

# Culture Wars in the Classroom: Texas Voters Call for a Cease-Fire

Results of a statewide poll by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research



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## Texas Freedom Network Education Fund Introduction

For more than 15 years, the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund has been warning of the consequences of the damaging “culture wars” raging on the Texas State Board of Education. The contentious debate this spring over what will be taught in social studies classrooms – like previous disputes at the board over science, sex education and even math – has attracted national derision and turned Texas into an educational laughingstock.

These recent battles over science, sex education, and social studies, while serious, are really symptoms of the larger problem – Texas has allowed politicians with personal agendas to write our children’s curriculum, rather than teachers and scholars.

We believe the future of education in our state stands at a crossroads.

Curriculum and textbooks are the building blocks of a quality education. Even the best teacher can be hamstrung by a flawed textbook. And increasingly, education is the key to success in a child’s future – the best jobs now require at least a college degree, often more. It is more important than ever that we provide students with a rigorous education that gives them the best possible preparation for college and the jobs of tomorrow.

But despite the importance of these issues – and the high profile of these curriculum battles in Texas – there has been very little research into public opinion in this area. That is why we invested in a statewide poll of likely Texas voters earlier this spring. This report contains the results of that poll, the first-ever substantive look at where Texans stand on the heavily politicized State Board of Education and other issues that are part of the far-right agenda for education.

The information contained here is rich with important insights and practical advice for policy-makers, political candidates and activists alike. This data also provides guidance as lawmakers evaluate policy changes and persuasive messages that TFNEF and other advocates can use to build public support for critical reforms at the State Board of Education.

One thing is clear – people are fed up with state board members playing politics with curriculum and textbooks, and they are looking for a solution that ends the “culture wars” in our classrooms. If you are one of those people looking to refocus education in Texas on the basics of preparing our children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I invite you to join our *Just Educate* campaign at [www.tfn.org/justeducate](http://www.tfn.org/justeducate).

Kathy Miller  
President, Texas Freedom Network Education Fund  
July, 2010

July 13, 2010

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## Texas Voters Call for a Cease-Fire

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## Overview and Key Findings

While much has been written about the controversy surrounding curriculum changes in Texas public schools, until now we could say very little about where Texas voters actually stand on these issues. New data contained in this report, however, should help provide some clarity to the ongoing debate. Broadly, we can draw some basic, but revealing conclusions from this new data. Texans believe that teachers and experts should set curriculum standards, and they place a high value on a quality education. They dislike the notion that a small group of politicians can project their own personal values and beliefs onto the public school curriculum over the recommendations of teachers and scholars. Moreover, voters oppose the curriculum changes made by the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE), once they have heard a description of the process.

Opposition to politicizing the development of public school curricula is both broad and deep, crossing political, ideological, and geographic lines. Parents of school-age children and even voters who want to see more religious influence in public schools strongly oppose allowing an elected state board to trump the recommendations of teachers and scholars.

Texas voters—regardless of political affiliation or ideological views—agree that politics has no place in developing public school curricula. Voters show strong support for ensuring that teachers and scholars can determine curriculum standards for public schools that provide a high quality education and prepares students for the future, without interference from partisan state board members.

### Key Findings

- **Texas voters believe the public school curriculum should be set by teachers and scholars, not politicians.** Nearly three-quarters of Texas voters say that teachers and academic scholars should be responsible for writing curriculum standards and textbook requirements for Texas' public schools. Only 19 percent prefer that an elected state board make curriculum decisions.
  - **Because they are not following this issue closely, a plurality of voters are undecided about whether they support or oppose the new curriculum standards.** There is great fluidity in this debate, depending on how closely voters are following the issue.
  - **Voters who are closely following the curriculum process are more likely to oppose the standards than those following the proceedings less closely or not at all.** Opposition is driven more by resistance to the politicization of education than by an objection to religious influence in public schools.
  - **Despite the fact that a majority of Texas voters believe that separation of church and state is a key principle of the Constitution, nearly half of voters think religion should play a *larger* role in schools.** In fact, the leading reason for supporting the SBOE efforts is that “religion should be part of school.”
  - **After hearing a description of the curriculum adoption process, a strong majority of Texans oppose the curriculum changes.** Fifty-seven percent of voters oppose the SBOE's
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actions after hearing information about the changes being made to the initial recommendations, while just 29 percent support the revisions. Opponents include some “unlikely bedfellows,” such as moderate Republicans, college-educated men, Independent women, cobbled together with liberals, Democrats, and more secular voters.

