

ARTICLE
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FINE ARTS TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
Past, Present, and Future

At their General Meeting on Friday, September 10, 2003, the State Board of Education (SBOE) approved final revisions to Chapter 74 of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) to comply with Senate Bill (SB) 815. SB 815, which was enacted by the 78th Legislature in 2003 and was effective the 2003-04 school year, mandated, as a matter of accreditation, that school districts must utilize the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) when providing instruction in all of the required curriculum (foundation and enrichment content areas), including Fine Arts. The TEKS are no longer simply "guidelines" or "recommended" for enrichment content areas. All of the student expectations in all four strands of the Fine Arts TEKS – Perception, Creative Expression/Performance, Historical/Cultural Heritage, and Response/Evaluation – must be addressed in a locally-developed curriculum when providing instruction in Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre, grades K-12. This legislation is now reflected in Section 28.002(c) of the Texas Education Code (TEC) and, consequently, was incorporated into TAC 74.1(b) by the SBOE.

What does this mean for Dance educators and other fine arts educators? What does this mean for administrators? More importantly, what does this mean for the schoolchildren of Texas?

What did SB 815 say?

SB 815 mandated that the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are required of all Texas school districts as a condition of accreditation in providing instruction in *all* of the required curriculum – foundation *and* enrichment subject areas. There are two categories of the state-approved required curriculum that all school districts in Texas must offer – foundation and enrichment. The foundation content areas consist of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The enrichment content areas consist of Fine Arts, Languages Other Than English, Health and Physical Education, Career and Technology Education, Technology Applications, and Religious Literature. Two of the basic differences between the foundation and enrichment curricula are 1) foundation subjects are assessed on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

(TAKS) and State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) as part of the state accountability system, whereas the enrichment subjects are not assessed; and 2) prior to the passage of SB 815, the TEKS were required in providing instruction in the foundation curriculum, but the TEKS were required as “guidelines” in providing instruction in the enrichment curriculum. The inclusion of the single word, “guidelines,” in the language stated in item #2 above may initially seem insignificant, but, in actuality, the distinction is significant. Essentially, school districts could legally disregard the intent and purpose of the TEKS in the enrichment curriculum areas. With the passage of SB 815, however, the TEKS are now required of all Texas school districts when providing instruction in Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre.

What did SB 815 not say?

SB 815 does *not*:

- mandate Fine Arts certified specialists at the elementary school level (local school district decision);
- prescribe the amount of instructional time or teaching methodologies for Fine Arts (local school district decision); and/or
- add Fine Arts to the TAKS or STAAR.

What are the TEKS?

The TEKS are the state-approved learning standards that describe what students should know and be able to do at the end of every grade level in each of the required “core” academic disciplines, including Fine Arts. Yes, as per TAC 74, Fine Arts is a “core academic subject” in that all of the required curriculum – foundation and enrichment – is designated as “core.” In June 1995, the 74th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 1, which was an overhaul of the education code and designation of a required curriculum in both the foundation and enrichment areas. That same year, the SBOE was charged with the task of developing a set of statewide standards that would detail the essential knowledge and skills to be demonstrated by all students in Texas public schools. The new standards were to be rigorous and relevant and were to be designed to provide multiple connections across disciplines and grade levels.

To accomplish this task, the SBOE appointed Clarification and Writing Teams for each curriculum area. These teams were charged with the task of clarifying *what students should know and be able to do at each grade level of their education*. The committee conducted a literature review of the former Essential Elements in addition to other state and international curricula. The committee considered questions regarding the “big idea” of each discipline and what performance standards should be expected of students and when. The teams incorporated interdisciplinary concepts, content, and skills across the curriculum and ensured that the new standards would meet the learning needs of all Texas students.

The SBOE also appointed Connection Teams that would review each discipline’s drafted standards and ensure that standards in all content areas were coherent and linked across

the curriculum. Additionally, a review process was developed for the standards in all curriculum areas. Since enrichment curriculum areas were also charged to develop the new set of standards, a Fine Arts Writing Team was established in 1995 by the Commissioner of Education. This team consisted of educators with a broad range of expertise in fine arts education. The Region 20 Education Service Center in San Antonio was engaged in supporting the Fine Arts Writing Team by organizing meetings and facilitating communication between writing team members, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and educators in the field. Furthermore, the TEA Director of Fine Arts provided support, access to fine arts experts, and appropriate materials culled from the national project to develop fine arts standards.

As with other curriculum areas, the Fine Arts Writing Team reviewed the essential elements of instruction, state, national, and international research, policies, standards, curricula, assessments, surveys, and numerous other documents. The goal was to produce an essential knowledge and skills document for grades K-12 that would assure that education in the four arts content areas - Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre – in Texas public schools would be both relevant and rigorous.

