

SBOE Meets in Austin

The State Board of Education (SBOE) met in Austin this week garnering the national spotlight primarily for the debate over the proposed social studies Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Below is a list of highlights from the four-day meeting.

Social Studies TEKS - After hours of public testimony and heated debate over more than 300 proposed amendments (since January 2010), the SBOE voted 10 to 5 to give preliminary approval to the social studies TEKS revisions. Those voting against the proposed document included: Mavis Knight (Dallas); Mary Helen Berlanga (Corpus Christi); Rick Agosto (San Antonio); Lawrence Allen Jr. (Houston); and Rene Nunez (El Paso). The five board members said they were disappointed with minority representation in the proposed K-12 standards thus far. The final vote on the revised TEKS will occur at the May meeting providing the public with more time to weigh in on the proposed standards. Given the sheer number of amendments, Texas Education Agency (TEA) staff expects to have an updated version of the social studies standards posted online in mid-April. The new social studies TEKS will be in Texas classrooms starting in the 2011-12 school year.

English Language Arts and Reading Elective TEKS - The SBOE adopted the English language arts and reading (ELAR) elective TEKS which includes subjects such as journalism, contemporary writing, and public speaking. The new curriculum standards will be implemented beginning with the 2011-12 school year.

Middle School Fine Arts Requirement - The SBOE adopted a rule requiring students to complete a TEKS-based fine arts course during grade 6, 7 or 8 starting with the 2010-11 school year. The Legislature passed House Bill 3 in 2009 requiring this change.

Physical Education (PE) Graduation Requirements - The revised PE graduation requirements that begin in the 2010-11 school year, no longer permit students to substitute career and technical education (CTE) work-based training courses for PE graduation credit. This change will affect roughly 2,000 students who had planned to take a block of CTE work-based training to satisfy their PE graduation credits in their senior year of 2010-11, but are no longer able to do so. SBOE chair Gail Lowe declined to open up the graduation chapter of rule, and directed TEA staff to determine if there were any other options available to help this particular group of students.

Norm-Referenced Assessments - The SBOE took action allowing school districts to use norm-referenced assessments administered at the local level for a maximum of eight years. That is an increase from the current practice which is six years.

Midcycle 2010 Proclamation - The Board adopted materials for the Midcycle 2010 Proclamation. The midcycle process allows publishers to introduce textbooks that were not available when the subject materials were last purchased without having to wait for the completion of the full adoption cycle. The following subject areas are included in the Midcycle 2010 Proclamation: Mathematics, Technology Applications, Languages other than English, Health, Physical Education, and Fine Arts. Please note districts may use local funds or textbook credits to purchase these materials; the state does not provide additional funding for districts to purchase instructional materials midcycle. It is the State's responsibility to fund instructional materials selected during proclamation years but not those materials chosen midcycle.

Midcycle Proclamation 2011 - The Board voted to advertise for bids for Midcycle Proclamation 2011. School districts would be able to utilize textbook credits or local funds to purchase Career and Technical Education materials or new Health materials.

Proclamation 2012 (Science Instructional materials) - The SBOE was expected to decide whether to issue Proclamation 2012 allowing the State to advertise for bids on science instructional materials. However, that item was postponed until the May meeting.

Commissioner's List on Electronic Textbooks - The passage of House Bill 4294 last year, now requires the Commissioner of Education to adopt a list of electronic textbooks and instructional materials from which districts may choose. Districts may use state textbook funds to purchase the technological equipment necessary to utilize electronic textbooks and instructional materials. The commissioner's update detailing what is on the list was delayed until the May meeting. However, school district administrators are expected to be notified in April.

Charters Approved - SBOE members took action on changes to two charters. The charter for Imagine International of North Texas was awarded with the condition that the commissioner of education approve the management contract. The Board also approved the charter for International Academy of Central Texas, LLC. Both were originally awarded charters in November 2008.

Permanent School Fund Bond Guarantee Program - David Bradley, Chair of the SBOE Committee on School Finance/Permanent School Fund, was concerned that districts may be using long-term bonds to purchase items with short-term life spans, such as computers, and proposed language that would have required superintendents to certify that bond money would be spent accordingly. TEA staff noted that auditing districts over the use of bonds in this regard would take the agency into an area of oversight that they have never previously been involved. Additionally, Laura Slaughter, executive director of the Municipal Advisory Council of Texas, testified that some of the options being considered such as requiring districts to break up a bond package into assets of shorter/longer life spans would only increase costs to districts. Gail Lowe expressed her desire that any change to the program not place any substantial new requirements on school districts. Bradley's substitute language failed. The Committee on School Finance/Permanent School Fund recommended that the Board vote at first reading to revise the guidelines for the Guarantee Program for School District Bonds by: maintaining the \$2,300 application fee, setting the multiplier at three times the cost value of the Permanent School Fund, and decreasing the reserve for the bond program from 8 percent to 5 percent. The Board approved the three recommendations.

The next SBOE meeting is scheduled for May 19-21, 2010 in Austin.

Summary provided by Texas Association of School Boards