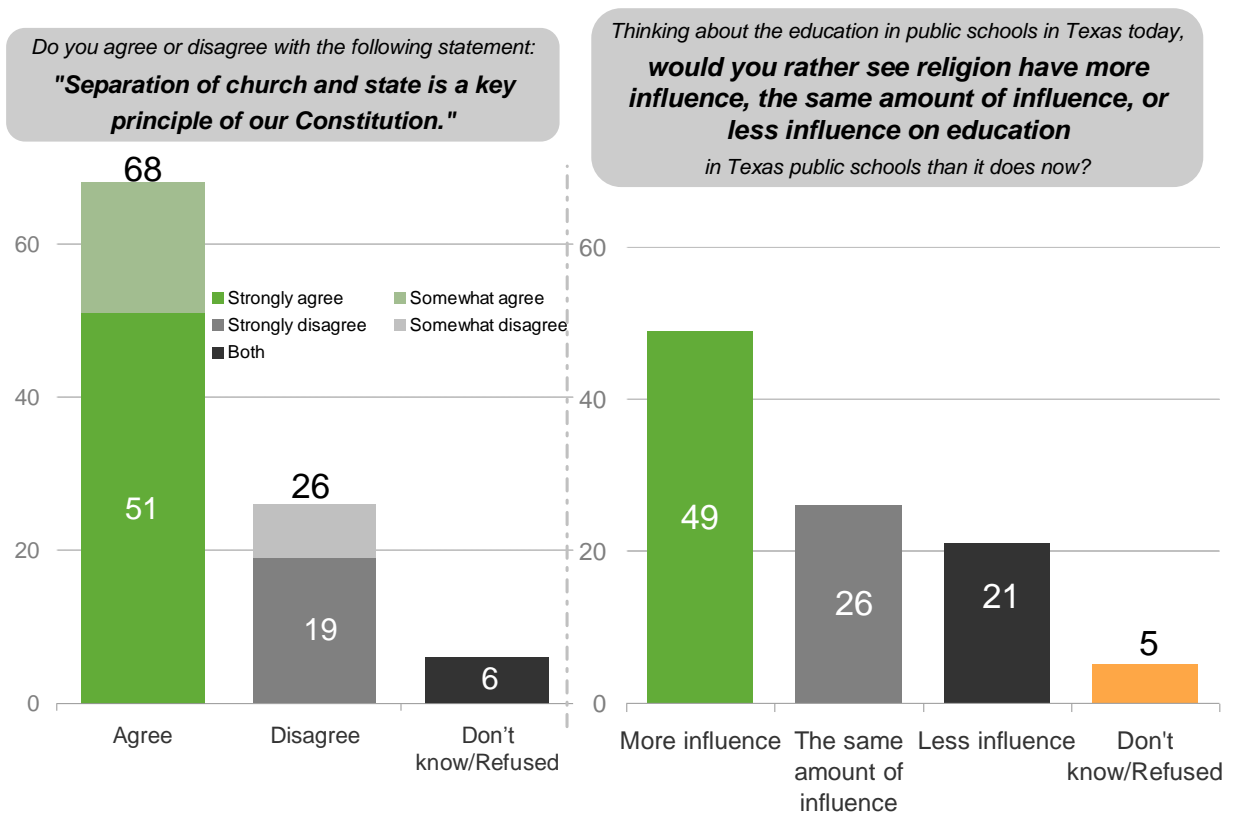
- **Opposition is focused on a politicized process that leaves out core concepts and puts a quality education for Texas students at risk.** Voters strongly object to the SBOE making the curriculum “too political” and trying to promote “their own political agenda.” They believe that experts—not politicians—should be responsible for setting school curricula, and also point to the risk that this new curriculum could pose to high-quality education and academic/career readiness.
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## Separation of Church and State and Religion in Schools: Voters Favor Both

Texas voters come to this debate conflicted to some degree between the concept and practice of religious influence in schools. The majority of Texas voters believe that separation of church and state is a key principle of the Constitution. Sixty-eight percent of likely voters agree that it is a core principle, including 51 percent who strongly agree. Only one-quarter of voters (26 percent) disagree that the separation of church and state is a key principle of the Constitution. Consensus about the First Amendment extends across party lines. Nearly 6-in-10 Republicans (59 percent) believe in the importance of this principle, as well as 76 percent of Democrats and 74 percent of political independents.

While voters believe in the separation of church and state, other data in this survey make plain that this does not mean that Texans want to see religion eradicated from public schools. On the contrary, nearly half of voters think religion should play a *larger* role in schools, and another quarter of voters believe religion has the proper influence now. Some support teaching “traditional” values in schools in order to provide children with sound morals as they enter society. Others believe that schools should teach multiple perspectives—including religious perspectives—to impart critical thinking skills and let children determine their own beliefs.

**Figure 1:** Separation of church and state as a key principle of the Constitution



Importantly, and contrary to conventional wisdom, teaching these “values” in schools is not inconsistent with support for comprehensive sex education—including access to information about condoms (80 percent support)—or protecting the gay and lesbian students from bullying in schools (88 percent). Even 55 percent oppose using public taxpayer dollars to allow students to attend parochial and religious schools. Notably, people who believe that religion should have more influence in schools still support anti-bullying (85 percent) and sex education (71 percent) in public schools.