Between 1995 and 1997, the draft document underwent extensive review by citizens and educators across Texas. Reviewers included individuals appointed by the SBOE, the Texas Business and Education Coalition, educators, parents, business professionals, college/university faculty, and other stakeholders. The Texas Center for Educational Research served as a consultant to the Fine Arts Writing Team, developing a process to use in addressing each reviewer's comments. The initial feedback for the Fine Arts TEKS was accumulated February – May 1996. During this period, the Writing Team responded to over 450 reviews and revised the draft of the new standards accordingly. In addition, nationally recognized arts experts were contracted to comment on the first draft of the Fine Arts TEKS. The second round of feedback occurred August – October 1996. During this period, Regional Education Service Centers organized teachers by grade level to review and comment on all curriculum area TEKS. The Fine Arts TEKS were also reviewed in this method, and the Writing Team incorporated suggestions into the final document. The final document was submitted to the SBOE in February 1996 and was unanimously approved in March 1997.

Why Standards?

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was the beginning of the educational standards movement. With the passage of the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" in 1994, U.S. lawmakers acknowledged the importance of high standards in improving education. As a result, the demand for higher standards has come from all areas: administrators, teachers, students, parents, state/national educational organizations, and business/community leaders.

Many educators emphasize high standards as an important factor in improving the quality of education for all students. As a result, schools and districts are developing a high quality curriculum that is based on standards. Since developing a standards-based

curriculum requires changes in the way teachers teach and schools are operated, it is essential to provide educators with adequate time and resources for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the curriculum. The curriculum development process should also accommodate opportunities for reflection and revision so that the curriculum is updated and improved on a regular basis.

Why TEKS?

- √ The Fine Arts TEKS can make a difference because they powerfully address two fundamental issues that are pervasive in all education matters - quality and accountability. The TEKS will help ensure that the study of the arts is disciplined and focused and that arts instruction has a reference point for assessing its results. The TEKS provide a direction for competence and educational effectiveness, but without creating a “one shoe fits all” model. The TEKS can enhance weak arts instruction to improve programs and help make good programs even better. Requiring the TEKS should result in teachers having to spend less time defending and advocating arts education and having more time to teach children Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre.
- √ Dance and Fine Arts educators have mastered the concept of showcasing our “products” (dance performances, art exhibitions, music performances, theatrical performances). The audiences and spectators in attendance at these events are often (and justifiably) awed by the quality of the end result of our teaching. After all, Texas can legitimately lay claim to the finest school Dance programs in the nation and can serve as a model for other states. These impressive performances and exhibitions, though, did not somehow mystically materialize with the wave of a wand. Unfortunately, we as arts educators simply do not showcase the “process” of achieving these results nearly enough, which constitutes the actual teaching and learning that occurs daily in Texas music classrooms and rehearsal halls. The TEKS will serve as a vehicle to showcase the extraordinary “process” of arts education, which can and should serve as models for educators in other academic disciplines.
- √ Educators often erroneously refer to Dance and the arts in our schools as “cocurricular” and/or “extracurricular.” The term, “cocurricular,” is no longer part of Texas education vocabulary in that a course, event, or activity in school is now either “curricular” or “extracurricular.” Granted, certain worthwhile and beneficial extracurricular activities, such as dance competitions, are a “reasonable expectation” of Dance classes. However, just as science fairs can be integrated into Science classes, literary contests can be a component of English Language Arts classes, mathematics competitions can be a segment of Mathematics classes, and history competitions can be a part of Social Studies classes, these academic disciplines are not regarded by anyone as “extracurricular.” Nor should Dance and the other Fine Arts content areas be considered or referred to as “extracurricular.” The problem occurs when the primary or sole focus of Dance programs becomes the extracurricular activity itself – much like some teachers in other academic areas “teaching to the test” when preparing students for the TAKS or STAAR. However, if the main focus of the Dance program is directed toward attaining the goals and

objectives outlined in the student expectations of the Fine Arts TEKS through proven and innovative practices, students will gain a richer, deeper, and broader knowledge and appreciation of dance and the arts that will last a lifetime. The desired outcomes of this teaching philosophy should then be clearly evident in the above-mentioned extracurricular activities as well as other locally-developed assessments.

