English courses for grades 4–8; students are tested on the STAAR Reading exam

- **Wr**
  - Writing roster for grades 4 & 7; students are tested on the STAAR Writing exam

- **T**
  - TELPAS roster for grades 3–8; students are tested on the TELPAS exam

- **PLA-T**
  - ELA and TELPAS roster for grades 4–8. Students are in a Reading, Language Arts, or English course and are being taught language acquisition; students are tested on both the STAAR Reading exam and the TELPAS exam.

- **Wr-T**
  - Writing and TELPAS roster for grades 4 & 7. Students are in a course where both writing and language acquisition are being taught; students are tested on both the STAAR Writing exam and the TELPAS exam.

- **Sc**
  - Science roster for grades 5 & 8; students are tested on the STAAR Science exam

- **SS**
  - Social Studies roster for grade 8; students are tested on the STAAR Social Studies exam

- **A1**
  - Algebra I roster; students are tested on the Algebra I EOC exam

- **B**
  - Biology roster; students are tested on the Biology EOC exam

- **E1**
  - English I roster; students are tested on the English I EOC exam

- **E2**
  - English II roster; students are tested on the English II EOC exam

- **H**
  - US History roster; students are tested on the US History EOC exam

Please note that “STAAR” and “EOC” exams include regular, Spanish, and Alt-2, and “TELPAS” exam includes both regular and Alternate.
You can’t “teach TELPAS!” Everyone Teaches the ELPS! Why is there a course designation for TELPAS?

Comparative Growth analyses are calculated using TELPAS for teachers responsible for English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and responsible for the student gains on the TELPAS Reading exam. The majority of the time, the teacher responsible for teaching ELA (as measured by the STAAR Reading and/or Writing exams) is the teacher most closely associated with teaching ELPS and for the student gains on the TELPAS Reading exam. The Comparative Growth analysis done using TELPAS is the same analysis done using STAAR and allows us to provide growth scores to a larger number of teachers using this separate student assessment. The TELPAS course designation was chosen as shorthand to identify ELPS that are assessed through the TELPAS Reading exam.

How do I link English Language Proficiency Standards (the TELPAS content area), ELA, and Writing combination rosters?

Comparative Growth analyses are calculated using TELPAS for teachers responsible for English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and responsible for the student gains on the TELPAS Reading exam. These teachers most often are the same as the teacher responsible for ELA instruction and STAAR Reading gains or Writing instruction and STAAR Writing gains. ELA and ELPS teachers may see up to three kinds of rosters requiring linkage:

- **TELPAS roster for grades 3–8; students are tested on the TELPAS exam**
  Teachers should link students for the appropriate percentage of instruction they are providing for ELPS, and only ELPS. **Student-teacher linkages will be used to calculate TELPAS Comparative Growth teacher reports only.**

- **ELA and TELPAS roster for grades 4–8; students are tested on both the STAAR Reading exam and the TELPAS exam**
  Teachers should link students for the appropriate percentage of instruction they are providing for ELPS and for ELA. Linking students in a course identified as “ELA + TELPAS” allows a teacher to link students in one roster for two content areas. **Student-teacher linkages will be used to calculate Reading STAAR Comparative Growth teacher reports and TELPAS Comparative Growth teacher reports.**
Writing and TELPAS roster for grades 4 & 7; students are tested on both the STAAR Writing exam and the TELPAS exam.

Teachers should link students for the appropriate percentage of instruction they are providing for ELPS and for Writing. Linking students in a course identified as “Writing + TELPAS” allows a teacher to link students in one roster for two content areas. Student-teacher linkages will be used to calculate Writing STAAR Comparative Growth teacher reports and TELPAS Comparative Growth teacher reports.

When the teacher is not responsible for ELPS/TELPAS student gains:
Principals and/or support team members should change the course designation to “ELA” or “Writing” only. The class can then be copied to the teacher(s) responsible for ELPS, and the course designation can be changed to “TELPAS” only. If no teacher is responsible for TELPAS gains, principals and/or support team members do not need to create or copy these rosters; no teacher should have a “TELPAS” roster.

When more than one teacher is responsible for instruction of one of the contents, but not the other:
Teachers need to be able to link appropriately as to ensure students are not linked for more than 100% of instruction per content area. For courses identified as “ELA+TELPAS” or “Writing+TELPAS,” principals and/or support team members should change the course designation to “ELA” or “Writing” only and add a “TELPAS” only roster to the appropriate teacher(s).

When the teacher is responsible for ELPS/TELPAS student gains, but has no TELPAS rosters:
Principals and/or support team members may either change the course designation to the appropriate “+TELPAS” type or may add a separate “TELPAS” roster.

It is important to note that student-teacher linkages will be used to calculate Comparative Growth teacher reports for only those subjects for which the teacher has linkages.
I teach kids who are identified as ESL/EL. Do I do something special for these kids?
If you are teaching the students English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and are partially or fully responsible for the student gains on the TELPAS Reading exam, those students are in grades 3–8, and you are responsible for at least 20% of their instruction in ELPS, you should link those students. If your students are enrolled in a course identified as “ESL/ELD” you should have a “TELPAS” roster with which to link students. You should link the students for the appropriate percentage of instruction for ELPS.

