

Much Ado About Texas: Civics in the Social Studies Curriculum

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THE SOCIAL STUDIES are distinctive in the American public school curriculum because they are the courses in which civic values, norms, and behaviors are most directly addressed. The political nature of social studies courses like civics, government, economics, and history makes divorcing the curriculum from the external forces of conservative and liberal politics difficult. A majority of the social studies curriculum is consistent nationwide with a heavy emphasis placed on the Founding Era, the branches of government, and general U.S. history. The choices about which material to include or exclude indicates what civic values and skills students need to learn in order to become a good citizen. These values can be and often are defined by the controlling political party within a state. By studying the revision process and the content of a state's social studies curriculum, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the potential influences that liberal and conservative ideologies have on student learning. The recent revisions to the Texas social studies standards from 2010, and the contentious debate that they inspired, provide insight into one state's battle between these liberal and conservative forces to define good citizenship through the social studies curriculum.

Given the level of attention paid to the Texas revisions, we would expect the changes from the previous curriculum, adopted in 1998, to be dramatic. Widely considered a victory for conservatives, the most recent

curriculum was passed in a 9-5 vote along party lines with Republicans in the majority. Headlines following the vote declared that the “Texas School Board Rewrites US History with Lessons Promoting God and Guns.”¹ Following the vote, the California state legislature went so far as to pass a bill that would require extra scrutiny from its own Board of Education to prevent a “Texas curriculum” from being adopted, though it was ultimately vetoed by the governor.² However, based upon a content analysis of the 2010 revisions, we find that the differences between the 1998 and 2010 Texas social studies standards are minor in most cases, and when the revisions are more substantive, they are made in the areas where they will have limited impact.

Although partisans on both sides of the culture wars have acknowledged the political nature of teaching civics, there is significantly less awareness as to how civics is taught and how students learn civic norms and behaviors. The emphasis on content and disregard for pedagogy in the battle over the Texas social studies curriculum demonstrates two problems for policy makers. First, both liberal and conservative advocates underestimate the role of the teacher in implementing best practices in the classroom, and second, they overestimate the nuances and structure that the state curriculum plays in actual instruction.

The controversy over the Texas social studies standards may not have had the sweeping consequences that critics feared, or proponents hoped, but the changes to the civics standards and the reaction to them does return the social studies curriculum to its place as battleground in the culture wars where debates over American values can be staged. In an opinion published in the *Los Angeles Times* at the height of the battle in Texas, Jonathan Zimmerman succinctly captures the rhetoric of the debate on both sides: “Conservatives on the Texas school board claim that these changes will simply provide ‘balance’ to the dominant liberal paradigm,” while liberals “scoff at the unlettered rubes of the Lone Star State, who are obviously revising history to fit their present-day predilections.” Zimmerman points out, however, that both conservatives and liberals are guilty of the same “war crimes” in the fight over the social studies curriculum—both are concerned with winning, rather than balance, so they can “foist these ideas on our kids.”³

Our study of the Texas social studies revisions reveals that the pedagogical purposes of the government and citizenship curriculum are actually secondary to the political and rhetorical expression of values that they promote. To demonstrate this point, we review the state of the social studies following the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the process for revising social studies standards in Texas. We then conduct a content analysis of the 1998 and 2010 standards. An examination of the

political nature of the process as well as the substance and language of revisions to the government and citizenship standards in the 2010 Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) social studies curriculum reveals that the revision process serves primarily as an opportunity for political position taking, not educational improvement.

