

Elementary English Language Arts Overview



The Mission

The Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. Elementary Language Arts Program is committed to the vision that all students can and will become lifelong readers and writers who are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure their success as effective communicators, reflective thinkers, and quality producers. A key district goal supports the vision: *Ensure students' literacy by making certain that all students can read and write on grade level or above by the end of third-grade and every year thereafter.*

The Framework

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), revised for implementation in the 2009-2010 school year, is the blueprint for raising student achievement by defining grade-level standards and clarifying them with performance descriptors known as student expectations. The English Language Arts and Reading TEKS are divided into five strands: Reading, Writing, Oral and Written Conventions, Research, and Listening and Speaking. The complexity and sophistication of the student expectations increase in relationship to the developmental and cognitive levels of students.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2000) called for increased accountability and a revised statewide assessment to measure student progress. As a result, the Texas Education Agency created a new framework for organizing the TEKS by categorizing the performance descriptors into broad categories. Furthermore, specific TEKS have been vertically aligned and identified as eligible for testing on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The TAKS reading objectives for grades 3-8 include the following student competencies.

- Obj. 1:** The student will demonstrate a **basic understanding** of culturally-diverse written texts.
- Obj. 2:** The student will apply knowledge of **literary elements** to understand culturally-diverse written texts.
- Obj. 3:** The student will use a variety of strategies to **analyze** culturally-diverse written texts.
- Obj. 4:** The student will apply **critical-thinking** skills to analyze culturally-diverse written texts.

The TAKS writing objectives for grade 4 include the following student competencies.

- Obj. 1:** The student will, within a given context, produce an **effective composition** for a specific purpose.
- Obj. 2:** The student will produce a piece of writing that demonstrates a **command of the conventions** of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure.
- Obj. 3:** The student will recognize appropriate **organization of ideas** in written text.
- Obj. 4:** The student will recognize correct and effective **sentence construction** in written text.
- Obj. 5:** The student will recognize **standard usage** and appropriate **word choice** in written text.
- Obj. 6:** The student will **proofread** for correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling in written text.

The Curriculum

The district's curriculum for elementary language arts provides a logical progression of the TEKS that is structured to support the development of proficient readers and writers. Units of study and mini-lessons aligned to the district scope and sequence feature critical TEKS objectives that are essential for the growth of literacy skills. Reinforced throughout the year, the critical TEKS objectives are shown on the grade-level Principal Overviews. Each nine-weeks, reading teachers incorporate a variety of genres in the balanced literacy framework to ensure that students have opportunities to apply critical-thinking skills using complex, high-quality literature (fiction, nonfiction, and prose). Instruction on the metacognitive (awareness of one's thinking) strategies that proficient readers use supports the development of comprehension processes: *monitoring for meaning, activating schema, making connections, asking questions, determining importance, inferring, creating sensory images, & synthesizing*. Additionally, each nine weeks includes instructional activities to develop students' vocabulary knowledge.

Students must regularly engage in the writing process by producing developmentally-appropriate, polished compositions. Throughout the school year, a variety of genres are embedded in the scope and sequence to allow students the opportunity to write for varied purposes with different organizational forms. Students are also expected to respond to reading in written form by making connections and engaging in higher-level thinking using textual evidence to support their responses. The Six Traits™ of Writing serves as a common language for describing the effective qualities of writing and are integrated into the writing units of study. Oral and written conventions - grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling - are taught in context rather than as isolated skills in order to achieve the goal of applying them correctly in a written composition or oral presentation, which is the goal of effective communication.

The Big Three™ (Grades K-2) and Big Six™ (Grades 3-5) Information Problem Solving Processes provide effective models for guiding students through an inquiry-based research process. Listening and speaking skills are integrated into the curriculum to enable students to comprehend a speaker's message, participate in discussions, and collaborate with other members of the learning community through reading partnerships, book clubs, and cooperative learning tasks.

The Instruction

Research-based instructional practices provide the basis for a sound reading and language arts program. Teachers should utilize the components of balanced literacy to provide students with high-quality instruction. Teachers are required to develop lesson plans that include the critical objectives assigned to each six-weeks, as well as the TEKS that occur naturally with the use of the balanced literacy components. Student assessment data and research-based strategies such as those featured in Marzano's *Classroom Instruction that Works* should drive instructional decision-making and classroom practices. Strategies known to have a strong impact on student achievement are noted below.

- Identifying similarities and differences
- Summarizing and note-taking
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- Homework and practice
- Nonlinguistic representations
- Cooperative learning
- Setting objectives and providing feedback
- Generating and testing hypotheses
- Cues, questions, and advance organizers