TEKS and the Texas A-F Accountability System:

Alignment with Scholar Academic and Social Efficiency Ideologies

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Scholar Academic Ideology
Aims: The goal of education is to pass down the knowledge stored in academic disciplines to students. Schools exist to bring young people into the world of learning and help them think like scholars in their field.
Child: Students are seen as incomplete minds that need to be filled with knowledge. They are viewed as beginners in a discipline who can grow into full members of it over time.
Learning: Learning happens when students absorb the knowledge and ways of thinking that belong to an academic discipline. Students learn best when they are treated like junior versions of real scholars.
Teaching: Teachers are mini-scholars who know their subject deeply and pass that knowledge on to students. They use lectures, guided practice, and discussion to help students think and understand like experts.
Knowledge: The most valuable knowledge comes from academic disciplines like math, history, and science. Knowledge must be recognized and approved by a discipline before it belongs in the classroom.
Evaluation: Students are ranked based on how well they have learned the content of a discipline. Tests measure whether students have absorbed and can use the knowledge they were taught.

Social Efficiency Ideology
Aims: The purpose of education is to prepare students to function as productive adults in society. Schools should teach the specific skills people need to do their jobs and live useful lives.
Child: Children are seen as future adults who need to be trained for real-world roles. Their value is tied to what they will be able to do once they grow up, not who they are as kids.
Learning: Learning means a change in behavior that results from practice and repetition. Students learn by doing the actual skill they are supposed to master, not just reading or hearing about it.
Teaching: The teacher manages the learning environment and keeps students on track. Teachers guide and motivate students through a structured set of activities designed by curriculum developers.
Knowledge: The most important knowledge is the ability to perform specific skills needed in adult life. Knowing facts matters less than being able to actually do something useful with that information.
Evaluation: Students are assessed based on whether they can perform the required skills at an acceptable level. Evaluation is tied directly to the stated objectives and uses clear, measurable standards to determine success.

Scholar Academic Ideology

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS, show a strong connection to the Scholar Academic ideology. The TEKS are organized by academic discipline, including mathematics, science, English language arts, social studies, and more. This structure lines up directly with what Schiro describes as the Scholar Academic belief that "the only really useful knowledge is that which conforms to the structures revealed in the cognitive disciplines" (Schiro, 2013, p. 43). Every subject in the TEKS traces back to an academic discipline, which is exactly what Scholar Academics believes schools should be built around.

The TEKS also require students to think and reason within each subject area, not just memorize facts. The mathematics TEKS at every grade level include process standards that go well beyond recall. For example, students at every grade level are expected to "apply mathematics to problems arising in everyday life, society, and the workplace" and to "display, explain, and justify mathematical ideas and arguments using precise mathematical language" (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2012, § 111.5). This reflects Schiro's description of Scholar Academics wanting students to "take part in the process of knowledge-getting" (Schiro, 2013, p. 21), meaning students should think like mathematicians or scientists, not just recall information.

I see this in my own work as an elementary math coordinator. When I look at the Grade 3 TEKS for mathematics, students are not just asked to compute. The Grade 3 introduction states that students in algebraic reasoning "will use multiple representations of problem situations" and that the focal areas include "understanding and representing fractions as numbers and equivalent fractions" (TEA, 2012, § 111.5). That kind of expectation comes straight from the Scholar Academic belief that children should be brought into a discipline and taught to think within it.

The A-F accountability system does reflect some Scholar Academic values, but only to a limited extent. The Student Achievement domain measures STAAR performance across academic subjects, suggesting that schools should care most about mastery of disciplinary content. Scholar Academics believe that student evaluation should measure how well students have absorbed the knowledge of a discipline (Schiro, 2013, p. 52), and STAAR does assess subject-area content. However, the Scholar Academic ideology tends to value ranking students within a discipline and measuring depth of understanding, while STAAR focuses more on passing a cut score than on deep intellectual engagement with a discipline.