I am a tutor. Do I do linkage?
After-school tutors, STAAR tutors, hourly tutors, or other types of instructors who are not responsible for the school day instruction of a subject requiring linkage should not be linked to the students they tutor. Student linkages should be completed only for those teachers who responsible for the school day instruction of students in the courses designated as requiring linkage.

HISD recognizes the value tutors can and do have on a campus. However, the purpose of the linkage process is to link the appropriate students to the teachers responsible for the school day instruction of students in courses that have been identified as requiring linkage. Please see the core course list here.

I am an hourly teacher/hourly lecturer/long-term substitute. Do I do linkage?
Hourly teachers, hourly lecturers, and long-term substitutes should not be linked to students. While HISD recognizes the value hourly/part-time teachers have on campus, the ultimate purpose of the linkage process is to calculate and present a Teacher Comparative Growth report, which is used in the Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS). Hourly teachers, hourly lecturers, and long-term substitute teachers are not appraised through TADS, therefore these teachers should not complete the linkage process.
I am an elementary school lab teacher. Do I do linkage?

Elementary school lab teachers of courses requiring linkage can and should be linked to students if all the following conditions apply.

If the lab teacher:
1. Is responsible for at least 20% of the curriculum instruction (e.g., one class period a week);
2. Provides content grades (e.g. a percentage score to be used in the overall letter grade; not a conduct grade such as E/S/P/U) for the course to the homeroom teacher and/or on the report card; and
3. Plans and conducts lessons with students.

If all these conditions apply, then the lab teacher should link all students for which he/she is responsible—at the appropriate percentage.

Lab rosters are not automatically loaded into the AIM portal for linkage. The principal or a campus support team member will need to create a roster for these classes, and teachers must manually add and link these students.

Principals/Campus Support Team Members: Please consider your lab teacher(s) carefully. Do they contribute to the instruction and grading of students in a core course, or is their instruction and grading more appropriately categorized as ancillary? If the lab teacher links students for 20% of instruction, then the other teacher linking the students should link those students at 80% of instruction. A student can never be claimed at more than 100% instruction for a subject from all teachers claiming that student.

Please note: Tutors are not to be considered as lab teachers!
I am a co-teacher. How do I do linkage?

Co-teachers (certified Special Education teachers teaching in an inclusion setting) and Special Education inclusion teachers, or teachers who function as co-teachers but do not have the job title of “co-teacher,” include teachers who work with regular education teachers to teach the same students for the same content area.

In these cases, the teachers who “share students” for the same content area should both link all students for whom they are responsible at the appropriate percentages. For example, if two teachers are teaching the same students in math, and each is responsible for half of the teaching, then both teachers should link the same students at 50% of instruction each. This equates to 100% of instruction for each student, with half of the instruction being “credited” to Teacher A and half of the instruction being “credited” to Teacher B. Teachers who share students should collaborate to complete their student linkage for the best results.

I team teach with one or more other teachers. How do I do linkage?

Team teachers, collaborating teachers, or other shared teaching arrangements include teachers who work together to teach the same students for the same content area. In these cases, the teachers who “share students” for the same content area should both link all students for whom they are responsible at the appropriate percentages.

For example, if two teachers are teaching the same students in math, and each is responsible for half of the teaching, then both teachers should link the same students at 50% of instruction each. This equates to 100% of instruction for each student, with half of the instruction being “credited” to Teacher A and half of the instruction being “credited” to Teacher B.

It is important to note that if two or more teachers link the same students for a minimum of 20% of instructional time, then they will receive the same Comparative Growth analysis.

For this reason, teachers who share students should collaborate to complete their student linkage for the best results.
Principals and Campus Support Team Members: How do I get more help?

1. Principal User Guide
2. Principal PowerPoint Slides
3. Online Support: Principals and support team members can submit an electronic help ticket if they need assistance during the linkage process.
4. Battelle for Kids Help desk: The BFK Help Desk is available at (866) 543-7555 Monday through Friday from 7 a.m.—4 p.m. CST to help with:
   - Accessing the AIM portal
   - Logging into the AIM portal with username and password
   - Locating/navigating the BFK•Link® system
   - Locating campus support team members as listed on the “Link” home page
   - Locating missing students
   - Adding missing students to the AIM portal (note that the Help Desk cannot add missing students to rosters, only to the portal itself)
5. Houston ISD Research & Accountability Linkage Support Team: Principals, support team members, and teachers may contact the Research & Accountability office to directly connect with members of the Linkage Support Team at research@houstonisd.org. Furthermore, principals or support team members may arrange a campus visit by a member of the linkage support team to assist teachers, support team members, and the principal in completing the linkage process at your campus.

Teachers: How do I get more help?

Teachers:

1. Contact your Principal or a Campus Support Team Member
2. Teacher User Guide
3. Teacher PowerPoint Slides
4. Online Support: teachers can submit an electronic help ticket if they need assistance during the linkage process. Please note that support tickets are prioritized to respond to principals and campus support team members first, then by teachers, and are answered in the order received.
5. Houston ISD Research & Accountability Linkage Support Team: Teachers may contact the Research & Accountability office to directly connect with members of the Linkage Support Team at research@houstonisd.org.