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
English I, II, III, and IV

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
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, English I–IV) 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 the English I, II, III, and IV TEKS**

Across English I–V, the term “apply word study” is used in 1(A). Participants felt this term was too general/ambiguous to provide teachers with any meaningful direction. One participant noted that this SE is based on the CCRS standard "Identify new words and concepts acquired through study of their relationships to other words and concepts." Several participants wondered whether this SE could be rephrased to be closer to the CCRS standard. A review of the wording is needed.

Across English I–IV, consideration should be given to deleting the phrase "search for" in SE 2E. 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.

Across English I–IV, a review of the term “validate collaborations” is needed in strand 4 (Collaboration). Participants understood and appreciated the idea of making the process of collaborating more positive, but they also noted that validation is not measurable and that there’s no way to require students to appreciate the
Participants noted that any validation that occurs should be a natural by-product of a high-quality collaboration rather than a TEKS requirement.

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.

Across English I–IV, strand 5 (Multiple Genres) is misaligned to this strand in the elementary grades and, to some extent, in grades 7 and 8. Unlike earlier grades, the reference to genres seems to be focused on genre strands, especially for literary reading. As currently written, the literary genres—fiction, literary nonfiction, poetry, and drama—are not specified at all. Forum participants were split on the issue of whether genres should be specified. Some liked the fact that no genres are listed or specified. Their rationale was that multiple genres can support the topics, ideas, and understandings that are relevant and important to a specific group of students and that prescribing specific genres may interrupt teachers’ ability to connect meaningfully in what they professionally know is going to work best for their student demographics. On the other hand, some participants felt that including specific genres in the TEKS is a good guideline for teachers who are new to the profession and have little support from master teachers or central office staff. Others supported the inclusion of genres because they were afraid that Texas would be where it was 10–15 years ago, with teachers focusing primarily on literary texts and selecting only a smattering of expository texts. Still others represented a third point of view: that listing genres is not a limitation but a starting point. They noted that teachers can and should go beyond the genres listed, but that they should at least do what’s specified. A review of this issue is needed.

Across English I–4, 5(B) requires students to analyze literary and expository genres to craft authentic writing. Clarification is needed of whether the expository genre is meant to include writing such as argumentative essays, personal essays, and rhetorical analyses.

Across English I–4, clarification of “multi-genre composition” (7G in English I, 7F in English II–IV) is needed. Many participants were confused as to what this term means. Questions asked in the forum included the following: Is this SE focused on multimodal texts? Does it require multiple types of writing within one composition? Does it have a multimedia aspect? Is it referring to a multi-genre research project (rather than a composition)? Participants noted that this SE is confusing because the vocabulary used in the SE is not familiar to teachers. A review of the language is needed to clarify the intent of the SE.
Across English I–IV, a review of the types of writing specified in strand 7 is needed. In English I, expository but not argumentative essays are specified, and in English II, it’s the opposite. In neither course is analytical writing required. In English III and IV, neither expository nor argumentative essays are required. In English IV, some participants questioned the importance of writing poetry and suggested that this SE be deleted from the TEKS. Overall, participants were split over whether types of writing should be specified. While many liked the fact that this draft was less prescriptive about the types of writing teachers were required to teach, there were definitely participants who had fears about moving in this direction. A comment made in English I captures this issue: “Not prescribing certain essays will allow too many teachers to say that they don’t have to teach them. In my current school, it’s difficult enough to get some teachers to go beyond the expository essay that they know will be assessed. In my former district, we fought this attitude by being able to point to the TEKS and say that certain types of writing needed to be done. Without that, I feel it will be that much more difficult to get teachers to go beyond what is tested.”

In English III and IV, consideration should be given to adding the effective use of absolute, gerund, infinitive, and participial phrases.

Across English I–IV, consideration should be given to adding the phrase “and an appropriate tone” to 7L (in English I) and 7N (in English II–IV) after the word “voice.”

Across English I–IV in 7(M) (English I and II), 7(N) (English III), and 7(O) (English IV), consideration should be given to changing the romanette “pronoun-agreement” to “pronoun-antecedent agreement.”

Across English II–IV in 7(M) (English II), 7(N) (English III), and 7(O) (English IV), review of the terminology “loose,” “periodic,” and “inversion” is needed. Participants pointed out that AP students need to learn these terms because they are specifically used on the AP exam; however, general education English students use the more common term “complex sentence.” Participants asked why it was necessary to use new and different terminology to represent a concept students have already learned by another name. They requested that familiar/common terminology be maintained unless it has been used incorrectly.

The SEs in strand 8 (Inquiry and Research) in English II are identical to the SEs in strand 8 in English I. The SEs in English III and IV are also identical. Review is needed to confirm that there are no distinctions between English I and II or English III and IV with regard to this strand.

In English III and IV, 8(C) requires students to present an “argumentative publication.” Participants interpreted this to mean that the research goal must be argumentative. Although the knowledge and skill statement says that students engage in inquiry processes “for self-selected and assigned purposes” (which seems to leave the research purpose open), specifying “argumentative presentation” in the SE is a de facto limitation on the type of research that students can do. In addition,
argumentative writing is currently not included in strand 7. There was broad support
for removing this presentation mode from 8(C).