

Texas Literacy Collaborative for Educator Preparation: A Faculty-Led Initiative for Preparing Teachers of Reading

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Abstract

House Bill 3 requires individuals seeking certification to teach grades kindergarten through six to pass a Science of Teaching Reading (STR) exam. Texas educator preparation programs are revamping coursework to prepare candidates to pass this exam, and, more importantly, help them to provide the #heartwork needed to support young readers. Resulting from that work, two university faculty members initiated the Texas Literacy Collaborative for Educator Preparation (TXLCEP)—a state-wide faculty-led initiative for preparing teachers of reading. This article discusses how TXLCEP was created, illustrates what to expect at a TXLCEP session, and explains how to become a member of TXLCEP.

Keywords: literacy educator preparation, faculty collaboration, Science of Teaching Reading, House Bill 3

The Science of Teaching Reading (STR) is currently one of the “hottest” topics in the field of literacy. In fact, the annual *What’s Hot in Literacy* survey reported the STR to be the “hottest” topic in the years of 2020, 2021, and 2022 (Cassidy et al., 2020; Cassidy et al., 2021; Grote-Garcia & Orlicb, 2022). The 2022 report even predicted that the STR will remain “hot” in years to come (Grote-Garcia & Orlicb, 2023). The attention being paid toward the STR is evidenced with the magnitude of resources being released on the topic, such as special issues of journals including *Reading Research Quarterly* (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020), podcasts such as the *Science of Reading: The Podcast* (Amplify Education, Inc., 2021) and *Triple R Teaching* (Geiger, 2022), as well as position statements from professional organizations such as the International Literacy Association (2020) and the National Education Policy Center & Education Deans for Justice and Equity (2020). Largely fueled by Hanford’s (2018) *Hard Words: Why Aren’t Our Kids Taught to Read?* and conversations taking place among dyslexia advocacy groups such as the International Dyslexia Association (Hurford, 2020), the STR has made its way into

mainstream publications—one being the *New York Times* with the articles, *Why Are We Still Teaching Reading the Wrong Way?* (Hanford, 2018) and *The Debate Over the Best Way to Teach Reading* (The New York Times, 2022). This widespread focus on the STR has impacted multiple aspects of the early literacy field—a handful being—curriculum adoption, teacher professional development, educator preparation programs, and state certification requirements.

The increased attention on STR is partly fueled by ongoing concerns over low National and State reading scores. In fact, publications are referring to these low scores as “America’s Reading Crisis” (O’Reilly et al., 2019). According to data from the 2019 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation’s Report Card, just over one-third of fourth-graders scored proficient or higher in reading (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, & National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). Even more concerning for the Lone Star State is that The Nation’s Report Card identified that on average, fourth-

grade students in Texas performed below the national average—indicating that change is needed in Texas schools.

Proposed as a possible solution to the reading crisis are efforts to better prepare teachers to teach reading. In 2019, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3 (HB 3) requiring each teacher and principal in grades kindergarten through three to attend reading academies. HB3 also requires those seeking an initial certificate to teach in grades Pre-K through six to pass an STR exam prior to being certified (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). With these changes, Texas educator preparation programs (EPPs) are revamping coursework and even making major changes to degree plans to better prepare teacher candidates to design and deliver instruction aligned with the STR. As a response to the new testing requirement, two faculty members from two different EPPs in Texas initiated the *Texas Literacy Collaborative for Educator Preparation* (TXLCEP)—a state-wide faculty-led initiative for preparing teachers of reading. In this article, we discuss how TXLCEP was created, what to expect at a TXLCEP session, and how to become a contributing member of TXLCEP.

