



ELAR/SLAR TEKS REVISION AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By Tracy Kriese

Abstract: This column is a review of three areas of interest to Texas ELAR educators: the ELAR/SLAR TEKS revision, recent news from the Texas Education Agency, and the status of several bills relating to assessment. Included is a summary of the past two years of the ELAR/SLAR TEKS revision process and information about next steps in that process.

Keywords: ELAR/SLAR TEKS, 85th Texas Legislature, STAAR, Independent Graduation Committee, A-F accountability system

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For the past two years, the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) has been conducting a revision of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) and Spanish Language Arts and Reading (SLAR). That process comes to a close this summer, and Texas literacy professionals can begin preparing for implementation of new K-8 ELAR/SLAR TEKS in school year 2019-2020 and new English I-IV TEKS in school year 2020-2021.

ELAR/SLAR TEKS Revision Process

The ELAR/SLAR TEKS revision began in spring 2015 with a public notification that the standards were up for review. SBOE members nominated and approved a variety of classroom teachers, administrators, program coordinators, other education professionals, and parents to serve on ELAR and SLAR review committees. Experts in ELAR/SLAR curriculum and instruction were also nominated and approved by the SBOE and tasked with evaluating the work of the review committees and making final recommendations to the Board.



At the direction of the SBOE, the experts began their work by reviewing the current TEKS, evaluating the standards for complete and logical development, correct use of vocabulary and terminology, appropriate level of rigor at each grade level, clarity and specificity of student expectations, and horizontal and vertical alignment. The experts were also asked to consider whether all student expectations could reasonably be taught within the amount of time typically allotted for the grade level or high school course, whether there were student expectations that could be eliminated in order to streamline the standards, and whether there were specific areas that needed to be updated to reflect current research and College and Career Readiness Standards. Each expert submitted an independent initial review of the TEKS to the SBOE in the summer of 2015.

In order to facilitate the revision work the review committees and experts would be doing, TCTELA proposed a survey of Texas educators about their use of the current TEKS. The Education Research Center at Texas A&M University was commissioned by the TCTELA Board to develop a survey and interview questionnaire that would be sent out to members of professional literacy groups, including the Texas Association of Bilingual Education (TABE), the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE), the Coalition of Reading and English Supervisors of Texas (CREST), the National Writing Project of Texas (NWPT), the Texas Association for the Improvement of Reading (TAIR) and TCTELA. Over 1100 participants responded, sharing information about how they used the TEKS, what revisions were needed to make the standards more clear and concise, and what kind of professional development would be most useful. The final survey report, *Voices of Texas Teachers in English Language Arts and Reading TEKS Revision*, was published in September 2015 and shared with the SBOE.

The SBOE also requested that leadership from professional literacy organizations evaluate the current standards and make recommendations. As a part of that process, representatives from CREST, NWPT, TABE, TAIR, TALE, TCTELA, the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), and the Texas Association for

Supervision and Curriculum Development (TxASCD) collaborated on a proposed framework for the new ELAR/SLAR TEKS. This framework, which was adopted by the review committees, called for the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening using multiple text types across eight strands: Beginning and Sustaining Foundational Skills, Comprehension, Response, Collaboration, Multiple Genres, Author's Purpose and Craft, Composition and Presentation, and Inquiry and Research.

In the fall of 2015, the ELAR/SLAR review committees began their work, meeting face-to-face and online over the next year. Committee members were divided into four grade band work groups: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and English I-IV. As laid out by the SBOE for all TEKS subject area reviews, the charge for the work groups was to use the current TEKS as a foundation document, revising that document in consideration of several requirements: the standards must be written for the general course of study for the subject, as opposed to an Advanced Placement course; the standards must align with College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS); and the standards must comply with any related education statutes. In addition, committee members were to ensure that student expectations were content driven and could be reasonably taught prior to the end of a school year or prior to any state assessment for that subject. Any changes were to be justified and tracked by the work groups.

In November 2015, the first draft of revision recommendations was presented to the SBOE along with reviews of that draft from the Board-appointed experts. Educator feedback on the first draft was facilitated by TCTELA via an online forum that launched in January 2016. Open to the public, the forum had over 800 participants, the majority of whom were classroom teachers. Over a period of several weeks, participants responded to questions posed in the forum, engaging in an online exchange of ideas about the proposed standards. Further discussion of the TEKS review process and first draft occurred at the January 2016 TCTELA conference, which featured a conversation with TCTELA President Kim Pinkerton and State Board of Education Chair Donna Bahorich.

Conference attendees submitted questions about the TEKS review for Chairman Bahorich and also had an opportunity to provide feedback on the first draft by participating in roundtable discussions organized by grade band.

TCTELA collected comments and data from forum and roundtable participants, a summary of which was presented to the SBOE in January 2016. Concerns expressed about the November 2015 draft by forum participants included inconsistency of academic terminology across grades, disparity in number and complexity of student expectations from grade band to grade band within strands, and lack of consistent strand placement of skills from grade band to grade band.

The ELAR/SLAR work groups continued to meet to address these and other issues, producing a second draft of proposed TEKS in April 2016. In an effort to ensure that educators' voices were continuing to be heard, TCTELA President Kim Pinkerton prepared a report comparing the second draft with the concerns that had been raised in the online forum. Each concern covered in the forum report was evaluated as having been either fully addressed, partially addressed, or not addressed by the April 2016 draft, and detailed results were shared with the SBOE.

The SBOE Chair requested that TCTELA continue gathering educator feedback by conducting a second forum, which opened in August and ran through September. In a forum report presented to the SBOE in September 2016, participants echoed opinions expressed by the expert reviewers and by representatives from the work groups: meaningful progress was being made in organizing and streamlining the TEKS, but it was clear that more work was needed in the areas of vertical alignment, clarification of individual student expectations, and evaluation of those expectations for developmental appropriateness. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provided additional testimony at the September SBOE meeting, recommending that student expectations be revised to ensure a progression of higher order thinking skills through all grade levels.

