

June 26, 2015

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

For the most part, the grade levels and courses are complete courses of study, in that I don't believe anything core to literacy as a whole has been left out. Some things need to be addressed in some courses and in some grade levels as I'll illustrate in subsequent answers.

Figure 19 needs to be reworked to include all that we know about reading comprehension and put back into the body of the TEKS. Research has been done for the past 30 years on what strategies proficient readers use to understand and comprehend text. In fact, the research is so prevalent that no one is really researching it anymore. Literacy experts agree that reading comprehension includes the following strategies: monitoring for meaning, asking questions, drawing inferences, synthesizing, making connections, determining importance, activating schema, and creating sensory images. (Anderson and Pearson, 1984; Pearson, et al 1992; Keene and Zimmerman, 1997; Harvey and Goudvis, 2000 and so many more) Currently in the TEKS a sampling of these strategies in abbreviated form appears in reading/beginning reading/strategies and ends in 3rd grade.

What must be considered here is that these are strategies that all readers use and the strategies themselves don't really change over the course of a reader's age from grade level to grade level through to adulthood. The variables that change are the complexity of the text and the complexity of the thinking. On the surface, keeping the strategies the same across grade levels doesn't seem like children are growing in knowledge and ability; but they are growing in applying strategies to more difficult and more nuanced texts and thus increasing complexity of thinking. As a comparison, take any sport that you've played - let's say basketball. In kindergarten, coaches teach offensive strategies, defensive strategies, ball-handling, shooting, etc. In the NBA, coaches teach offensive strategies, defensive strategies, ball-handling, shooting, etc. The core needs of the players don't change, but the complexity of the opponents and the games changes dramatically. The same with reading - even now, as a proficient reader, when you're reading this, you're making connections, activating schema, synthesizing, etc.

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

Sensory language (K&S Reading/comprehension of literary text/sensory language) The term that should be used here is *figurative language*, which is the broader, more inclusive term for use of language that conveys more than the literal interpretation (sensory language would be a subcategory of figurative language). Sensory language means that the language the author uses would appeal to the reader's senses, but the SE's listed in several grade levels 6.8.A, 8.8.A,

June 26, 2015

I.7.A, II.7.A, III.7.A, and IV.7.A encompass much more than just sensory language; they designate allusions, symbolism, irony, etc. which are not necessarily sensory language but are definitely figurative language.

Additionally, sensory language and figurative language are in all types of texts not just literary. Authors of informational text often use figurative language to convey meaning. I suggest a broader application of “language” be applied across genres.

Theme and genre (K&S reading/comprehension of literary text/theme and genre) This seems to be a mash-up of theme work and comparison of literature from different cultures. The SE’s don’t convey a study of genre but more of the interconnection of literature from different cultures and the influence of time period on literature. See K.6.D vertically through to IV.2.B and 5.3.C vertically through to IV.2.C.

Culture and history (K&S reading/comprehension of informational text/culture and history) This also seems mislabeled because all the TEKS are related to topic (K.9.A) and to author’s purpose (3.12.A) and controlling idea (IV.8.A). There isn’t really anything about “culture and history” in this strand.

Overall this strand and the idea that is intended, based on STAAR test questions that I’ve analyzed, is really about the author’s message specifically of an informational text. We need significant clarification about main idea, central idea, author’s purpose, author’s message, controlling idea, and theme. Once the terms are defined and decided upon, the language should be consistent across the TEKS.

Here’s an example of confusion: in the larger English language arts context (not just Texas☺), author’s purpose means the author’s reason for writing something, for example, to inform, to persuade, to entertain, etc. In Texas, author’s purpose is used to identify the message that the writer is trying to convey in an informational text. We have narrowed the definition and caused confusion, and it doesn’t belong under a culture and history strand.

Reading/fluency 1.5.A, 2.4.A, 3.3.A, 4.1.A, and 5.1.A (*read aloud grade-level stories with fluency and comprehension*). You can read aloud with fluency, but reading aloud with comprehension doesn’t make sense. Fluency might be one indicator of comprehension, or a teacher could follow-up with comprehension check, but I don’t know how you read aloud with comprehension.

Writing/expository and procedural texts and persuasive texts This is an area that we need to seriously consider. Texas has departed from the language that colleges and the rest of the

June 26, 2015

ELA world use. We call the texts persuasive, but most everyone else calls them argumentative. The way it is written in the TEKS suggests that argumentative texts are a type of persuasive text, which is not the case.

Additionally, the tested readiness TEKS in English I I.15.A (*write an analytic essay of sufficient length*) say *analytical* but students write an *expository* essay on the test, not an analytical essay. We need clear and consistent language.

Compare the TEKS horizontally in 4th grade and in English I for expository and persuasive writing (4.20.A & 4.19.A and I.15.A & I.16.A-E). If these two types of writing stay in the TEKS, we need clarification through the TEKS or subsequent documents about expectations because currently the TEKS do not clearly delineate the differences.