Certification in Texas

Texas has a long history of using assessments to measure knowledge, and the pathway to becoming a teacher in the Lone Star State is no exception. Individuals seeking certification to teach in Texas must pass the state’s pedagogy and professional responsibility (PPR) exam and a content pedagogy exam for their specific area of focus (SBEC, 2022). In addition to these two exams, “House Bill 3, passed during the 86th Texas Legislature, established the requirement that all teacher candidates who teach students in grades Pre-K-6 demonstrate proficiency in the science of teaching reading on a new, standalone certification exam” (TEA, 2022c, para. 1). In the two subsections that follow, HB 3 is discussed further and direct connections are made to ways the bill has impacted elementary schools and educator preparation programs (EPPs). Additionally, an overview of the STR exam is provided. Both items are discussed further because they formed the foundation on which TXLCEP was created.

House Bill 3

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) describes HB 3 as “a sweeping and historic school finance bill” (2022a, para 1.) and elaborates upon that idea by sharing that “the bill provides more money for Texas classrooms, increases teacher compensation, reduces recapture and cuts local property taxes for Texas taxpayers” (TEA, 2022a, para 1.). For the purpose of our literature review, we will focus on the bill’s prioritization of early literacy instruction and teacher preparedness to teach early literacy skills—omitting other areas from our review that are also addressed by HB 3 such as mathematics, dual language education, and blended learning.

The requirements outlined by HB 3 apply to public schools and open-enrollment charter schools. Included in HB 3 are several requirements placed upon a variety of stakeholders. In the interest of brevity we have chosen to illustrate the content of HB 3 with a condensed list of three requirements connected to early literacy instruction. The three requirements are also summarized in the TEA’s HB3 overview titled, *House Bill 3 Texas School Finance: 86th Legislative Session* (TEA, n.d.)—a resource that we heavily relied on for forming the discussion that follows. We have chosen to discuss the three selected requirements to illustrate how HB 3 is shifting literacy instruction in Texas.

First, HB 3 “establishes an early education allotment (additional 0.10 weight) for each student ...who is educationally disadvantaged or limited English proficient” (TEA, n.d., p. 12). TEA (n.d) elaborates on these allotments by sharing that those funds must be used for implementing early literacy and proficiency plans that include annual reading performance goals over a five-year period. Also, school boards must monitor progress toward those goals at least once annually. Such requirements demonstrate that Texas has ongoing plans for STR-aligned instruction, and that there is a need to prepare teacher candidates to deliver that instruction. TXLCEP addresses those needs by facilitating state-wide workshops in which faculty collaborate to adjust coursework and build resources to meet the demands of HB 3.

Secondly, TEA (n.d.) shares that HB 3 requires the Commissioner to establish a common kindergarten readiness standard and to adopt a multi-dimensional

assessment tool that includes a reading instrument. The purpose is to ensure alignment across the state. This HB 3 requirement illustrates the need for EPPs to prepare teacher candidates to administer and interpret early literacy assessments, and to use the data gathered from those assessments to design differentiated literacy instruction. The STR exam assesses teacher candidates on those skills through a constructed response item—a requirement that TXLCEP is actively responding to by building similar materials that can be used by EPPs for preparing teacher candidates for the exam. The constructed response item is described in detail in a later section.

Finally, HB3 requires schools to provide a systematic and direct phonics curriculum in grades K-3 (TEA, n.d.). Schools must certify to the TEA that they have integrated reading instruments to support Pre-K to grade 3 students. For this requirement, many schools are incorporating more Structured Literacy (SL) practices. SL was originally coined by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA, 2016) to describe literacy instruction that met the needs of students with dyslexia; however, it is currently being largely used to describe literacy instruction that applies STR. Common practices and materials that are currently included in SL are sound walls (Dahlgren, 2020), heart words (Moats & Tolman, 2019), direct teacher-student instruction (Spear-Swerling, 2018), and decodable texts (International Dyslexia Association Ontario, 2022). Such practices are a paradigm shift from those commonly practiced in Balanced Literacy classrooms (e.g., word walls, independent reading, leveled text), which is the instructional framework that has largely been taught to teacher candidates in EPPs—especially before the passing of HB 3. As EPPs transition from exclusively training teacher candidates in Balanced Literacy and into also offering training in the methods of SL, members of TXLCEP will collaborate to collect and build related resources that can be used in that training. Such resources include, but are not limited to, demonstration videos, research-based articles, and faculty-created questions that are aligned to the Texas STR competencies (TEA, 2022b) and modeled after released sample questions from TEA (see TEA 2022b).

