

Texas curriculum compromise in works

Education board will form subcommittee to hash out differences on language arts materials.

By [Laura Heinauer](#)

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State officials revising language arts curriculum standards for Texas' 4.6 million public school students decided Wednesday to move forward with input from supporters of a controversial alternate plan that was rejected 10 years ago during the last revision process.

Wednesday's decision follows a recent effort by State Board of Education Chairman Don McLeroy, R-College Station, to get fellow board members to scrap two years of work by a board-appointed committee of educators and education experts in favor of the alternate plan.



[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Don McLeroy



[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Mary Helen Berlanga



[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Patricia Hardy

McLeroy said he was disappointed with the committee's standards because they lacked clear direction on the content of instruction. The alternative plan has a reading list, with an emphasis on the classics, in addition to instruction on spelling, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary.

Opponents said the standards preferred by McLeroy and other conservatives on the board are rigid and out of date. Critics of McLeroy's efforts included more than a dozen educators who testified in front of the board Wednesday that the alternate plan focuses only on isolated skills and limits students' reading experiences.

The board will now form a subcommittee that will consist of members who favor the alternate proposal, those who favor the proposal from the board's original appointed committee and education consultants StandardsWork, a Washington, D.C.-based group that was paid \$85,000 for its help in developing the committee-based curriculum proposal.

"I think this is a good compromise that gives all people, all parties the right to have their voices heard," said board member Patricia Hardy, R-Fort Worth.

The state's curriculum standards decide what is in Texas textbooks and define what is taught in the state's classrooms. They also have an impact on what is on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

McLeroy's alternate proposal, the primary author of which is retired teacher Donna Garner, was rejected by the state board about 10 years ago because it was too specific.

The alternate plan appears to have the support of as many as seven of the 15-member education board, several of whom said the committee's proposal was vague and repetitive.

Several board members seemed troubled that established processes for the development of curriculum standards were being changed. The board will also review the state's science curriculum, including how evolution will be taught in public schools, later this year.

"If we're doing it now, are we going to do it in science?" asked board member Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi, one of three board members who voted against the compromise. "Are we going to do it in other subject matters?"

The board expects a final version of the new language arts requirements at the end of March and plans to vote on the standards at the end of May.

lheinauer@statesman.com; 445-3694

