



## **TAKS Vocabulary Kits: An Overview**

### **Education Service Center Region 12 – Waco, Texas**

Education Service Center (ESC) Region 12 currently offers a classroom solution to assist students in mastering the essential vocabulary currently found in the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Our materials are designed to provide students with a framework of critical vocabulary on which to build concepts learned in the classroom that are then tested on the TAKS.

### **Methodology**

Tracy Holcomb, education specialist at ESC Region 12, worked closely with fellow specialists to identify specific terminology used in the Reading, Math and Science TAKS tests. She then developed key vocabulary lists including terminology taken directly from the Reading, Math and Science TAKS tests along with grade-level appropriate definitions (grades 3 through 8) in each of these areas. Using skills and knowledge acquired as a junior high math and reading teacher for 20 years, she worked to develop a strategy to introduce and reinforce vocabulary acquisition in each of these key areas for students in grades 3 through 8. She has been working with over 500 teachers in the Central Texas area for five years to refine the system. Educators using her materials and methods have indicated that their students are experiencing a high degree of success on the TAKS following the implementation of these strategies.

Tracy's method includes the introduction of one to two new vocabulary words in ten-minute activities four days a week. As students build their repertoire of essential vocabulary, games designed to reinforce vocabulary acquisition are included in the daily activities. Once-a-week formal assessments are also provided. These assessments include only vocabulary introduced in the week(s) prior and are incrementally challenging. Comprehensive final exams along with one to two retakes are also provided to assess students' mastery of the vocabulary before taking the TAKS. Separate accommodated quizzes, finals and retakes are included. Larger font size, fewer questions per page and a limited number of questions and answers make these quizzes ideal for special needs students including struggling readers and inclusion students.

### **Research**

The methodology used in each "kit" is based upon the distributed review and practice model as applied to vocabulary retention--a teaching strategy proven to be tied to long-term retention of information (Swanson & Deshler, 2003). Using this model, students receive explicit instruction in new vocabulary including group instruction in pronunciation and definitions in an incremental fashion. They are actively engaged in vocabulary acquisition and retention using the proven strategies of:

- distributed review and practice (both oral and written)
- repeated practice using highly engaging group activities (not worksheets)
- sequenced review including incremental and controlled introduction of vocabulary
- daily feedback
- weekly and end-of-term reviews and assessments

This instructional methodology has a proven impact upon student retention and application of learned vocabulary (Denton, 2008).

## Materials

Each “kit” includes everything needed to implement the system. Materials are intended to be used over the course of several weeks prior to administration of the TAKS. Activities require from ten to fifteen minutes per day of classroom instruction time. Each kit includes:

- Teacher’s guide (1)
- Quizzes for regular classroom use - including final exam(s) and retake(s)
- Accommodated quizzes - including final exam(s) and retake(s)
- Flash cards (1 set of 8 1/2” by 11” cards, full color both sides)
- Memory Drill cards (2 sets of 3” by 2 1/2” cards, full color on one side, black and white on the other)
- “Vocab Volley” cards (1 set of 3” by 2 1/2” cards, full color on both sides)
- Storage container (1)

Currently available kits:

- Introductory Math (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade)
- Intermediate Math (4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Grade)
- Advanced Math (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade)
  
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading
- 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading
- 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading
- 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading
  
- 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Science (Life, Physical and Earth Science vocabularies included)
- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science (Earth/Space Systems, Living Systems and the Environment, Motion/Forces/Energy, Structures/Properties of Matter vocabularies included)

## Bibliography

- Swanson, H., Deshler, D. (2003). Instructing adolescents with learning disabilities: converting a meta-analysis to practice. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 36, 124-135.
- Ebbers, S., Denton, C. (2008). A root of awakening: vocabulary instruction for older students with reading difficulties. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 23, 90-102.