

Review of Final Draft of TEXAS English Language Arts and Reading Standards

Sandra Stotsky
Revised June 25, 2016

- 1. Does each grade level or course follow a complete and logical development of English language arts and reading concepts? NO.**

For example, in Strand 2, on Comprehension, we find “(E) make connections to personal experiences...” It appears at all 12 grade levels and is identically worded. (E) is not a standard or a concept. Here is another example, “(D) Create mental image...” appears at all 12 grade levels and is identically worded. It, too, is not a standard. Nor can such pedagogical commands be assessed.

- 2. Have the correct vocabulary and terminology been used throughout the TEKS? NO .** Many assertions in the document are not standards and are incorrectly labeled as such. See the AFT’s 2008 *Sizing up State Standards* for examples of real content standards (p.3).
<http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/sizingupstandards0308.pdf>

- 3. Is the level of rigor appropriate for each grade level? NO**

- 4. Are the student expectations (SEs) clear and specific? NO**

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

The entire document needs revision, especially the three empty process strands (Comprehension, Response, and Collaboration)

- 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? NO**

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

YES. Eliminate all repeated assertions such as the examples in #1. Most repeated assertions are not standards. Most are not assessable. They are also useless without sample titles, authors, or literary/historical periods to indicate reading level and historical/cultural knowledge expected. For example, another regularly repeated assertion is on p. 18, English IV, (2) A. “Establish purpose for reading assigned and self-selected text.” If grade 12 students choose or are assigned to read “The Three Little Pigs,” who cares what their purpose is? What matters is the teacher’s purpose, which is not being assessed.

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

The framework shaped by the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (TCTELA) and other literacy organizations in Texas does not reflect the framework for the only set of ELA standards in the country that empirically increased academic achievement in all demographic groups (i.e., the 2001 *Massachusetts English Language Arts Curriculum Framework*). Any ELA framework used in Texas should reflect a framework with positive empirical results, not an untried and unproven framework such as the TCTELA-shaped framework.***

*** (In this review, I refer only to TCTELA—not all the other literacy organizations in Texas—when

referring to the influence of outside organizations on the draft standards because it is the state affiliate of the chief and largest professional organization for English teachers in the country (National Council of Teachers of English). NCTE has a history of opposition to authentic and measurable standards, especially for literature, dating back to the 1990s (see <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED485523.pdf>, p.15)

9. Are the College and Career Readiness Standards adequately and appropriately addressed throughout the TEKS? NO.

Few Texas students will be ready for college or a career if their education is based on these TCTELA-shaped standards and framework.

10. Do you have any other suggestions for the English language arts and reading TEKS for the SBOE to consider? YES. See my four suggestions below.

The TCTELA-shaped standards are among the most poorly conceptualized standards in the country I've examined. They are for the most part empty skills/processes and show few developmental progressions from grade to grade. They do not reflect or encourage "higher-order thinking." Few high school students in Texas will be able to read most of the titles in a list of Suggested Nonfiction Books developed in 2009 in Massachusetts, whether or not they are in AP courses (see attachment).

The TCTELA-shaped standards lack strands for all four major genres taught by well-trained English teachers: Fiction, Poetry, Dramatic Literature, and Nonfiction. There are no sample titles, authors, or literary periods for any standard in any strand. Nor do these standards require students to become familiar with significant people or events in Texas literary or political history—something one might expect from state-based organizations.

1. Choice needs to be offered to Texas parents: Let them decide whether they want these TCTELA-shaped standards or the 2008 research-based standards that have been in place in Texas for the past eight years. Parents of students enrolled in a public secondary school should be allowed to vote by secret ballot. The decision whether to adopt these TCTELA-shaped standards or to retain the research-based 2008 standards should be made by those with children in the public schools—in mathematics as well as in English Language Arts. Decisions on standards made by a state board with little expertise in mathematics, science, or English language arts are not respected, even if it has statutory authority.

