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Year 1 State Report: Texas

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The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL), funded from July 2015 through 2020 by the Institute of Education Sciences, examined how college- and career-readiness (CCR) standards were implemented, if they improved student learning, and what instructional tools measured and supported their implementation.

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Year 1 State Report: Texas

Abstract

This report examines how the state of Texas approached college- and career-ready standards implementation during a time of transition. The state has recently implemented revisions to the math standards and is currently revising the English language arts (ELA) standards. The revised ELA standards are expected to be ready for full implementation in the 2018–2019 school year. For the purposes of this report and in keeping with C-SAIL's focus, the authors concentrate on implementation of Texas's ELA and math standards.

Keywords

college and career-ready standards, implementation, curriculum, professional development, assessment, students with disabilities, english learners

Disciplines

Education | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research

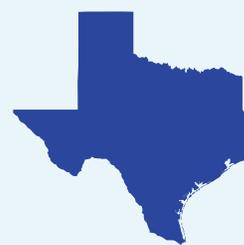
Comments

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YEAR 1 STATE REPORT: **TEXAS**



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About the Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL)

The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL) examines how college- and career-ready standards are implemented, if they improve student learning, and what instructional tools measure and support their implementation. C-SAIL is led by Andy Porter, with a team of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, University of Southern California Rossier School of Education, American Institutes for Research, and Vanderbilt Peabody College. The Center is funded through a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education.

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Introduction

The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL) examines how college- and career-readiness (CCR) standards are implemented, if they improve student learning, and what instructional tools measure and support their implementation. Established in July 2015 and funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education, C-SAIL has partnered with California, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Texas to explore their experiences with CCR standards-based reform, particularly with regard to students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs).

This report examines how the state of Texas is approaching CCR standards implementation during a time of transition. The state has recently implemented revisions to the math standards and is currently revising the English language arts (ELA) standards. The revised ELA standards are expected to be ready for full implementation in the 2018–2019 school year. For the purposes of this report and in keeping with C-SAIL’s focus, we concentrate on implementation of Texas’s ELA and math standards.

Texas Academic Standards Timeline | At-A-Glance

The adoption, implementation, and revision of Texas’s CCR standards and assessments are part of an ongoing process spanning several years. Below is an overview of Texas’s timeline for this process, beginning with the year that CCR standards were first adopted:

Year CCR standards were adopted	The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in ELA and math were adopted in 1997.
Year(s) the CCR standards were fully implemented (all schools in the state were required to use the CCR standards.)	The original TEKS in ELA and math were fully implemented in the 1998–1999 school year. The most recent revision to the ELA TEKS was first implemented in the 2009–2010 school year. The most recent revision to the Math TEKS was fully implemented in the 2014–2015 school year.
Year(s) CCR standards were/will be revised	The ELA TEKS were revised in 2008. The Texas Education Agency is currently working on revisions to the ELA TEKS that are expected to take effect in the 2018–2019 school year. The Math TEKS were revised in 2004, 2008, and 2012.
Year(s) CCR-aligned assessments were fully administered across the state	The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was first administered in 2003.
Year(s) CCR-aligned assessments were/will be revised	TAKS was phased out beginning in 2012 and was replaced by the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). By 2015, all students in the state of Texas were taking the STAAR.

Major policy developments relevant to standards-based reform in the state

Texas is currently adopting a new teacher evaluation system that is set to be implemented in the 2016–2017 school year. There have also been recent changes to special education assessment prompted by changes in federal law that have pushed more special education students into the general assessment system.

Data Analysis | Our Framework

Drawing on interviews with seven key state officials across various offices of the Texas Education Agency, this report synthesizes and analyzes those responses using the *policy attributes theory* (Porter, Floden, Freeman, Schmidt, & Schwillie, 1988), a theoretical framework positing five attributes related to successful policy implementation. The following descriptions of each policy attribute guided this analysis:

- **SPECIFICITY:** How extensive, detailed, and/or prescriptive a policy is. The explicitness of the goals, guidelines, and resources may help schools implement policies with a greater degree of fidelity.
- **AUTHORITY:** How policies gain legitimacy and status through persuasion (e.g., rules or law, historical practice, or charismatic leaders). Policies have authority when state and district leaders, parents, community members, and other stakeholders devote time and resources to the reform initiative, which sends the clear signal that the endeavor is an institutional priority. Policies are also deemed authoritative when stakeholders participate in the decision-making processes, when they demonstrate their investment in the reform, or when they believe that the reform sets high standards for norms related to race, ethnicity, or income.
- **CONSISTENCY:** The extent to which various policies are aligned and how policies relate to or support each other.
- **POWER:** How policies are reinforced and enacted through systems of reward/sanction.
- **STABILITY:** The extent to which policies change or remain constant over time.

The report focuses on five focal areas—standards and curriculum, assessment, professional development (PD), English language learners (ELLs), and students with disabilities (SWDs). We report on each focal area through the lens of the policy attributes to help readers see how state officials identified areas of strengths and challenges related to standards implementation in Texas. Given the limited nature of our data set, however, we do not purport to provide the full depth and breadth of the agency’s work toward standards-based reform.



Executive Summary

SPECIFICITY

The ELA and Math **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)** both lay out specific student expectations across the grade levels, which are assessed using the **State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)**. Though Texas Education Agency (TEA) is not authorized to provide districts with mandates on how best to meet the demands of these standards, it does offer professional development through the Education Service Centers (ESCs) that expose teachers to revisions made to the standards and strategies for how to incorporate these revisions into their own teaching. There are also specific policies related to the education of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). In the case of ELLs, Chapter 89 of the Texas Education Codes lays out program options that districts can choose from. Each school is also required to have a **Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC)** that receives guidance documents from the state that are used to inform the supports that they recommend for ELLs at their school. In the case of SWDs, schools are provided with a manual that clearly delineates how schools should support these students. In addition, as a parallel to the LPAC, schools must also have an **Admission, Review and Dismissal process (ARD)** that uses guidance from the state in devising Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for SWDs. One challenge confronting TEA is that efforts to make the standards as specific as possible have led to feelings among many stakeholders that there are too many standards to cover. TEA officials have been working with key stakeholders in an attempt to balance the need for specific guidance with the need for realistic expectations about what teachers can cover in a school year.

