The revised Spanish language arts TEKS have been reviewed by bilingual educators, and their comments are summarized in this report. These comments were received via the TCTELA forum, emails to the moderators and in-person conversations between the moderators and bilingual educators. Comments submitted in January can be found at the end of this report. Most of the comments were related to the Foundational Language Skills strand.

Two major themes appeared in the comments. One theme related to whether the revised TEKS represent what we know about the development of Spanish literacy. The other theme focused on the need for TEKS related to the comparison of English and Spanish.

1. Do the revised TEKS reflect what we know about Spanish literacy development?

We need to make sure we are not imposing on Spanish literacy instruction a literacy development framework based on English. For example, Spanish literacy development is not as dependent on phonological awareness skills as is English literacy development. (See, Goldenberg, 2014). The Mexican national curriculum standards do not include an emphasis on phonology (2011, Programas de estudio). Instead, the Mexican national curriculum focuses on developing comprehension. An examination of the Mexican national curriculum materials for first grade (See, Español, Libro para alumno, Primer grado) indicates that students are first taught to read their name. They then work with wordless stories and stories that are read together. From this stage, they then proceed to words, syllables and letters. Since the Spanish language has a much more closely aligned symbol sound relationship than does English, the emphasis on phonemic awareness is not needed. While the emphasis on phonemic awareness in the early grades may not hinder the reading development of the Spanish-speaking student, it takes valuable instruction time that could be devoted to the development of comprehension.

Here are the comments from one reviewer:

Identifying letter names - in Spanish this is not a necessary component for literacy and may actually be detrimental.

Phonological awareness is directly from the English and is not needed in Spanish.

Rhyme is still included even though this has been discussed extensively about the difference in English and Spanish.

One TEKS addresses contractions and there are only 2 contractions in the Spanish language.

Another reviewer stated:

We need to take advantage of the fact that the phonics in Spanish is less complicated than in English. We need to concentrate more on early reading that leads directly to meaning, than spending time on tasks that are not necessary to the development of literacy in Spanish.

Another reviewer pointed out the lack of inclusion of vowels as a foundational skill. This reviewer stated:

I am also not in agreement with the change of K.2A and B. If we combine them, we are not specifying that the foundation for being able to decode any syllable in Spanish is the skill of
knowing and decoding the 5 vowels. Students first need to be introduced and exposed to the
5 vowels, then they are taught how to use the 5 vowels to create syllables using the rest of
the consonants. This is a foundational skill for decoding in Spanish and if it’s not specific,
teachers may miss this very important step in reading instruction.

The Spanish sound symbol relationship is better addressed during writing instruction (2009,
Escamilla). In the Mexican school system, students are engaged in dictados. These dictados are based
on sentences with which the students are familiar. The dictados are carefully selected to highlight
areas in phonics and writing conventions that the students need to learn. Therefore, TEKS related to
the sound symbol relationship should be included in the Writing strand.

2. English and Spanish Comparison

Our bilingual learners benefit from instruction that guides them in comparing their two languages.
Recognizing the similarities and differences supports the students in their biliteracy development.
There are no TEKS, however, that address this. There is a need for TEKS that specify the concepts
and skills students should develop. For example, while morphology is addressed in the English TEKS,
in the Spanish TEKS, there is no mention of comparing the morphemes and their meanings.

Here is the comment from one respondent:

I agree that we need to teach both languages authentically, but we have to take into account
the biliteracy component of our teaching. There should be a strand in the TEKS for biliteracy.
This would be things students need to know about looking at similarities and differences
between languages. Also, identifying cognates and false cognates should be a TEKS. The
TEKS currently have a document that places Spanish and English TEKS side by side, so that
document will continue to be helpful when it comes to conventions and grammar, however,
we need to have specificity in the TEKS so that teachers are accountable for providing
opportunities for transfer of language.

Another respondent stated:

I think the crucial point is if we are developing biliterate students, but we have Spanish LA
TEKS and English LA TEKS, we are not really providing the base or support needed for
biliteracy. There need to be connections made between literacy and the two languages.

The Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE) recommends that the Spanish language arts TEKS
be further revised. In particular, TABE recommends that the Foundational Language Skills strand be
revised to reflect what current research and current practices in Spanish-speaking countries reflect
as best practices in Spanish literacy development. TABE also recommends that an additional strand
be added that addresses the comparison of English and Spanish and how this knowledge supports
biliteracy development.
January 2016

Notes on TEKS:

Most of the changes are cosmetic. For example, in places the word “including” might have been changed to “such as” and vice versa.

Divide the standards into three blocks: Word Study, Reading and Writing. All standards fall into these three categories. By taking the strands and having the teachers place them under the appropriate category, teachers have been able to see where the redundancy lies within their State standards. For example, in first grade where most of the redundant TEKS are found, teachers were able to see that the same standard we saw in phonics, may be found under phonic awareness, then again in spelling and yet again in conventions. This is one reason they are feeling overwhelmed. The same standard is repeated four times.

One other major concern is ELAR has 8 strands as a major revision. SLAR does not. When we try to compare, we are going to have a very difficult time determining what TEKS are taught in both and which TEKS are only taught in one or the other language. This is also going to have a big impact on assessment. For example, when students are taking a reading CBA or benchmark, we try to assess the same TEKS. The way each of these is currently structured, there will not be matching TEKS. The only thing I can think of is we will need to be very knowledgeable about both and match concepts.

Bilingual/dual language teachers are required to teach in English and Spanish. A document is needed that shows teachers similarities and differences between the two languages. TEKS related to this are needed.

They also need English language development which can include some literacy, but also focuses more on the development of English as a language. The students need intentional development of English as a language, as well as integrated development (as in, when English is developed during a content area). We have the ELPS, but they are way too general to be used for actual ELD instructional planning.

The verbiage used in the English TEKS and the Spanish TEKS seems to differ. The verbiage used in the English TEKS appears to be at a higher level than what is used in the Spanish TEKS. For example, why are the verbs used in the English version that relate to comprehension, response, author’s purpose etc. at a higher blooms level than the Spanish?

B and V should be taught as having the same sound. Teaching them as representing different sounds is teaching students erroneous concepts. Yes, there are regional differences and that can be mentioned. There isn’t enough time to teach all the regional differences for all of the letters. Saying that the reason that the students should be taught that b and v represent the same sound is because this will make it easier for them to learn English is demeaning. The students are more than capable of learning that there are differences between English and Spanish.

KS 1 and 2 need to follow more closely the way literacy in Spanish is developed. We know from Escamilla, 2009 that phonological awareness in Spanish is best developed through writing and analysis of written language. As children write and reflect on their writing, they analyze speech. This is not emphasized enough in KS 1 and 2. Many of the SEs are repeated within the two strands.

Rhyme in Spanish is not the building block that it is in English. The emphasis on rhyme in the kinder TEKS does not take into consideration its lesser importance in Spanish.

Spanish has few compound words that are part of students’ everyday language. The emphasis on compound words should be moved to a different grade level.

The kinder Spanish LA has students identifying upper and lowercase letters, but we know research shows they need to know the letter sounds, and teaching letter identification can inhibit Spanish literacy in early elementary.

5th grade, (7) adjectives - they suggest the “más mejor” example… Not correct. It is redundant. The correct form is “mucho mejor o simplemente mejor”.