As illustrated in the previous paragraphs, the three selected HB 3 requirements impact EPPs. An even more

direct consequence that HB 3 has on EPPs is the requirement that teacher candidates seeking to earn a certificate to teach in grades Pre-K to 6 must demonstrate proficiency in the STR by passing a separate STR certification exam (TEA, n.d.). This requirement, as well as the three HB3 requirements shared in this section, shift how literacy is taught in Texas and how EPPs need to prepare teacher candidates. These needs are the foundation from which TXLCEP was created.

The STR Exam

The STR has been described as “research about the foundational role that phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary play in learning to read” (Mosley Wetzel et al., 2020, p. S230), and advocates of STR often reference *The Simple View of Reading* (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and *Scarborough’s Reading Rope* (Scarborough, 2001) to illustrate that body of research. As mentioned previously, EPPs are adjusting their certification programs to better prepare Pre-K through 6th grade teacher candidates to deliver instruction aligned with the STR in their future classrooms. EPPs also need to prepare those same teacher candidates to pass a stand-alone STR exam for Texas Teacher certification (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). In this section, we provide an overview of that STR exam. First, we provide some historical context for the exam; then, we provide an outline of the exam’s framework. We have chosen to explore these two items because TXLCEP was built upon the idea of faculty collaborating across the State of Texas to better prepare teacher candidates to meet these two challenges.

The Science of Teaching Reading Standards (adopted by SBEC in 2018) were “aligned with the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading” (TEA, 2022b, p. 2). In the year that followed the passing of the standards, HB 3 was passed, establishing “the requirement that all teacher candidates who teach students in grades Pre-K-6 demonstrate proficiency in the science of teaching reading on a new, standalone certification exam” (TEA, 2022c, para. 1). That requirement took effect on January 1, 2021 (TEA, 2022c), and according to the website of TEA (2022c), is required for the issuance of the following five certification fields: (a) Early Childhood (EC-Grade 3), (b) Core Subjects with

Science of Teaching Reading (EC-Grade 6), (c) Core Subjects with Science of Teaching Reading (Grades 4-8), (d) English Language Arts and Reading with Science of Teaching Reading (Grades 4-8), and (e) English Language Arts and Reading/Social Studies with Science of Reading (Grades 4-8). Having those five fields required to meet the STR testing requirement demonstrates the broad need for EPPs to collaborate in curating and building resources to prepare teacher candidates.

As explained in TEA’s (2022b) *Preparation Manual Science of Teaching Reading: (293)*, the STR competencies that are assessed on the new stand-alone STR exam are arranged into the following four domains:

- Domain I Reading Pedagogy - includes foundational concepts and best practices of reading assessment and instruction
- Domain II Reading Development: Foundational Skills - includes foundational reading skills (e.g., oral language, phonological and phonemic awareness, print concepts, and reading fluency)
- Domain III Reading Development: Comprehension - includes vocabulary development and comprehension development pertaining to both narrative and informational text
- Domain IV Analysis & Response - includes analyzing assessment data and tailoring instruction to meet students’ needs

The STR exam is “designed to assess whether an examinee has the requisite knowledge and skills that an entry-level educator in this field in Texas public schools must possess” (TEA, 2022b, p. 2). The exam is arranged into two main sections. Those sections include 90 selected-response questions and one constructed response (Pearson Education Inc., 2022). Both sections “are based on the Science of Teaching Reading exam framework. Questions on [the] exam range from Prekindergarten–Grade 6” (TEA, 2022b, p. 2). The selected-response questions are largely scenario-based and assess candidates’ knowledge of Domains I, II, and III (see above, TEA, 2022b). Below is an example of a selected-response question provided in the *Preparation Manual Science of Teaching Reading: (293)* (TEA, 2002b). We have chosen to share the question to

illustrate the unique construction of selected-response questions.

