

Education board leader unhappy with proposed reading curriculum standards

Education board leader critical of rewrite, prefers update of rejected plan

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By TERRENCE STUTZ / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN – The chairman of the State Board of Education said Monday that he is ready to junk a massive rewrite of the state's English and reading curriculum standards for public schools and replace it with an update of an alternative plan originally rejected by the board more than a decade ago.

Board Chairman Don McLeroy, R-College Station, said a proposed curriculum plan for English and reading classes – drafted by scores of teachers and curriculum experts over the last two years – is not acceptable and he will urge other board members to reject the plan at a meeting Wednesday.

He said he will seek board support for an alternative proposal that sets more specific guidelines for what English teachers should teach, including lists of books and passages that should be read by all students in those classes.

The alternative document is similar to a proposal that was rejected by the board in 1997 after the state's education commissioner said it was overly specific and would infringe on the ability of teachers to tailor classes for their students.

But Mr. McLeroy said the updated alternative plan is the best approach for Texas schools.

"It think it will lead to much better textbooks," he said.

The curriculum standards are supposed to lay out what students should be taught in English and reading classes. They also provide the basis for questions asked on student achievement tests – such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills – and for material that must be included in textbooks purchased by the state.

Regarding the curriculum standards that have been drafted by panels of educators over the last two years – capped by the recent hiring of a consultant who was paid \$85,000 by the state to complete the work – Mr. McLeroy said the results were "very disappointing."

"I was hoping it would be a lot better. But frankly, the standards they came up with are inadequate," he said.

Some board members questioned the 11th-hour effort to scuttle the original proposal on the eve of its possible adoption by the education board. The board has been discussing the English curriculum standards since last summer.

Board member Geraldine Miller, R-Dallas, said it would be unfair to ask board members to vote on a lengthy proposal that they just received in the past few days.

"We've not had a chance to review, and our experts have not had a chance to review it," she said.
"It basically disregards everything we've done over the past two years."

