



## TEACHER APPRAISAL, T-TESS ALTERNATIVE DOMAIN I

*The Texas State Teachers Association offers the following comments to Proposed Amendment to 19 TAC Chapter 150, Commissioner’s Rules Concerning Educator Appraisal, Subchapter AA, Teacher Appraisal, §150.1002, Assessment of Teacher Performance, and §150.1004, Teacher Response and Appeals*

The Texas State Teachers Association appreciates the work of the Texas Education Agency in drafting the proposed new rule text that would allow districts to choose between assessing teachers using the existing Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) Domain I or the proposed new Alternate Domain I. TSTA membership recognizes that a teacher-designed lesson that centers the unique needs of students in an innovative and relevant way will always represent the most distinguished teaching. However, we recognize that some districts might choose to implement a scripted curricula for individuals serving as teachers of record who have not completed an educator preparation program or had the benefit of high-quality field experience. When teachers enter the classroom unprepared to implement high-quality instruction that includes lesson design, they may need to be appraised with the Alternate Domain I.

TSTA was fortunate to have served on the Alternate Domain I Development Committee and provided feedback on behalf of our 65,000 members on the rubric’s draft language in development. It was valuable to have served alongside the experienced teachers and administrators who were participating in the High Quality Instructional Materials pilot program and were actively engaged with the materials. TSTA supports that the proposed Alternate Domain 1 rubric incorporates several recommendations made by the committee. **However, much of the feedback was not incorporated into the rubric, which has resulted in proposed language that is not a complete representation of the committee’s overall sentiment.**

**Additionally, TSTA is concerned that the proposed rule text that was published for comment only added language to include Alternate Domain I but does not make the proposed rubric language publicly accessible.**

The development committee understood that our task was to change language in order to develop an instrument that could evaluate a teacher based on her ability to internalize a lesson if they were using curriculum where the lesson design was actually a component of the curriculum. However, the consensus sentiment of the committee was that the curriculum still is only as good as the teaching, and — in the words of an administrator in an HQIM pilot — an instrument should be able to measure “the ability of a teacher to take it and make it their own.” This same administrator said only when the teachers on his campus using the HQIM in the pilot understood that they had the flexibility to “make it their own” did the instruction become high quality.

In this shared sentiment, the committee offered feedback throughout that would recognize the capacity to internalize. But feedback was consistent that the instrument should be written such that it can celebrate a teacher’s ability to “move off script” while maintaining the integrity of the instructional materials and alignment to the instructional purpose. The committee agreed that districts should develop in all teachers the capacity to design lessons and should always aim

ultimately to use Domain I to appraise teachers. For this reason, we believed the Alternate Domain I rubric should include language that values a teacher for adapting the curriculum, which we believed would demonstrate a skill beyond internalization. It was our recommendation that competent lesson internalization identified developing or proficient educators, but a teacher who can effectively adapt to accommodate the unique needs of her students is further along the student centeredness spectrum of the instrument and would be more appropriately rated accomplished or distinguished.

The below comments all relate to the committee's general sentiment that the rubric should incorporate language that allows for instructional latitude and values individualization and adaptation as a skill deserving of a higher score.

**1. TSTA supports that the proposed rubric incorporates several recommendations made by the development committee.**

The Alternate Domain I Development Committee expressed concerns with the use of the word "fidelity" in the General Descriptor of Dimension 1.3 because it is vague and not easily understood or measured. The committee recommended using the word "integrity," which the proposed rubric reflects. TSTA supports this change because it frees teachers to demonstrate knowledge of students in a way that would allow a teacher to move off script but could still be evaluated on whether she is maintaining the intent of the instructional resources and aligning to the lesson's purpose.

We appreciate that changes reflect committee feedback in Dimension 1.4 as well. We recommended removing the word "identifies" in "prioritizes and identifies" and replacing "selects" with "analyzes and applies." Both changes reflect the committee's feedback that language should not be written such that going off script in a quality way would result in a lower appraisal score. TSTA supports these changes because it does not necessarily confine teachers to the named activities.

**2. TSTA has concerns that the proposed rubric is not a complete representation of the committee's overall sentiment.**

While we appreciate that several committee recommendations were accepted and integrated into the draft rubric, TSTA is concerned that the general sentiment expressed by the committee is not reflected in the proposed language. It was consensus opinion that the Alternate Domain I rubric must of course be able to evaluate a teacher's capacity to internalize a lesson, but we believed — and TSTA strongly believes — that language must also allow teachers space to adapt lessons in quality and meaningful ways.

