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The Honorable Keven Ellis
Chairman, Texas State Board of Education
1701 N. Congress Ave.
Austin, Texas 78701

Delivered via Electronic Mail

Re: Concerning and potentially illegal provisions in Social Studies TEKS draft recommendations for social studies practices

August 29, 2022

Chairman Ellis:

We write today with deep concerns with the recently proposed changes to the social studies Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards found in our Education Code—changes you will soon be voting on. In a stunning reversal of the spirit in which the Legislature passed several reforms meant to protect children last session, the proposed changes require educators to, among other things, violate Texas law by, for example, teaching subjects associated with critical race theory and polluting the minds of Texas children by asking them to consider the perspective of the murderous tyrant Santa Anna at the Alamo. The changes also eliminate the teaching of Texas history as stand-alone courses, which is a time-honored tradition of Texas schools. They foster disrespect for law enforcement, and further guides children away from the Judeo-Christian foundation upon which our state and country was founded. We provide examples below from the TEKS draft recommendations to clarify our concerns, and we demand that you immediately amend these proposed standards so that they comply with Texas law and reflect the culture and traditions of Texas in an appropriate manner.

- 1. The Proposed Revisions Violate Texas Law by Compelling Teachers to Discuss Currently Controversial Issues:** Last session, our very own Rep. Steve Toth authored H.B. 3979, which specifically prohibits teachers from being compelled to discuss widely debated and

currently controversial issues of public policy or social affairs.¹ The originally proposed standards, however, violate this and other provisions of the law outright numerous times in the “teacher’s notes” column of the draft changes. For example, an excerpt from one of the notes shows that a recommended trade book for Grade 2 requires teachers to discuss “the brutal, race-driven murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police . . . inspiring a surge of Black Lives Matter protests . . .”² Aside from the fact that even Keith Ellison, the former deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee and the current Democrat Attorney General of Minnesota, rejected to charge Derek Chauvin with a hate crime because his office did not have “any evidence that Derek Chauvin factored in George Floyd’s race as he did what he did,”³ the notion that police brutality and “systemic racism” have overtaken law enforcement—a view we very much disagree with—is exactly the type of brainwashing propaganda H.B. 3979 sought to remove from the classroom. The law further requires that if a teacher *chooses* to bring up subjects such as these that they “explore that topic objectively and in a manner free from political bias . . .”⁴ The suggested materials, however, do not allow for that type of balanced conversation.

The proposed standards for Grade 8 also violate H.B. 3979 by requiring educators to discuss the controversial issues such as the “pride” movement, but only as framed alongside with the Civil Rights movement.⁵ There is no room for an opposing viewpoint supporting traditional marriage—the lesson is based on the assumption that the “pride” movement is good for society. Further examples can be found in the proposed Grade 3 teacher’s notes, where teachers are expected to explain to eight-year-old children how the “Texas Rangers were used as an instrument of oppression” during early Texas history.⁶ Although we understand that the teacher’s notes have been removed from the revised version of the proposed standards presented by Workgroup F, we question whether the teacher’s notes will still be recommended for use by teachers, because when asked about the notes in the August 1st Special Meeting of the SBOE, SBOE staff explained that those teacher’s notes were simply “intended to allow the workgroups to provide additional information . . .” and that the notes were used “for information that [the SBOE] should consider putting in the TEKS . . .”⁷ The staff member goes on to explain to SBOE Member Will Hickman, who expressed concern about the language referencing the Texas Rangers as “instruments of oppression,” that “that language wouldn’t appear in the standards at all.”⁸ We ask, however: will the notes appear anywhere else?

¹ Tex. H.B. 3979, 87th Leg., R.S. (2021). The text of the bill is codified in Tex. Educ. Code Ann § 28.0022 (a)(1).

² ALLIAH L. AGOSTINI, *THE JUNETEENTH STORY: CELEBRATING THE END OF SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES* 31 (2022). The book is recommended for teachers to use for the Grade 2 under Section (3)(G). SOCIAL STUDIES TEKS REVIEW WORK GROUP D DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS 12 (2022).

³ Mychael Schnell, *Minnesota AG Explains why Floyd’s Death Not Charges as Hate Crime* (Apr. 25, 2021), THE HILL, <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/550211-minnesota-ag-explains-why-floyd-death-not-charged-as-hate-crime/>.

⁴ Tex. Educ. Code Ann § 28.0022 (a)(2).

⁵ *Id.* at 89.

⁶ SOCIAL STUDIES TEKS REVIEW WORK GROUP D DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS 12 (2022).

⁷ TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY, SBOE Special Meeting, Aug. 1, 2022 at 50:08, https://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/sboe_special_meeting/20220801/3/.

⁸ *Id.* at 50:51.