AUTHORITY

TEA strives to make the adoption and revision of standards and assessments a collaborative and transparent process that includes all key stakeholders. The most recent math revisions included a range of stakeholders including mathematicians, educators, and community members. A similar model is being followed with the current revision process underway for the ELA standards. This collaborative process helps provide legitimacy for any revisions made. Yet, having such a collaborative process also leads to contention, with stakeholders often differing in opinion as to the most effective way of revising the standards or assessments. This has become particularly contentious in recent years—with strong opposition to high-stakes testing and any perceived similarities to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), along with different philosophical orientations toward pedagogy, leading to strong and vigorous debate across the state. This same collaborative and transparent model is used in the education of ELLs and SWDs. While Chapter 89 has legislative authority in determining programming for ELLs, the LPACs are also used to engage a range of relevant stakeholders in the education of ELLs in their schools and districts. Similarly, in line with federal policy, the ARDs ensure that multiple stakeholders are involved in diagnosing SWDs and ensuring that they receive appropriate services.

CONSISTENCY

A challenge in ensuring consistency in standards implementation across the state is that TEA is not authorized to mandate any policies related to instruction. Issues of instruction are left to the discretion of local districts. Nevertheless, TEA works to develop tools and resources that districts may opt to use as they work to meet the demands of the TEKS. These tools and resources are primarily available through the 20 ESCs that districts have at their disposal to provide professional development and other supports catered to their particular needs. TEA also has a process in place to ensure that assessments are aligned to any revisions made to the standards; this process begins with cross-divisional work at TEA and gradually incorporates the feedback of educators and other key stakeholders who provide feedback on the extent to which possible test questions are aligned with particular standards. Chapter 89 ensures that ELL policy across all of the districts in Texas is consistent. Though districts have some discretion in the type of bilingual education or ESL model they can select, that choice is constrained by the state policy. In addition, though LPACs have some discretion in the types of supports they recommend for ELLs in their school, they are also constrained by state policy. Though TEA strives to ensure that SWD policies across the state are as consistent as ELL policies, state officials reported challenges in ensuring that these students receive instruction that is responsive to their needs while preparing them for the demands of the TEKS. The expectation is that all instruction provided to ELLs and SWDs should be aligned with the TEKS, with districts responsible for applying and adapting appropriate supports as guided by state policy.

POWER

Texas has a strong tradition of local control of schools. This means that TEA is somewhat limited in its ability to assert power over districts. The one exception is the state accountability system that provides districts and schools with a grade based on a series of factors including test scores, graduation rates, and surveys of parents and communities. All students, including ELLs and SWDs, are included in this accountability system. Beyond this accountability system, TEA must rely on more indirect ways of supporting districts in meeting the needs of their students. A primary mechanism for this is to provide supports and resources that districts, schools, and teachers find useful in helping them improve instruction. Much of this work is done by the ESCs in partnership with TEA, which also has the power to ensure that districts are in compliance with Chapter 89 in the education of ELLs. Any district that wishes to have a waiver from these policies must apply to TEA for permission.

STABILITY

The ELA and Math TEKS have been in place since 1998. Small revisions to the math standards were made in 2004. More significant revisions to both the ELA and math standards were made in 2008. The math standards were revised again in 2012. The ELA standards are currently undergoing a new round of revisions. The **Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)** was the first assessment to be developed that was aligned with the TEKS. It was first administered in 2003. In 2012 the TAKS was phased out and replaced by the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The fact that the math standards were being revised at the same time that the new assessment program was being phased in caused many



challenges for districts and schools. The ESCs have remained a consistent source of support for districts throughout these revisions. Chapter 89 has dictated ELL programming since 1996 and was renewed most recently in 2012. Recent changes to the assessment of SWDs were prompted by changes in federal legislation. In addition to the STAAR Alternate, an assessment available to 1% of the student population with severe cognitive disabilities, Texas used to have the STAAR Modified, an assessment available to 2% of the student population with more mild but still significant disabilities. In 2013, the federal government ruled that they could no longer use this test, meaning that students had to be moved into the general assessment program either through taking the general assessment or an accommodated assessment aligned to the mainstream standards. There have also been recent shifts to the 1%-assessment that moved it from a performance-based assessment administered by the ARD to an item-based assessment that is the same for all students. One state official reported that these changes to special education assessment were “a shock to the system.”

Standards & Curriculum

SPECIFICITY

Texas has created its own state standards called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). TEKS includes standards for ELA and math along with a range of other subjects including science, social studies, health education, physical education, Spanish language arts and English as a second language, and world languages. Each of these standards offers specific performance indicators of what students should be able to do during each grade for that particular content area. This report focuses on the ELA and math standards.

The most recent revision to the ELA standards was in 2008. Major changes that were made in 2008 included more of a focus on (a) the use of context to determine the meaning of new words; (b) greater emphasis on analysis, inference making, synthesis, and comparison; (c) reliance on test-based support and evidence; and (d) intentional focus on cross-cultural and multi-contextual analyses. New revisions to the ELA standards were underway at the time of the interviews, with one of its major goals being to develop a more integrated approach to the use of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the ELA classroom.

The most recent revision to the math standards was in 2012. Major changes that were made in 2012 included (a) the incorporation of process standards to delineate successful problem solving, (b) consistent application of mathematical concepts, (c) emphasis on multiple representations of the same problems, and (d) use of deductive reasoning and logical arguments to understand relationships. The revised math standards were fully implemented in grades K–8 in 2014–2015 and in high school in 2015–2016.

One challenge reported by state officials is that there may be too many standards. One state official described the standards as “a mile wide and an inch deep.” Officials reported that efforts were made to address this concern in the most recent math and ELA revisions. These efforts have been challenging since educators working on the standards revision process often are reluctant to remove standards and are even inclined to add new standards. TEA has worked with the standards revision teams to find common ground in the hope of balancing the desire for breadth and depth.

AUTHORITY

TEA supports efforts to bring together key stakeholders when the state is working on revising standards. The revision process begins with the State Board of Education nominating individuals to sit on a revision committee. These individuals include classroom teachers, school- and district-level administrators, as well as representatives from higher education, the business sector, and parents of children in Texas public schools. One state official reported challenges in getting non-educators to volunteer for revision committees and described making concerted efforts to reach out to districts to encourage them to nominate community members who have relevant expertise and experience. TEA also strives to ensure that the revision committee includes representatives from all geographic areas of the state. As the revision committee meets, there are also several opportunities for public input available to any resident of Texas. As one state official put it, “I



will be honest, we appeal to them, we beg them, to follow the process, get involved in the process. We try to encourage them to, to pay attention and just submit feedback to let us know how they might be better.” After this vetting process, there is a final 30-day period of public input that the State Board of Education is required to offer as per state law to give the public one final opportunity to learn about and comment on the revisions. One state official noted, “we try to make that whole process a very public and open process.”

