

THE TORCH

TEXAS EAGLE FORUM

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Make Texas Education Great Again

By Cindi Castilla, President - *Texas Eagle Forum*



Who else dreams of a public education system that propels young Texans toward a self-determined and success-filled future, specifically an education closer to that of the great thinkers of the past? I imagine we all do, which is why I am thankful to share with you an exciting opportunity happening this month for Texas public schools.

Many years ago, the State of Texas set the national standard for K-12 textbook material. Some readers may even recall those TEF members who served as volunteer “readers,” pouring over proposed textbooks, marking them for accuracy. Since Texas educates about 10% of our Nation’s children, textbook publishers would correct the books to match Texas standards and values. These efforts resulted in the Texas version of textbooks being used across the country, as publishers did not want to go through the expense of producing and printing two versions of every textbook.

But all this changed in 2011 when the state legislature passed SB 6, a bill which decentralized the selection and purchase of educational resources for public schools, limiting the oversight and quality control

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our State Board of Education (SBOE) had over public education. The most dramatic change, however, was a linguistic one. SB 6 swapped out the word “textbook” for the term “instructional material” (IM), opening the door for BigTech’s big entrance into Texas Public Schools.

Technology flooded into our classrooms, unhindered and unchecked. School districts could now choose any product they wanted, and many chose online products, which made it difficult for parents to monitor what their children were being exposed to in the name of “education.” Public education in Texas would never be the same.



A Brief History of Politics in Education

The movement away from a high-quality and effective education started over 100 years ago, during the Industrial Revolution. In the late 1800s, public education increasingly began to abandon classical learning methods and began, instead, to emphasize practical skills and shifting the goal of education towards training workers for specific roles in factories and skilled labor occupations. At the same time, as Marxist-led cultural revolutions were sweeping across Russia and Europe, education became a tool for social transformation, and schools focused on indoctrinating students with revolutionary ideas counter to the intellectual and cultural heritage of Western Civilization. This was no secret at the time. Indeed, it was the communist Fredrich Engels who wrote, “The education of all children, from the moment they can get along without a mother’s care, shall be in state institutions.”

During the 1960’s Civil Rights Era, the movement toward secularism gained momentum. At the time, advocates claimed that taking the Bible and prayer out of the public schools would free-up more time in class for academics. Even the Supreme Court produced several opinions in support of secularizing education.

However, more recent Supreme Court decisions actually support the Bible’s place in public education as worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. While mandatory devotional readings are still prohibited, so is hostility toward the Christian religion. It is acknowledged that the concept of a wall between faith and government is wrong, and that the push towards secularism in the mid-20th century didn’t improve education so much as it contributed to the moral degradation of our society and the dumbing down of America’s school children.

By the end of the 2023-2024 school year, this confluence of history and politics culminated with about half of public-school children in Texas reading below grade-level - some multiple grade levels below, suggesting some students may even be illiterate. Furthermore, our children are being taught a revised version of “history” rather than the accurate one their parents learned. Parents can no longer help their children with math as newly invented methods to add, subtract, multiply, and divide are making basic arithmetic exhausting and nonsensical.

In addition to the gutting of educational achievements, public school children are being taught to rely on their feelings instead of facts; being exposed to the lies of gender theory; being subjected to the student violence; and being fed the lies of the anti-American, race-baiting rhetoric rampant in many districts across our State. Indeed, new math, revisionist history, failed reading methods, and subversive indoctrination seem to be deliberately inserted to further divide parents and children.

Taking Education Back from Big-Tech

During the recent 88th legislative session, the Texas House passed House Bill 1605 (HB 1605), returning control over instructional materials to the SBOE. HB 1605 allows the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to purchase IM directly from vendors and, in turn, make them available to school districts. And while school districts are not required to use TEA-purchased materials, there is a financial incentive to do so. Additionally, HB 1605 requires school districts to allow parental review of instructional materials, either in-person or through an online portal. Gov. Greg Abbott weighed-in at the time saying the new law “will bring students back to the basics of education ... [and] allow our students to better understand the connection of history, art, community, literature, and religion on pivotal events.”

HB 1605 also requires TEA to obtain or develop IMs to include in a digital library of educational resources, much in the same way a private school might maintain a library of approved textbooks for teachers to reference. Any newly obtained or developed resource is reviewed and approved by the elected representatives on the SBOE and is either owned by the State of Texas, in the public domain, or

considered “free use” under intellectual property laws.

Following the passage of HB 1605, a specially-appointed group of experts working directly for Texas Commissioner of Education, Mike Morath (who has consistently asked our legislators, under oath, to bring textbooks back to the classroom), gathered and developed a game-changing Reading/Language Arts (RLA) curriculum for grades K-5. According to the TEA, “A highly transparent, three-month public feedback period began in May 2024, giving the public an opportunity to review and offer comments on the proposed materials. The SBOE also welcomed several hours of public testimony at its September meeting where additional feedback on the product was received.”

As a result, in October 2024, TEA issued a press release announcing the release of Bluebonnet Learning, “a new brand for Texas state-owned textbooks... [A] collection of high-quality math and elementary reading instructional materials, Bluebonnet Learning is designed to improve student academic outcomes by building foundational skills in reading and mathematics and providing valuable curricular and instructional support for Texas teachers.”

This new curriculum contains high-quality lessons delivered in printed form. Indeed, it is written and designed to be printed. The TEA will provide printed versions to all districts that choose to use it. Contrast this with other curricula currently being considered which are only available online and are littered with distracting and potentially risky link buttons all over the student’s computer screen. Even homeschooling parents can use the digital version of Bluebonnet Learning for free. Additionally, parents will be able to see the upcoming lessons through a parent portal. They can even learn along with their child, if they did not get a great education.