■ **Figure 2:** Religion and policy

<i>Now I am going to describe several issues. Please tell me whether you support or oppose each one.</i>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Oppose</b>
Requiring public schools to protect all children from bullying, harassment, and discrimination in school, including the children of gay and lesbian parents or teenagers who are gay.	<b>88</b>	<b>9</b>
Teaching about contraception, such as condoms and other birth control, along with abstinence, in high school sex-education classes.	<b>80</b>	<b>19</b>
Using public tax-payer money to fund vouchers to allow some students to attend private schools, including parochial and religious schools.	<b>42</b>	<b>55</b>

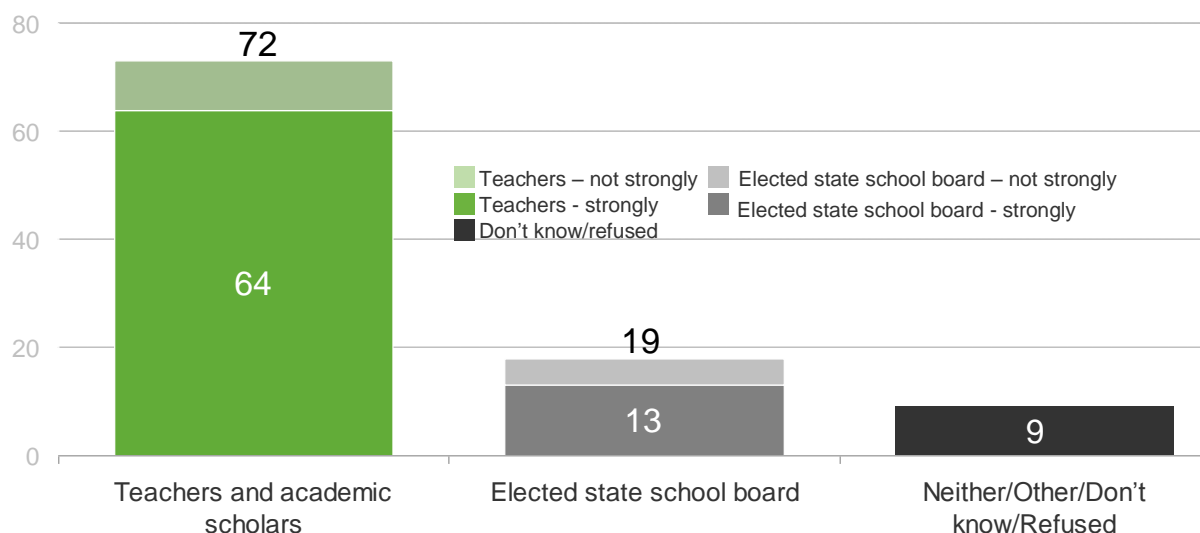
## Experts, Not Politicians, Should Set Curricula

Texas voters believe that teachers and scholars should be responsible for making decisions about curricula in order to achieve the high-quality education public schools need to prepare students for future academic pursuits and careers.

Nearly three-quarters of Texas voters (72 percent) say that teachers and academic scholars should be responsible for writing curriculum standards and textbook requirements for Texas' public schools. Only 19 percent prefer that an elected state board make curriculum decisions.

**Figure 3:** Responsibility for writing curriculum and textbook standards

*Who do you think should be responsible for writing curriculum standards and textbook requirements for Texas' public schools: Teachers and academic scholars OR An elected state school board?*



