***USAGE NOTE: We recommend this letter be sent to the child’s teacher, principal and counselor. For good measure, copy a school board members as well.***

[Child’s Teacher]

[Principal of School]

[Name of School]

Re: [Name of Student]

Removal from STAAR Related Accelerated Instruction Classes

Dear [Principal]:

I was greatly disappointed to see that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School has unilaterally decided to remove my child from [his/her] chosen elective course(s) of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in order to place them in a second [math/reading] class to prep for the STAAR assessment. This letter will inform you that pursuant to Tex. Education Code §26.010 and the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, I am removing [Child’s Name] from participation in this full period Accelerated Instruction class offered under Tex. Educ. Code §28.0211 [28.0213 in high school] because [his/her] participation in the STAAR assessment process conflicts with my [religious or] moral beliefs. I have taken this action after careful consideration of the negative effects of the STAAR assessment process, including the negative effects of accelerated instruction, and for the protection of the mental and physical well-being of my child, and with a full understanding of the potential consequences of this decision. Please remove the second [reading/math] class from my child’s schedule and return them to the educationally appropriate elective choice they have previously made.

While I am under not statutory duty to define the nature of my [religious or] moral beliefs, among the issues that form my moral objection are:

[*INSERT ALL APPROPRIATE REASONS, IF YOU DESIRE, OTHERWISE DELETE THE PRECEDING INTRODUCTION AND CONTINUE AT THE NEXT PARAGRAPH.*

* **Accelerated Instruction Results in the Loss of Valuable Classroom Time and Resources:** Most students in accelerated instruction are removed from a classroom setting or deprived of the fullness of the curriculum in order to be trained in test taking strategies. This is not a useful use of student time, staff resources or district money. Moreover, it has not practical purpose for my child who will not be taking the assessment.
* **STAAR Assessment Has Resulted In Physical And Mental Damage To Students**: Numerous reports of high levels of stress, anxiety, sleeplessness, headaches and vomiting has been received from parents of students involved in STAAR assessment. I will not risk the health or safety of my child, nor support a system that subjects children to these risks, simply to provide an additional data point for the Texas Education Agency.
* **The Validity of the Assessment Instrument Has Never Been Independently Verified**: The Texas Education Agency contracted the development of the assessment instrument to a foreign, for profit corporation. No independent evaluation of the instrument has ever been undertaken. Rather, in a blatant conflict of interest, the test developer was permitted to attest to its validity. If the test is invalid, no valid purpose could be served by accelerated instruction.
* **STAAR Assessment Narrows the Curriculum**: The loss of a rich curriculum has been documented in research and in teacher testimony. The use of high-stakes tests is universally found to be associated with teachers focusing on the content of the tests, administering repeated practice tests, training students in the answers to specific questions or types of question, and adopting transmission styles of teaching. In such circumstances teachers make little use of assessment formatively to help the learning process. High-stakes tests are inevitably designed to be as ‘objective’ as possible, since there is a premium on reliable marking in the interests of fairness. This has the effect of reducing what is assessed to what can be readily and reliably marked. Generally this excludes many worthwhile outcomes of education such as problem-solving and critical thinking. **This problem is exacerbated when children are removed from class or denied elective choices to be prepped for STAAR testing**.
* **STAAR Assessment Violates the Rights of Special Education and ELL Students**: According to Sara Baker, director of the Fannin County special education office, “[t]here is no validity in this test that is going to help [special education students] or is really assessing things that will help that child.” Special education students are denied accommodations guaranteed to them under federal law. ELL students are provided accommodations proven by the TEA’s own research to be ineffective. Permitting my child to participate in this assessment program would give the appearance of agreement or acceptance of this fundamentally flawed approach.
* **STAAR Data Is Not Used to Address Achievement Gaps**: Although ELL students rated Limited English Proficient had an 87% failure rate on the Spring 2013 English I EOC examination, the TEA stated that no documents existed analyzing this achievement gap or proposing interventions or programs to remediate these problems. When a staggering failure rate such as this does not merit so much as a single e-mail within the TEA, one has to question whether any data from the STAAR assessment is actually being used to address academic readiness. I do not consent to my child being tested for mere purposes of data collection.
* **STAAR Assessment Reduces Socialization As A Central Core Of Learning**: The reduction of opportunities to learn to socialize through collaborative classroom activities reduces children’s opportunities to develop healthy social skills. Being seated alone at a desk taking a test all day or for a significant portion of the day isolates children from learning how to develop community-based problem solving skills they will need as adults.
* **STAAR Problem Solving Does Not Prepare Children for the Demands of the Workplace or Higher Education**: The demands of the modern workplace require creative problem solving, initiative and higher order thinking. Higher education requires critical thinking and the ability to demonstrate writing and comprehension skills across the curriculum. Most tests include many topics that are not important, while many important areas are not included on standardized tests because they cannot be measured by such tests. Teaching to the test does not produce real and sustained gains on independent learning measures.
* **[Insert any other reasons you deem appropriate]**

These reasons, among others, have led me to the conclusion that I cannot morally or ethically permit my child to participate in full period accelerated instruction linked to the STAAR assessment. [I understand that the state requires the district to offer this instruction, and I am willing to work with you to find a manner to participate in accelerated instruction in tutorial or homeroom settings. However, I cannot agree to deprive my child of curriculum broadening elective opportunities just to prep for the STAAR assessment]

The right of a parent to opt out of instructional programming for moral and ethical reasons is clearly provided for by statute, and there is no exception in the statute for accelerated instruction activities. Because my child will remain in [his/her] regular [reading/math] class, we can be assured they will receive necessary instruction in that subject during the upcoming semester. I trust that the school district will act responsibly in securing my rights under the Texas Education Code and the U.S. Constitution to remove my child from all accelerated instruction, STAAR tutorials, and test preparation activities. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

[Parents Names]