In Dimension 1.1, the committee recommended using "understands why" instead of "understands how" objectives are aligned and logically sequenced. There were several comments that expressed concern that the use of the word "how" was vague and lacking rigor. Seeing *how* something is aligned is not an especially difficult skill and not reflective of good teaching. Understanding *why* the objectives are aligned and sequenced in a given manner demonstrates a deeper understanding of the lesson's intent and instructional goals. It also makes little sense to measure a teacher's understanding of *how* as opposed to a teacher's understanding of *why*. One pilot participant made the astute observation that "understanding how" was an evaluation of the curriculum, whereas "understanding why" was an evaluation of the instruction, which of course is the intent of the instrument. The agency response was that the recommendation was left unchanged because "we want teachers to understand how activities are aligned," but TSTA believes this is not sufficiently rigorous, nor is it reflective of stakeholder feedback.

In Dimension 1.2, the committee recommended changing "identifies and uses" to "identifies and chooses." We appreciate that the word "uses" was replaced, but we disagree that replacing it with "selects" gets at the intent of the recommendation. We worry that assessing whether a teacher is "using" or "selecting" methods to measure student progress confines the teacher to the finite options provided in the curriculum when there are many quality ways that a

teacher can look for student understanding. We acknowledge that using what is provided for teachers is very often the best means to do this (especially for a teacher of record that is untrained), but we offered the word “chooses” because accomplished and distinguished teachers farther along the instrument’s student-centeredness spectrum may likely have methods more suited to the unique needs of the students.

Finally, TEA indicated as next steps that it would “revisit ‘adapting’ lessons as a descriptor in Alternate Domain I.” Stakeholder feedback made the recommendation in several ways that an instrument must be suited to recognize a teacher for adapting a lesson, for individualizing for students, even if this were off script. It was recommended:

- “These could be scaled on the proficiency levels where the more a teacher moves off script in a high quality fashion should be accomplished or distinguished.”
- “A teacher who is just understanding or following a pre-designed lesson is developing or proficient, but our accomplished and distinguished teachers are those that make it their own.”
- “Should consider language that values a teacher for adapting, which would be above and beyond internalizing or following a script.”
- “Could differentiate on proficiency levels, high quality might be something that the teacher makes his/her own.”

**Given the strong sentiment and repeated recommendation, it is not clear that the agency revisited the inclusion of “adapting” lessons as a descriptor.**

### **3. TSTA has concerns that the proposed rubric was not publicly available during the public comment period.**

Perhaps our greatest concern is that the proposed rubric that will impact the way many teachers are appraised was not made available to the public during the public comment period. The Alternate Domain I Development Committee had access to the language of the draft rubric, but the proposed rule text published for comment did not link to the Alternate Domain I draft rubric, nor was it made available on the TEA website. It is not adequately transparent or good practice to propose rules that introduce a new, alternative domain to assess teachers when the rubric by which the teachers will be assessed is not made available to the public for review.

Section 2002.024 (a) of Government Code requires the notice of a proposed rule to include a brief explanation of the rule with a clear indication of any words proposed to be added or deleted from the current text. If it is the agency’s position that a rubric appendix does not fall under this code, it follows that best practice in any public comment process would be to make clear to the public exactly what changes are being proposed. **Otherwise, how is the public, beyond committee members, able to comment if the rubric language is not publicly available for review?**

TSTA members who are qualified and accomplished educators will always advocate for teacher evaluation instruments that measure competence and professional capacity over conformity, but we also support the rights of districts to determine locally, with educator input, what is in the best interest of their community. For this reason, we acknowledge the need for an Alternative Domain 1 that allows for evaluation based on lesson internalization as opposed to lesson design and **support that it remains an optional instrument.** The committee worked diligently and collaboratively to recommend verbiage and language changes that were reflective of stakeholder feedback and the lived experience of the districts piloting the curricula. **We appreciate that many recommendations were accepted, but TSTA is concerned that the many recommendations made were not incorporated** and thus the proposed rubric is not a fair representation of the committee’s feedback or sentiment. **TSTA is especially concerned that the proposed rubric was not made available to the public.** Obfuscating draft language in this manner lacks the transparency that is fundamental to the public comment process.