

## **Feedback on First Draft of Recommendations (Nov. 2015) English Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills**

This document contains both general and specific comments generated as a result of my recent review of the draft ELAR TEKS (Nov. 2015). Responses to the questions presented in the feedback guidelines document follow a brief introduction with some general comments.

In direct response to feedback provided during the initial review of the previous ELAR TEKS (2009), the draft recommendations address some of the items identified.

- In an effort to streamline the ELAR TEKS, there is improvement in the explicit interconnectedness of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The number of standards and student expectations is also an improvement.
- The overall flow of the draft ELAR TEKS is improved as a result of identification of standards that are aligned and apply across all grade levels.
- Identification of eight standards with consistent numbering across grade levels facilitates horizontal and vertical alignment within and across grade levels.
- Integration of the previous comprehension appendix highlights the needed emphasis on comprehension as central to ELAR standards rather than separate or an “after-thought” as presented in previous edition.

1. Does each grade level or course follow a complete and logical development of English language arts and reading concepts?

- Some grade levels are stronger than others for this area (e.g., foundational skills for phonics knowledge at the primary elementary level are strong, but vocabulary knowledge is weak at all levels).
- An examination of individual grade levels reveals a logical sequence, but some of this is lost when multiple grade levels are examined across one standard because of repetitive wording and little differentiation.
- There are instances where there are huge leaps in student expectations within a grade level suggesting that accomplishment within an academic year may not be feasible. For example, kindergarten expectations range from identifying parts of a book to making inferences and supporting those with text evidence to discussing insights. The language development necessary for some of these skills is not supported through the standards (i.e., building vocabulary knowledge, understanding the academic vocabulary inherent in the student expectations such as discuss and explain).

2. Have the correct vocabulary and terminology been used throughout the TEKS?

- For the most part, the vocabulary and terminology have been consistent; however, there are terms that may be interpreted in different ways across grade levels (e.g., respond to, analyze, interpret).
- In an effort to maintain consistency for each standard across all grade levels, the sentences or wording that follow the “title” of the standard are also the same and this may not be necessary or appropriate. For example, for English I, Standard (1), the sentence, “Students develop word structure knowledge through phonological awareness, print concepts, and phonics to decode and encode texts,” is unnecessary and is not supported with the SEs (nor should it be at this level). If this wording should relate to the SEs delineated for each, then these should be adjusted while still maintaining the standard “title.”

3. Is the level of rigor appropriate for each grade level?

- There are some inconsistencies noted in the level of rigor for each grade level and this is related to student expectations that may be difficult to measure and inconsistent differentiation across grade levels within standards. If intended rigor will be achieved, it will be important to revise the standards to reflect development of skills across grade levels that is differentiated explicitly and builds on previous learning and accomplishment of standards.

4. Are the student expectations (SEs) clear and specific?

- Wording of some SEs across grade levels remains identical and therefore, difficult to differentiate expectations from one grade to the next. The difference between grade levels for some standards is captured only in the introduction (a) (2) “. . . students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater depth to increasingly complex texts in multiple genres as they become self-directed, critical learners . . .” Unless more clear demarcations or delineation are stated, the intent may be lost.
- Some student expectations may be difficult to measure with the use of words such as “understand” and “analyze” in the absence of differentiation between grade levels and examples of indicators or specific expectations within grade levels.

5. Are the TEKS aligned horizontally and vertically? If not, what gaps should be addressed?

- The focus on word analysis seems to diminish after Grade 4. While grade 5 includes an SE related to advanced phonics knowledge, it is an isolated example that relates only to pronunciation changes as a result of spelling changes. The emphasis should be placed on the changes that occur as a result not only because of spelling, but that spelling and pronunciation change as a result of manipulating base words so that words can function differently in syntax and the impact on meaning (e.g., changing a word from a noun to

an adjective). The focus on morphology and etymology should be emphasized to a greater degree beginning at grade 5 and continuing through English I-IV (emphasis is too general).

