

Wilkerson Feedback on Final Recommendations

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

On the whole, the document reflects a complete and logical development of ELAR concepts. The writing teams wrote a document that most definitely will prepare Texas students for college and career; and although they represent changes from the current TEKS, these new TEKS are much, much closer to where Texas needs to be. I anticipate that there will be much discussion over the new TEKS and the changes from the previous TEKS, but we needed change. Please refer to my initial feedback on the TEKS for specifics, but mainly we needed a logical, coherent, organized document that reflects current research, is usable and informative for teachers, and produces educated, well-rounded citizens. By adopting these standards, we are moving in that direction.

I am especially proud of the work done in the writing/composition strand. Utilizing industry-standard terminology will better equip teachers and students. I also love the revisions that K-2 completed from the first draft. The TEKS are much more streamlined and teacher-friendly. I appreciate that the committee members took seriously the comments made by myself and others to trust the professionalism of teachers to know and understand what a specific SE means.

While I am proud of the work and thankful for the work that the writing teams have done, I recognize that there are areas that need to be addressed. The areas are not wholesale major changes, but some revision is still necessary.

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

I applaud the committees for utilizing the reading comprehension strategies in the comprehension strand. The committees recognized the need to integrate comprehension into the body of the TEKS and to use relevant and research-based strategies across grade levels. While some critics will argue that the strand doesn't show incremental increase of complexity across grade levels, the writing committees and ELA teachers and administrators know and understand that the complexity and increasing rigor comes in the complexity of the texts that students read as they move through grade levels.

The committees have also taken care to use correct terminology for the writing genres (argumentative, informative, literary, and analysis). Those genres are ones that students are expected to master and produce in both college and career.

A couple of minor areas of concern: 3-5.3.F uses the word *implied* and 6-12.3.F uses *explicit and implicit*. There is virtually no difference between implied and implicit so why two different terms; and more importantly, explicit should start before implied/implicit, so explicit should begin in earlier grades and then build to include implicit.

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The SE's regarding argumentative text structure and features in strands 5 and 7 need some revision. I suggest aligning terminology. Earlier grades use "persuasive" text and later grades use "argumentative." There is a difference in persuasive and argumentative texts, so using them interchangeably isn't acceptable. I suggest using argumentative throughout with illustrative examples of "opinion essays" in earlier grades. There isn't consistent use of "claim" and "thesis" throughout the document, and I suggest consistent use of terminology to avoid confusion.

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

6.6.C.i is the first mention of recognition of thesis in informational text, but students are asked to identify and analyze organizational patterns of informational text that support text's main ideas as early as 1st grade. An SE regarding identifying the main idea should be added at the appropriate grade level and then aligned vertically to build to thesis in 6.6.C.i.

5.7.I suggests that students write a persuasive editorial. That isn't something I would ask 5th graders to do. I know that the SE says "such as," but I think that there could be a more grade-level appropriate writing that could be suggested. Additionally, the switch needs to be made in the language to use "argumentative" text as stated earlier.

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

I think that on the whole the SE's are clear and specific. As I've discussed in previous documents and testimony, the K-2 SE's are much more specific and prescriptive and the 9-12 SE's are much more vague and nuanced. Each group knows this and to a degree attempted to address it, but the groups had different ideas about the degree of specificity to provide to teachers as they plan instruction, and the document reflects this disagreement.

I'll point out a few places where this idea is problematic. One example of this occurs in strand 1 under the SE related to vocabulary development (which is a different letter at different grade levels, see #5 recommendation). K-8 identifies specific roots and affixes while 9-12.1.B.iii says, "develop vocabulary by increasing vocabulary and learning new words and concepts, including academic and other content vocabulary." Another example appears in 9-12.5.B. K-8 provides a nice progression of increasing knowledge and skill regarding plot development, setting, theme, and character development, but 9-12 subsumes all of those into (B) analyze and apply the characteristics and structural elements of literary texts such as: (i) theme, characters, and plot;

These examples are just a couple of places, but the issue exists throughout the document, and 9-12 needs a bit more specificity to aid in alignment.