A first-grade student has been identified as having dyslexia and has begun intervention. Which of the following approaches to instruction would be most effective to enhance the student's reading development?

- A. allowing the student to use colored overlays on all classroom texts to ameliorate the visual difficulties caused by dyslexia
- B. using reading materials with the student for instruction and guided practice that utilize specialized fonts designed for people with dyslexia
- C. arranging for the student to spend time each day on the classroom computer using a working-memory training program
- D. providing the student with systematic, explicit multimodal instruction in all the essential, evidence-based components of reading (TEA, 2022b, p. 19)

The answer to the question is answer choice *D*. The sample question illustrates the scenario-based format that is often seen in certification questions. The question assesses candidates’ understanding of dyslexia research and the application of that research. For example, “convergent research on dyslexia supports a language-based, multimodal approach to instruction that is systematic and explicit; addresses all five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension); and integrates spelling and writing instruction with reading instruction” (TEA, 2020b, p. 42). A common practice of TXLCEP gatherings is exploring released questions such as the one shared above to analyze how they are constructed. Following the analysis, faculty members work in small groups to construct similar items that can be used to prepare teacher candidates for the STR certification exam. The result is a continuously updated database of practice questions that are aligned with the STR competencies (TEA, 2022b).

Also created at TXLCEP gatherings are constructed response prompts. The constructed response portion of the STR certification exam is used to assess candidates' knowledge and skills related to Domain IV (see above TEA, 2022b). In that response, teacher candidates must use their "knowledge of reading pedagogy and the developmental progression of foundational reading skills and reading comprehension" (TEA, 2022c, p. 71) to analyze multiple data exhibits that represent one case study student. Following that analysis, candidates must write a response in which they identify instructional needs of the featured student and justify those needs using the provided data. Next, candidates must describe how they would address those needs by identifying and describing an instructional strategy or activity that is aligned with the STR (TEA, 2022c). The constructed response prompts that are created at TXLCEP gatherings are modeled after the released samples (TEA, 2022b) and are added to the continuously updated TXLCEP database that is shared with TXLCEP members.

TXLCEP

TXLCEP was created by two faculty members, from two different universities, who share an interest in supporting and collaborating with faculty from EPPs across the state of Texas. TXLCEP is a state-wide faculty-led initiative for preparing teachers of reading. In this section we share how TXLCEP was created and explain what to expect during a TXLCEP session.

Creation of TXLCEP

When Texas enacted HB 3 and added the STR exam to its slate of educator certification tests, university educator preparation programs began to discuss how to help teacher candidates meet the rigorous standards that the exam items would assess. The second author and her colleagues attempted to create modules and quick test review sessions; however, time was limited for reading faculty members to take a deep dive into the domains and competencies and produce robust activities that would help prepare students to be successful on the STR exam. She also reached out to several peers at other Texas higher education institutions to see if collaborative work could be initiated. The first author was one of these peers, and, at the same time, she was creating, on her own, a long list of resources (i.e., research,

articles, videos) to use in her university's reading courses. After meeting and discussing how to best approach preparing teacher candidates for the exam, they decided to form a collaborative work group in order to tackle the design of a thorough resource guide for each of the STR domains and competencies. This working group was named the Texas Literacy Collaborative for Educator Preparation (TXLCEP).

Mission and Goals

The mission of TXLCEP is to create a repository of resources for university faculty and others who prepare educators to use as course and test preparation materials. These materials may consist of sample selected-response and constructed-response test items, research and practitioner articles, books, videos, websites, and podcasts. The implementation of these materials will help teacher candidates to be successful on the STR exam, as well as provide them with information to grow their knowledge of reading processes.

By working together, TXLCEP members harness the knowledge and perspectives of literacy teacher educators from many different backgrounds who specialize in different facets of literacy instruction (e.g., emergent literacy, reading comprehension, content area reading, disciplinary literacy). This approach to the work is much more efficient than individual educator preparation program personnel creating their own materials.