This process was used in the most recent efforts to revise the math standards in 2012, which included both educators and mathematicians. One state official described the process as working to find common ground between content experts and teachers. State officials reported that their efforts to include multiple stakeholders have made the most recent revision to the math standards somewhat contentious. One particularly contentious issue concerned the degree of difficulty of the standards, with a strong contingent of community members saying that they were too difficult, and another contingent asserting that all students need high math standards in order to be college and career ready. The State Board of Education, which has the ultimate authority in approving revisions to the standards, met with both groups and sought to find a middle ground.

TEA has adopted a similar model in regard to efforts to revise the ELA standards, a process that was ongoing at the time of the interviews with state officials. One state official reported that they tried to make the process as transparent as possible by including on the TEA website comments from stakeholders participating in the revision process along with recommended revisions that they intended to make. As the official noted, “that is where we really ask them to tell someone who wasn’t in the room what they did and why. That might provide some insight into what those committees are thinking as they work on these drafts.” As with the math standards, this collaborative process has led to multiple instances of contention. Unlike with the math standards revisions, the ELA revision disagreements have been more philosophical in nature, with some community members advocating for more traditional approaches to ELA instruction that focus heavily on phonics, spelling, and grammar, and others favoring more progressive approaches to ELA instruction that prioritize comprehension and literary analysis. A point of particular contention has been the perceived similarities among certain stakeholders between the TEKS ELA standards and the Common Core State Standards—an especially sensitive issue since opposition to the Common Core is strong in Texas.

TEA also strives to maintain ongoing communication with the broader community about any revisions to the standards well ahead of time so that local communities can both prepare for these revisions and offer any feedback they have about them. The primary way that TEA works to do this is through offering many pathways of communication. The most prominent pathway is the ESCs that local districts have available to them to answer any questions related to the standards or assessment programs. The information that TEA shares with ESCs is also available on TEA’s online portal, relevant TEA electronic mailing lists, as well as through social media. In addition, communication is supported by seasonal in-person and virtual conferences and weekly e-mail blasts to local districts providing the most up-to-date information about the standards and assessments. One of the challenges in maintaining ongoing communication is Texas’s size, which can sometimes make it “a huge challenge to help make sure that folks are up to date and aren’t caught by surprise that the standards have been revised.”

CONSISTENCY

Though the State Board of Education is responsible for approving revisions to state standards, a state law specifically prohibits it from mandating any particular instructional model for meeting the standards. Issues related to instruction are at the discretion of local school districts. As one state official noted, “we have to be very careful that we don’t appear to be creating anything that could be perceived as something that we would require school districts to use. Those decisions have been explicitly given to the local school districts.” This means that each district is able to determine its curriculum implementation strategies.

TEA does provide resources to the Education Service Centers (ESCs), which in turn provide professional development to local districts that could support district efforts to implement curriculum. TEA offices work to ensure that these curricular resources are aligned with the TEKS. One way that they do this is through the development of committees that include key stakeholders from different divisions within TEA as well as classroom teachers. These committees offer the opportunity to receive feedback on resources that also allow them to be adjusted as necessary to ensure their utility for teachers. One state official offered as an example of such adjustments supplemental student lessons that are designed to address certain student expectations that districts have found difficult for students to meet.

TEA also works to ensure that supplemental programs that it offers to districts are aligned with the TEKS. One state official described a grant program focused on expanding high quality pre-kindergarten across the state. As part of these efforts, TEA has worked on revising the pre-kindergarten guidelines so that they more effectively serve as precursors to the TEKS. The official noted that there was a specific focus on incorporating more rigorous math into the pre-kindergarten guidelines to better support students as they begin elementary school. In a similar vein, TEA has recently received funding to offer **Math and Reading Academies** that provide intensive professional development for teachers in the early elementary grades in math and reading that are aligned with the TEKS.

POWER

TEA has no direct power, manifested in a system of rewards and sanctions, over whether districts implement standards-based instructional approaches. Indeed, TEA is explicitly prohibited from mandating specific instructional approaches. The agency’s power comes from district and school performance on state assessments that are aligned to the standards.

STABILITY

Prior to 1998, Texas had “essential elements” that provided guidelines for what teachers should be teaching. In 1998 these essential elements were replaced by the TEKS, which shifted the focus to what students should know and be able to do at the end of the grade level or course. State officials reported feeling confident that the TEKS will continue to be in place for the foreseeable future. As one official explained, “I have not heard or seen any evidence that there’s anybody who believes that they need to go away or need to be replaced with something else.”

A system for revising the standards is also in place, and revisions occur on a regular cycle. These



revisions are then used to inform the adoption of new instructional materials or textbooks that local districts can select. In 2004, minor revisions were made to the math standards. Both the ELA and math standards were more substantially revised in 2008. From there the math standards were revised again in 2012, with the ELA standards undergoing a new round of revisions at the time of the interviews in the spring of 2016.

State officials reported that the 2008 revisions to the ELA standards were quite significant. The revised standards placed a greater emphasis on nonfiction, with a particular emphasis on persuasive and expository reading and writing. More focus was placed on the writing process as well as on phonics-based instruction in the early grades. New sections were also added on grammar, conventions, and research. Though the latest revisions of the ELA standards were still ongoing at the time of the interviews in Spring 2016, state officials reported that the ELA revisions were less focused on content and more focused on the organization of the standards. The ELA standards will continue to have a strong focus on phonics and phonological awareness at the early grades. A major revision that is expected is a reorganization of the standards in order to better emphasize that ELA skills should not be taught in isolation but should rather be taught in an integrated way. Specifically, they expect a different structure for how student expectations are organized within the standards document to facilitate this more integrated approach so that reading and writing are not isolated and separate from listening and speaking. One state official provided the example of a current strand, “reading and comprehension,” and how they are planning on revising it to be “comprehension, listening, speaking, reading and writing using multiple texts.” Other recommended strands include “collaboration, listening, speaking, reading and writing,” “multiple genre, listening, speaking, reading and writing,” “author’s purpose and craft,” “composition and presentation,” and “inquiry and research.”