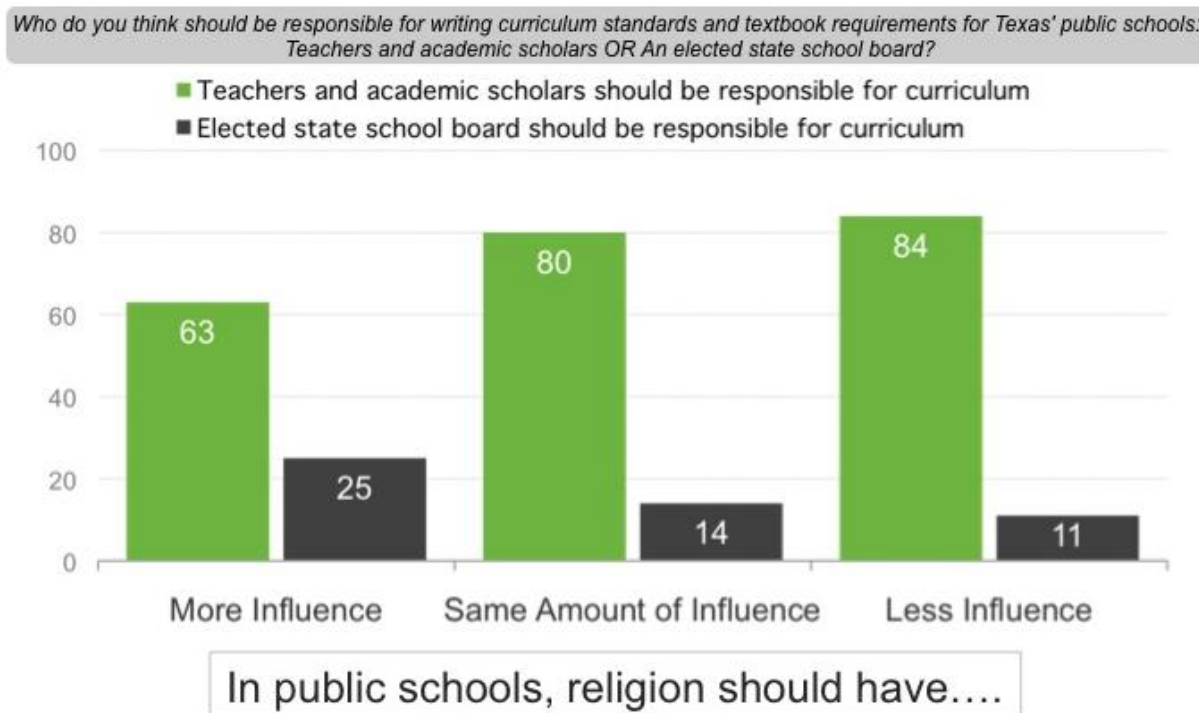
Support for teachers and experts making curriculum decisions is broad and extends across party lines. Democrats overwhelmingly prefer that teachers and experts determine the curriculum (84 percent), but support is also high among self-identified Republicans (63 percent) and political independents (76 percent).

This bipartisan support is also evident among voters who plan to vote for Republican state legislators this year. Currently, Republican candidates hold a significant edge: overall, 54 percent of voters say they will vote for the Republican candidate for state legislator in November, compared to 34 percent who say they will vote for the Democrat. And even among those voters who say they will vote Republican, 63 percent believe that teachers and academic experts should set curricula, compared to just 25 percent who prefer an elected state board.

Voters who want to see more religious influence in schools, among the most conservative blocs of the electorate, also believe teachers and experts are best-suited to be writing curriculum standards. Almost two-thirds of voters (63 percent) who want more religious influence in schools think teachers should set curricula—not an elected school board (25 percent).



**Figure 4:** Support for teachers and scholars setting curricula among those who desire more religious influence in schools



Moreover, the voters who are among the most engaged in schools—parents—also overwhelmingly prefer that experts handle curricula instead of an elected state board. Only 15 percent of parents believe an elected state board should be responsible for writing curriculum standards. Overall, 78 percent of parents prefer that teachers and scholars make curriculum decisions, and 69 percent feel that way strongly.

**Figure 5:** Responsibility for curriculum and textbook standards by party ID and parents

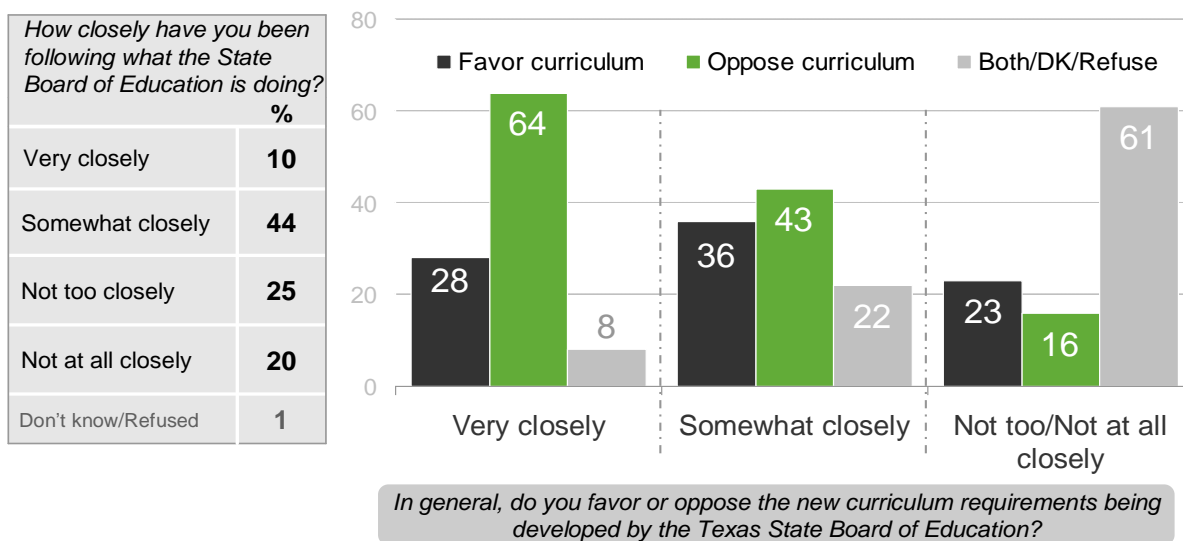
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Parents	Pub. School Parents
Teachers/Academic scholars - Strongly	76	68	53	69	68
Teachers/Academic scholars - Not so strongly	8	8	10	9	9
Elected state school board - Not so strongly	2	6	7	5	4
Elected state school board - Strongly	9	12	17	11	11
Neither/Don't know/Refused	4	6	14	6	8
<b>Teachers/Academic scholars - Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Elected state school board - Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