Between TXLCEP meetings, members will implement the resources into coursework and test preparation sessions and report back on successes with materials as well as needs for enhancement. This will ensure that the created resources remain current. TXLCEP may also be a venue for research, as peers across the state may collaborate with one another to study STR areas that lack resources and disseminate findings through publications and conference presentations.

Member-Driven Sessions

During our first brief introductory TXLCEP meeting at the October 2022 CSOTTE Conference, we led the session by introducing the purpose of TXLCEP and possible upcoming meeting structures. Each session following this one is member-driven, meaning that the participating

members will drive the creation of resources. Also, following each session, an electronic survey will be sent to those who attended the meeting that will allow collaborators to provide questions, feedback, and other ideas to consider as the group continues its work. Participants will also indicate what they would like to see on the agenda for the next meeting, which will ensure that the most pressing needs of the group are met. Regarding meeting leadership, any member of the TXLCEP group may host a meeting. Meetings might occur as stand-alone in-person or virtual gatherings or participants may choose to include meetings as part of a conference, such as CSOTTE.

What to Expect at a TXLCEP Session

The second and most recent meeting of TXLCEP occurred in February of 2023 during the annual conference of the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE). That meeting was structured to reflect what we anticipate to

Figure 1

Sample of TXLCEP’s Domain I Curriculum Map

Domain I — Reading Pedagogy			
"Competency 001 (Foundations of the Science of Teaching Reading): <u>Understand</u> foundational concepts, principals, and best practices related to the science of teaching reading" (TEA, 2022b, p. 3).			
STR Strand <i>(What the Teacher needs to Know)</i>	Unpacking of the Strand and Suggested Resources	Associated TEKS <i>(What Students Need to Do)</i>	Assessment Questions
<p>TOPIC: Scientifically Based Reading Research and Selection of Materials</p> <p>"A. Demonstrate knowledge of scientifically based reading research (e.g., key findings of the National Reading Panel, the National Early Literacy Panel, the National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth), including the key research-based components of reading instruction (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension) and the essential roles that oral language, writing, and motivation play in promoting reading development for students in prekindergarten through grade 3" (TEA, 2022b, p. 3).</p>	<p>Key Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scientifically based reading research Science of Reading Structured Literacy Evidence based practices The Simple View formula presented by Gough and Tunmer in 1986 <p>Supporting Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phonemic awareness Phonological awareness Phonics Fluency Vocabulary Text Comprehension Decoding Linguistic comprehension Phonology Orthography Morphology Syntax Semantics Pragmatics Discourse <p>Research Connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Reading Panel [Practical Guide for Teachers/48 pages] National Early Literacy Panel [Summary/ 8 pages] 	<p>High focus on Strand 1: Foundational Language Skills: listening, speaking, discussion, and thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oral language Phonological awareness Print Concepts Phonics Morphology to communicate, decode, and spell Vocabulary Fluency Self-Sustained Reading <p>ACTIVITY: Exam the layout of the TEKS and find evidence of the terms associated with Scientifically Based Reading Research.</p>	<p>The literacy coach is providing a training to faculty and staff on "Structured Literacy". Which of the following would be incorrect for her to say?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> "Structured Literacy is representative of reading instruction that applies the Science of Reading to classroom practice." "The intent of establishing the term <i>Structured Literacy</i> was to differentiate reading instruction or programs that are truly informed by the Science of Reading from those that purport to be but are not." "One critical hallmark of Structured Literacy instruction is that it teaches all the components that evidence has found to be foremost in ensuring reading success." "Structure Literacy and the Science of Reading are synonyms and exclusively address phonics instruction." <p>The Simple View of Reading proposes that reading comprehension is the product of _____ and _____.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> encoding and comprehension decoding and linguistic comprehension decoding and encoding encoding and linguistic comprehension <p>According to the Simple View of Reading, decoding is comprised of _____, _____, and _____.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> phonology, orthography, morphology syntax, semantics, pragmatics discourse, graphophonics knowledge, semantics phonics, phonological awareness, syntax