Social Studies Left Behind

Although the movement towards standards, assessment, and accountability has dominated the national discussion on public education for several decades, it has centered on math, science, and language arts. The social studies are not included in the battery of tests prescribed by NCLB, and as of now, there is no independent social studies curriculum in the Common Core Curriculum standards that have been adopted by forty-five states (of which Texas is not included).⁴ Several states do not require students to take a standardized test in social studies, nor do they offer much in the way of state objectives. Even in states that do have state social studies objectives and administer standardized social studies tests, as is the case in Texas, these assessments have generally received the lowest priority. This is due, in part, to the fact that NCLB does not even require a social studies test as a requirement for compliance with the mandate. Therefore, passing a social studies test, even when administered by states, is frequently not a requirement for students to graduate. Following the implementation of NCLB, which emphasized math and reading, 36% of school districts decreased the amount of time they spent teaching social studies—on average seventy-six fewer minutes per week.⁵

Political realities have created a severely limited and competitive fiscal environment where precious federal monies must be spent on those subjects that determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as a requirement of NCLB. Some critics may claim that the decreased amount of time and money spent on social studies is an example of the erosion of American tradition and values. Nevertheless, the absence of social studies from the national conversation is actually an example of one of the last expressions of federalism in education. Allowing Texas, for instance, to develop its own social studies curriculum gives the state the opportunity to tailor the curriculum to fit the social and political values of the region. Precisely because the social studies curriculum is written at the state level, state social studies revisions have become a staging ground for ideologues to wage social and political battles. For instance, ideological debates over teaching the role of religion in the American founding, the importance of free market capitalism, and American exceptionalism have featured largely not only in the Texas revisions, but also more recently in Nebraska and Minnesota.⁶

Zimmerman argues that the perception of liberal bias at least within history textbooks and curricula on the part of conservatives is less about perception and more about the methodologies in studying history. A primary focus of historians is understanding the cause and effect of change in human events, and in American history, most social and political change has been driven by liberal reform movements like populism, progressivism, and the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, aside from presidents, reformers attached to liberal causes and movements are among the more frequently spotlighted figures in history textbooks and curricula.⁷

Lone Star Civics and the Social Studies Revisions

In Texas, the process for developing the state learning objectives is itself inherently political. The State Board of Education (SBOE) has fifteen elected members, and Texas is one of only ten states in the country that elects its SBOE members by partisan election.⁸ The SBOE is charged with establishing statewide curriculum standards, selecting textbook adoptions, determining passing test scores, and setting graduation requirements. Establishing the SBOE as an elected office makes its members the object of special interest groups like textbook publishers, teachers' unions, and other groups with ideological and political agendas. To further complicate matters, oversight of the educational system is shared between the SBOE and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The TEA is an administrative body that answers to the governor and is charged with implementing policies for primary and secondary schools.

The statewide curriculum historically has been revised about every ten years by the SBOE for each subject area, and all textbooks that are adopted must follow the TEKS curriculum. Beginning at least one year before a new curriculum is voted on, a team of teachers and academics is formed to make suggestions for revisions. The existing TEKS and revisions are then reviewed by an advisory panel of six experts who are appointed by the SBOE. For the 2010 revisions, four of the experts were scholars with backgrounds in education, political science, and history. The other two reviewers were profoundly conservative figures. The first, David Barton, is the founder of the advocacy group Wallbuilders, which specializes in teaching that America was founded as a Christian nation. The other was Reverend Peter Marshall, who incidentally passed away in 2010.

These conservative reviewers are important to understanding why the social studies revisions in Texas received such national attention. Their comments on the revisions, both in the formal reviews of the curriculum and in the national press, helped to fuel the fires of support and opposition. Their critiques span the entire spectrum of the modern conservative

movement, including social, economic, and political conservatism. Aside from calling for a greater emphasis on the Christian faith and the Bible in the curriculum, Barton and Marshall both advocate for more attention to free markets and American exceptionalism. As with the analysis we present on the revisions to the TEKS themselves, issues regarding Christianity, capitalism, and exceptionalism in the curriculum all have proponents that are both conservative and liberal. We associate the critiques from Barton and Marshall with conservative ideology primarily because that is how they self-identify. On the website for Barton's Wallbuilders organization, there are several press releases and articles arguing that liberals are either wrong or immoral.⁹

When the SBOE first passed the TEKS in July 1997 as an update to public school standards, the vote was divisive. The board split in a 9-6 vote, with six Democrats and three moderate Republicans in the majority, and six conservative Republicans in opposition. The conservative bloc objected that the TEKS were not rigorous enough, downplayed fact-based knowledge, and gave too much control over curricula decisions to local school districts.¹⁰ The curriculum was voted on as a single package rather than by subject area. There did not appear to be any objections to specific content within the social studies curriculum. Nevertheless, the overall tenor of the debate was highly partisan, which led to discussions about moving the SBOE to nonpartisan elections.¹¹ This change never materialized.

