

## Four on school board push Bible curriculum

### Expert: E-mail to school districts 'jaw-dropping'; lawsuits predicted

By **GARY SCHARRER**  
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AUSTIN — Several state Board of Education members are encouraging public school districts to use a particular Bible curriculum that some experts predict will land them in court if they do.

"It's absolutely jaw-dropping," said Mark Chancey, a professor of religious studies at Southern Methodist University, referring to the e-mail circulated by state Board of Education members Terri Leo, R-Spring, Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands, Cynthia Dunbar, R-Richmond, and Gail Lowe, R-Lampasas.

Local schools should decide which Bible curriculum to offer, they said in the e-mail to school administrators and school boards.

"We recognize, however, that the curriculum provided by the National Council On Bible Curriculum in Public Schools has been implemented successfully in numerous school districts within the state of Texas for years," the e-mail said.

Chancey, who has studied the curriculum,

characterized the course as the teaching of "a religious right political advocacy group trying to promote the role of conservative Christianity in public life."

About 11 Texas school districts used the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools courses in varying degrees during the 2005-06 school year, Chancey said, when he studied the curriculum. Chancey is chairman of SMU's department of religious studies.

### Backers say it's valid

Texas lawmakers last year approved legislation making it easier for public school districts to teach a Bible course starting next year.

The e-mail was an effort to "inform and reaffirm that this curriculum has been around for a number of years and has always satisfied the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills)," Lowe said. Leo, Cargill and Dunbar did not respond to telephone calls seeking comment Friday.

The four members told school officials, "It makes logical sense to select a curriculum that has already been tested and proven within the field."

The e-mail said they "believe the curriculum provided by the National Council On Bible Curriculum In Public Schools meets the academic requirements set forth by both the State Board of Education and the Texas Legislature, and could be implemented successfully by local school districts."

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But Chancey and officials of the Texas Freedom Network disputed that assertion.

### How to teach it

Last March, the Ector County Independent School District ended a lawsuit with a settlement requiring the Odessa-based school system to drop the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools course.

Lowe said it's possible a teacher might have taught the curriculum inappropriately and believes the course material itself is sound.

But Chancey said the curriculum "reflects a bias towards conservative Protestant perspectives of the Bible at the expense of other perspectives. Basically, this course promotes certain religious views over all others."

A Florida judge also ruled against the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools 10 years ago, he said.

"They are promoting a Bible class curriculum that's going to get schools sued," said Dan Quinn of the Texas Freedom Network, an Austin group that promotes religious freedom and individual liberties.

"It's just reckless to mislead school districts and pretend that this curriculum is appropriate," he said. "This curriculum puts school districts in the role of favoring and promoting particular religious perspectives that are simply not shared by everyone."

Lowe said, "The Texas Freedom Network likes to predict lawsuits and likes to stir up trouble."

[gscharrer@express-news.net](mailto:gscharrer@express-news.net)

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