Following the overview of the TXLCEP’s Domain I curriculum map, faculty prepared to spend the remaining workshop creating similar curriculum maps for Domains II and III (for the competencies see TEA, 2022b). The process of mapping began with analyzing released sample questions (see TEA, 2022b) to find typical patterns within the questions. The faculty identified that the released items often referenced typical developmental patterns (e.g., the continuum of development for phonological awareness), grade expectations, and stages of readers (e.g., Chall’s Stages of Reading Development). Faculty also identified that the released items often required knowledge of the interactive relationship among essential literacy skills such

as the relationship between phonemic awareness and spelling skills. This step was essential to the workshop as it prepared faculty to structure their assessment questions with similar patterns.

Next, faculty were divided into two groups; one for Domain II and the other for Domain III. Each of the groups were provided a mapping template to list key vocabulary, research connections, associated TEKS, and faculty-created assessment questions. Figure 2 is an example from that mapping template. Small groups of faculty worked for approximately 90 minutes to fill in the provided mapping template.

Figure 2

Example of Mapping Template

Domain 2 — Reading Development			
Competency 003—(Oral Language Foundations of Reading Development): Understand foundational concepts, principles, and best practices related to the development of oral language, including second-language acquisition, and demonstrate knowledge of developmentally appropriate, research- and evidence-based assessment and instructional practices to promote all students’ development of grade-level oral language skills (TEA, 2022b, p. 7).			
STR Strand <i>(What the Teacher needs to Know)</i>	Unpacking of the Strand and Suggested Resources	Associated TEKS <i>(What Students Need to Do)</i>	Assessment Questions
<p>TOPIC:</p> <p>“A. Demonstrate knowledge of explicit, research-based strategies, tools, and techniques for assessing various aspects of students’ oral language development, including their academic language development (e.g., knowledge and usage of sentences and grammatical structures of increasing complexity)” (TEA, 2022b, p. 7).</p>	<p>Key Vocabulary: Explicit, research-based strategies to assess students’: Oral Language Development Academic Language Grammatical structures</p> <p>Supporting Vocabulary:</p> <p>Research Connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <p>Videos:</p> <p>Resources/Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		

As the participants and presenters were working in the templates to add resources, ideas for the collaborative emerged. The group discussed the ways in which this information might be created and shared as well as how to spread the word amongst literacy faculty across the state. One participant shared that items they use for course test banks might be included. Another mentioned they had a collection of videos they recorded in classrooms and during the pandemic that might be helpful. Several participants noted that links to articles and resources would need to be reviewed frequently to make sure they were current, and that it might be better to include the citation information and the DOI for articles rather than links, since most faculty have access to their institution’s library and can download those materials.

After the participants had time to work in the template provided, the group reconvened to share their contributions and discuss how the work might be continued. Attendees brainstormed how faculty might work together at future conferences, virtual meetings, and face-to-face meetings. The group also considered ways to fund future meetings and perhaps pay for faculty members to travel to meetings and to create resources. Because this particular session’s focus was adding resources and sample selected-response items to the mapping template, there was not time to work on creating constructed-response items. Group members did share how sample items can be created from the case studies that students write as a required component of reading assessment courses in which they spend a semester tutoring a child. The benefits to using student-created case

studies as samples is that the work is already completed and the item would represent an authentic instructional situation.

Closing Thoughts

In this article we shared how we, faculty members from two different EPPs in Texas, created TXLCEP. We founded TXLCEP as a response to the new STR testing requirement mandated by HB 3 and the need to quickly update the literacy coursework at their respective universities. We also illustrated what to expect at a faculty-led TXLCEP session. TXLCEP's goals moving forward are to invite additional faculty from across the state of Texas to become active members. Ways to actively participate are to attend future sessions and to email resources that will then be disseminated to TXLCEP members. Such resources can be emailed to us, and we will disseminate them to TXLCEP members. Inquiries about TXLCEP, requests to join TXLCEP, and interests in hosting a TXLCEP workshop can also be emailed to the authors of this article.

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