The 2012 revisions to the math standards were very significant. Because of the breadth of the changes, the revised standards had a staggered implementation so that they were implemented for the first time in elementary school in 2014–2015 and in high school in 2015–2016. The major focus of the math revisions was to increase rigor so that all students were Algebra ready by the beginning of high school. The revision also moved the process standards to the beginning of the document before the content standards in order to give them more priority. All state officials interviewed agreed that the revisions have increased the rigor of the standards and that the first year of full implementation was a challenge to teachers and districts. One particular challenge reported was that despite the fact that the process standards have been in the math standards since 2008, there is still confusion among many teachers about the role and function of process standards and how they should be prioritizing the process standards in their instruction. Though the math standards have a major goal of making students Algebra ready by high school, there have also been recent policy changes, with Algebra II no longer a graduation requirement. The state legislature recently eliminated this requirement in favor of a more general requirement of an advanced math course. This has fueled ongoing debates about whether math instruction in Texas is truly preparing students for college and careers.

Assessment

SPECIFICITY

In 2012, Texas adopted The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) to replace the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). This assessment program provides annual assessments in reading and mathematics (for Grades 3–8), writing (for Grades 4 and 7), science (for Grades 5 and 8), social studies (for Grade 8), English I, English II, Algebra I, biology, and U.S. history (for high school). The STAAR academic performance standards—ranging from Level I, unsatisfactory academic performance, to Level III, advanced academic performance—demonstrate the extent to which students have mastered the skills included in the TEKS. Every year, the goal is for the STAAR assessments to represent a different combination of TEKS student expectations at each grade level to ensure that teachers focus on the entire set of standards when teaching. To assist teachers in this regard, TEA provides access to the answers and assessed TEKS expectations for test questions used in previous years.

In addition to the general assessment program, Texas offers modified assessments for ELLs and SWDs. For grades 3–5, ELLs have the option of taking the **STAAR in Spanish** for reading, math, writing, and science. For grades 3–8, ELLs have the option of also taking the **STAAR L**, an online, linguistically accommodated, English version of the mathematics, science, and social studies tests. These assessments include linguistic modifications of the assessments that seek to maintain the integrity of the content being assessed. ELLs taking the STAAR L are eligible for more accommodations than ELLs taking the general assessment. The decision of which assessment to give to ELLs and what accommodations to provide is determined by the LPAC based on guidelines provided by the state. In general students in grades 3–5 in bilingual programs are administered STAAR in Spanish, with students in grades 3–5 in ESL programs administered the STAAR L. In grades 6–8 all eligible ELLs receive the STAAR L. Students with disabilities have the option of taking the **STAAR A**, which is an accommodated version of the STAAR aligned to the same standards, or the **STAAR Alternate 2**, which exists for reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies for K–12 and is aligned to modified standards.

AUTHORITY

TEA adopts a similar process for state assessment development and revision as it does for standards creation. It convenes key stakeholders including teachers, academics and other community members to develop and give feedback on possible assessment questions. Despite these efforts to include multiple stakeholders there has been increased resistance to the amount of testing that is occurring in public schools across the state. State officials connect this resistance to a broader national backlash against testing that plays out in unique ways in Texas. This resistance has reached the state legislature, where state representatives raise testing concerns in virtually every session. Resistance has grown louder in light of the fact that, since the implementation of the new assessment program, there have no noticeable gains in student performance. Previous testing programs the state adopted realized noticeable gains, raising more questions about the validity of the new assessment system as well as questions about its difficulty level.

In addition to the collaborative structures in place to ensure key stakeholders are involved in



the creation of assessments, TEA also works to maintain the authority of assessments through outreach efforts to the broader community. A primary way that TEA seeks to maintain communication and outreach with districts, schools, teachers, and community stakeholders is through an annual state-wide assessment conference. Upwards of 3,000 educators and community stakeholders from across the state attend the conference, organized by the student assessment division. TEA also makes concerted efforts to reach out to parents and other community members. One way that they do this is through regular state-wide parent conferences that they fund through Title III and national Gear Up grants. These conferences introduce standards and assessments in an accessible way and address parents' and community members' questions or concerns about them. As with other conferences, the parent conferences also focus on any revisions recently adopted or currently underway.

These regularly scheduled conferences are supplemented with online communication and outreach, including weekly e-mails from TEA to districts. The TEA website also provides a wealth of information about the standards and assessments, including educator guides specific to all of the different assessment programs as well as released test items accompanied by the standard that each item is intended to assess. These also include several documents available in English and Spanish that explain the standards and assessments to parents and other community members. In addition, TEA also uses social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to communicate to parents and the community about policies related to standards and assessments.

CONSISTENCY

TEA begins the process of assessment development and revision by looking at the standards. As one state official described, “our job is to establish quality curriculum standards that identify what students should know and be able to do and then it moves onto the next phase, which is assessing the students’ ability...in those curriculum standards.” Every time there is an update to the standards TEA facilitates efforts to examine the changes that have been made in order to incorporate those changes into the assessment associated with those standards. This includes removing questions that assess skills no longer reflected in the standards, moving questions that assess skills that now belong to a different grade, and adding questions that assess new skills that are now reflected in the standards.

This revision process begins through internal meetings between the student assessment staff and the curriculum staff, where they discuss possible test questions and how they relate to student expectations as articulated in the standards. Every possible assessment question is coded back to a specific student expectation in order to ensure alignment of the assessment with the curriculum standards being assessed. After these internal meetings, other relevant key stakeholders, including educators, convene to look at assessment questions and give their opinion of how well questions are aligned with student expectation as laid out in the standards. An important component of the item development and revision process is a review that evaluates the accessibility of particular items for SWDs and ELLs. Questions that have been successfully vetted through this process then appear as field questions, with the results of this piloting of the questions analyzed to determine the quality of the question. As one state official emphasized, “everything that’s done in test construction is very much focused back to the student expectations.”

POWER

Each year, TEA establishes academic accountability ratings for its school districts. Such ratings utilize standardized tests scores and graduation rates to illuminate student achievement and progress, postsecondary readiness, and initiatives focused on closing the achievement gap. These comprehensive academic accountability ratings are then incorporated into the **Texas Consolidated School Rating Report**, which additionally uses a Community and Student Engagement score based on locally determined criteria to assess districts and schools. In addition to this general accountability system, individual schools also receive school report cards from TEA using similar metrics. These reports cards are shared publicly and are also used to identify priority schools that, due to low performance, are expected to develop a plan for improving academic achievement as well as to participate in mandated trainings provided by the state. Districts with priority schools are also eligible for supplemental funds from Title I to assist them in implementing the school improvement plan. Schools that perform well on the state accountability system are designated as reward schools and treated as models for other schools to replicate.