When the SBOE voted on revisions to the social studies TEKS in 2010, the vote was even more contentious than it had been over the 1998 curriculum. With nine Republicans on the board voting as bloc, one of their main objectives was to fight the liberal bias they perceived in the previous curriculum. As Don McLeroy, the Republican chair of the SBOE, argued, the revisions aimed to "challenge the powerful ideology of the left and highlight the great political divide of our country."¹² Consequently, the 2010 government and citizenship curriculum emphasizes American exceptionalism and the Judeo-Christian heritage of the American legal tradition.

While the elected SBOE aimed in its revisions to highlight the political divide in the country, Texas citizens wanted a less political process for developing state standards. A survey of likely Texas voters conducted in May 2010 found that only 19% of respondents favored having an elected SBOE in charge of curricula decisions. Support for a less political process crossed partisan lines, with 84% of Democrats and 63% of Republicans responding in favor of placing power over curricula revisions in the hands of a panel of teachers and scholars.¹³ This political divide between the members of the SBOE and voting citizens mirrors the type of elite partisan polarization that has been seen in other policy areas. As Morris

Fiorina and others have argued, American party elites have become more polarized, emphasizing the culture war as a means to mobilize their party bases during primary elections. Most Americans, however, remain less polarized, favoring more moderate policies.¹⁴ As has been the case with issues such as school prayer, gay rights, and women's rights, so too does it seem to be the case with explicitly political revisions of school curricula. Party elites see opportunities to emphasize political divisions to mobilize their base, while the majority of citizens are more likely to converge toward a moderate position.

Methods

To understand how the Texas curriculum changed between 1998 and 2010, we conducted a content analysis of the government and citizenship TEKS for both versions regarding the four social studies courses that are part of the graduation requirement for Texas public schools: United States History Studies Since Reconstruction; World History Studies; World Geography Studies; and United States Government. We analyzed the government and citizenship TEKS that are listed for each course, as these are the learning objectives that are specifically related to civic education. In our analysis, we distinguished the different approaches to teaching civic education into two broad categories—one conservative and one liberal—as well as several sub-categories. The conservative approach emphasizes transmitting the knowledge and values that define the American identity. This includes learning about the structure of government and civic values, as well as the importance of individual rights, personal responsibility, and patriotism. By contrast, the liberal approach stresses the behaviors and values necessary for democratic engagement, which include avenues for active participation, deliberation, understanding issues of social justice, and globalism.¹⁵

We follow the method employed by Wayne Journell in his work on Virginia's civics curriculum by dividing these two broad approaches into seven distinct sub-categories.¹⁶ The first two, civic republicanism and character education, fall into the conservative approach. Civic republicanism emphasizes learning about history, the structure of government, and individual rights, with stress on patriotism and American values. Character education identifies specific values that are necessary for good education and promotes those values through the study of specific individuals, with emphasis on the need to practice those values in daily life.

The remaining five sub-categories are more liberal forms of civic education, which include deliberation, social justice, participation, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Deliberation focuses on teaching students to have civil discourse over political issues. Social justice also

focuses on political issues, especially inequality and oppression, but specifically encourages students to take positive action to help remedy injustices. Participation is more expansive in that it advocates for broad forms of participation, from voting to attending local political meetings. Transnationalism and cosmopolitanism both take an international approach to civic education, but transnationalism focuses on learning about the structures of other governments and how they are all connected in a continually globalizing world, while cosmopolitanism emphasizes that all people do, or should, share the same basic values of toleration, cooperation, and individual freedom.