- Standard 4, Collaboration, seems more like an instructional approach than a standard specific to ELAR. Student collaboration is something that can be accomplished within any standard or content area and at any grade level, so the inclusion of collaboration as an ELAR standard is confusing and may not be necessary. It seems to break the flow of the other standards, although “teamwork” was also part of the previous standards.
6. Can all student expectations reasonably be taught within the amount of time typically allotted for the grade level or high school course prior to the end of the school year or prior to a state assessment?
- It is difficult to determine if many of the SEs can be taught within a defined period of time by grade level because of the lack of differentiation from one grade level to the next (see Comprehension and Response, for example).
7. Are there student expectations that can be eliminated in order to streamline the standards?
- I don't think so at this time for the current draft.
8. Are there specific areas that need to be updated to reflect current research?
- A major concern relates to the identification of using context to determine meaning as a first expectation for students to develop vocabulary. Using context is ineffective if students lack the vocabulary or syntax knowledge to know how to use context to confirm meaning.
  - The use of context for determining or confirming meaning is dependent on the text structures and vocabulary inherent in the text providing the context; thus, if the student lacks vocabulary knowledge and the text is not written in an explicit way to help the student use it effectively, instructional value is lost.
  - The introductions for each grade level articulate a focus on authentic reading and writing (a) Introduction (1), and research supports this focus; however, the emphasis seems to be lost within the GL standards and SEs.
  - Specific attention to understanding and using academic language is emphasized minimally across grade levels. While it may be difficult to identify a pre-determined, mutually-agreed-upon set of words, terms, or phrases that comprise academic language appropriate for each GL, a minimum set of examples should be included.
  - In general, it may be beneficial to embed more research support (i.e., citations) and include some that are current and support specific standards (e.g., phonics instruction, pa and print paired when teaching both phonemic manipulation and letter-sound knowledge or alphabetic principle, integration of reading and writing, writing process, use of authentic writing).

- Although concepts of print or print awareness knowledge and skills are important, they account for less variance than letter-sound knowledge, phonemic awareness, or automaticity and fluency with fundamental reading skills; thus, it may be important to stress the latter set of skills more than the former or include some research support to stress the importance and impact on instructional time and value.

9. Are the College and Career Readiness Standards adequately and appropriately addressed throughout the TEKS?

- Yes. Each standard can be linked to a CCRS for ELAR (Writing, Reading, Speaking, Listening, and Research) and therefore supports the attainment of CCRS. In general, the student expectations delineated for each ELAR TEKS support CCRS with specificity across grade levels and because of the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing within the ELAR TEKS, each CCRS is addressed multiple times.

10. Do you have any other suggestions for ways in which the English language arts and reading TEKS can be improved?

- Place an earlier focus on technology and digital literacy.
- Although the standards are streamlined and relatively easier to follow across grade levels given that the set of proposed/revised standards are consistent, the student expectations from one grade to the next are not well defined or differentiated consistently; thus, it remains difficult to determine what is quantitatively different from first grade to third grade in comprehension, for example.
- As an advanced organizer, it would be helpful to see the 8 strands identified as numbered bullets as part of the introduction (under (a) (1) and listed as numbered in all GL documents. Listing as such would highlight the prominence and increase readability.
- In addition to including an advanced organizer that lists the standards, it may also be helpful to include an example and explanation to show numbering of standards and student expectations.
- Include a table that organizes standards across grade levels by standard (having this available during next revision phase may help reduce redundant wording and identify opportunities to differentiate between grade levels for each standard).
- Maintain consistency of language and wording across all standards. For example,
  - “The student is expected to . . ./The students are expected to . . .”
  - “Develop vocabulary by . . ./ Develop vocabulary to . . ./Develop new vocabulary and demonstrate understanding by . . .”
- The introduction for K includes a reference to the tradition of teaching U.S. and Texas history (4), but this is not included in other introductions.

- Minor wording recommendation for (a) Introduction (2): Last sentence —“Students will engage in academic conversations, write, and read (or be read to in primary/elementary grades) on a daily basis with application for cross-curricular content and opportunities for student choice.” If wording remains consistent across ALL grade levels as it is now for K-12, these minor word changes increase the appropriateness and application of the intent.
- K-2, Standard 1, D, i (Vocabulary): include objects and categories
- At a minimum, Standards 3 (Response), 4 (Collaboration), and 7 (Composition and Presentation) should include student expectations that state explicitly that students will use or embed new vocabulary into their speaking, discussions, and writing. This is an oversight and including explicit language for teachers to expect and therefore, teach students how to use new vocabulary, may diminish the “exposure” or “teach and hope” approaches and increase students’ active use of and attention to integrating new vocabulary into their oral and written lexicons.
- 1 (B) (i) for at least grade 6: Change wording: “adjusting fluency when reading grade-level text based on self-monitoring of comprehension and the reading purpose.”
- The focus on 8 standards across all grade levels with same order and numbering is an improvement; however, not all strands represent measurable standards that are differentiated across grade levels. Is there a way to further align so that sub-standards and SEs can align across GLs? For example, the Foundational Skill Strand, (1) addresses vocabulary across all GLs, but for some it is labeled (B) and others (C) or (A). English I-IV is structured differently for (1).
- Examples of performance indicators may be necessary to further differentiate between grade levels and to support teachers’ abilities to teach and assess students’ accomplishment of standards from one grade level to the next.
- There are some additional wording changes I might suggest, but I’m not sure we are at the point to do this if substantive revisions will be made at this point. For example, change “discuss inferences supported with text evidence” to “identify and explain meaning of inferences using text inferences.”