At the time interviews were conducted, Texas was using the **Professional Development and Appraisal System** for teacher evaluation. A new teacher evaluation system, the **Texas Teacher Evaluation & Support System (T-TESS)** was being piloted in 57 districts. The expectation is that T-TESS will be implemented in all schools statewide in the 2016–2017 school year. Using a rubric that assesses planning, instruction, learning environment, and professional practice and responsibilities, the T-TESS will evaluate teachers on the basis of direct observations (70%), student growth data (20%), and goal-setting and professional development (10%). Importantly, student growth data will not factor into the teacher overall score until the 2017–2018 school year. Though TEA is offering a series of supports through ECSs as districts move toward this new evaluation system, the ultimate responsibility for implementing the system, along with decisions related to how it will be used to reward and sanction teachers, remains at the discretion of local districts.

STABILITY

The stability of the state assessment program is in the hands of the state legislature and the state board of education. As one state official put it, “every legislative session is a new ballgame.” That said, state officials did not foresee any significant changes to the assessment system in the near future. The one exception is any revision that will be made to the ELA assessment based on the revised curriculum standards that were underway at the time of the interview.

State officials reported that assessment programs in Texas have lasted for about 10 years before being replaced by a new assessment program, with revisions made consistently in response to revisions to the curriculum standards. The most recent change has been from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). At the elementary school level, the grades and subjects remained the same even though the assessment changed. At the high school level there was a shift away from a general assessment administered at the end of 9th, 10th, or 11th grade to course-specific assessments. At the time the initial STAAR program began in 2012 students were expected to pass 15 end-of-course assessments to graduate. That changed in the subsequent legislative session.



Students now are expected to pass five assessments to graduate. An additional challenge was that all of these changes occurred at the same time that revisions to the math standards, mentioned above, were in process. As one state official succinctly put it, “we’ve had sort of a lot of different things going on all at the same time.” The next legislative session is January 2017. Any new changes to the assessment program would be determined then.

Professional Development

SPECIFICITY

The specificity of professional development is directly related to the extent of the revisions that have been made to the standards. Minor revisions may include 1- or 2-day professional development training, while more substantial revisions include more extensive training. When revisions to the standards are made, TEA releases a request for proposals for new professional development courses that will prepare teachers to meet the demands of the newly revised standards. Typically, the vendors are either universities or one of the 20 Education Service Centers (ESCs) that are responsible for providing professional development support to local districts. The vendor works in collaboration with TEA staff to create the content of the professional development training. The goal is to have the course completed by spring in preparation for summer professional development for teachers, facilitated by the ESCs.

The first round of professional development is typically offered in-person during the summer at ESCs. Once a sizeable number of teachers have completed in-person training, the typical next step is to move toward an online model, with the goal of attracting a second wave of teachers who may prefer to do the training at home. TEA has also recently begun experimenting with a blended model through which trainers receive a facilitator’s guide that they use to begin the work with teachers at the service center before sending them home with videos and activities to complete on their own. Teachers then complete a cycle of in-person training and independent tasks.

Online resources are available through an online platform known as **Project Share**. These online courses offer metrics regarding enrollment numbers and the completion of the course. Some of these online courses also have an assessment component that evaluates whether teachers have mastered the objectives of the course. The courses also provide online resources that teachers can download and print. These include side-by-side documents illustrating the changes that have been made to the standards, vertical alignment documents, and glossaries that define new terms that appear in the standards. In addition to these documents, TEA offers ESCs and teachers support materials developed in response to their unique challenges related to specific standards revisions.

AUTHORITY

The ultimate responsibility for providing professional development lies with local districts. Some districts, especially larger ones, have extensive professional development divisions that offer their teachers a menu of options for professional development during the year. Smaller districts as well as larger districts with a specific need rely on the ESCs to provide their teachers professional

development. The primary mechanism through which TEA, in collaboration with the ESCs, works to give authority to the professional development made available to local districts is through making the content of these professional development modules vital to teachers by providing them with resources that the teachers see as helping them to improve their teaching. As one state official described it, “the incentive is I have all of these resources available free of charge for me and online that I can go and preview and be able to work with my Education Service Center for further clarification if needed.” The ESCs also work to develop partnerships with local districts so that the districts see them as a resource that will help them better prepare their teachers to meet the demands of the TEKS.

CONSISTENCY

TEA maintains communication with the 20 ESCs responsible for providing professional development opportunities to local districts. There is an annual meeting of all 20 ESCs along with representatives from the 25 largest districts in the state to train them on the nuts and bolts of the entire assessment program. This conference, along with a PowerPoint and district- and campus-coordinator manuals that lay out the process, provides districts with everything needed to administer the assessment program in the spring. One state official described these manuals as “a testing coordinator’s bible during the testing season. Everything they need to know about the testing program is contained within that manual.” The expectation is that the representatives of the ESCs and the districts will go back and train others in their regions or districts.

Though each professional development course related to the TEKS is different, the content of each course seeks to support teachers in consistently implementing the standards in their classrooms. Each course begins with a general overview of the new standards and how they have changed. Each course leads teachers through a vertical alignment that helps them understand the progression of the standards across grades. In conjunction with the vertical alignment are classroom scenarios that illustrate how the standards might be used in classrooms across grades. After this general overview, the course adds layers that focus on ELLs and the connection of the new standards to the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). In addition, the course also works to make connections between the TEKS and Texas’s college- and career-readiness standards to support teachers in seeing how these standards are aligned to one another. One state official described the format as follows: “Training will sometimes start with the content, the content specific standards, but then we add the working with English language learners and then we add the student’s trajectory. This is what he ultimately needs to do and how as he heads for college or career and this is how this piece fits into that trajectory.”

A recent professional development initiative spearheaded by TEA was focused on the revision to the math standards. The state legislature appropriated funds to support teachers in making the transition to the new standards. TEA used these funds to create in-depth professional development courses following the model laid out above, with the objective of supporting teachers in implementing math instruction that was completely aligned to the revised standards. In 2014, when the revised standards were first implemented in elementary school, the professional development was divided into elementary and middle school focuses. In 2015 the focus was on high school.