One recommendation would be for a small team to look at the document as a whole and ensure that the same level of specificity exists throughout. The document lacks coherence because of the differences in specificity, and this issue could yield negative consequences for students, teachers, and districts. We want a document that gives teachers enough specificity to

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know what to teach and also enough professional freedom to make decisions that best suit their students. Both can exist in one set of standards, but at certain places in this document, we have extremes.

1.5.B.iii is missing a word, “describing the main character(s) and the reasons for their and actions.”

7-8.5.B.iv says, “explaining how the theme(s) is developed.” This is a vague SE that needs further explanation and specificity.

4.6.G should say *rhetorical* instead of *literary* to ensure vertical alignment and so as not to repeat 4.6.F.

Students are likely to encounter flashbacks in books that they are reading, so 8.6.F could include flashbacks as a literary device.

6-12.8.B needs more information. Currently, the SE says, “develop a plan.” I recognize that the SE is under the research and inquiry strand so a plan for research can be assumed; however, there needs to be more clarity provided across grade levels.

There are numerous minor edits that need to happen throughout the document, so I won’t take time to point out each one. I anticipate that someone will take care of that.

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

This is an area that needs attention. In an effort to put the TEKS in the order in which they should be taught, the committees moved SE’s and put them in different order at different grade levels. This is problematic for both teachers and for districts. For example, in strand 1, K-4 and 6-8 have A as “develop oral language” and 5th grade moves that SE to F. At the district level, curriculum specialists look vertically when planning a scope and sequence and professional development to see the progression of learning that should take place across an SE. Having SE’s in different locations will make this difficult and the ensuing work will become more of a “seek and find.”

Additionally, teachers look across an SE to see what students should come to them knowing and to see what students will be expected to be able to do at the next grade level. This work aids teachers in planning the “level of instruction” as researched and formulated by Gagné, R.M. and Briggs L.J. (1997). Teachers do not have the time to search through a document to find what comes before or after, so providing them with a coherent and aligned document will give them time to spend crafting a lesson to teach the SE.

I believe that SBOE members wanted to make the product a very usable tool for teachers and asked committee members to put the TEKS in the order that they would be taught, but ALL of the grade levels are going to have to get together and decide this. It doesn’t make sense that in

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5th grade *only*, oral language skills would be taught in a much different order than every other grade level.

My recommendation is that the committee members line SE's vertically beginning in kindergarten or 12th and then put all the rest of the grade level expectations in the same order. Districts and teachers can make professional decisions about the order in which SE's are taught.

To illustrate the point, think of the TEKS in outline form.

1. Foundational Skills

A. Oral language

- i. Instructions
- ii. Eye contact
- iii. Social communication
- iv. Giving presentations
- v. Listening and responding to presentations

B. Phonological awareness

- i. Rhyme
- ii. Word/sound identification

This is just meant to be illustrative of the structure that needs to exist across grade levels, not to say that it should be in this order. Some strands have this in place while others don't and that will cause problems for teachers and students.

Vertically, there is an alignment issue between 5th and 6th grade regarding theme. 5.5.B.iv says, "explaining multiple themes and ideas not explicitly stated within and across texts." 6.5.B.iv says, "explaining multiple themes and ideas not explicitly stated in a text." If 5th graders can explain multiple themes across texts then 6th graders should be able to do at least that. This same issue appears in 3-6.6.B. The verbs are out of alignment between 5th and 6th. Additionally, across grade levels in 8.A, there are some issues with student and teacher-directed inquiry questions. "Teacher-directed" is introduced in 6th grade, but in earlier grades the SE's say, "generate" questions, so one would assume that students do that themselves, so there is no need to go back to teacher-directed. Unless, that is, we are expecting teachers to begin directing inquiry in 6th grade, which I seriously doubt is the case.

9-12.5.C, D, & E all use the verbs analyze and apply and other grade levels do not. There needs to be agreement and alignment in whether to include "apply." Strand 7 Composition refers to these SE's to get genre specific characteristics to guide the writing skills, so the "apply" seems redundant.

Strand 3: Response has some very nicely vertically aligned TEKS, specifically see G, I, and J. The committees ensured that the skills addressed in these SE's built logically in a way that will make these SE's meaningful and important to teachers and students.