*Who do you think should be responsible for writing curriculum standards and textbook requirements for Texas' public schools: Teachers and academic scholars OR An elected state school board?*

## Engaged Voters Strongly Oppose the State Board’s Actions

Among Texas voters who are paying “very close” attention to the debate over the state board’s actions, opposition to the SBOE’s new curriculum requirements reaches 64 percent. Among voters who are paying “somewhat close” attention, a plurality of 43 percent oppose the new curriculum requirements. These voters are much more likely to oppose the curriculum than voters who indicate that they are not following the process closely (16 percent oppose).

**Figure 6:** More engaged voters oppose new curriculum



However, few voters are paying close attention to the work of the state board at this point. Although opposition to the revisions is considerable among voters who are closely following the process, that group constitutes only 10 percent of Texas voters. Forty-five percent of voters are following the proceedings “not too closely” or “not at all.”

Interest in this issue seems mostly flat across the electorate; we see a modest rise among older voters relative to younger voters, though this would likely be true of any other political issue as well. Interest drops slightly among Republicans and does not change among parents, including public school parents. Among liberal Protestants and un-labeled Protestants (i.e. those who designate themselves as “other” and those who don’t know their designation), interest jumps appreciably.

**Figure 7:** Engagement in SBOE process among all voters and subgroups

<i>How closely have you been following what the SBOE is doing?</i>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Liberal Protestants</b>	<b>Over age 64</b>	<b>Children in public school</b>	<b>Parents</b>
Very Closely	10	22	11	11	9
Somewhat closely	44	41	48	40	40
Not too closely	25	17	21	28	27
Not at all closely	20	20	18	20	24
Don't know/Refused	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Total Closely</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Not too/not at all</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>51</b>

Given the relative lack of attention to the work of the state board, it is not surprising that views are undeveloped overall. Among all voters, support for the SBOE’s curriculum revisions is nearly evenly split, with 32 percent opposed and 29 percent in favor. A plurality, 35 percent, are unsure about the new standards.

## Information Impacts Curriculum Debate

Giving voters more information about the SBOE's curriculum standards shifts this debate strongly towards opposition to the new curriculum standards. Upon hearing a brief description of the SBOE's process for revising the curriculum, most "undecided" voters and some initially-supportive voters shift to opposing the new curriculum standards. While this description uses neutral language, it highlights the fact that the SBOE is changing a document created by teachers and experts, adding topics that promote particular religious and political views, and removing commonly-accepted teachings from the standards.

### Description of SBOE Curriculum Revision Process:

*Every ten years, the Texas State Board of Education oversees a review of curriculum requirements for the state's public schools. Teachers, scholars, and curriculum experts make initial recommendations, and then the elected Board members revise the curriculum. This year, the majority on the Board has made more than 300 changes to the 120-page document of initial recommendations. Many of these changes include adding topics to the curriculum that promote religious views and conservative political opinions. For example, the revisions include removing commonly-accepted language, facts, and descriptions from social studies and science requirements because some members of the Board hold conflicting political or religious perspectives.*

Before hearing the description, 32 percent of voters oppose the new curriculum requirements and 29 percent support them, with a plurality saying they don't know how they feel about the changes. After hearing the description above, Texas voters oppose the changes by a convincing 57 to 29 percent margin (14 percent "don't know"), a 24-point net shift toward opposing the SBOE's new requirements.

Learning about the state board's revisions increases opposition across partisan, racial, and religious lines. Among voters most likely to oppose the state board's actions initially, strong majorities oppose the actions after hearing information. Opposition also grows dramatically among base voters, including Democrats and liberals, and voters in the middle of the electorate, including independents, Catholics, and older white voters.

Most striking is that, even among the most conservative blocs of the electorate, voters split evenly or tilt slightly toward opposition of the state board's revisions to the public school curriculum after hearing this information.

