

How Will the New ELAR TEKS Impact Future Instruction?

Categories: Reading

In my last blog post, “Reading Instruction Non-Negotiables,” I shared a list of reading non-negotiables that are paramount to effective reading instruction. As we begin the second semester of the school year, I thought this would be an opportune time to review the new English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) that will go into effect for the 2019–2020 school year for Kindergarten through grade 8. I’d like to unpack some of the changes, what those changes mean for teachers, and how a firm foundation in your reading non-negotiables will guide and support you and your students on the road ahead.



We know the goal of content standards is to define what’s important for schools to teach and for students to learn. We also understand that these standards will shift as the needs of our students shift. Let’s explore how these new ELAR TEKS have evolved. Below is an overview of some of those changes:

- There are now seven strands:
 - S1: Foundational language skills
 - S2: Comprehension skills
 - S3: Response skills
 - S4: Multiple genres
 - S5: Author’s purpose and craft
 - S6: Composition
 - S7: Inquiry and research
- Figure 19 expectations (the metacognitive thinking skills standard in both assigned and independent reading to determine the author’s message) are integrated into general student expectations at each grade level and course
- Vertical alignment across grade levels
- Horizontal alignment between English and Spanish
- Revision to genres

This past fall I had the opportunity to attend the Coalition of Reading and English Supervisors of Texas (CREST) Conference where the new ELAR TEKS was a hot topic. At the conference, one of the points referenced time and time again was, “While each strand (and

substrand) in the new ELAR TEKS represents a distinct literacy focus, the strands are not intended to be considered—or taught—separately.” Two presenters in particular, Victoria Young and Jennifer Wilkerson, shared four literacy principles in the new ELAR TEKS that, when thoroughly understood, will “expand your knowledge base about what your students should know and be able to do and will help you consider what kind of instructional changes—or pivot—will be required to teach these content standards in a way that results in meaningful literacy gains for your students.” The principles are:

- Literacy Principle #1: The interconnected nature of listening, speaking, reading, and writing must be central and explicit so that the skills central to literacy development are taught as both integrated and recursive.
- Literacy Principle #2: Every strand must include thinking, since the development of literacy skills is dependent on students’ ability to think clearly, coherently, and flexibly about what they are reading, writing, viewing, listening to, and discussing.
- Literacy Principle #3: The role of text complexity in literacy development (and in the differentiation of certain skills from grade to grade) must be central and explicit.
- Literacy Principle #4: The alignment of knowledge and skills must make sense vertically—from grade to grade within a strand—so that the curricular structure on which instruction is based is purposeful, coherent, and appropriately scaffolded.

I think it’s equally important to point out that these new ELAR TEKS require teachers to expose students to important concepts earlier in their elementary career; examples include:

- The use of first or third person in text and elements of drama is introduced in Kindergarten
- “Cursive script” begins in grade 2
- Phonics is taught through grade 5
- “Silent sustained reading” is extended through grade 8
- Students are required to read “high frequency” words from a research-based list (for example, a Dolch word list or a Fry’s word list) rather than a common list

As your schools and districts begin providing professional development on the new ELAR TEKS this year, consider how this learning aligns with those reading non-negotiables you’ve established. Here are the 10 reading instruction essentials that I shared in my last blog:

- Whole-class Shared Reading
- Guided Comprehension Instruction
- Independent Reading (self-selected text)
- Independent Writing
- Vocabulary Study
- Word Study
- Small-group Guided Instruction
 - Rereading
 - Talking about Text
- One-on-one Conferencing

Again, the new TEKS prompt teachers to interconnect reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This task, which may appear to be a heavy load, is naturally inclusive within your reading non-negotiables. Reading non-negotiables allow students to build on the strategies, skills, and competencies they are learning. For example, during your *independent reading* portion of the day students self-select text to read and unpack using those literacy strategies taught during a whole group shared lesson. As you walk around to

confer one on one with students, your goal is to listen, question, probe, and note students' abilities to listen, speak, read, and write. When utilized on a daily basis, reading non-negotiables address student expectations.

Additionally, it's crucial that you consider how your instructional curriculum and materials align with the new ELAR TEKS and your reading non-negotiables. What you want is curriculum that not only supports the TEKS but also those fundamental opportunities students need as part of their reading block. Finally, the curriculum you decide to adopt should be a tool you can use to begin the transformational work needed to ensure both you and your students succeed. Happy New Year!