

Texas English teachers fight board-mandated reading lists

07:38 PM CDT on Wednesday, March 26, 2008

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AUSTIN — Scores of English teachers urged the State Board of Education on Wednesday to reject proposed curriculum standards that would spell out what literary works their students should read, insisting they are best suited to make those decisions.

Educators from North Texas and across the state said board members should listen to teachers before they adopt curriculum standards for English that will remain in place for the next decade, influencing not only what is taught in the classroom but also providing the basis for state tests and textbooks used in public schools.

Carrollton-Farmers Branch English teacher Elsa Anderson said a board proposal to establish reading lists for English and reading classes is a mistake and would “tie teachers’ hands and deprive them of making decisions about books that are best for their students.”

Ms. Anderson, representing the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, said the book titles included in the board proposal — most of them classics — are “extremely limited in diversity” and would have a negative impact on the reading achievement of minority students.

Cynthia Tyroff of the Northside school district in San Antonio, also representing the council of English teachers, said an alternative curriculum plan embraced by social conservatives on the board — which includes reading lists — would represent a step back for education in Texas.

“It is a very dated document that seems to indicate that [its supporters] want to go back in time, perhaps to *Happy Days*,” she said, referring to the television series. “They don’t want to face the changing times, that we are now a global society and need to communicate with diverse people.”

Others charged that the needs of minority students — particularly Hispanics — were largely ignored when the curriculum proposal was drafted.

One of the few to testify in favor of the board proposal was Brooke Terry of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think tank that has been involved in key education issues. “Unfortunately our public schools are not doing a good job of teaching these skills,” she said, pointing to the large number of high school graduates in Texas who need remedial classes when they get to college. “Our public schools need to focus on

teaching the basics of reading and writing. We believe the proposed English-language arts standards will help schools improve,” she said.

Social conservative groups have generally supported the reading lists, although some have criticized a few of the books on the proposed list, including J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*.

Board members listened to several hours of testimony on Wednesday in preparation for board consideration of the curriculum standards on Thursday.