A third draft of the ELAR/SLAR TEKS was presented in November 2016. In response to feedback from professional literacy organizations and testimony from the appointed experts, the Board approved an extension of the work, requesting that the experts continue their review and make final recommendations in preparation for first reading at January/February 2017 SBOE meeting. These final recommendations from the experts were included in a draft posted in December 2016. Through a series of online meetings, representatives from TALE, CREST, TASA, TASC, TAIR, TABE, NWPT, and TCTELA worked together to review the document and draft amendments for submission at first reading.

Because a large number of amendments were to be considered at the January/February 2017 meeting, the SBOE voted to divide first reading of the ELAR/SLAR TEKS into two parts: K-8 at the January/February meeting and English I-IV at the April meeting. At each of those first readings, amendments were approved by the SBOE, and updated drafts were then posted in the Texas Register for a required thirty-day public comment period. Teachers, curriculum coordinators, administrators, other educators and members of the public were invited to submit feedback to the SBOE.

Second reading of the ELAR/SLAR TEKS for grades K-8 was held

in April 2017, with the SBOE approving many of the amendments suggested during the public comment period. Final adoption occurred at a special SBOE meeting on May 10. Second reading of ELAR/SLAR TEKS for English I-IV was scheduled for June 2017.

Next Steps

The SBOE issued Proclamation 2019 at the April 2017 meeting. This call for instructional materials includes ELAR for grades K-8, SLAR for grades K-6, English Learners Language Arts for grades 7 and 8, spelling for grades 1-6 (both English and Spanish) and handwriting for grades K-5 (both English and Spanish). Publishers have the option to submit new materials aligned to the revised TEKS or submit existing materials with updated alignment to the revised TEKS. Publishers with currently adopted instructional materials may choose to offer supplemental materials reflecting



the revised TEKS. State review panels will evaluate all materials submitted in response to Proclamation 2019 and report their findings to the commissioner of education, who will then make a report to the SBOE. Final SBOE action on Proclamation 2019 is scheduled for November 2018.

Implementation of the revised ELAR/SLAR TEKS will occur in school year 2019-2020 for grades K-8 and school year 2020-2021 for English I-IV. As reported by Commissioner Mike Morath at the April 2017 SBOE meeting, TEA is planning to offer web-based and face-to-face professional development opportunities. A “TEKS unpacking” website will help educators understand the

revised TEKS and explore appropriate instructional practices for implementing them. A pilot program that involves groups of teachers working together to develop, teach, and then evaluate research-supported lessons will be expanded, with videotaped instruction and educator feedback available to teachers online. In addition, region service centers will be involved in developing plans for teacher training.

Teacher preparation for implementation of the new TEKS will also be a focus at the TCTELA annual conference in Galveston January 25-28. TCTELA's PD2Teach project has already begun gathering input from educators about what they want to see in TEKS-related professional development, and plans are under way to provide practical, meaningful support to members as they prepare to incorporate the new standards into their instruction.

Updates From TEA

In January 2017, the Texas Education Agency announced that beginning with the spring 2017 administration, English I, II, and III End of Course exams would no longer include short response questions, explaining that the change was made in an effort to better align the exams with those given in grades 3 through 8.

TEA has also made changes to the Confidential Student Report (CSR) sent home with a student's STAAR scores. The CSR will now give parents a web address and login that will allow them to view specific test questions missed by the student, the answer chosen by the student, and the correct answer. The CSR will also include the student's Lexile history and a suggested reading list by grade level. Performance labels have been renamed so that parents will be able to more clearly understand a student's achievement as measured by the test. *Level I: Unsatisfactory Academic Performance* will now be *Did Not Meet Grade Level*; *Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance* will now be *Approaching Grade Level*; *Final Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance* will now be *Meets Grade Level*; and *Level III: Advanced Academic Performance* will now be *Masters Grade Level*. More information about the new CSR design can be found at tea.texas.gov/studentreport/.

Updates From the 85th Texas Legislature

As part of its 2017 Literacy Education Day at the Texas capitol, TCTELA voiced support for authentic assessment in education, including the assessment of both writing and reading for balanced literacy; decreased emphasis on standardized testing in measuring the performance of students, teachers, and schools; and the use of graduation committees for students who don't test well and who need additional support. Several bills filed with the 85th Texas Legislature related to those issues.

HB 515 originally called for the elimination of STAAR writing at grades 4 and 7 and STAAR social studies at grade 8. It would have also replaced the high school history End of Course exam with the United States citizenship test. However, several amendments restored the writing tests and the history test, calling instead for the development and piloting of an alternative writing assessment and a study of social studies curriculum across several grades. The bill died in conference committee in the Senate.

HB 22 is a reworking of the A-F accountability system that was adopted in 2015. Under the version of the bill that passed out of

conference committee, schools will be rated in three categories rather than five: student achievement, student progress, and closing the gaps. Standardized test results will be a significant factor in measuring elementary, middle, and high school performance, but high schools will also be measured using additional factors such as graduation rates and enrollment in advanced courses. If HB 22 is signed into law, districts will receive grades in 2018 and individual campuses in 2019. Districts with good performance ratings could receive permission to develop their own accountability systems, which could then count for up to 50% of the overall accountability grade.

SB 463 extends a student's right to an Independent Graduation Committee (IGC) in the event that student does not pass one or two of the five required End of Course exams. The 2015 law establishing IGCs was set to expire in 2017, and this bill extends that date until 2019.

Both HB 22 and SB 463 are expected to be signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott.

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