Following the method and coding scheme used by Journell in his analysis of the Virginia civics curriculum, we coded each of the TEKS based on the seven previously mentioned categories.¹⁷ TEKS that focused on history, the structure of government, individual rights, or patriotism were coded as “civic republicanism.” Those that stressed specific values or individuals who exemplify specific values were designated as “character education.” TEKS were coded as “deliberation” when they focused on students studying contentious viewpoints. TEKS that focused on issues of inequality and oppression were labeled as “social justice.” When TEKS emphasized avenues for civic engagement, they were labeled as “participation.” TEKS that specified an examination of other governments or international issues were labeled as “transnationalism,” but when they specifically mentioned global values such as global human rights or toleration, they were labeled as “cosmopolitanism.” We also found that certain TEKS focused exclusively on historical or economic information and did not fit into any of the existing categories, so we labeled those as “None of the Above.” Examples of each of the types of citizenship for both the government and citizenship TEKS can be found in Figure 1.

An important point to keep in mind is that in making this distinction between conservative and liberal approaches to civic education, we are not arguing that the individual subjects associated with their respective ideology are inherently conservative or liberal. Instead, we argue that both ideologies place a higher priority on the subjects we associate with them. For instance, the study of history is by no means liberal or conservative, and reasonable minds can come to different interpretations of historical events that carry either liberal or conservative implications. Similarly, there exist several character education curricula that promote either liberal or conservative values. What makes these ideas conservative in this context is that in conjunction with the other concepts we identify as part of the conservative approach, they are generally declarative and intend to promote the status quo by transmitting the collective political and cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. The same thing can be said

Type of Citizenship	No. of Standards	Examples of Standards
Government TEKS		
Civic Republicanism	38	<i>World Hist.</i> 20(A) Explain the development of democratic-republican government from its beginnings in the Judeo-Christian legal tradition and classical Greece and Rome through the English Civil War and the Enlightenment.
Character Education	0	n/a
Deliberation	0	n/a
Social Justice	1	<i>U.S. Hist.</i> 21(A) Analyze the effects of landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions, including <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> , and other U.S. Supreme Court decisions.
Participation	1	<i>U.S. Gov.</i> 11(C) Identify opportunities for citizens to participate in political party activities at local, state, and national levels.
Transnationalism	7	<i>World Geog.</i> 14(A) Analyze current events to infer the physical and human processes that lead to the formation of boundaries and other political divisions.
Cosmopolitanism	0	n/a
None of the Above	2	<i>World Hist.</i> 19(A) Identify the characteristics of monarchies and theocracies as forms of government in early civilizations.
Citizenship TEKS		
Civic Republicanism	18	<i>U.S. Hist.</i> 22(C) Describe U.S. citizens as people from numerous places throughout the world who hold a common bond in standing for certain self-evident truths.
Character Education	1	<i>U.S. Gov.</i> 24(A) Describe qualities of effective leadership.
Deliberation	4	<i>World Geog.</i> 15(B) Explain how citizenship practices, public policies, and decision making may be influenced by cultural beliefs, including nationalism and patriotism.
Social Justice	4	<i>U.S. Hist.</i> 23(B) Evaluate various means of achieving equality of political rights, including the 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments and congressional acts such as the American Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.
Participation	6	<i>World Hist.</i> 21(A) Describe how people have participated in supporting or changing their governments.
Transnationalism	0	n/a
Cosmopolitanism	1	<i>World Hist.</i> 22(F) Assess the degree to which American ideals have advanced human rights and democratic ideas throughout the world.
None of the Above	0	n/a

Figure 1: 2010 Government and Citizenship TEKS, by Type of Citizenship.