**Figure 8:** Opinions on Curriculum Changes, Pre- and Post-Information

	Initial stance on SBOE revisions		Stance after description of SBOE revisions	
	Total Oppose (%)	Total Support (%)	Total Oppose (%)	Total Support (%)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Base Opposition:</b>				
Democrats	44	28	71	20
Protestant Liberals	42	21	78	18
White voters ages 18-29	40	49	64	34
<b>Swing Audiences:</b>				
Independents	40	21	63	22
Catholics	29	36	48	35
Non-college women	33	28	62	27
Hispanic men	41	29	62	34
White voters ages 50+	30	24	54	28
<b>Right Divided:</b>				
Republicans	21	35	43	39
Conservatives	23	34	41	40
Fundamentalists	26	26	46	36
Evangelicals	16	39	43	46
Observant <sup>1</sup>	26	33	47	37
Hispanic observant	30	32	42	45

<sup>1</sup> This includes any respondent who indicates that he or she attends religious services at least once a week.

## Reasons Voters Oppose or Favor New Curriculum

Most voters—especially those who support the curriculum revisions—believe that religion has some role to play in schools, even when they also value the principle of separation of church and state. But they are more divided about the limits of religious influence and the specific policy and curriculum decisions it should impact. In the case of the SBOE’s revision process, opponents of the revisions worry that personal political agendas have hijacked the curriculum process, while supporters of the revisions are more singularly focused on increased religious influence in schools.

Opponents of the revisions to the curriculum note that the revisions are based on personal opinions (21 percent) and are too political or conservative (13 percent), while 12 percent bemoan the lack of experts involved in the process or that the SBOE board members are not qualified. Another 16 percent are concerned about the distortion of history. A smaller number oppose the changes because they believe that religion should not play a role (or should be a limited influence) in public schools. These voters oppose any religious content (11 percent) and are concerned about the violation of the separation of church and state (6 percent). Additionally, 3 percent say that teachings should include all religions and not be limited to a specific faith.

Supporters of the new curriculum, on the other hand, are largely convinced of the need for more religious values in a child’s education—27 percent name religious views as the reason for supporting the changes, including 17 percent who specifically say that religion should be part of school. Another 12 percent say they want to bring back balance in education, to correct a liberal bias. Another 10 percent want to restore moral or traditional values.

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**Figure 9:** Reasons voters favor and oppose new curriculum

*Please describe why you FAVOR the new curriculum requirements being developed by the Texas State Board of Education?*

	(percent mentioning)	%*
<b>Religious Views</b>		<b>27</b>
Religion should be part of school		17
Country founded on Christian/Religious Beliefs		8
Right to practice religion		3
Country would be better off/no religion reason for so many problems		2
<b>Conservative Views</b>		<b>20</b>
Keep from going too far left/Liberal Bias in public schools		12
Restoring balance/back to traditions		6
Should teach morals/morals are important		4
<b>Change is needed</b>		<b>13</b>
Curriculum needs updating		7
Teach both sides		6
In the best interest of the kids		6
Elected Board		5
Need more info		3
Not in favor		4
Don't know		11
Other		12

*Please describe why you OPPOSE the new curriculum requirements being developed by the Texas State Board of Education?*

	(percent mentioning)	%*
<b>Based on Personal Opinions</b>		<b>21</b>
<b>Limit Religion in School</b>		<b>17</b>
Oppose religious content/Should not be taught in school		11
Violates separation of church and state		6
<b>Distortion of History</b>		<b>16</b>
<b>Too Political/Too Conservative</b>		<b>13</b>
<b>Not Academics/Not Qualified</b>		<b>12</b>
<b>Forcing Views on Kids</b>		<b>8</b>
<b>Works well the way it is</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>Should Cover all religions, not one</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Don't know/refused</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>Do not oppose/favor it</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>Other</b>		<b>10</b>



## Important Constituencies: Emerging Demographic Groups and Strange Bedfellows

Demographic trends and changes in Texas have the potential to shape the political environment in the state. Several growing blocs of voters—each of whom tend to be rooted in different places on the ideological and political spectrums—have the opportunity to have a considerable impact on the direction of the debate about how best to develop curriculum and textbooks.

These include:

- **Voters living in suburban and exurban counties.** Texas has some of the fastest growing suburban counties in the nation,<sup>2</sup> which tend to be more politically conservative than urban areas as well as the state overall. However, while these voters are more conservative, they are relatively similar to the rest of the state in their attitudes about the influence of politics on public school curriculum standards.
- **Youth Voters.** Voters between the ages of 18-29 tend to be more ideologically progressive and serve as a counter-weight to the more conservative blocs of the electorate. These voters are less religious generally and, while less likely to be aware of the SBOE debate, are more likely to oppose the Board's actions throughout the survey.
- **Hispanic voters.** The number of Hispanic voters in the state continues to climb, and these voters emerge as a key swing group. Initially, Hispanic voters oppose the SBOE's actions at the same levels as other Texans, and opposition grows strongly after hearing more information about the changes.
- **Unlikely Bedfellows.** The debate about who should determine curricula splits even the most dedicated conservative voting blocs. But some groups of voters who are typically conservative-leaning are even more divided over this issue than would be expected. These are the "Unlikely Bedfellows" of the debate because—on issues involving the curriculum—they espouse views more typically associated with moderate and Democratic-leaning factions.

