A Report Created for the State Board of Education (SBOE), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the English Language Arts Reading (ELAR) and Spanish Language Arts Reading (SLAR) Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) Review Committees

An Initial Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Demographics and Key Trends of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (TCTELA) TEKS Forum Discussion Threads

TCTELA TEKS Forum History
In fall 2015, the TCTELA approved measures to fund and manage a forum in which Texas literacy teachers and professionals would have a place to voice their opinions about the ELAR/SLAR TEKS revisions (http://www.tctela.org/about-community). Invitations to join the forum were sent through the TCTELA member database and were also sent to other literacy and professional organizations across the state in the hope that they would share the information about the forum with their members. The TCTELA TEKS Forum went live at the beginning of January 2016. It was open to the public. Users were able to create an account, view links to the ELAR/SLAR revised drafts, and make comments to threads related to ELAR/SLAR TEKS strands, grade bands, and general issues. The thread conversations were moderated by Victoria Young, former director of reading, writing, and social studies assessments for the Texas Education Agency; Dr. Judith Márquez, Professor of Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language and chair of the Counseling, Special Education & Diversity Department at the University of Houston-Clear Lake; and Dr. Laurie Weaver, Professor of Bilingual and Multicultural Studies at the University of Houston-Clear Lake.

Demographic Information
All demographic numbers are reported based on data registering from Tuesday, January 26, 2016. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. **Note: One user may represent a group of people working together to submit one agreed-upon set of comments. For example, some literacy professionals reported hosting focus groups where comments were gathered and then posted by one person back to the forum. Other literary professionals reported that their posting represented a grade-band group, campus, or district. For this reason, the 866 people who created TCTELA TEKS Forum accounts do not represent the actual number of participants who contributed to forum discussions. In fact, the quantitative data linked to comments posted on the forum cannot precisely be determined, since the actual number of participants cannot be accurately calculated from the number of registered users.**
The TCTELA TEKS Forum has 866 registered users. These users reported the following data regarding their work in public school settings and in English language arts and reading education:

- 59% (510) are teachers and 34% (293) are administrators.
- 91% (784) work in public school settings.
- 75% (557) primarily teach ELA or Reading.
- 61% (528) have 11 or more years of experiences teaching ELAR.
- 63% (543) are solely responsible for or work in teams for lesson planning.

It is clear that the vast majority of users of the TCTELA TEKS Forum are those who represent the groups that have the highest vested interest in the ELAR TEKS revisions. The users are ELAR teachers and administrators who work in our public school settings. They are also experienced in the field of teaching ELAR and are primarily responsible for daily lesson planning.

The 866 user data also indicated the following:

- 25% (213) teach early childhood (EC)–grade 5 and 47% (409) teach grades 6–12.
- 10% (87) teach in dual language/bilingual/Spanish immersion programs.
- 100% of the ESC regions are represented (one user or more).
- 58% (508) are from Regions 4, 10, and 11.

All grade levels are represented by the users. A larger number of users teach in the middle and secondary settings than in the elementary setting. For this reason, the voices and perspectives of middle and secondary ELAR educators may be more accurately represented than those of elementary ELAR educators. Very few respondents reported work in the area of SLAR. Therefore, the voices and perspectives of ELAR educators may be more accurately represented than those of SLAR educators. All regional service centers are represented by the users; however, more than half of users are from the Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth areas. According to the most recently published report of enrollment in Texas public schools, TEA indicates that these three regional centers serve slightly more than 2.5 million children in Texas, which is 49% of the total number of children in public schools (TEA, 2014).

One final note about the 866 user data. Only twenty-one percent (186) reported that their primary involvement was with TCTELA as a professional organization. This is important to note, as this is a forum hosted by the TCTELA. Users also associate themselves with organizations such as Coalition of Reading and English Supervisors of Texas (CREST), International Literacy Association (ILA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Texas Association for Bilingual Educators (TABE), Texas Association for School Administrators (TASA), and others.

Summary:
It is clear from the data that the 866 users represent the professional literacy population most affected by the ELAR TEKS revisions and that these educators are experienced in their field. The users represent all grade levels, all regional service areas, and a variety of professional organizations. It is the hope of the TCTELA that the narrative discussion of the results of the TCTELA TEKS Forum will be considered, as the forum did seem to capture a sampling of the voices and perspectives of public school literacy teachers and administrators across the state of Texas.
Feedback from Participants on Global Issues

Wording of Strands

Question asked on Forum site: Should strands 2–8 be expressed more like strand 1?

- Near-unanimous support for applying the wording in strand 1 (Developing and Sustaining Foundational Language Skills) to strands 2 through 8, which are currently introduced with a one-word label (e.g., changing “Comprehension” to “Developing Comprehension Strategies and Skills” or “Employing Active Strategies to Support Comprehension”).

- Forum participants provided the following rationales for the recommendation to change the wording of the strands. More clearly defining the intention of each strand (1) provides clarity and direction to teachers by enabling them to better understand both the purpose and the depth of the strand and (2) calls attention to the need to actively engage students as they acquire the concepts and skills specified in the strand.

