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 literacy 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 to describe the same skill. 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 a 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 Grades 3, 4, and 5 TEKS**

- In grade 3, consideration is needed for rewording of 2(H) to delete the requirement to summarize “across texts.” Participants noted that summarizing is very complex and requires skills such as determining the importance of ideas. While students may be able to apply summarization skills to a single text, participants noted that applying these skills across texts would not be developmentally appropriate for most 3rd graders.

- In grade 3, both 5(C) and 5(D) address folktales. Clarification is needed with regard to how these SEs are different from one another.

- In grade 3, clarification is needed in 5(E) with regard to the term “narrative.” Does this mean literary nonfiction (in reading) and personal narrative (in writing)? Participants noted that clarification is needed with regard to what 3rd graders are expected to do with regard to reading and writing in this genre.

- In grade 4, SE 5(D) addresses media use for different purposes. Consideration should be given (for coherence reasons) to reordering this SE so that it is listed at the end of the strand rather than in the middle of SEs addressing literary texts.
In grade 4, SE 5(F) needs reworded (“read, respond to, and compose personal experiences”). Some participants commented that the term “personal experiences” doesn’t fit with the verbs in the SE.

In grade 4, SE 5H(v) addresses writing brief expository compositions. This SE states that students “establish a central idea in a topic sentence.” This phrasing represents a misconception in that a topic sentence is the central idea of a paragraph, not a composition. In grade 3, the term “controlling idea” is used, and the language describing the SE is clearer. Consideration should be given to revising the SE in grade 4 to be more in line with grade 3.

In grade 4, SE 5(K) addresses reading and responding to drama. Consideration should be given (for coherence reasons) to reordering this SE so that it is listed with other SEs addressing literary texts.

In grade 4, a review of SE 6(D) is needed. It is much less specific than the corresponding SE (6D) in grade 3 and appears to be missing language.

1B(viii) in grade 4 (using spelling patterns and rules to spell correctly) is missing from grade 5. Some participants wondered whether this omission was purposeful or whether this romanette should be added to grade 5.

In grade 5, romanette 5A(i) requires students to explain “how each incident gives rise to or foreshadows future events.” Participants commented that it is not necessary to explain every incident, as some are small and relatively unimportant. They favored changing “each incident” to “important or major incidents.”

In grade 5, participants noted that romanette 5G(i) does not seem developmentally appropriate. Most 5th graders will not be able to identify the relationships listed (parallelism, comparison, causality), especially in the context of persuasive texts. Consideration should be given to reconceptualizing/rewording this romanette.

Consideration should be given to introducing pronoun-antecedent agreement in grade 4 or grade 5 under SE 7(F). The rationale is that an understanding of pronoun-antecedent agreement is important for clarity in writing, so the introduction of this skill would support students’ ability to write clearly.

In grade 5, a review of SE 7(I) is needed. The comma use example is exactly the same as grade 4 and seems very narrow for 5th grade. Consideration should be given to include additional examples of comma use. For example, since students are required to write complex sentences in 5th grade (SE 7[G]), should comma use in complex sentences be introduced?

8(D) is formatted differently in grade 5 than in grade 4. In grade 5, skills are listed separately using romanettes, while in grade 4, skills are listed together in the SE proper. Consideration should be given to applying consistent formatting from grade 4 to grade 5.
A review of the way in which skills are organized within a strand is needed. For example, in grade 5, monitoring accuracy and prosody and writing legibly are romanettes under 1(C), foundational language skills. However, in grade 4 these skills are listed under strand 1 as separate from foundational language skills (1D and 1E). Many participants commented that corresponding SEs from grade to grade should be organized similarly for consistency. Should the organization of grade 4 be applied to grade 5 or vice versa? Consistent placement and organization of SEs and romanettes supports the student learning continuum by making it easier for teachers to track a skill back to the preceding grade and forward to the next grade.
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.

In all three grades, participants felt that 3(I) (“explain how texts evoke personal responses”) might be too vague to provide necessary direction to teachers. Consideration should be given to rewriting the SE more specifically.

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 in this and wondered if the reading and writing requirements could be specified with regard to collaboration.

In all three grades in strand 4, participants commented that “work productively in teams” should be changed to “work productively in groups” to deemphasize the idea of competition.

In strand 5 in all three grades, composing fiction, poetry, literary nonfiction, expository, and persuasive writing are mentioned in SEs A, D, E, F, and G, but the descriptions of these SEs seem clearly focused on reading, not writing. As detailed in the 3rd vertical alignment issue at the beginning of this document, should the purposes for writing be moved to strand 7?

Participants would like the verb “constructing” to be used in the SE or romanette that addresses correct sentence structure in strand 7 (e.g., 7F[viii] in grade 4). The rationale is that “constructing” emphasizes the active process of building good quality sentences in the context of real writing (not simply correcting during the editing process). In addition, consideration should be given to consistent placement of this skill in strand 7. In grades 3 and 5, it’s addressed in an SE; in grade 4, it’s addressed in a romanette under the conventions SE.

Clarification of the term “on-site inspections” in 8(B) as it relates to sources is needed in all three grades. Participants indicated that they did not know what this term meant.