The four classical modes of discourse are exposition, narration, description, and argument. We need to be clear about what we expect of students as we prepare them for college and career, and write the TEKS to reflect those expectations.

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

The SE's addressing theme need some modification because they don't match what is expected of readers reading on grade level. See K.6.B vertically through IV.2.A. Students reading on grade level should be able to identify and describe implicit themes by 4th grade (TEKS have this in 6th 6.3.A) then they should identify and describe multiple themes by 5th grade (TEKS have this in 7th grade 7.3.A). This is important because the books that the students are reading in 4th and 5th grade if they are reading on grade level contain multiple implicit themes, so we need to begin students in doing that work earlier.

III.2.A is well-stated and might be the most complex and thorough statement of theme to work backwards from.

IV.2.B seems very low-level for senior level work. II.2.B and III.2.B seem to call for higher level thinking.

4.2.D begins the vertical study of idioms, but the culminating TEKS III.1.D and IV.1.D go too far in what should be expected of a junior or senior level student. There are college courses devoted the "analyzing and explaining how the English language has developed and been influenced by other languages." I.1.D (same strand vertically) calls for students to describe the origin of foreign phrases. It is enough that students know the meaning of foreign words or phrases or more importantly can infer their meaning from context.

June 26, 2015

I.5.C should start earlier. By the end of 5th grade, students reading on grade level will be reading books where the characters' points of view are important and analyzing the way the characters' point of view shapes the story is important to understanding the book. 5.6.C asks students to "*explain different forms of third-person points of view.*" Students don't need to explain or describe points of view; they should always be relating it to meaning and the piece as a whole.

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

There are several SE's that are not clear:

- I.2.A I'm not sure this is an important skill and exactly what it looks like practically.
- II.8.A This is an example of wordiness that gets in the way of the work that students are to do.
- 8.11.B The TEKS is misleading. Rhetorical fallacies are subdivided into three categories: emotional, logical, and ethical fallacies. Logical fallacies are a type of rhetorical fallacy, but they are listed like they are equal. The examples in the TEKS all belong into the large category of rhetorical fallacies, and then can be subdivided into the 3 subcategories. This becomes problematic in teachers' and students' understanding.
- 7.17.C and 8.17.C is vague. What is meant by "*demonstrate the writing skills for multi-paragraph essays.*" What specific skills of essay writing should be present?
- 7&8.18.C "*include evidence...that differentiates between fact and opinion.*" What does that practically look like?

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

The strand that has the best vertical alignment with good progression and clear and concise language is the reading/comprehension of informational text/expository text. Most of the SE's build on each other to a logical conclusion. K.10.B (*retell important facts in a text*) to 3.13.B (*draw conclusions from the facts presented...*) to 8.10.A (*summarize the main ideas, supporting details, and relationships...*) to IV.9.A (*summarize a text in a manner that captures the author's viewpoint, its main ideas, and its elements without taking a position or expressing an opinion*).

I'll be a little contradictory here and say that while that strand shows good vertical alignment as a whole there are 2 issues that I think need to be addressed. First, K.10.B (*retell important facts in a text*) and 1.14.B (*identify important facts or details in a text*) should be rewritten to

June 26, 2015

ensure vertical alignment. You can't retell without identifying, so the progression of expectations is off. Also, 7.10.A takes a departure from the other TEKS in that strand. All other TEKS say *summarize* and 7.10.A says *evaluate a summary*.

I.2.C and II.2.C seem oddly out of place in vertical alignment. Figurative language hasn't been part of that strand vertically up to English I and then drops off in English III.

2.11.A seems misplaced.

Reading/Comprehension of text/independent reading this should continue through to English IV. Student should still read independently through middle and high school for sustained periods of time and produce evidence of their reading.

Reading/comprehension of literary text/poetry There needs to be a clear division of structure and language in poetry. There needs to be 6.4.A (language) and 7.4.A (structure) in all grade levels. 8.4.A is too easy and unnecessary. 4.4.A is more rigorous than 8.4.A.

5.7.A (*identify literary language and devices in biographies*) The literary language and devices in biographies would be no different from other literary forms, but if someone knows of major differences in the language in those genres then a list or examples should be provided. 6.7.A follows the same pattern. 7.7.A seems oddly disconnected because students are to *describe the structural or substantive difference between an autobiography or diary and a fictional adaptation of it*. That doesn't seem like an important skill for 7th graders when reading literary nonfiction. The study of speeches as literary nonfiction should begin before 8th grade.

Reading/comprehension of literary text/fiction 7.6.A (*setting's influence on plot development*) should begin in 4th grade. Again, if students are reading on grade level, the books that they are reading will begin to use setting as an important feature in plot development. We should be preparing students to understand the books that they are reading. 6.6.A *summarize* is a low level skill, and students need to be doing much more work with plot development than summarizing.