Vertical Alignment from grade to grade and level to level

Question asked on Forum site: Are the TEKS vertically aligned from grade to grade and level to level? That is, do the TEKS at each grade level build on the TEKS specified in the previous grade? Is there a smooth, seamless “slide” (transition) from the elementary to the middle school and from the middle school to the high school with regard to the expectations for student learning?

- Forum participants noted the lack of vertical alignment across grades and levels in the current draft of the TEKS. This issue is likely the result of the drafts being completed on different time lines by different committees.

- 1st vertical alignment problem: inconsistent use of academic language and terms. Example: Under Foundational Language Skills, the term “fluency” is used in K–3 and in 6–12, but in grades 4 and 5, the terms “accuracy” and “prosody” are used instead of “fluency.” There are many instances of inconsistent language use in this draft. Forum participants believe this should be an area of focus, their rationale being that the more the terminology is consistent from grade to grade, the better the TEKS can be understood not only by teachers but also by students. Consistency supports shared understandings of the specific meanings of academic language and terms used in the TEKS.
2nd vertical alignment problem: specificity and completeness within a strand. Example: In strand 3 (Response), there are only three student expectations in grade 6, as opposed to nine student expectations in grades 4 and 5. In addition, the student expectations are more generally written in grade 6 than in grades 4 and 5. As currently written, strand 3 in grade 6 seems to require less of students than this strand does in grades 4 and 5. On the other hand, strand 7 (Composition and Presentation) in middle school is much more detailed than any of the elementary grades. Forum participants commented that the difference in the specificity and completeness of the student expectations from elementary to middle school to high school causes significant alignment issues because it is difficult for teachers to understand how the expectations build from one year to the next.

3rd vertical alignment problem: inconsistent placement of student expectations in strands. In K–5, the SEs addressing writing for different purposes (writing a story, writing to present information, etc.) have been placed in strand 5. In grade 6–English IV, the SEs addressing writing for different purposes have been placed in strand 7. This inconsistent placement of SEs represents a major disruption in the vertical alignment of elementary to middle school and high school. Forum participants felt strongly that student expectations addressing similar skills must be placed in the same strand so that teachers can clearly track growth in student learning from grade to grade and level to level.

Balance between comprehension and textual complexity

Question asked on Forum site: The student expectations listed under strand 2 (Comprehension) are identical from kindergarten through English IV. If these comprehension skills are truly recursive, how does one grade differ from the next with regard to student learning? Does the difference in the expectations for student learning reside in the increased complexity of texts students read as they move from grade to grade?

Many Forum participants weighed in on this issue. They felt that the main concept of this strand— "Students use metacognitive skills to comprehend increasingly complex texts" —means that students need to practice the same skills using more complex grade-appropriate texts from year to year. Participants stated that the increased complexity and diversity of texts would naturally lend themselves to deeper study and understanding of the strand 2 student expectations.

The question from Forum participants was how to communicate the relationship between comprehension and textual complexity, i.e., how "front and center" text complexity should be in the TEKS.

Use of Definitions and Examples in Student Expectations

Questions asked on Forum site: Should academic terminology be placed in parentheses after definition? Should jargon or esoteric language (e.g., encode = spelling) be eliminated
to the extent possible so that it is easier for teachers and parents to understand the requirements of the curriculum?

- Many Forum participants commented that the TEKS are made to be used by teachers, so the language in the TEKS should reflect the language used in English language arts and reading classrooms. While it’s important that these standards be explainable to students and parents, the TEKS themselves are specific to instruction. Therefore, it's appropriate for correct academic terminology to be used.

- Forum participants were split over the use of examples, either in parentheses or as “such as” and “including” statements. Some participants thought that examples were helpful (as in “recognize spoken alliteration or groups of words that begin with the same spoken onset or initial sound [e.g., baby boy bounces the ball]”). Other participants felt that lists following “such as” and “including” sometimes inadvertently limit the full range of what should be taught because some teachers misinterpret the examples as representing an absolute list.

- Forum participants overwhelmingly supported the need for an easily accessible glossary (perhaps by grade band: K–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9–12) that could be used by teachers, parents, and the general public to clarify the meaning of the language and academic terminology used in the student expectations.

**Feedback from Participants on Issues Specifically Related to Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 TEKS**

- In strand 1, there was broad support for placing the romanettes under the SEs in a logical, developmental, scope-and-sequence order: i.e., romanette (i) being what is most basic to teach and the last romanette being what is most difficult or complex to teach. Rationale from participants: this would help teachers develop a more holistic view of an SE in that it would be easier to see the developmental learning continuum.

- Forum participants recognized the need for a consistent placement of romanettes from grade to grade; i.e., romanettes addressing the same skill under an SE should be presented in the same order in adjacent grades so that the vertical alignment from one grade to the next is clear. For example, in the current draft, the skills in 1A(ii) in kindergarten are addressed in 1A(v) in 1st grade. The romanettes addressing these skills should match from kindergarten to 1st grade.

