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Senate Education Committee Hearing State Textbook Adoption

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The Texas Public Policy Foundation would like to thank the Chair and Members of the Senate Education Committee for inviting me to testify on one of the Committee's Interim Charges – the effectiveness of the state textbook adoption process.

The Foundation has a long and comprehensive involvement with the state textbook adoption process. Since 1997, we have commissioned and published reviews on a number of textbooks submitted for state adoption – high school algebra, first grade reading, elementary and middle school mathematics, environmental science, and middle and high school social studies.

Based on this involvement, we believe the state textbook adoption process:

- Offers a way to ensure schools have the instructional materials necessary to meet state mandates for student performance and school accreditation;
- Improves the quality of instructional materials by inviting public engagement; and
- Provides schools with information needed to make informed decisions about textbook selection.

Results of the Foundation's 2002 review of social studies textbooks – 26 middle and high school texts were reviewed by both a classroom teacher and a university scholar – offered evidence that the state adoption process could be improved. We found:

- Textbooks contain factual errors; publishers submit texts with factual errors and these errors are often missed by state's teacher textbook panels;
- Factual accuracy is best determined by academic scholars while classroom teachers are best able to evaluate readability and presentation of material; and
- In many approved textbooks, the quality of academic coverage is very weak; the state adoption process is not designed to evaluate thoroughness of academic coverage.

Textbooks represent a considerable investment for Texans. Over eight hundred million dollars were spent on textbooks in the 2002-03 biennium, and expenditures were anticipated to surpass the billion mark for the 2004-05 biennium before textbook appropriations were reduced in balancing the budget.



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Textbooks are an essential component of a standards-based education and the school accountability system. State expectations for student learning are conveyed in state textbooks and tested on state assessments. Student outcomes determine grade-level promotion and school accreditation.

School districts depend on the state textbook adoption process. It ensures instructional materials provide the information needed for student and school success. Most school districts lack the resources to audit textbooks. Without the state process, most districts would be unable to make informed decisions about textbook selection.

Teachers depend on accurate and comprehensive textbooks to guide classroom instruction. NEA studies indicate that 95 percent of teachers use textbooks and close to 90 percent base instruction on textbooks. Textbooks are particularly important for inexperienced teachers, especially teachers teaching outside their areas of certification (about 30 percent in Texas).

Student success depends on textbook quality. Researchers examining the International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) suggest that U.S. students score at the bottom of nations tested because of academically weak textbooks. Researchers have also correlated faltering scores on the National Assessment of Academic Progress (NAEP) with the academic deficiencies of textbooks used throughout the nation.

Research commissioned by the Texas Public Policy Foundation indicates that many textbooks submitted for state adoption and used in Texas public schools fall seriously short of expectations for factual accuracy and academic integrity. Our findings mirror the research conducted throughout the nation by such organizations as the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Textbook League, and the American Textbook Council – as well as by institutions such as the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and North Carolina State University. Judging by the 337,000 links given by Google for textbook errors, textbooks require significant improvement.

The quality of textbooks must be improved to help students in Texas public schools reach high expectations. High quality textbooks can be secured by focusing academic scholarship and classroom expertise in Texas on the problem. Despite the controversy currently attached to textbook adoptions, textbook research shows that factual accuracy and comprehensive, objective information can be recognized independent of special interest and political affiliation.

We suggest that the state adoption process could be significantly improved by:

1. Establishing a review a review panel of scholars who are subject area experts in Texas' colleges and universities to supplement the evaluation of teacher textbook panels;
2. Reducing cost of the state textbook review by –
 - A. Eliminating special university reviews commissioned by the Texas Education Agency;
 - B. Levying fines on publishers for all factual errors in textbooks *submitted* for adoption; and
 - C. Sending textbooks to the reviewers' home for evaluation instead of paying for teachers to travel to and stay in Austin for one week.

3. Evaluating how well texts cover the state curriculum requirements as well as identifying factual accuracy; and
4. Establishing a panel of academic volunteer scholars from Texas' universities and colleges to advise the State Board of Education on questions of textbook accuracy.