### Voters from the fastest growing suburban counties

Overall, suburban voters are more conservative than voters in the state, and certainly more conservative than voters in urban areas. Six-in-10 say they will vote for a Republican candidate for the State Legislature this year, compared to 54 percent of all voters and 47 percent of voters in large metro areas; fewer identify as Democrats (18 percent versus 30 percent of all voters and 40 percent in large metro areas). They are not moderate: 39 percent identify as "strong" Republicans compared to 31 percent of voters overall.

Despite this level of conservatism, suburban voters are no more religious than voters statewide (52 percent attend services weekly, versus 53 percent of all voters) and share similar views about the SBOE's curriculum revisions and depoliticizing the curriculum setting process. Like

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<sup>2</sup> "Texas Has High Number of Fastest Growing Counties," *Austin Business Journal*; March 27, 2009; <http://austin.bizjournals.com/austin/stories/2009/03/23/daily61.html>.

Texas voters overall, 49 percent of these suburban voters believe that religion should have a greater influence in schools, but 56 percent oppose the SBOE's process of changing the curriculum after hearing the description.

### Young Voters Ages 18-29

Young voters ages 18-29 are more likely to say religion should have less influence than more influence in schools (31 percent versus 21 percent overall). Eighty-seven percent support teaching comprehensive sex education in schools. Young adults also overwhelmingly support having experts determine curriculum standards rather than an elected state board, even more so than older voters (83 percent prefer experts compared to 72 percent of voters overall).

Some of this support is not surprising given that younger voters, even in Texas, tend to be more ideologically progressive and less religious than older voters. For instance, one-quarter of young voters call themselves "liberal," compared to just 16 percent of voters statewide. And while more than half of voters (53 percent) indicate that they attend church regularly, only 41 percent of young voters are regular churchgoers. In fact, 18 percent of young adults claim no specific faith or religion, compared to just 7 percent of voters over 50.

Despite this ideological and religious divide, younger voters begin more supportive of the SBOE's curriculum revisions than older voters.<sup>3</sup> Part of this initial support may actually be due to modal differences in the survey design (i.e. web platform) or because young voters are unfamiliar with debate; the precipitous drop in support for the revised curriculum following the description of the SBOE's revision process provides some support for the latter hypothesis. Opposition to the SBOE's revisions grows substantially after the description of the SBOE's process.

### Hispanic Voters

There is a great deal of contradiction among Hispanic voters in Texas on issues of curricula and religion. In a state dominated by Protestants, Hispanic voters bring a Catholic influence to this debate. Over half of Hispanic voters (56 percent) identify as Catholic, compared to 15 percent of white voters. However, Hispanic voters' faith does not always drive their policy stances and attitudes. Hispanic voters are no more likely to want greater religious influence in public schools (46 percent, compared to 49 percent of voters statewide). And, despite Catholic doctrine opposing birth control, 85 percent of Hispanic voters support comprehensive sex education that includes teaching about condoms and other forms of birth control.

In the debate over the SBOE's curriculum process, Hispanic voters *oppose* the revisions in similar proportions to the overall electorate: 33 percent of Hispanic voters initially oppose the revisions compared to 32 percent of voters overall. Moreover, opposition to the state board's actions grows to 55 percent after hearing information.

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<sup>3</sup> Survey mode may have contributed to why few young adults provided a "don't know" response to these questions. Young adults who completed the survey on the phone were more likely to respond with "don't know" than those who completed the survey on the web.

**Figure 10:** Emerging Demographic Groups on Key Measures

	Total	Seven Fastest Growing Counties	Youth ages 18-29	Hispanic Voters
<b><i>Would you rather see religion have more influence, the same amount of influence, or less influence on education in Texas public schools?</i></b>				
More influence	49	49	35	46
The same amount of influence	26	24	32	31
Less influence	21	21	31	22
<b><i>Who should be responsible for curriculum standards/textbook requirements?</i></b>				
Teachers and academic scholars	72	69	83	73
An elected school board	19	20	15	23
<b><i>Initial Stance on SBOE revisions</i></b>				
Total Favor	29	26	50	36
Total Oppose	32	32	40	33
Don't know/refused	35	38	9	30
<b><i>Stance after description of SBOE revisions</i></b>				
Total Favor	29	30	37	37
Total Oppose	57	56	61	55
Don't know/refused	14	14	2	8