- √ As stated in the “No Child Left Behind” Education Act (Title IX, Section 9101 [11]), core academic subjects are identified as "English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, **arts**, history, and geography.” This bipartisan legislation determines how the U.S. Department of Education will support our nation's schools, students, and communities. The requirement of the Fine Arts TEKS as mandated by SB 815 serves to more closely align the state of Texas with the “No Child Left Behind” federal legislation and reinforces the fact that the arts are truly an essential educational endeavor alongside the other foundation subject areas and not merely entertainment, an activity, or a frill.
- √ The learning standards are actually a reflection of what our best Fine Arts teachers have been doing for many years. The TEKS, though, are documented in writing, are clearly articulated, provide a vertically and horizontally aligned structure for student achievement, and, consequently, “legitimize” the arts as an essential component of a well-rounded and balanced education for all students. Additionally, one credit of Fine Arts is required of all students for high school graduation; all students in middle school must take a Fine Arts course; and all three Fine Arts content areas at the elementary school level (Art, Music, and Theatre) must be offered in grades K-5. It is only logical that the TEKS be mandated when providing instruction in courses that are required for high school graduation, middle school, and in elementary school.
- √ As previously stated, the TEKS are “what” students should know and be able to do at the end of every grade level in each of the academic disciplines, including Fine Arts. It is the responsibility of school districts, though, to develop local curriculum that is aligned with the TEKS. The state of Texas does not mandate “how” the TEKS are mastered (e.g. curriculum development, methodologies, instructional time, scheduling, staffing). However, the fact that the Fine Arts TEKS are required of school districts when providing instruction in Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre will bolster the rationales of educators’ requests for the resources necessary to effectively and appropriately deliver the TEKS.
- √ The population of Texas is very transient in nature. Indeed, student transfers from school to school within local school districts are a common occurrence. The Fine Arts TEKS, however, will bring about a level of consistency in grade level student achievement and high standards of learning in the arts, regardless of the size, geographic location, socio-economic status, and/or other demographic considerations of schools - factors that are, regrettably, sometimes used as excuses for low student expectations.

What Now?

So, is SB 815 yet another unfunded mandate by the State of Texas with which school districts must contend? Not really. Prior to 2003, many school districts had already required the Fine Arts TEKS for Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre instruction and had developed curriculum that is aligned with the standards. The Texas Dance Educators Association (TDEA) convention and the other arts education conferences offer a myriad of TEKS-related workshops and clinics for their respective memberships. Furthermore, many school districts provide their Fine Arts teachers with TEKS-related professional development opportunities that are locally organized and facilitated.

It is important to note that TEA established the Center for Educator Development in Fine Arts (CEDFA) in 1995 to support effective and appropriate implementation of the Fine Arts TEKS in Texas schools. With the passage of SB 815, the potential and value of CEDFA's mission becomes more significant than ever. CEDFA provides a vast amount of TEKS-related information, products, and resources for fine arts educators, some of which are listed below:

- CEDFA website (<http://www.cedfa.org>)
- Fine Arts Curriculum Frameworks for Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre
- Fine Arts TEKS Scope and Sequence Charts for Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre
- Fine Arts education research
- Two Fine Arts instructional video series entitled *Portraits of Excellence: Fine Arts in Texas Schools* and *Proof of Performance: Fine Arts in Texas Schools*
- *PDAS and Fine Arts Teachers* document (elementary, middle, and high school levels)
- Instructional video and correlating booklet entitled *Fine Arts for All Students*

The most far-reaching project of CEDFA, however, is the annual Texas Fine Arts Summit initiative. By gathering Fine Arts educators, campus/district administrators, school board members, community members, and other stakeholders in Fine Arts education, the goal of the Fine Arts Summit is to increase support for the arts in Texas public schools. Workshop presentations at the Summit, which are conducted by expert educators who are members of the CEDFA Training Cadre, address topics in Dance, Art, Music, and Theatre that are aligned with the Fine Arts TEKS.

The current Fine Arts TEKS will soon be reviewed/revised by statewide committees, the memberships of which were selected by the SBOE. The revised/new Fine Arts TEKS are expected to be implemented in Texas schools in the Fall of 2013. Members of the Dance TEKS Review/Revision Committee are as follows:

Denise Cochran, Round Rock ISD
Lu Ann Carter, Houston ISD
Fayla Curry, Klein ISD
Sonja Korman, Houston ISD
Elizabeth Sanchez Lopez, Northside ISD
Elizabeth Moench, Corpus Christi ISD

Lynn Reynolds, Houston ISD
Lily Cabatu Weiss, Dallas ISD

The Dance educators listed above will be responsible for reviewing and, as needed, revising the current Fine Arts TEKS for Dance. Among other considerations, one of the major anticipated issues for the Dance TEKS will be as to whether or not to expand the Dance TEKS from grades 9-12 to grades K-8 to align with Art, Music, and Theatre, which are already grades K-12.

Successful implementation of the Fine Arts TEKS is a reality only when students, teaching, and learning are at the center of education, instead of programs and activities not related to curriculum. With that goal, the TEKS can empower Fine Arts educators in Texas schools to provide what we envision as best for our children and for our society.