

Tennessee English Language Arts Educator Advisory Team,

The [Tennessee Coalition for Truth in our Classrooms](#) is a group of students, education advocates, and over 25 organization leaders who value Tennessee's diverse students, staff, and communities and promote teaching truthful and honest history. It is a subset of the [Tennessee Alliance for Equity in Education](#), convened by [EdTrust-Tennessee](#).

In fall 2024, our Coalition provided feedback as part of the Tennessee State Board of Education's English Language Arts (ELA) Standards review process. We appreciate that [a number of our recommendations](#) were reflected, and we'd like to see more of our suggestions implemented:

1. Promote Students' Cultural Awareness and Understanding of Others' Perspectives

Given Tennessee's [growing student racial and ethnic diversity](#), the Coalition recommended that standards should include language that explicitly includes reading, comparing, and analyzing texts and narratives from a variety of perspectives and different cultures. Students benefit from seeing their own and their classmates' complex identities reflected in stories, including [increased intrinsic motivation](#) that leads to developing more skillful reading tactics. This may be because culturally relevant texts help all students [activate prior knowledge](#): an essential step that supports comprehension. Other [benefits](#) from exposure to texts from diverse cultures include better class engagement, better critical thinking skills, increased test scores and graduation rates, and improved attendance, self-esteem, and empathy.

The Coalition was excited to see that the second and fourth grade versions of **RL.IKI.9** remained unchanged, as we recommended. These standards included requirements that students compare and contrast aspects of narratives from different cultures. For example, **4.RL.IKI.9** - *Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story by different authors or different cultures*. Similarly, the second and third grade versions of **RL.KID.2** will continue to require students to identify the central message or moral in fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures. **2.RL.KID.2** - *Identify the central message or moral of stories, fables, and folktales from diverse cultures; recount their essential elements in chronological order*.

We were encouraged by the changes made to the high school versions of the **RI.IKI.9** standards, which included some of our recommendations. These standards include new language asking students to analyze related texts across place, time, and/or voice. **11-12.RI.IKI.9** - *Analyze thematically related texts of literary merit, considering how the texts treat similar themes or topics across place, time, and/or voice*. **This change is in the right direction; however, we believe that explicitly including a requirement to compare literature across diverse cultures and perspectives is imperative.**

The versions of **RL.IKI.9** in grades K, 1, 3, and 5-8 remain largely unchanged, and do not ask students to compare texts from different cultures and perspectives. For example, **8.RL.IKI.9** - *Compare and contrast how a contemporary text was shaped by a more traditional work (e.g., myths, poetry, etc)*. **There is an important opportunity to enhance these standards and ensure that students compare texts to traditional works from various cultures and perspectives.** The [majority of texts used in school](#) come from white authors and perspectives; however, over [40% of Tennessee](#) public school students are students of color.

2. Prepare Students For Opportunities and Demands of an Increasingly Complex and Diverse World

In order to ensure students engage in critical inquiry, evaluate speakers' points of view, and integrate multiple sources of information, the Coalition supported keeping the following standards as is: craft and structure **RI.CS.6**, comprehension and collaboration **SL.CC.1-2¹**, and **W.RBPK.5²**. As we recommended, the central focus of each of these standards remains intact. These standards emphasize skills including engaging in critical inquiry; evaluating speakers' points of view, arguments, and sufficiency of evidence;

and expressing students' own ideas, including supporting analysis with evidence. This group is of critical importance to equip students with essential skills in an ever-more complex world, and will prepare students to uncover bias, make informed decisions, and advocate for what is important to them.

In an increasingly complex and diverse world, ensuring students are learning based on a challenging set of ELA standards is important. When students grapple with narratives from a diverse set of cultures and perspectives, they are more engaged in learning and see increases in test scores, graduation rates, and attendance, which sets them up for success in their chosen career paths.

The Coalition appreciates the opportunity to continue engaging in the ELA standards revision process. The second iteration of ELA standards adhered to a number of our recommendations, though we'd still like to see a number more reflected in the updated standards. Thank you for your commitment to working to ensure all Tennessee students are prepared to succeed in life.

Sincerely,



1 Note that the standard codes reflect the numbering in the round 2 feedback survey. In the Coalition's first letter, we recommended keeping SL.CC.1-3. SL.CC.2 and 3 were combined into one standard in the second feedback survey.

2 In our first letter, the Coalition recommended keeping standard W.RBPK.7 as-is. In survey 2, the standard was re-numbered as W.RBPK.5.