2. As a rule of thumb, I suggest that if over 25% of parents in a district want to retain the research-based 2008 standards, then their school district should make a K-12 curriculum based on them available in its schools. This would lead to a huge savings on textbooks and professional development.

3. Given the likelihood that both the state's parents and the SBOE on average know equally little about what the contents of a progressively challenging K-12 ELA (or mathematics) curriculum should be, at least let parents vote for what they want for their own kids. That would solve the opt-out problem, a seeming concern of the *Dallas Morning News*. http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/20160609-editorial-parents-here-s-how-students-win-in-staar-wars.ece?_ga=1.150832881.614454100.1465665376

4. Two types of tests should be made available: tests based on the research-based 2008 standards and new tests based on the TCTELA-shaped standards. All test items should be released after use. Teachers should not be held accountable for student test scores on any test. All high school tests should be vetted by undergraduate teaching faculty in Texas colleges; they should determine the pass score needed for enrollment in credit-bearing freshman courses, not K-12 teachers or a state board of education.

Proposed List for Massachusetts High School Nonfiction (a partial list): 2009

Economics

Adam Smith	<i>An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations</i>
Jeremy Bentham	<i>Defence of Usury</i>
John Stuart Mill	<i>On Liberty and Principles of Political Economy; Utilitarianism</i>
Thomas Malthus	<i>An Essay on the Principle of Population</i>
David Ricardo	<i>The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation</i>
Karl Marx	<i>Das Kapital, Communist Manifesto</i>
Max Weber	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>
John Maynard Keynes	<i>The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money</i>
Friedrich August von Hayek	<i>Individualism and Economic Order</i>
Milton Friedman	<i>Capitalism and Freedom; Monetary History of the United States 1867-1960</i>
Ludwig von Mises	<i>Liberalism; Human Action: A Treatise on Economics; The Theory of Credit and Money; Socialism; The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality</i>
Niall Ferguson	<i>The Ascent of Money</i>

British Literature

Francis Bacon	“Of Truth,” “Of Revenge,” “Of Boldness”
Queen Elizabeth	“Speech to the Troops at Tillbury”
John Donne	“Meditation XVII,” from <i>Devotions Upon Emergent Situations</i>
John Milton	from “Areopagitica”
Jonathan Swift	“A Modest Proposal”
Samuel Johnson	excerpts from <i>The Preface to Shakespeare</i>
Mary Wollstonecraft	<i>A Vindication of the Rights of Women</i>
William Wordsworth	“Preface to <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> ”
Thomas Carlyle	“Captains of Industry” from <i>Past and Present</i>
John Ruskin	“The Stones of Venice”
Virginia Woolf	<i>A Room of One’s Own</i>
George Orwell	“Marrakech,” “Politics and the English Language,”

American Literature

“The Declaration of Independence	
Ben Franklin	selections from his <i>Autobiography</i>
Noah Webster	“Letters to a Young Gentleman Commencing His Education”
Ralph Waldo Emerson	“Nature,” “The American Scholar,” “Self-Reliance”
Henry David Thoreau	“Civil Disobedience,” <i>Walden</i>
Walt Whitman	“The Death of Abraham Lincoln”
Ambrose Bierce	selections from <i>The Devil’s Dictionary</i>
H. L. Mencken	selections from <i>The American Language</i>
Robert Frost	“Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue”
Loren Eiseley	“The Brown Wasps”
E. B. White	“Once More to the Lake”
Isaac Asimov	“The Eureka Phenomenon”
Joan Didion	selections from <i>Slouching toward Bethlehem</i>

Ninth and tenth grade texts

Abraham Lincoln,	“The Gettysburg Address”
Martin Luther King	“I Have a Dream,” “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
Helen Keller	<i>The Story of My Life</i>
Anne Frank	<i>Diary of Anne Frank</i>
Dylan Thomas	“Memories of Christmas”
Elie Wiesel	<i>Night</i>
John Holt	“How Teachers Make Children Hate Reading”
James Thurber	“A Dog’s Eye View of Man”
Mary Talbot	“The Potato: How It Shaped the World”