A Golden Opportunity for Texas Public Education

Bluebonnet Learning materials contain no progressive indoctrination. Instead, it teaches phonics for reading; uses classical education concepts; includes rich literature to inspire personal reading; brings back cursive beginning in second grade; and keeps children off of screens for the subjects developed to-date (K-5 RLA and Math K-12).

Contrary to media coverage surrounding this announcement, the Bluebonnet Learning K-5 RLA curriculum does not teach religion, but it does contain biblical stories and poetry. Any educator who values a rich education agrees that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary value and undeniable contributions to the history and development of Western Civilization. The Bluebonnet teacher guides do a great job of helping teachers who may not be familiar with the Bible to understand how to lead these lessons, providing them with historical context and why this lesson is using a biblical text.

Some critics are taking aim at the literary sources selected for read-aloud, arguing that the stories and books are too difficult for younger students to understand. TEF disagrees. Exposing students to rich read-aloud literature that is above their reading level is key to raising well-educated children. It enhances their vocabulary, their imagination and their love of reading. (We would advise reading several grade levels above a child’s level – but this is a great start!)

The Bottomline on Bluebonnet

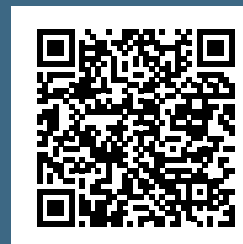
It is worth repeating here: No district is forced to use the Bluebonnet Learning Curriculum. Local control still exists. Districts have a choice in what they use, and they can reject particular lessons if they are not a good fit for the students in their schools.

It is also important to emphasize that, contrary to much of the unsubstantiated alarmism surrounding this new curriculum, Bluebonnet Learning has no connection to the United Nations. It is stored in an online educational resource (OER) library, but Texas owns it. By law, it can only be changed via a majority vote of our SBOE.

We have a critical opportunity to turn things around for students and parents in Texas. Bluebonnet Learning must have SBOE approval. Hearings begin November 18th and the final vote is scheduled for November 22nd. We need your help to get this passed!

Let’s help Texas deliver a non-woke, high-quality, historically accurate, phonics-based reading and language arts curriculum to grades K-5. Call your SBOE representative today, and ask him or her to support this great curriculum for Texas children! ●●●

To learn more about Bluebonnet Learning, visit the Texas Education Agency website using the secure QR-code below.



<https://tea.texas.gov/instructional-materials/bluebonnet-learning>

Then help Bluebonnet Learning get approved for Texas public schools.

Contact your SBOE Representative Today!

Election Integrity - There's Still Work to be Done - After former President Donald Trump won the election in a landslide, President Joe Biden claimed election integrity is an issue of the past. Legacy media outlets have been pushing a similar message. But election integrity advocates beg to differ. Trump's massive turnout truly did make this election "too big to rig," but that does not mean it was free from bad actors trying to rig it. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, officials found broken security seals on multiple tabulators before polls closed, causing officials to recount 31,000 ballots. In Pennsylvania, multiple counties turned away Republican poll watchers on Election Day before the RNC intervened, and the poll watchers gained access. And in Centre County, officials were planning to stop counting ballots overnight but reversed course when the RNC sued. While this election seemed more straightforward overall because it was a "landslide," election integrity advocates need to focus on cleaning voter rolls, passing the SAVE Act to require proof of citizenship to vote, and requiring voter ID — including for overseas voting. SOURCE: Logan Washburn, "No, Trump's Too-Big-to-Rig Victory Doesn't 'Lay to Rest' Election Integrity Issues," *The Federalist*, November 7, 2024

Sweden Warns Parents About Screen Time for Kids - Now that smartphones and personal computers have been ubiquitous for a full decade, emerging research is helping people across the globe begin to understand how these technologies affect human growth and development. Studies of screen time and its effect on infants demonstrate a correlation between the number of daily hours of screen time and developmental delays in gross motor skills and speech, and poorer executive functioning. New guidance from Sweden's Public Health Agency suggests that children between the ages of 2 and 5 should have no more than an hour of screen time, including watching television, video chatting, and playing games on phones and tablets; and children under the age of 2 should not have any. As Sweden's public health minister emphasized, the concern is not only with the time spent on technology, but also with the inadequate time left to do everything else that is necessary for health and well-being. When screen time is eliminated or reduced, children have more time to be outside, interact in person, and, critically, sleep. SOURCE: Anna Kaladish Reynolds, "Sweden Warns Parents: Quit Plopping Your Baby in Front of Brain-Rotting Screens," *The Federalist*, November 8, 2024

K-12 Choice for Rural Texas Students - While the Texas economy is racing full speed ahead, the state's K-12 education has stalled and is in decline, with some of the worst cases in rural areas. Rural students in Texas saw declines approximately three times larger than the national average of their peers in both eighth-grade math and eighth-grade reading since 2007. But Texas families recognize the need for reform. Last fall, a survey by *The Dallas Morning News* and the University of Texas at Tyler found that 60 percent of Texas support school choice policies. This support is particularly strong among rural Republicans in Texas, according to the report. When families have many options to choose from, district schools have a strong incentive to improve. SOURCE: "From Surviving to Thriving: K-12 Choice and Opportunity for Rural Texas Students," The Heritage Foundation, August 15, 2023

GREAT AMERICAN QUOTE

*"Adore God;
reverence and cherish your parents;
love your neighbor as yourself,
and your country more than life."*

- Thomas Jefferson

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

*"The memory is the first faculty
which opens in the minds
of children. Of how much
consequence, then, it must be
to impress it with the great
truths of Christianity before it is
preoccupied with less interesting
subjects."*

- Benjamin Rush
Signatory to the Declaration of
Independence

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