Type of Citizenship	Government TEKS, 1998	Government TEKS, 2010	Citizenship TEKS, 1998	Citizenship TEKS, 2010
Civic Republicanism	40	38	14	18
Character Education	0	0	2	1
Deliberation	1	0	6	4
Social Justice	1	1	3	4
Participation	1	1	6	6
Transnationalism	3	7	0	0
Cosmopolitanism	0	0	0	1
None of the Above	1	2	1	0

Figure 2: Government and Citizenship TEKS, by Type of Citizenship and Year.

about the concepts we identify as liberal. There are both liberal and conservative applications of issues like participation, transnationalism, or cosmopolitanism. The reason these ideas are included in the liberal approach is because they are included in the curriculum in such a way that promotes broader liberal values of equality, toleration, and questioning established social and political institutions.

Analysis

In the revisions of the TEKS in 2010, the greatest attention was given to content rather than pedagogy. Even though it would be reasonable to expect significant shifts in the content, especially given how much attention was paid to the revisions by the press, the shifts in the form of civic education were minimal. As indicated in Figure 2, the broader civic values that students are supposed to learn change relatively little from the 1998 TEKS to the 2010 TEKS. There remains a heavy emphasis on civic republicanism across the board, indicating that Texas has and continues to take a conservative approach to teaching civics. In fact, despite the cries of critics, there were even slight increases in values that are more embraced by liberals, such as social justice, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism. That a traditionally conservative state perpetuates a generally conservative social studies curriculum, however, hardly seems to explain the passionate and vitriolic response from news outlets, educators, and politicians from around the country. What are significant and newsworthy are the rhetorical changes made to individual objectives. But what makes the entire revision process truly remarkable, and what at the same time has been overlooked, is that rhetorical changes designed to combat a liberal bias have a miniscule effect on actual pedagogy.

There are two main areas in which we find evidence of substantive changes in the rhetorical language in the government and citizenship TEKS; American exceptionalism and religion. For instance, a set of TEKS standards were added under Section 22 to the 2010 U.S. History citizenship objectives in which the students are expected to understand “the concept of American exceptionalism.” Most explicitly, Objective 22(C) states, “describe U.S. citizens as people from numerous places throughout the world who hold a common bond in standing for certain self-evident truths.” David Barton, one of the expert reviewers, notes, nothing of American exceptionalism is mentioned in the 1998 TEKS, and its inclusion in the 2010 TEKS represents the influence of conservative rhetoric in the new standards. In his reviews of the 1998 TEKS and the drafts of the 2010 TEKS, Barton continuously exhorts the importance of teaching students that American government is exceptional, that American ideals are unique and not widely shared by other nations, and that those ideas are the cause of American “prosperity, stability, and freedom.”¹⁸

One of the most controversial debates in the revision process involved the place of religion in the curriculum. Both of the conservative reviewers and the public comments of Chair McLeroy call for greater attention to religion, and, in particular, the relationship between religion, democratic governance, and civic virtue. The comments on the 1998 TEKS and drafts of the 2010 TEKS from conservative reviewers Barton and Marshall argue that the American political system is directly grounded in the Christian tradition, which in turn makes the teaching of church and state as separate institutions historically inaccurate in their view.¹⁹ Despite the saturation of religious rhetoric in the notes and comments of the conservative reviewers, as well as the rhetoric of the more conservative members of the SBOE, the evidence of an expansion of religious content in the 2010 TEKS is relatively limited. What is more, most of the contentious changes made to the 2010 government and citizenship TEKS do little to move beyond political and ideological rhetoric.

