

State board ditches suggested reading lists

But commission rejects curriculum plan favored by English educators, approving consultant's draft instead

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AUSTIN – In a concession to English teachers, the State Board of Education on Thursday backed away from a proposal that would have "suggested" what literary works students should read in English classes under new state curriculum standards.



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Geraldine Miller, a member of the State Board of Education from Dallas, offered a compromise curriculum plan at Thursday's meeting.

Teachers adamantly opposed the so-called reading lists, arguing they would undermine local control of schools and deprive teachers of their ability to decide what books and readings were most appropriate for their students. There were also fears that controversial books might someday be censored from the official state list.

While they prevailed in the debate over reading lists, groups representing English teachers were unable to win board support for an alternative English curriculum plan that they favored over one drafted by consultants hired by the board. The alternative plan was rejected on an 8-7 vote, with social conservatives on the board opposing the teacher-backed proposal.

Board members later unanimously approved their consultants' plan after board member Geraldine Miller, R-Dallas, offered a compromise version that deleted the reading lists and gave teachers more time to negotiate other provisions of the plan.

"We listened to the teachers and they told us there are already wonderful [book] lists out there that they use," Ms. Miller explained. "Why should we reinvent the wheel?"

She also offered an olive branch to Hispanics on the board, who complained that the needs of Hispanic children were overlooked by experts who developed the curriculum standards. Ms. Miller's motion called for Hispanic reading experts to review the proposed standards before their final adoption by the board in May.

Board member Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi, pointing out that 47 percent of the student enrollment in Texas is now Hispanic, accused some board members of "totally disregarding" the Hispanic population of Texas when selecting experts to write the English curriculum standards.

The standards adopted by the board will remain in place for the next decade, dictating what is taught in English classes in all elementary and secondary schools, and also providing the basis for state tests and textbooks.

After the board vote, Cynthia Tyroff, representing a coalition of English teacher associations, said while teachers appreciated the decision to scrap the reading lists, they were discouraged that their other key recommendations were not adopted. Still, she added, they will continue to offer suggestions.

The board continues its meeting today.