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 that 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.
Final TCTELA Forum Report—Current Draft of ELAR TEKS
Grades 6, 7, and 8

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 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.

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 Grades 6, 7,
and 8 TEKS**

- In grade 6, strand 5 (Multiple Genres) is misaligned to this strand in the elementary
grades and, to some extent, to this strand in grades 7 and 8. Unlike earlier grades,
no genres are listed or specified in grade 6 except “fiction” in 5(B) and “argument” in
5(D). In addition, strand 5 in grade 6 is much less detailed than this strand in grades
7 and 8 (e.g., six SEs in grade 6 as opposed to fourteen in grade 7). A review of
strand 5 is needed in grade 6 to address two questions. Should the genres that form
the basis for instruction be specifically addressed in the SEs? Should SEs be added to
this strand to provide greater specificity and direction (as the SEs do in this strand in
the elementary grades and in grades 7 and 8)?

- In grade 6, clarification is needed in 5(B) with regard to the verb “summarize” in the
context of the specific elements of fiction listed in the SE. Participants noted that the
focus is on identifying and analyzing these elements of fiction, not on summarizing
them.

- In grade 6, consideration should be given to changing the term “topic sentence” in
8(E) to “controlling idea.”

- In grade 7, 5(F) currently requires students to “read, respond to, and write stories”; however, 7(F) also addresses writing stories both in grade 6 and grade 7.
Consideration should be given to deleting the “write” requirement from 5(F) in grade
7. As part of the forum discussion of 5(F), participants raised the issue of whether
writing stories should be part of the middle school TEKS at all, since this purpose for
writing is thoroughly covered in the elementary grades, and many other purposes for writing need to be covered in middle school (e.g., personal narrative, expository [including summary and analysis of literature], and persuasive).

- In grade 7, 5(K) requires students to “analyze the structure of the central argument in contemporary policy speeches...” Participants felt strongly that it is not developmentally appropriate for 7th grade students to analyze the central argument of contemporary policy speeches because the analysis would require a prior knowledge of policy issues. Participants suggested changing “contemporary policy issues” to “contemporary issues” to make the SE more age appropriate.

- In grade 7, strand 7 is organized somewhat differently than strand 7 in grade 6 (and to some degree in grade 8). In grade 7, the romanettes under 7(0) are listed as separate SEs in grade 6. Participants noted that consistent organization is needed to make the TEKS more usable at a campus level. Therefore, consideration should be given to reorganizing the strand 7 SEs in grade 7 to strengthen the consistency from grade 6 to 7 to 8.

- In grades 7 and 8, 7(G) addresses writing poetry, and idioms and hyperbole are listed in the SE as figurative language examples. Consideration should be given to listing examples that reflect more common figurative expressions used in poetry.

- In all three grades, consideration should be given to adding the descriptors “print and digital” to 1A(iii), which addresses using word references. Adding these descriptors would match the wording of this SE in grades 4 and 5, thereby strengthening the alignment between elementary and middle school.

- 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.

- A review of strand 3 is needed for all three grades. As noted under vertical alignment (see issue two), this strand seems to require less of students in middle school than it does in grades 4 and 5. In addition, all three SEs are problematic. Participants felt that 3(A) (“explain how texts evoke personal response”) as well as 3(B) (“respond to texts”) might be too vague to provide necessary direction to teachers. Consideration should be given to rewriting these two SEs more specifically. Participants also felt strongly that “text coding” should be deleted from 3C. They noted that including this as an example of a strategy encourages teachers to focus on the exact coding requirements, placing the importance on the strategy itself instead of on what it is intended to help students be able to do (deepen their understanding of the texts they read).
A review of 4(A) and 4(B) is needed in middle school. Participants pointed out that these two SEs seem to focus more on presentations in an evaluative sense than in a collaborative sense.

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

There is no SE addressing poetry in strand 5. Participants stated that poetry should be added if it is a genre we expect students to read in middle school.

A review of the verbs listed in strands 5 and 6 is needed to make sure they are being consistently used to describe what students are expected to do with texts from elementary to middle school to high school. Participants noted that teachers need a shared understanding of the difference in meaning and cognitive complexity of verbs such as interpret, analyze, and evaluate.

Strand 6 (Author’s Purpose and Craft) in grades 6, 7, and 8 seems less specific and complete than strand 6 in grades 4 and 5. Some SEs don’t seem to directly address author’s purpose or craft (e.g., in grade 8, 6A and 6D), and some SEs merely repeat SEs under strand 5 (e.g., in grade 7, 6D repeats 5D and 6E repeats 5E). In addition, some SEs are written so generally that teachers would likely interpret them in different ways (e.g., in grade 6 the meaning of the term “various techniques” in 6G). Participants noted that a greater number of SEs are needed to address the ways in which authors’ choices influence meaning within a text. The majority of participants stated that the SEs in this strand should be revised to provide teachers with a better road map of what students should be learning in middle school with regard to author’s purpose and craft (especially craft).

An issue was raised on the forum site in the middle school grades related to the inconsistent use of academic vocabulary, specifically with regard to expository writing and the use of central idea, controlling idea, and thesis statement. There was broad support for using the same academic term in the TEKS for all grades. The rationale is that it is illogical to call the same concept different terms at different grade levels. One participant made the comment that “having different terms makes it very confusing for both teachers and students. There are actually teachers out there that think a controlling idea is different from a thesis statement.” Consideration of this issue is needed.

An issue was raised on the forum site in the middle school grades with regard to the increased emphasis on the interaction between schema and text. Participants who teach in low socioeconomic communities were particularly concerned about the
assumptions being made about each student and their level of schema. Many of the comments were similar to the following: “I am wondering about how the limited experiences of my students might impact their own schemas and, as a result, their ability to interact with these texts in a way that now seems to be expected of every child.” Consideration of this issue is needed.