



HB1291: Throwing Open the Doors to Textbook Censorship by the Texas State Board of Education

As amended by the Senate Education Committee on May 16, HB1291 would effectively remove limits on the State Board of Education's ability to censor content in textbooks for Texas public schools. The Legislature in 1995 acted to rein in a state board that had been demanding publishers make sometimes hundreds of politically charged changes to textbook content. Democratic and Republican state attorneys general have upheld SB1's limits on the board's authority in formal opinions. But board members have ever since pushed against the limits imposed by SB1. As amended by the Senate committee, HB1291 would cast away those limits, allowing board members to decide whether textbook content is "suitable."

Subjective Criteria for Censoring Textbook Content

- HB1291 would allow state board members to reject textbooks with content they deem as not "suitable for the subject matter and grade level for which the instructional material was submitted." Such a subjective standard opens the door to members demanding the removal of any content they dislike.
- Board member (former chair) Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands, has said this provision would give her and like-minded board members the ability to strike textbook content they think is inappropriate.ⁱ
- This provision would return Texas to the pre-1995 days when board members could freely demand that publishers make textbook changes to address their personal and political objections to content.

A Long History of Trying to Reject 'Unsuitable' Content

State board members and activists aligned with them have deemed the following content unsuitable for Texas public school students over the years:

- A photograph of a mother carrying a briefcase and leaving home for work
- Line drawings of self-exams for breast cancer in health textbooks
- Factual information about birth control in health texts
- Established evidence on evolution and environmental issues in science texts
- Full accounts of the history of slavery and civil rights struggles in textbooks
- The inclusion of labor leader Cesar Chavez, civil rights icon Dolores Huerta and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall in curriculum standards
- Accepted methods for teaching multiplication in mathematics textbooks

Limiting Textbook Choices for School Districts

- Censorship hides factual information from students but also limits choices for school districts.
- To stay competitive in the Texas market, publishers do almost anything to get board approval for their textbooks. But they have withdrawn submitted textbooks under SBOE consideration rather than make all of the changes to factually accurate content board members have demanded. Some have decided not even to submit a textbook in some courses, such as health.

ⁱ "SBOE member seeks suitability clause for textbook adoption," The Courier, 4/16/2017, yourconronews.com/news/article/SBOE-member-seeks-suitability-clause-for-textbook-11077283.php