TEKS and the Texas A-F Accountability System:

Alignment with the Social Reconstruction Ideology

Brittany Sanders

University of Mary-Hardin Baylor

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Dr. Darrell Becker

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Social Reconstruction Ideology
Aims: Schools exist to help fix what is wrong with society. The goal is for students to look critically at the world, understand injustice, imagine something better, and actually do something about it.
Child: Children come to school shaped by their families, communities, and culture. They are not neutral. They have the potential to grow into people who challenge unfair systems and push for a more just world.
Learning: Learning is a group experience, not an individual one. Students learn through discussion, shared experiences, and working through real social problems together. Thinking, feeling, and taking action are all part of it.
Teaching: The teacher is more of a partner than an authority. They bring their own values and stances into the classroom and guide students to question society. Both the teacher and students are learning and growing together.
Knowledge: Knowledge is not neutral or objective. It is shaped by whoever holds power in society. What is worth knowing is whatever helps students understand injustice and work toward changing it.
Evaluation: Formal tests are not the real measure of learning. The best indicator is whether students go out and actually do something in their community. Feedback during class helps students refine how they think and act.

Social Reconstruction Ideology

When looking at the Social Reconstruction ideology next to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, it is hard to find much common ground. Social Reconstructionists believe education exists to help students understand the problems of their society, develop a vision for something better, and take real action toward change (Schiro, 2013, p. 151). That is a different purpose than what the TEKS are designed to do. The TEKS are a list of academic skills the state has decided every student must learn, organized by grade level and subject area. A third grader in Texas is required to "represent fractions greater than zero and less than or equal to one with denominators of 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8" and to "solve one- and two-step problems involving multiplication and division within 100" (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2012, § 111.5).

Nothing about those standards asks a child to look at the world around them and wonder why things are the way they are. In the schools I support, teachers are working hard to get students to that kind of conceptual and procedural mastery, and that work matters. Still, it is not the same as what Schiro (2013) describes when he talks about sixth graders using math to analyze racial profiling data, examine the cost of the Iraq War, or investigate why their school is more crowded than schools in wealthier neighborhoods (pp. 155-156). The TEKS were not written with that kind of purpose in mind.

Looking more closely at how the TEKS are structured reinforces this point. Every strand, from number and operations to geometry and measurement to personal financial literacy, is pre-packaged with specific skills assigned to specific grade levels before any teacher ever meets their students (TEA, 2012, § 111.6). Schiro (2013) is clear that Social Reconstructionists view academic content not as an end in itself, but as a tool that only has value when it is "loaded" with social meaning and directed toward helping people understand and transform their world (pp. 190-191). The TEKS treat content as the destination, not the vehicle. The personal financial literacy strand in Grade 5 comes closest to touching real-world systems. Students are expected to define income tax, payroll tax, and sales tax, and to explain the difference between gross and net income (TEA, 2012, § 111.7). Understanding those concepts is useful, yet the standard asks students to define and explain, not to question. It does not ask who collects those taxes, where the money goes, or whether the system is fair. Schiro (2013) makes it clear that teaching students how economic systems work without asking them to question those systems is a political choice whether teachers recognize it or not, and one that leaves existing structures untouched (pp. 160-161).

The mathematical process standards create a small opening. Students across every grade level are expected to apply math to real-world contexts and work through genuine problem-solving, which at least creates space for the kind of community-connected instruction Social Reconstructionists value. Schiro (2013) describes that kind of instruction as starting where students are, drawing on their actual experiences in their communities, and using those experiences as the foundation for both mathematical thinking and social analysis (pp. 156-159). That space exists on paper, though whether it gets used that way depends entirely on the teacher. I have been in classrooms where teachers are genuinely trying to do that. During a campus visit, I observed a teacher extend a lesson on personal financial literacy by connecting the math to real household budget comparisons, and the conversation that followed was richer than the task alone would have probably generated. That happened because of that teacher, not because the standard required it. The process standards create permission for that kind of work, but they do not create expectation. A teacher can address every process standard in the TEKS with a contextualized word problem that has nothing to do with social inquiry.

Where the TEKS leave some room for interpretation, the A-F Accountability System closes most of it. The 2026 Accountability Manual outlines a rating structure built around three domains: Student Achievement, School Progress, and Closing the Gaps (TEA, 2026, p. 3). Student Achievement is calculated using STAAR performance data, with points awarded based on the percentage of students who reach Approaches, Meets, and Masters grade level (TEA, 2026, p. 14), and that score becomes the foundation for a campus's overall letter grade. Schiro (2013) argues that Social Reconstructionists do not see the push toward standardized testing as a neutral measure of learning, but as part of a larger effort to control curriculum, reward schools that fall in line, and move education further from anything that asks students to think critically

about their world (pp. 193-196). That is a strong claim, though it connects to something I see regularly. When a campus is chasing a better rating, the conversation in planning meetings shifts almost entirely toward tested skills. I have sat in data reviews where the question on the table is always some version of which highly-tested TEKS students are not passing and how to fix that before STAAR. That framing is driven by what the accountability system rewards, and social analysis never enters the conversation.

Of the three domains, Closing the Gaps is the one that seems most connected to what Social Reconstructionists actually care about. It disaggregates performance data by race, income, language status, special education classification, and other factors, tracking whether gaps between student groups are narrowing over time (TEA, 2026, p. 36). Monitoring those disparities does reflect an awareness that not all students start from the same place, and that schools have a responsibility to the students who have been historically underserved. The system's response to a gap, however, is always to raise the group's STAAR scores. Nothing in the system is designed to help students understand why those gaps exist, what historical and structural forces produced them, or what it would take to address them at a deeper level. Schiro (2013) argues that Social Reconstruction education is not about adjusting outcomes within an existing system but about preparing students to examine and ultimately reconstruct the system itself (pp. 163-164). The A-F Accountability System, including Closing the Gaps, never questions whether the structure itself is the problem. It identifies which students are falling behind on standardized measures and pressures schools to fix that. It does not ask whether the measures themselves reflect the values of a just society, and it does not give students any tools to ask that question either.

References

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