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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?

Yes, I believe that the SE's can be reasonably taught in a school year. There is a good balance of content SE's and process SE's which will make the task very doable for teachers. The writing teams took seriously the charge to streamline and make revisions that make the TEKS much better.

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

In strand 5, SE A across the grade levels needs to be reconsidered. There are too many genres specified and suggested in that SE. That amount of specificity makes the genres and content insurmountable.

In strand 7, SE F can be merged into the writing process portion of that strand (A-E). The writing committees did a similar thing by adding the specific grammar content in the editing (D) portion of the writing process, so the same could be done by adding some of the elements of F into the planning, drafting, and revision portions of the writing process.

For example, take 6.7.F.ii, "organizing with purposeful structure including an effective lead, transitions, sentence-to-sentence connections, and closing" and move it under 6.7.B "develop drafts by choosing an effective organizational strategy, such as sequence of events, cause-effect, and compare-contrast, and building on ideas to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing." to say something like, 6.7.B "develop drafts by organizing to include

- i) Purposeful structure such as sequence of events, cause-effect, and compare-contrast,
- ii) Effective lead,
- iii) Transitions to build on ideas,
- iv) Sentence-to-sentence connections to produce a coherent piece of writing, and
- v) Effective conclusion.

All of the other SE's under F can be integrated into the writing process in a similar fashion. This will make the document more streamlined and will also illustrate that the specific craft elements in F can and should be taught within the writing process.

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

These standards are MUCH better than what we've had in previous years and are reflective of current research. There are a couple of areas where the TEKS have been improved because the writing committees utilized current research. One of those areas is strand 2 comprehension. The comprehension strategies utilized in the newest version of the TEKS are based on over 30 years of extensive, replicated research, which has been proven as effective

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reading instruction. So including these strategies in our TEKS brings us into compliance with what current exemplary reading instruction looks like.

Strand 4 collaboration is one portion of the new TEKS that is based on research from the 21st century (Kuhn, 2015; Kyndt et al., 2013; Noroozi, Weinberger, Biemans, Mulder, & Chizari, et al., 2012). The standards are focused on cognitive skills and interaction and not on social skills, a distinction discussed in Hesse et al., 2012's *A Framework for Teachable Collaborative Problem Solving Skills*. I anticipate that some will argue that collaboration shouldn't be included in the standards, but given the distinction that the strand calls for cognition, metacognition, and problem-solving, and that the strand is based on current research and developments in education, and that business owners and the CCRS call for these skills to be in place, they are a necessary and valuable part of educating our Texas students.

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

Yes, I believe that the document adequately and appropriately addresses the CCRS.

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

3-5.5.B.v and 3-5.5.C.i contain too many specifics regarding poetry elements and text features. Many of the poetic devices listed should be moved to strand 6 because those devices aren't only found in poetry. Including them in strand 5 ensures that those will only be taught with poetry, and our students will be at a disadvantage when reading other literary, argumentative, and informative texts that include imagery, alliteration, figurative language, etc. The specifics of text features should be listed following "such as" instead of "including." Limiting those specifics for text features will be problematic for teachers and students.

The issues outlined in the previous paragraph highlight a bigger issue the SBOE should consider as they seek to create a whole and usable document. I recommend commissioning a few committee members or content experts to look at the document and work toward coherence. Because 4 different committees worked on the document, there are distinct breaks between 2nd and 3rd, between 5th and 6th, and between 8th and 9th. I know that committees worked on a vertical alignment strand to achieve vertical alignment, but their work didn't address the rifts between grade level committees' work. That small group can also edit the document as there are many small mistakes that I didn't take time to point out.

The document is meant to be read and used as a whole document, using strands to inform and build on other strands. In my experience, teachers have not always utilized the TEKS this way. The SBOE should direct the staff of TEA to provide professional development on the usage of the TEKS, **and** that professional development content should be planned and implemented with some of the writers of the document as they know the intricacies of each strand and how they are to be used together. In addition to using the writing committee members to plan the professional development, SBOE should commission a small group of them to also

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write a clarifying document that will define terms, provide additional examples, and give clarifying information regarding usage of the TEKS as a whole and interconnected document.