Social Efficiency Ideology

The alignment between the TEKS, the A-F system, and the Social Efficiency ideology is even stronger. The TEKS are written almost entirely in behavioral terms. Each standard begins with a verb that describes what a student will do. Looking at Grade 5 number and operations alone, students are expected to "represent," "compare," "solve," "estimate," and "identify" across nearly every standard (TEA, 2012, § 111.7). This matches almost exactly what Schiro describes as the Social Efficiency requirement that objectives "must be stated in behavioral terms that specify observable behaviors, action capabilities, actions, skills, or cognitive processes" (Schiro, 2013, p. 72). Bobbitt himself said that education is not about filling a mind with knowledge but about developing the ability to perform specific actions, and the TEKS are written precisely in that spirit.

The TEKS are also sequenced hierarchically across grade levels. Skills build on one another from kindergarten through grade 12, which directly mirrors Gagné's learning hierarchy model described in Schiro, which states "the acquisition of knowledge is a process in which every new capability builds on a foundation established by previously learned capabilities"

(Schiro, 2013, p. 90). You can see this clearly by tracing fractions across grade levels. In Grade 2, students work with halves, fourths, and eighths using concrete models (TEA, 2012, § 111.4). By Grade 3, they expand to denominators of 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8 and begin working with equivalent fractions (TEA, 2012, § 111.5). Grade 4 adds addition and subtraction of fractions with equal denominators (TEA, 2012, § 111.6), and Grade 5 extends that work to unequal denominators and multiplication of fractions (TEA, 2012, § 111.7). In my district, we use Lead4ward vertical alignment documents to show teachers how each TEKS connects upward and downward across grade levels. That sequencing is Social Efficiency thinking put into practice, and it is built right into the document itself.

The A-F accountability system is one of the clearest examples of the Social Efficiency ideology in action. The 2026 Accountability Manual explains that schools are evaluated across three domains: Student Achievement, School Progress, and Closing the Gaps (TEA, 2026, p. 3). Each domain produces a numerical score that gets converted into a letter grade. This is exactly what Schiro describes when he discusses the Social Efficiency emphasis on "accountability to the client" and on evaluating outcomes using measurable, observable data (Schiro, 2013, pp. 83-84). Schools are treated like the steel mill in Bobbitt's analogy, where they receive a product (students), process them, and are then held accountable for the quality of the output.

The STAAR component of the Student Achievement domain assigns points based on the percentage of students who reach Approaches, Meets, and Masters grade levels (TEA, 2026, p. 16). The Closing the Gaps domain uses specific performance targets with a 0 to 4 point scoring method for student subgroups (TEA, 2026, p. 39). All of this reflects what Schiro describes as Social Efficiency evaluation, which relies on predetermined behavioral standards, criterion-

referenced measures, and statistical data to determine whether the educational product meets the required specifications (Schiro, 2013, pp. 96–97).

I see this connection in my own district. STAAR data is typically not released until late May or early June. Once it comes out, campus and district leaders immediately begin analyzing results against the domain calculations that will determine accountability ratings. Those ratings then drive decisions about campus improvement planning, instructional focus for the following year, and resource allocation across campuses. Districts and campuses are evaluated based on whether students hit performance targets. Campus labels go up or down based on the scores. Bobbitt's quote that "standards are to be found in the world of affairs, not in the schools" (Schiro, 2013, p. 67) feels very real when state-mandated performance targets are handed down to us and campuses are then judged against them. The teacher does not set the target. The state does. TEA is the client, and the campus is the contractor.

Summary

Both ideologies are present in the TEKS and the A-F system, but the Social Efficiency ideology is dominant. From kindergarten through grade 5, every strand of the TEKS follows the same pattern: behavioral objectives written with action verbs, content organized into a hierarchical sequence, and skills tied directly to a state assessment system that measures and ranks school performance. The Scholar Academic ideology shows up in the fact that the content itself is organized by academic discipline, and students are expected to think within those disciplines. However, the way that content is structured, assessed, and used to rate schools is much more aligned with Social Efficiency. As Schiro notes, Social Efficiency educators ultimately shifted from serving society broadly to serving the academic standards promoted by

the state (Schiro, 2013, p. 82), which is exactly what the Texas accountability system reflects today.

References

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