Despite the unanimity of conservative reviewers and board members on the issue, the evidence of greater emphasis on religion in the 2010 TEKS is subtle at best. An itemized analysis of the content within the objectives indicates that the revisions in the 2010 TEKS have relatively little consequence in terms of how or what content is taught. For instance, Objective 18 in the 1998 World History TEKS addresses the evolution of “rights, republicanism, constitutionalism, and democracy,” and the subsequent Objective 18(B) expects students to “summarize the worldwide influence of ideas concerning rights and responsibilities that originated from Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian ideals in Western civilization such as equality before the law.” The corresponding revision in the 2010

World History TEKS is found in Objective 22(B), which enumerates specific rights and responsibilities implied in the 1998 TEKS, though the 2010 revision flips the language slightly to give greater attention to the Judeo-Christian influences: “identify the influence of ideas regarding the right to a ‘trial by a jury of your peers,’ and the concepts of ‘innocent until proven guilty’ and ‘equality before the law’ that originated from the Judeo-Christian legal tradition and in Greece and Rome.” Certainly, reversing the order in referencing the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions in the 2010 curriculum could be perceived as an effort to place a priority on Judeo-Christian values as the dominant moral and legal codes that shaped Western and American culture. Given the expressed intention to infuse the curriculum with conservative Christian religious perspectives, it is reasonable to associate this change with a conservative effort to shape historical interpretation in the curriculum and character education. Comparing the 2010 objective to its 1998 counterpart, however, indicates that the changes to this objective are mostly rhetorical. More to the point, a teacher delivering a lesson on modern Western political thought and its influences could use the exact same lesson plan, method of instruction, and curriculum materials to comply fully with either the 1998 or the 2010 objective.

The most direct religious influence in the 2010 TEKS is found in Objective 7(G) of the Government standards. It states that the student is expected to “examine the reasons the Founding Fathers protected religious freedom in America and guaranteed its free exercise by saying that ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ and compare and contrast this to the phrase ‘separation of church and state.’” The purpose of comparing the concept of the “separation of church and state” with the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment represents a subtle effort to infuse the government curriculum with a conservative perspective that fundamentally opposes the separation of church and state doctrine. But as before, pedagogical freedom remains with the teacher, and although this objective may open the door to addressing more conservative perspectives on constitutional interpretation, there remains an equal opportunity to teach the objective from a more liberal point of view.

The rhetorical and political quality of the changes to the civics objectives are evidenced in the fact that there is almost no discussion of civic pedagogy among those pushing for more conservative reforms. The only statement on pedagogy comes from Barton who includes an entire section in his review that argues that any mention of pedagogy should be removed from the TEKS altogether. His justification is somewhat contradictory. He first claims that “any competent teacher has already been trained for teaching,

[therefore] TEKS addressing methodology and pedagogy represent a needless redundancy and should be eliminated.”²⁰ He later goes on to endorse the elimination of education colleges, and encourages “prospective teachers to obtain a full degree in the field in which they plan to teach.”²¹ Despite the peculiarities of this argument, Barton is the only member of the review board to even address pedagogy. Furthermore, there was a dearth of dialogue in the press regarding civic pedagogy. The praise and criticism in the press focused exclusively on the content.

Politics not Pedagogy

The importance of addressing pedagogical issues in constructing standards for teaching civics in this case is not simply to appease educators. Instead, the absence of any discussion regarding civic pedagogy indicates either a lack of concern or understanding as to what makes social and civic learning distinctive. Government and citizenship curricula are among the few direct statements of the desired behaviors and values that the state wishes to impart to the next generation. For instance, a state that emphasizes the importance of social justice and fighting inequality as part of its civics curriculum will need to conduct social studies classes differently from a state that emphasizes voting as the primary venue for civic participation. Consequently, to fulfill the objectives, social studies teachers must directly engage in the instruction of state-endorsed behaviors and values concerning how a good citizen is expected to behave. No other discipline is charged with such duties, and most methodology and pedagogy courses do not address this issue.

Therefore, if those involved with the revision of the Texas social studies TEKS actually expect students to learn the civic values included in the standards, some guidance must be given as to how teachers should teach them. The lack of discussion on pedagogy in this case indicates, at best, ambivalence as to whether or not students actually absorb the values and behaviors included in the government and civics standards. In the 2010 revisions, there were no changes to the social studies curriculum that would require teachers to change significantly how they taught to comply with the revised objectives. This suggests that the major revisions to the government and citizenship TEKS are a series of rhetorical statements indicating political position taking on the part of elected SBOE members, not primarily a collection of objectives that students are intended to learn.

