Guidelines for Expert Feedback on the Spanish Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

Louisa Aguirre-Baeza -

Please review the current Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Spanish language arts and reading, kindergarten - grade 6 and English I and II for Speakers of Other Languages, as applicable, and respond to the following questions. In your feedback please indicate the specific grade level/course and student expectation number you are referring to, as appropriate.

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

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

3. Is the level of rigor appropriate for each grade level? In alignment with the current STAAR test, YES.

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

5. Are the TEKS aligned horizontally and vertically? If not, what gaps should be addressed? YES – as written in isolation. However, Figure 19 is still seen as the "left out" piece and really needs to have a strand of its own such as Reading/Writing like an author or Reading Comprehension.

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? In isolation, yes. However, for districts that are trying to use innovative models such as dual language, assessment and mastery of skills in two languages at all grade levels is very difficult to accomplish with two sets of LARs TEKS (English and Spanish). Districts are having to create documents and define the skills that truly transfer and justify why one language will struggle in terms of performance over another. However, with TELPAS and STAAR, there is no room to struggle – you are either making progress and hitting the standard or you are not.

7. Are there student expectations that can be eliminated in order to streamline the standards? Elimination of standards will eliminate rigor. However TEA approved/recommended resources on what sight words should be mastered at each grade level (English) and how that compares to high frequency words in Spanish are needed. K5.B states grade specific vocabulary – are the same grade specific words in English equivalent to those in Spanish and which word lists are most relevant for both languages? Educators are forced to depend on textbooks and publishers to determine what is grade level specific and yet vocabulary development is an area of weakness across the state especially for ELLs. Guidance/Specifics as to which words should be mastered at each grade level in each language are needed.

8. Are there specific areas that need to be updated to reflect current research? I have worked as a teacher, as a university instructor for teacher preparation, as a

Education Service Center Specialist and as a campus and district administrator. As a 5th grade teacher, I was responsible for teaching the entire TEKS for 5th grade to students who were born and raised in El Paso but could not speak English, to students who recently entered the US within the last 3 years, and to students who were generally struggling learners regardless of the language. Then, I went to the university where I taught incoming teachers to dissect the TEKS and use research based practices on how to provide "transfer," recognize cognates, develop literacy, and be supportive of the cognitive/emotional/linguistic needs of students who are acquiring English as a second language. Followed by a position at the Education Service Center which allowed me to serve as the liaison between TEA and the District to assure state and federal compliance with rules and regulations that basically govern that all students "progress". I have now returned full circle as a District Administrator to assure that "it all gets done". In theory, I respect the system and I am determined to make the system work. However, the BIGGEST issue, in my opinion, is getting right back to the classroom and looking my teachers in the face and giving them resources/support/structure. We all generally agree on the WHY – it has always been about the students. Research does tell us that everyone will have a different HOW because of proximity to the border, socio-economic status, additional factors that provide labels such as At-Risk, SPED, GT, etc.; and assessments/accountability systems provide a standard or baseline (which varies from year to year). So the HOW will always vary. The TEKS however, at the very least have to provide as much of the WHAT as possible.

- "descriptive words"
- "nouns"
- "expository texts"
- "well known Folktales or fables"
- "new vocabulary"
- "use common words"

The bullets above are words and phrases found throughout our elementary TEKS without specificity. What if I use nouns like perro, wow-wow when teaching but the assessment is using words like can, Labrador? Technically all words are correct but has the teacher been provided with a master list of what words are grade level specific, a state recommended list of expository texts and folktales, and/or a list of the TEA supported common words, then the instruction would have matched the assessment. Lots of research is available with lots of recommendations, we need guidance/lists/support from TEA as to which are the appropriate lists to use and which ones are used/considered when developing assessments. Otherwise, districts and teachers consequently depend on vendors and textbooks to provide us this information at their going rate when we should be demanding it from them at our bartered rate.

The Texas Educational Service Center Curriculum Collaborative (TESCCC) originally tried to have a "common curriculum" several years back which evolved into CSCOPE. The mere vertical alignment and specificity support are the pieces that are missing in our current TEKS. Lesson plans will always be controversial but the intent of the TEKS and the framework of "the what" should be endorsed and given the stamp of approval by TEA.

9. Are the College and Career Readiness Standards adequately and appropriately addressed throughout the TEKS? The fact that we have two sets of standards is the problem. If we are preparing students for college/career, then we should not have separate standards.

10. Do you have any other suggestions for ways in which the English language arts and reading TEKS can be improved? I am willing to be part of the solution as much as I possibly can. Thank you for this opportunity!

Aguirre-Baeza