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## Board officials like Bible curriculum

Gary Scharrer - Express-News

AUSTIN — Several State Board of Education members are encouraging public school districts to use a particular Bible curriculum that some experts predict would land them in court.

“It's absolutely jaw dropping,” Mark Chancey, a professor of religious studies at Southern Methodist University, said of an e-mail circulated by board 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,” they 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, said Chancey, chairman of SMU's department of religious studies.

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 requests for comment. The four State Board of Education members told school officials, “It makes logical sense to select a curriculum that has already been tested and proven within the field.”

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

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's course.

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

But Chancey said the curriculum “reflects a bias toward conservative Protestant perspectives of the Bible at the expense of other perspectives.”

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 organization 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.”

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