Writing/literary texts Writing about important personal experiences begins in 3rd grade (3.19.A), but students should begin writing about personal experiences in kindergarten through pictures, letter representations, etc. Waiting until 3rd grade to begin personal narratives is short-sighted. All children have experiences to write about and beginning them early will help them to gain fluency and control over writing. Also, high school students should also be writing narratives, but the TEKS for narrative end in 8th grade.

June 26, 2015

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?

Definitely not. By way of example, I went through the 7th TEKS and counted a couple of things just to quantify my thoughts and my experiences with teachers and curriculum development. There are 67 student expectations, which at first glance seem surmountable in a school year. However, several SE's (5 in 7th grade) have clarifying information that makes the SE much more complex and time-intensive. Take 7.19.A as an example.

(19) Oral and Written Conventions/Conventions. Students are expected to (A) identify, use, and understand the function of the following parts of speech in the context of reading, writing, and speaking:

- (i) verbs (perfect and progressive tenses) and participles;
- (ii) appositive phrases;
- (iii) adverbial and adjectival phrases and clauses;
- (iv) conjunctive adverbs (e.g., consequently, furthermore, indeed);
- (v) prepositions and prepositional phrases and their influence on subject-verb agreement;
- (vi) relative pronouns (e.g., whose, that, which);
- (vii) subordinating conjunctions (e.g., because, since); and
- (viii) transitions for sentence to sentence or paragraph to paragraph coherence;

The SE is *identify, use, and understand the function of the following parts of speech in the context of reading, writing, and speaking*. All the clarifying information that follows makes this more complex and much more time consuming, requiring many days of instruction (I'm using the term "day of instruction" here to refer to the class period or language arts block where the content/skill/strategy would be taught and practiced)

Additionally, many SE's are multi-faceted and require much more instructional time than just one lesson. For example, 7.10.D:

- (10) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students are expected to
- (D) synthesize and make logical connections between ideas within a text and across two or three texts representing similar or different genres, and support those findings with textual evidence.

Clearly, mastery of this SE would take several lessons, texts, readings, practice sessions, etc.

Next, I counted the number of instructional days that each SE would require, including time for teachers to teach and then students to practice, implement, and master the SE. This is a subjective task, but here are a couple of examples so that you'll understand how I came to the conclusion that there is much more content than is possible to teach in one school year.

- 7.10.D (referenced above) would take approximately 4 instructional days.

June 26, 2015

- 7.8 would take approximately 6 instructional days because teachers would need to provide content instruction in various uses of language in several texts over time and students would need to apply the content skill across several texts to ensure understanding and mastery.
(7.8 determine the figurative meaning of phrases and analyze how an author's use of language creates imagery, appeals to the senses, and suggests mood.)
- 7.13.D would likely take one lesson and students would apply the knowledge across the year in appropriate contexts.
(assess the correct level of formality and tone for successful participation in various digital media)

After I determined the amount of time required for each SE, I added up all the needed instructional days and came up with 195 days of instruction. We don't have enough time to teach what is in the TEKS.

7. Are there student expectations that can be eliminated in order to streamline the standards?

Vocabulary development vertically K.5.C through to IV.1.C. I see the importance of analogies as a way to teach students word relationships, but there seems to be an emphasis on analogies for the sake of analogies. I don't see that as useful for college and career readiness, especially since the SAT has removed analogies from their test in 2005.

Reading/media literacy could be streamlined much more. The entire K&S is too dense and specific, and there is barely mention of media literacy in the CCRS.

I-IV.14.C (*write a script*) This is an unnecessary task for high school students. The TEKS allow for choosing 2 of the 3 types of literary writing, but teachers would still need to teach students how to write a script, taking valuable class time needed for other more relevant reading and writing tasks.

The research strand needs to be whittled down to the most essential. How could this whole strand be worked into reading and writing? Many of the research concepts and skills we, as learners, employ in the act of reading and writing. This is one of those areas that tends to be overlooked by teachers, so I'd like to see it distilled to meaningful components and placed strategically.

8. Are there specific areas that need to be updated to reflect current research?

See my answer to question 1.

June 26, 2015

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

I think that the TEKS accurately reflect all the CCRS.

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

Teachers need clear definition and clarification of terms used in the TEKS. While there are some e.g.'s to provide examples, some terms call for a clearer definition of what is meant and expected. Some examples from the current TEKS:

- 6.3.B “stylistic elements”
- 7.3.B “conventions” in myths and epic tales
- I&II.16.D define the “organizing structures” that are possible
- I&II17.A.i “more complex active and passive tenses”

We need a clear, parallel structure for the TEKS framework. We also need consistent (K-12), defined language in the TEKS.