TEA also collaborates with teacher preparation programs in order to ensure that pre-service teachers receive the necessary preparation to meet the teaching demands of the TEKS. One such project is the Higher Education Collaborative with the University of Texas. This collaborative provides teacher educators with free materials and training on how to use these materials. Teacher educators were also provided support in integrating these materials into their course syllabi. More informal collaborations also occur during conferences convened by the TEA that teacher educators attend. In addition, all of the online resources available to in-service teachers are also made available to teacher education programs so that they can use them with pre-service teachers. One state official reported being aware of many teacher educators who explicitly direct their classes to complete certain online courses made available through the TEA website.

POWER

TEA is not authorized to provide sanctions for failure to participate in professional development. Any such sanctions are left to the discretion of the districts. At times, the state legislature will offer funding allocated to prepare teachers for revisions made to content standards. In these cases, TEA is able to offer financial incentives to teachers who do participate in professional development sponsored by the state through the ESCs. When financial incentives cannot be provided, teachers must either be mandated to participate in professional development through district policies or may voluntarily participate because of the quality and perceived importance of the professional development. As one state official explained, “in a state as big as Texas, it’s virtually impossible to do anything from this centralized agency. So there might be some districts who might make the decision to require that their teachers attend a certain training, but, you know, a lot of it from our perspective is trying to make any resources that we can available.”

The state tracks the numbers of teachers who participate in state-sponsored professional development offered through the ESCs, but there are no formal mechanisms to analyze these data to determine who participates in the professional development training. State officials did note that bigger revisions of the standards, such as the math standards revisions in 2012, saw higher numbers of teachers attending ESC trainings than smaller revisions and revisions to more specialized content areas such as fine arts. There are also currently no formal mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development training. As one state official asserted, “there are some evaluations that exist. I don’t know that we’ve got anything that is necessarily as complete as or comprehensive as one might hope.”

STABILITY

Any changes to the content of professional development opportunities offered to teachers are premised on changes made to the TEKS and/or STAAR. That said, the nature of the delivery of professional development has remained stable, with TEA having the primary responsibility of developing professional development materials and ESCs having the primary responsibility of delivering this professional development. Local districts can consult their regional ESC, use TEA materials to create their own professional development, and/or create their own materials that best fit their needs.

English Language Learners (ELLs)

SPECIFICITY

The implementation of the TEKS for ELLs is situated within broader state policies that dictate the services that must be provided to ELLs. In particular, **Chapter 89 of the Texas Education Codes** specifies that school districts with an enrollment of 20 or more ELLs at the same grade level who speak the same language must offer a bilingual education program. In circumstances where this is not the case, ESL programs may be offered in place of bilingual education.

Chapter 89 provides districts with the option of selecting from one of four different models of bilingual education:

1. Transitional bilingual/early exit model provides ELLs instruction in literacy and academic content areas through their first language along with instruction in English oral and academic language development. Exiting students will occur no earlier than two years or later than five years after the student enrolls in school.
2. Transitional bilingual/late exit model provides ELLs instruction in literacy and academic content areas through their first language along with instruction in English oral and academic language development. The goal is to promote full academic proficiency in the student's first language and English. Exiting students will occur no earlier than six years or later than seven years after the student enrolls in school.
3. Dual language immersion/two-way is a biliteracy program that integrates students proficient in English and students identified as ELLs. The primary goal is the promotion of bilingualism and biliteracy. Exiting students will occur no earlier than six years or later than seven years after the student enrolls in school.
4. Dual language immersion/one-way is a biliteracy program model that serves only ELLs.

For districts without the sufficient number of ELLs, Texas offers two different models of ESL that can be selected by districts:

1. English as a second language/content-based program integrates ESL instruction with subject matter instruction that focuses not only on learning a second language, but also on using that language as a medium to learn content.
2. English as a second language/pull-out program provides an ESL teacher to provide ELA only with students receiving their other content area instruction in mainstream classrooms. This can be done in a pull-out or inclusionary delivery model.

The **ELL portal on the TEA website** explains the structure for each of these program models.

Each school with a bilingual or ESL program is required to have a Language Proficiency



Assessment Committee (LPAC). In school districts required to provide bilingual education programs the committee must include a professional bilingual educator, a professional ESL/transitional language educator, a parent of an ELL student, and a campus administrator. In school districts required to provide ESL, the committee must include one or more professional personnel, a campus administrator, and a parent of an ELL participating in the program designated by the school district. The primary responsibility of the LPAC is to oversee the successful implementation of the program including (a) reviewing pertinent information on ELL students, (b) making recommendations concerning the most appropriate placement for ELL students, and (c) reviewing ELL progress at the end of the year. LPAC meetings are expected to occur upon initial enrollment of a new ELL, which is within the student's first 20 school days. The LPAC also meets in the spring of each year to determine appropriate assessments that are going to be given to the student and again at the end of the year for annual review and to determine the next year's placement. The LPAC also determines whether students exit from ELL status using guidance documents provided by TEA.

In addition to the TEKS, teachers working with ELLs are also expected to consult the **English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS)**. The ELPS lay out what students at beginning, intermediate, advanced, and high advanced levels can be expected to do in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers are expected to use these levels as a guide for developing pedagogical supports for ELLs at different levels of language proficiency. Teachers are also expected to use the ELPS as a guide for preparing students for the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) that is administered annually to monitor growth in English language proficiency. TEA also works with ESCs to tailor their professional development support to the specific needs of particular districts.

AUTHORITY

The education of ELLs within the state of Texas gains much of its authority from Chapter 89 of the Texas Education Codes. Though local districts are able to choose the program that they feel is appropriate for their ELLs and aligned with their philosophy of language education, their decisions are constrained by state policies. The only way for districts to deviate from these state policies is to request an annual waiver.

In addition, TEA works to engage key stakeholders in updating policies that pertain to the education of ELLs. In particular, during any TEKS revision process, TEA works to include classroom teachers who work with ELLs to discuss whether they feel the standards are appropriate and fair to this student population. Including teachers in the conversation makes state officials confident that the standards effectively balance the rigors demanded for college- and career-readiness with the unique learning needs of ELLs.

Finally, Texas works to institutionalize the authority of ESL and bilingual teaching strategies. For one, the state requires additional certifications for these teachers, where they learn how to effectively provide instruction to ELLs. At least one member of the LPAC must be a certified ESL or bilingual teacher who has this expertise. In addition, TEA makes resources available to ESCs related to the education of ELLs that they can share with their partner districts. These resources include online ELPS academies for each of the content areas.