More evidence to support the conclusion that the government and citizenship TEKS are primarily politically driven is that these TEKS are among the least tested on the statewide social studies test. Currently, the TEA is transitioning to a new statewide test known as the State of Texas

Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). As part of this process, the TEA has released the objectives that will be assessed on the STAAR test. A number of government and citizenship TEKS are included in this list, but a few points conspicuously stand out. First, the objectives from the 11th-grade U.S. history standards that address American exceptionalism are not included. Second, the only objective relating to religion and politics that is included is the previously mentioned objective from the World History curriculum that ties the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Greco-Roman tradition to the American political system. Others, like the citizenship Objective 21(C) that was added to the 2010 world history TEKS that specifically mentions the influence of early nineteenth-century evangelical reformer William Wilberforce, are not included on the list to be tested. Moreover, the most glaring omission from the list of assessed TEKS remains the entire curriculum for the Government course; this course being the most focused one that schools offer on government and citizenship. While the completion of the Government course is required for graduation, the material is not included on the STAAR test. The underlying reality indicated by the lack of assessment of the government and citizenship TEKS is that if the more conservative reviewers and members of the Texas SBOE were genuinely seeking conservative curriculum reforms, then they provided themselves with little means of ensuring that their reforms permeated the classroom door.

Ultimately, what the lack of assessment of these government and citizenship TEKS indicates is either a lack of understanding of how public schooling actually works, or that the changes to the TEKS were intended to serve a rhetorical purpose not a pedagogical one. Even more to the point, the public statements given by then-SBOE Chair McLeroy suggest that the more controversial changes made to the social studies TEKS were political in nature, designed to combat a perceived liberal political bias in the existing standards. Consequently, these events bring into question the nature and purpose of statewide civic learning objectives. The idea that government and citizenship TEKS are neither politically influenced nor subjective is simply wrong. They are, and they must be by the nature of the process of adopting a civics curriculum. Yet when the primary purpose in revising standards is political rhetoric rather than student learning, the role of politically motivated members of the SBOE in developing civic education objectives must be questioned.

Even though it appears clear that these revisions were motivated primarily by political purposes, not educational, that does not mean we should be unconcerned about the effects these changes could have on student learning. Currently, the latest and most controversial additions to the curriculum are not being tested. That does not mean that they

will not be tested in the future. Moreover, recent debates in Nebraska and Minnesota over their social studies curricula demonstrate that these debates are not simply limited to Texas. Arguments over whether American exceptionalism should be a priority, whether climate change should be taught as fact or as a theory, and whether or not slavery and oppression should be emphasized are central in these states' revisions. As with the Texas revisions, these debates are largely focused on content, not on pedagogy. The ideological rancor over civics standards is spreading, and there is every reason to expect that this trend will continue as more states revisit their own standards.

The process for developing civics curricula has always been regarded as inherently political, but the Texas process of having a partisan, elected SBOE make all curricula decisions provides little incentive to focus on pedagogical issues of learning. This is a disservice to students. The process for undertaking curricula changes needs to be less political. This could be accomplished by giving a meaningful voice to teachers, scholars, and others with expertise in the field in implementing revisions. This would also require that their suggestions could not simply be overturned by the SBOE for political reasons alone. Moreover, so long as we exist in a test-centered world, the civics curriculum must be tested, including material that is covered in senior-level Government courses. While the new social studies curriculum in Texas may not be as threatening as its critics feared, given the lack of attention to pedagogy and testing of the most controversial changes, this is not a model that should be followed. Those who are involved in teaching civics should be aware of the process of revising their own state's curriculum and take the example of Texas as a warning about the potential effects of partisan polarization among elected politicians on student learning.

Notes

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