- Forum participants pointed out that some romanettes within a grade are at odds with one another. For example, in kindergarten, 1A(ii) states that students demonstrate print awareness by "knowing that reading moves from top to bottom and left to right" but in first grade, students demonstrate print awareness by "reading texts by moving from top to bottom...." While participants saw the progression in complexity from “knowing” to “reading,” they also noted the problem with the wording used in kindergarten. The romanette indicates that students need only to know that reading moves from top to bottom. However, 1E(i) indicates that students read
independently for sustained periods of time, but to read independently, they must be able to do more than know about directionality. They have to read from left to right. Therefore, 1A(ii) does not work with 1E(i) in the kindergarten TEKS.

Verbiage of SEs needs to be consistent. In kindergarten–grade 2, the term “informational text” is used to mean expository text (see SE 5D). Beginning in grade 3 the term “expository text” is used.

In all three grades, consideration should be given to deleting the phrase “search for” in SE 2D. Participants felt that the focus should be on making connections (what enables readers to understand what they are reading) rather than on searching for connections (which represents the process). Participants also suggested that a phrase be added to the end of this SE that provides teachers with a rationale for the importance of making connections.

Some kindergarten SEs that participants identified as developmentally inappropriate:

1. In kindergarten, reconsideration is needed of the word “all” in 1A(viii), which represents a change to the current TEKS.

2. Reworking/reconceptualization of 2(F) is needed. It is not within the developmental capability of most kindergarteners to “sort through information” to “distinguish what is most important.” As participants noted, determining importance is a complex process and not a priority in kindergarten.

3. Reworking/reconceptualization of 2(H) is needed. For example, kindergarteners do not retell and summarize in a "logical" manner. Participants noted that summarizing is very complex and requires skills such as determining the importance of ideas, which are not appropriate or a priority in kindergarten. Paraphrasing and retelling are more age appropriate than actually summarizing and maintaining "logical order." The goal at this age should be maintaining the general meaning of the text.

4. Reworking/reconceptualization of 2(G) and (I) and 3(E) and (G). Participants noted that inference and synthesis require more schema than kindergarteners generally have. However, participants believed that it would be appropriate to introduce and scaffold these skills by adding the term “with assistance” (as is done in 3A).

5. Forum participants would like the committee to reconsider whether the issues listed in points 2, 3, and 4 of this list are also applicable to 1st and/or 2nd grade. They noted that some skills that were demonstrated with assistance in kindergarten may be demonstrated independently in first grade. However, in some cases the scaffolding needed in kindergarten may still be needed in 1st grade and, to some extent, in 2nd grade. Participants also noted that there's not much scaffolding in
the current draft of the TEKS. They would like the committee to take a close look at strands 2, 3, 5, and 6 with regard to scaffolding.

6. In 4(B), reconsideration is needed of including the term “clearly using the conventions of language.” Participants noted that this requirement is developmentally inappropriate in kindergarten and is not specified in the 1st or 2nd grade TEKS.
In 1st grade, 1B(i), “-ant” is used as one of the examples of a phonogram. However, this phonogram is not common. Consideration should be given to using a more common example, such as “-ink” (used in words such as blink, pink, think, rink, sink, wink).

In 1st grade, 1C(xv) introduces the idea of contractions. Participants would also like to introduce the idea of quotation marks. Their rationale is that first graders will see these often in the texts they are reading, so the introduction of quotation marks supports their early reading experiences.

Strand 4 (Collaboration) seems to be focused entirely on listening and speaking, except in grade 1, where there is an SE 4(E) requiring students to produce collaborative projects. The production of a collaborative project is not included anywhere else in the TEKS (K–English IV). Participants noted that the requirements for student learning with regard to reading and writing are unclear for this strand and wondered if the reading and writing requirements could be specified with regard to collaboration.

In kindergarten and grade 2 in strand 4, consideration should be given to changing “work productively in teams” to “work productively in groups” to deemphasize the idea of competition. This SE has been omitted in grade 1. Consideration should be given to adding it to strand 4.

In grade 2, participants noted that an SE that addresses reading aloud (similar to 1E[i] in grade 1) is needed in order to continue to strengthen fluency.

In grade 2, clarification is needed in 2(B) on the meaning of the term “teaching the various structures” in the context of student learning.

Participants would like the committee to reconsider whether SE 6(D) in grade 2 should be in strand 5 (Multiple Genres) rather than in strand 6.

Participants noted that the phrase “attending to” in strand 5 (SEs A, C, D, and E) is unclear in kindergarten–grade 2. They would like clarification of this phrase so that the cognitive demands required in these SEs are clear and can be interpreted similarly by teachers across the state.

Clarification is needed in 5A with regard to the term “narrative” in kindergarten–grade 2. Does this mean literary nonfiction (in reading) and personal narrative (in writing)?

Clarification is needed in 8C in grades 1 and 2 with regard to the terms “natural” and “personal” as they relate to sources.