CONSISTENCY

All students, including ELLs, are expected to meet the demands of the TEKS. State officials emphasized that the instruction is not any less rigorous but that it does include special programming and teaching strategies designed for ELLs. Each district offers a particular model of bilingual education or ESL instruction, and each school that offers a bilingual or ESL program must have an LPAC that includes administrators, teachers, and parents. In an effort to ensure consistency across schools and districts, TEA works closely with ESCs to see that the LPACs receive the appropriate training. In particular, TEA provides training in June to the bilingual/ESL contacts at each ESC, during which they go through the whole **Language Proficiency Assessment Committee Framework Manual**. This manual provides step-by-step instructions on the role and responsibility of LPACS from the time an ELL registers at the school. ESCs are then charged with ensuring that members of LPACs in local districts receive appropriate training.

Yet, even within these broad policy mandates there is still room for flexibility, with districts ultimately responsible for determining the types of services provided to ELLs and the teachers who have them in their classrooms. While districts are ultimately responsible for providing direct support to ELLs, TEA works to ensure consistency in the training and materials that it provides to the ESCs. One way that TEA has worked to do this is through the development of an **ELL checklist** that lays out appropriate instructional accommodations for ELLs. This checklist is supplemented by classroom instructional videos available online that illustrate best practices for meeting the needs of ELLs within the context of the TEKS across different grade levels and content areas. This web portal also provides information related to the ELPS as well as vignettes and lessons that use these standards in conjunction with the TEKS to support ELLs.

TEA has also worked to ensure that the ELPS play an integral role in efforts to support ELLs in meeting the demands of the TEKS. For example, TEA has tried to align the ELPS with the TELPAS. In contrast with the TEKS, where the standards were created first and then the STAAR assessment developed in alignment with these standards, the TELPAS pre-existed the ELPS. Therefore, efforts were made to ensure that the ELPS were developed in a way that aligned with the structure of the TELPAS. State officials also agreed that the ELPS should be taught in conjunction with the TEKS, with the ELPS providing a framework for teachers in differentiating instruction to support students in meeting the demands of the TEKS and in monitoring their language development. With this in mind, one state official reported that the ELPS were consulted by review panels during the process of adopting instructional materials in order to look for evidence that the textbook supported English language development as articulated in the ELPS.

Efforts have also been made to determine the alignment of the TELPAS with the STAAR. One state official reported that under the TAKS, there was strong correlation between student performance on both assessments—students who reached the level of exiting on the TELPAS also scored at grade level on the TAKS. When they conducted a similar study in 2014 comparing the TELPAS with STAAR they found that this correlation had diminished. They attributed this to the increased rigor of STAAR reading. Based on this decline in correlation, TEA convened a group of educators to look at the difference between the text complexity of TELPAS and STAAR. They concluded that the texts for higher proficiency levels of the TELPAS were not as



complex as texts on STAAR and have since made adjustments.

These global efforts to align the TELPAS and STAAR are complemented by more local efforts to support teachers in ensuring that they are ultimately using the ELPS and TELPAS as a stepping-stone for ensuring that ELLs are able to meet the demands of the STAAR. State officials sought to do this by including discussions of ELPS within conversations with ESCs about general issues related to standards alignment. One state official described her approach as follows: “Training will sometimes start with the content specific standards, but then we add the working with English language learners and then we add the student’s trajectory—this is what he ultimately needs to do and how as he heads for college or career and this is how this piece fits into that trajectory.”

POWER

While TEA has authority over ensuring that districts comply with district policies related to ELLs and includes ELLs in the accountability system used to evaluate districts, the agency does not have power to reward or sanction specific districts or teachers for the quality of instruction that they provide for ELLs. These efforts are left to the discretion of district leaders. Similarly, it is also at the discretion of district leaders and teachers to determine if professional development related to the needs of ELLs will be provided. When the state legislature offers funding, TEA is able to pay stipends to teachers for attending professional development. However, the norm is for teachers to attend professional development because of district mandates or at their own discretion. As one state official described it, “the incentive that we provide to them is that these resources are free of charge, these resources are self-paced, and these resources are going to be able to make their role as an educator a little bit easier when it comes to English language learners.”

STABILITY

ELL policies have remained stable in Texas for the past several decades, with the most recent Chapter 89 statute adopted in 1996 and renewed in 2012. Despite this relative stability in policies surrounding the needs of ELLs, one state official did note that she expected changes of some kind to happen soon:

I foresee major changes coming, you know, there’s always going to be changes, but our hope is that that changes are always with the child, taking the child into account and at the end of the day it’s to fulfill that objective of ensuring that they’re successful and that we close those gaps that we have. It’s a, it’s a long road because we have children coming with different, bringing different things to the classroom and all the different levels of their language proficiency, but can it be done, yes, but it does take a lot of effort and work on everyone involved.

While none of the state officials reported anticipating major overhauls of services for ELL students, this particular official said that she anticipated a refinement of these services to better meet the needs of ELLs.

Students with Disabilities (SWDs)

SPECIFICITY

Special education services in Texas are primarily shaped by federal legislation that lays out the rights of SWDs and the obligations of states and districts in providing support to these students. Texas offers districts and schools a manual entitled *Instructional Decision-Making Procedures for Ensuring Appropriate Instruction for Struggling Students* that lays out how districts and schools should support struggling students, along with procedures on how to identify SWDs. In addition, TEA also works to include suggestions for differentiation for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions within the curricular resources that the agency offers to districts. The ESCs also provide professional development opportunities that can be customized to fit the unique needs of any district that would like to improve its special education services. This might include general professional development related to special education along with more specialized supports that may even include on-site observations and support. One state official described this support as “breaking information down and providing very intensive technical assistance.”

TEA also maintains a strong partnership with the University of Texas, which provides support for the implementation of *Response to Intervention (RtI)*. The goal of this initiative is to ensure that general education teachers have the appropriate training for supporting students with effective Tier 1 instruction that will prevent the over-referral of students into special education. In addition, the goal is to better support these teachers in providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions when deemed appropriate through the RtI process. One state official described the work of this partnership as follows: “We’ve produced, in concert with our friends at [the University of Texas], a lot of professional development material, a lot of trainer material that was made available, not only to school districts through the Education Service Center but it was also made available to all of our university personnel that train teachers.”

