

Texas senators slam curriculum used locally

WILL WEISSERT, Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Top education leaders in the state Senate on Thursday grilled the creators of a curriculum system used across Texas -- and in Brownfield -- that critics claim promotes anti-American values and stifles classroom flexibility. This school year is the second BISD has implemented the

curriculum. CSCOPE is an electronic curriculum management system that offers Web-based lesson plans and exams designed to help teachers adhere to state educational requirements. It is now used in 875 school districts — more than 70 percent of districts statewide — and is supposed to be flexible enough for teachers to alter content to meet their individual needs.

But some teachers have complained CSCOPE is too rigid, and conservative activists say it promotes biased, progressive ideology. A string of witnesses before the Senate Education Committee raised those concerns, criticizing the program for lacking transparency and promoting liberal values they said were anti-Christian at best and openly socialist at worst.

One witness compared the system to "mind control," while an algebra teacher wept as he described quitting because he felt he was "aiding and abetting a crime" by using CSCOPE in his classroom.

"Discontent is rampant across the state," said Peggy Venable, a frequent critic of public schools who is the Texas director of Americans for Prosperity.

Defending the system was Wade Lebay, director of state CSCOPE at the Region 13 Education Service Center in Austin. He said CSCOPE offers about 1,600 model lessons districts can access for a fee of \$7 per student, though additional training for teachers on how to use the system can increase the per-pupil price.

"It's built by teachers, designed by teachers and that's what's powerful about CSCOPE," Lebay said. His is one of 20 service centers statewide that serve as liaisons between school districts and the Texas Education Agency, which oversees public schools.

Senators asked Lebay about complaints some lesson plans promoted pro-Islam ideals, or described participants of the Boston Tea Party as terrorists.

Lebay was even asked to read part of a sixth grade lesson plan that showed different countries' flags and instructed students to "notice that socialist and communist countries use symbolism on their flags." It went on to ask students what symbols they would use if they were to create a flag for a new socialist country.

First-term Sen. Larry Taylor, R-Friendswood, asked, "Does that sound like we're sympathizing with those types of countries?" He later said he found the lesson plan "very egregious as a Texan and an American."

Linda Villarreal, director of the Region 2 Education Ser-



vice Center in Corpus Christi, responded, "We have 1,600 lessons, so to take just this one is..." Taylor cut her off asking, "Who is reviewing these 1,600 plans?"

Another first-year senator, Donna Campbell, a San Marcos Republican, complained about the uniformity CSCOPE imposes — though Lebay and Villarreal argued it was necessary to ensure teachers best-adhere to complicated state curriculum requirements.

"Our teachers don't need to be scripted," Campbell said. Education Committee Chairman Dan Patrick said he'd never met a teacher who wasn't critical of CSCOPE.

The Houston Republican also objected to what he called the program's lack of transparency, complaining parents can't access lesson plans. CSCOPE's creators say such materials aren't available publicly because of intellectual property concerns, but elected officials should be able to access. Patrick noted, though, that Barbara Cargill, chairwoman of the State Board of Education, had requested a password to see the lessons but was ignored for months.

"What you all are doing could be great. But it's obviously not. It's obviously a mess right now," Patrick said. "It's really, really troubling to me."

Returning to complaints

about the Boston Tea Party lesson he added: "It's amazing that when you all called our founding fathers terrorists, in Texas, that you thought that wasn't going to cause problems."

Also Thursday, Patrick unveiled a bill seeking to overhaul high school graduation requirements to better emphasize "workforce development."

The measure would create a state-funded, eighth grade career and technical exploratory course to help students choose

classes they want to take in high school. Patrick then wants to allow students to choose between three academic paths in grades 9 through 12: a vocational plan featuring electives in business and industry, one built around science and technology, or a third option stressing arts and humanities electives.

Students still would have to take core courses — and pass state standardized tests — in math, science, social studies and language arts.

Endorsing Patrick's measure was "Jobs for Texas," a coalition of 19 industry trade organizations that says Texas students must be better-prepared for high-tech jobs.

"I believe every person has this great gift that God gives them of a talent. And we all have different talents," Patrick said. "We're going to create some flexibility within the system to tap into those talents. Once a student finds something that they love to do, they can just really flourish."



The following Brownfield High School band students were awarded at last weekend's Association of Texas Small School Bands regional competition at the Lubbock Civic Center: (back row, left to right) Ishmael Galindo, Area Band; John Molina, Area Band; Maverick Howard, All-Region; Bryan Gomez, All-Region; John Gonzales, All-Region; Zeke Morin, All-Region; Cole Garcia, All-Region; (next row) Brenda Rodriguez, All-Region; E.J. Cantu, All-Region; Eliazar Gonzales, All-State, Area and Honor Band; Michael Munoz, All-Region; Aaron Aguirre, All-Region; Jeremy Duran, All-Region; Christian Pilgrim, All-Region; (next row) Ashley Simental, All-Region; Alisha Zamora, All-Region; Valerie Molina, All-Region; Symphony Munoz, All-Region; Caley Rodriguez, Honor Band; Theresa Mendoza, All-Region; Jillian Rolan, Area Band and Honor Band; (front row) Gilbert Garcia, Honor Band; Joshua Duran, All-Region; Cody Henegar, Area Band and Sallie Dill, All-Region.



The following Brownfield Middle School band students were named All-Region at last weekend's competition at Lubbock Civic Center: (back row, left to right) Morayma Lucio, Albert Alaniz, Justin Dusek, Jeremy Duran, Jarlot Thrower, Carlos Bazan, Dobson Munoz, Lindsey Pauda, (front row) Ilana Rodriguez, Hannah Johnson, Rachel Hawkins, Jade Boyd and Carolyn Navarro.

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