### Unlikely Bedfellows

Opponents of the state board’s actions find surprising allies among a number of voters who are traditionally conservative leaning, but who are more opposed to the right’s efforts to inject politics into the curriculum process than other conservative blocs. These voters, including younger men, liberal to moderate Republicans, and non-“born again” Christians, are “Unlikely Bedfellows” here as they espouse views typically associated with more moderate and Democratic-leaning factions. These voters tend to support having teachers and experts write the curriculum, and they oppose the SBOE’s recent machinations and the resulting curriculum, as the following highlights:

**Young college-educated men**

- Seventy-nine percent believe teachers and academic scholars should be responsible for the curriculum
- Thirty-eight percent initially oppose the new curriculum.
- After the description, 56 percent oppose the SBOE's revisions.

**Liberal/moderate Republicans**

- Seventy-six percent believe teachers and academic scholars should be responsible for the curriculum
- Thirty percent initially oppose the new curriculum.
- After the description, 59 percent oppose the SBOE's revisions.

**Non-“Born Again” Christians**

- Seventy-six percent believe teachers and academic scholars should be responsible for the curriculum
  - Thirty-six percent initially oppose the new curriculum.
  - After the description, 62 percent oppose the SBOE's revisions.
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## Key Lessons on Messages and Framing

The research unambiguously recommends two reinforcing themes for this debate. These themes marshal the belief that experts should be responsible for setting school curricula, as well as pointing to the need for high-quality education that promotes academic and career readiness. The latter theme is also helpful in letting voters know that there is a real cost to Texas' children with the state board's political intrusion.

### Primary Theme

Texans want teachers and scholars, not politicians, to make decisions about the public school curriculum.

### Secondary Theme

Public schools need to focus on providing a high quality education, with standards developed by teachers and experts, to prepare students for college and their future careers.

In addition to the above themes, two specific messages emerge as especially persuasive. As is consistent with the rest of the research, these messages focus on depoliticizing the curriculum process.

**Non-partisan Board Message:** The Texas State Board of Education's process for revising the public school curriculum is too political. School board members are elected and just try to promote their own political agenda. Politics should be kept out of curriculum decisions and requirements should be made by curriculum experts and teachers.

**Experts Message:** The Texas State Board of Education disregarded advice from experts in history, science, sociology, or economics when they removed commonly-accepted language, facts, and descriptions from the social studies and science requirements initially proposed by teachers. Changes to the public school curriculum should be based on academic scholarship, not the opinions of a few politicians who happen to sit on the state school board.

In the realm of public opinion, we believe that reforming the curriculum process is a winnable fight. Even though our polling showed more people intend to vote for Republicans in legislative races in November, most voters—including some political conservatives and religious voters—believe the SBOE has overstepped its bounds. To win it, the debate must be framed around the goal of providing kids with a high quality education and removing politics from curriculum decisions. The strength of these messages and the general public opinion on these issues suggest that state legislators can likely take up the SBOE reform issue without fear of political pitfalls and, perhaps, even use it to their advantage.

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## Appendix: Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner designed and administered a statewide survey of 2010 likely voters in Texas with a web oversample of young people and a phone oversample of suburban/exurban voters. The survey reached a total of 972 likely voters in Texas. The survey was conducted May 4 – 12, 2010. The margin of sampling error for the total sample is +/- 4.0 percentage points.

The survey used a multi-modal design to reach a representative sample of likely voters in Texas, with an oversample of the seven fastest-growing suburban counties (on the phone) and an oversample young people conducted online:

- The phone portion of the survey reached 601 likely voters in the state of Texas. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner employs a hybrid voter screen to determine likely voters that is based on vote history from the voter file when available, self-reported vote history when vote history is not available, and stated intention to vote in 2010. Likelihood of voting for each combination of these variables is estimated based on an analysis of data from the last like-election in 2006, and only those voters with a high probability of voting are included in the sample. The vote history tables combine data from the voter file for those respondents who are on the file and uses self-reported vote history for those who are not on the file.
- The oversample of young people was conducted online and used an opt-in web panel. It included 219 young people ages 18-29 who are likely to vote in the 2010 general election. These respondents were randomly selected from a web panel designed to be representative at a state level. Internet surveys use, by necessity, non-probability based sampling methods and these results need to be considered with that limitation in mind.
- The second oversample was conducted via phone and consisted of 152 suburban/exurban voters. This consisted of the seven fastest-growing counties in the state of Texas (Collin, Comal, Fort Bend, Hays, Montgomery, Rockwall, and Williamson).

The data were weighted by gender, age, education, and region to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The sample size with these weights applied is 601.

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The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund supports research and education efforts that promote religious freedom and individual liberties.



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