At the local district level, the primary point of contact with SWDs is Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARDs). As the name indicates, ARDs are charged with determining whether a child has a disability, reviewing the progress of a child with a disability, and determining if a child should no longer be labeled as having a disability. ARDs receive specific guidelines from the state as to the necessary steps that they should take throughout the process.

AUTHORITY

TEA currently does not have a Director of Special Education. Instead, multiple divisions within TEA have authority over aspects of special education. This makes interdivisional and interagency coordination important. As one state official described it, “Program and Complaints meets with Legal Services that has mediation and due process hearings. And Fiscal is at the table and Monitoring is at the table and Curriculum is at the table as well as State Assessment. So you see where I’m going with it? It’s just different in relationship to the way we’re organized.” In addition, much of the direct work with districts connected to special education is done through the ESCs. Therefore, the various TEA divisions along with the ESCs have developed a communication network that specializes in special education that meets twice a month. In order to facilitate a collaborative process, TEA creates the agenda for one meeting per month



while the ESCs create the agenda for the other meeting. As one state official described it: “while we coordinate that meeting for those video conferences, we don’t own them in the sense that we invite people from Legal, people from Monitoring, people from Fiscal, people from State Assessment, you know, a variety of people throughout the Agency will come and present from time-to-time on issues that are important to the field that we need to communicate through the Service Centers.” The ESCs, in turn, offer approximately three meetings per year during which they share information and receive feedback from local partner districts.

TEA also holds regular stakeholder meetings that focus specifically on special education. These stakeholder meetings involve a range of people who do work related to special education, including special education administrators and teachers along with community advocates such as attorneys and representatives from child advocacy and disability rights organization. The stakeholder meetings focus on a range of topics related to changes in federal or state policies as they pertain to special education, with the objective of developing the most effective plan for implementing the policy changes. In addition to in-person conferences, TEA also offers a series of video conferences throughout the year, usually in the fall, winter, and spring. The video conferences often focus on the needs of SWDs within the context of the current assessment program, including eligibility for different versions of an assessment and procedures for providing necessary accommodations. One state official described this year’s video conferences as being focused primarily on the implementation of the STAAR A, the accommodated version of the STAAR made available to certain SWDs.

By law, ARDs have the primary responsibility for supporting SWDs and must involve a range of key stakeholders, including the parent of the child in question, the student (when appropriate), at least one general education teacher, at least one special education teacher, a district representative, and any other individuals with necessary expertise for a particular case.

CONSISTENCY

State officials emphasized that SWDs should be expected to meet the same standards as the rest of the students in Texas, albeit with differentiation to accommodate their unique learning needs. As one state official described it, “The art or science comes in how our talented special educators and general educators work together to help children with disabilities access the curriculum in a way that’s meaningful so that they, too, can be successful once they leave the public schools.” With this in mind, Texas offers the STAAR A, an accommodated version of the STAAR that is aligned to the same standards as the general assessment. It also offers the STAAR Alternate 2, an alternative assessment, available to 1% of the student population with severe cognitive impairments. This assessment is aligned to alternative academic standards based on the TEKS.

The ESCs play an integral role in supporting local districts as they work to meet the needs of their SWDs. They are charged with disseminating information that they receive from TEA in their regular meetings to partner districts. TEA uses federal discretionary funds that it receives for special education to ensure that there is the necessary special education expertise in all 20 ESCs. The agency also provides these experts with technical assistant as they work to support districts.

While ESCs provide technical assistance to local districts when requested, in the end it is the responsibility of the districts to provide high-quality instruction to special education students.

There is no state requirement for professional development for teachers related to special education beyond what is included in pre-service teacher certification. This leads to variation from district to district. One state official noted, “With over twelve hundred school districts and 451,000 kids in Special Ed out of 5 point whatever million kids we have, you can imagine it’s all over the place, you know.”

POWER

The assessment scores of SWDs are included within the accountability data that is used by TEA to evaluate the effectiveness of districts. Districts that do not demonstrate growth for SWDs risk receiving a lower overall grade from the state accountability office. Changes in the accountability system for SWDs in recent years have had unintended consequences in this regard. In 2015–2016, a new assessment program was administered for the first time for SWDs. During its first year of implementation it was decided that only SWDs who participate in the general assessment program and not a modified assessment would be included in state accountability results, though all scores would be reported for federal accountability. This led some districts to change IEPs to move students out of the general assessment program into the modified assessment program in an attempt to improve their state accountability score.

STABILITY

Special education in Texas has experienced some significant changes in the past few years. Due to changes in federal policy, Texas was forced to eliminate STAAR Modified, which was based on modified academic standards and was intended for 2% of the student population, which were primarily SWDs being instructed using modified achievement standards. This left Texas with only the STAAR Alternate available to 1% of the student population and the STAAR A that was aligned with the general content standards, leaving districts with the option of either moving students who had previously been assessed using the 2% assessment into the general assessment program or the general assessment program with accommodations.

In 2015, Texas made major revisions to the STAAR Alternate. The original STAAR Alternate was a performance-based assessment that was developed by the ARD committee of each particular school based on the student’s IEP. Tasks were scored according to a rubric that was then reported to the state for accountability purposes. In contrast, STAAR Alternate 2 is an item-based assessment that is the same for all participating students and is designed to assess the modified standards at their grade level. One state official described this shift as “a little bit of a shock to the system.” This official reported anticipating that things would run smoother in the second year of implementation, which was underway when we conducted the interview, as people became more familiar with the expectations of the new assessment.

Conclusion

State departments of education are charged with determining and implementing numerous policy activities to facilitate standards-based reform. Using the *policy attributes theory* as an organizing framework helps states see how individual initiatives contribute to a system of standards-based reform. Understanding how each reform component affects the specificity,



authority, consistency, power, or stability attributes of the implementation of reform will uncover strengths, opportunities, patterns, and variations in each state's strategic roll-out of CCR-aligned standards.

Given the specific, consistent, authoritative, powerful, and stable aspects of Texas standards-based reform initiatives since 1998, one can see why Texas is considered a leader in standards-based reform. Challenges do exist, as do uncertainties regarding recent revisions to the Math TEKS along with ongoing revisions to the ELA TEKS. C-SAIL's district, principal, and teacher surveys and interviews with key district administrators will provide further insights into both the successes and challenges that Texas is experiencing in bringing rigorous standards to the classroom.

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