2. **The Proposed Revisions Eliminate 4th and 7th Grade Texas History in Favor of Intertwining Texas History with other Historical Subjects:** Current TEKS standards ensure that a year-long course in Texas history is taught in 4th and 7th grade, while 5th, 6th, and 8th grades are dedicated to United States and world history.⁹ Texas history is a subject upon which our state has long prided itself—virtually no other state requires the teaching of its own history, but Texas has always been set apart due to our unique status as a previously independent nation and our rich, distinctive culture that came along with that.¹⁰ The proposed changes, though, seek to eliminate the standalone subjects of Texas history in favor of a diluted and confusing plan in which Texas and U.S. history is intertwined with other aspects of world history and a heavily decreased emphasis on Texas and American exceptionalism.¹¹ If the SBOE wishes to increase the amount of Texas history being taught in public schools by intertwining aspects of Texas history with world history, we are in full support of that. But to trade the rich aspects of the standalone Texas history courses, which benefit all Texans and *keeps Texas Texan*, in favor of this watered-down approach is something we fervently demand you reject.
3. **The Proposed Revisions Require Educators to Teach an Unbalanced View of World Religions and Unnecessarily Introduce Children to Occult Practices Such as Divination:** The now publicly retracted teacher’s notes included with the first draft of the proposed changes minimize Christianity’s effect on our society by imposing an unequal balance in teaching world religions, with twenty full days dedicated to studying Hinduism, Buddhism, and the related concepts of reincarnation, karma, nirvana, and their spread throughout the world.¹² In contrast, only seven days in the teacher’s notes are dedicated to the study and spread of Christianity, including only two days dedicated to its central ideas.¹³ As our society was built upon Judeo-Christian values, we are concerned that more time—or at the very least, equal time—is not dedicated to the study of Christianity. Thus, we again question whether the teacher’s notes are simply now hidden from public consumption or have been scrapped entirely. The proposed standards further unnecessarily remove a Judeo-Christian staple of our culture from the classroom by replacing the popular name of the calendar era that preceded the birth of Jesus Christ, “Before Christ” or “B.C.,” with “Before the Common Era,” or “B.C.E.”¹⁴ A most disturbing example requires teachers to “give examples of oracle bones and explain their purpose” to third graders.¹⁵ Oracle bones, we have learned, were used by ancient cultures for divination in occultic rituals to predict the future and communicate with spirits.¹⁶ Why the workgroup thought it to be essential that children specifically learn this practice is a mystery to us, but regardless, the requirement and those like it must be removed from the proposed changes.

⁹ See Tex. Educ. Code Ann. § 28.001 et seq.

¹⁰ 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 113.15 (2018) (Social Studies, Grade 4).

¹¹ See generally Social Studies TEKS Review Work Group D Draft Recommendations 33 (2022).

¹² Social Studies TEKS Review Work Group D Draft Recommendations 33 (2022).

¹³ *Id.* at 31.

¹⁴ See generally, *id.*

¹⁵ *Id.* at 24.

¹⁶ *Oracle Bone*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER.COM (2022).

4. **The Proposed Changes Require Students to Consider the Perspective of Santa Anna—a Murderous, Genocidal Tyrant, during the Battle of the Alamo:** The most substantial disgrace in the proposed changes is found in the revisions for Grade 7 that require students to compare “different perspectives on the siege of the fall of the Alamo”¹⁷ Allow us be frank: General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna was a murderous, genocidal tyrant who stands right alongside Adolph Hitler, Mao Zedong, and Joseph Stalin in the annals of history. Under no circumstances should Texas children be taught the “other side” of the Nazi-like tyrants our forefathers valiantly fought to allow us to be where we all are today. While educators have a responsibility to help students understand differing perspectives on controversial issues, the proposed revisions require educators promote potentially dishonest accounts of the meaning of the Battle of the Alamo, such as those found in the historically inaccurate book “Forget the Alamo”.¹⁸ In Texas, we will always remember the Alamo, and we will not stand idly by as the SBOE turns Texas history on its head.

The proposed changes, Mr. Chairman, are unacceptable and in many cases illegal. We are watching these changes closely and will not hesitate to intervene during the next legislative session, should the need arise, to protect Texas children from being further indoctrinated and taken advantage of. We demand the proposed changes be substantially amended before further action is taken.

Sincerely,



Mayes Middleton
State Representative
Chairman, Texas Freedom Caucus

cc:	Pam Little, Vice Chair, SBOE	Will Hickman, Member, SBOE
	Georgina C. Perez, Secretary, SBOE	Jay Johnson, Member, SBOE
	Lawrence A. Allen, Jr., Member, SBOE	Tom Maynard, Member, SBOE
	Rebecca Bell-Metereau, Member, SBOE	Sue Melton-Malone, Member, SBOE
	Ruben Cortez, Jr., Member, SBOE	Marisa B. Perez-Diaz, Member, SBOE
	Aicha Davis, Member, SBOE	Matt Robinson, Member, SBOE
	Patricia Hardy, Member, SBOE	Audrey Young, Member, SBOE

¹⁷ Social Studies TEKS Review Work Group D Draft Recommendations 71 (2022).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Bonnie Arnold, *Historians Not Fans of ‘Forget the Alamo’ Book* (July 18, 2021), HILL COUNTRY COMMUNITY JOURNAL, https://www.hccommunityjournal.com/article_c7f2e53a-e3ef-11eb-8e87-1793966cc084.html.