

State Board of Education

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January 9, 2015

Dear Concerned Citizen,

I've attempted to answer some of the concerns from parents and other stakeholders so they will know why there has been a change in math education in Texas. To clarify though, the State Board of Education (SBOE) has no authority over HOW a teacher teaches. Methodology is totally up to the teacher and the local school district. The SBOE oversaw the review and revision of the math curriculum standards (the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills or TEKS) in 2011-2012 and those new TEKS are being implemented this school year in K-8 and then implemented for Grades 9-12 in school year 2015-2016.

Here is information about the process and why the math standards were revised.

Starting in 2010, then Commissioner Robert Scott brought together top math educators and experts from Texas to form a Mathematics Advisory Group. Mr. Scott asked them to model new math standards using exemplary existing standards such as California, Minnesota and Singapore. He then instructed the Advisory Group to compare their draft to the Common Core standards to make sure they met or exceeded them; he was assured that they did. Once the work of the Advisory Committee was complete, Mr. Scott brought together a panel of national math experts (called the National Review Team) to review the new math standards. You may want to take a look at the Commissioner's Draft on this link.

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=214749971>

Scroll down towards the bottom and you will see this information with the link to the draft:

"In anticipation of the State Board of Education's scheduled 2011-2012 revision of the TEKS for Mathematics, the Commissioner of Education convened a group of advisors to review current research and resources and to offer suggestions regarding the upcoming TEKS revision and future professional development. The Commissioner's Mathematics Advisory Group, established in the fall of 2010, includes mathematics educators and mathematicians from Texas. The recommendations of the Commissioner's Mathematics Advisory Group regarding the next generation of mathematics standards in Texas were compiled and then reviewed by a panel of national advisors in mathematics, known as the National Review Team.

The result of this work is a document titled, "[The Commissioner's Draft of the Texas Mathematics Standards \(PDF, 954KB\)](#)."

The Commissioner's Draft begins with the history of the process for the math TEKS revision. Note that national experts were on the committees (page 5 of the document) as well as many math experts from Texas. The document explains that although the old math TEKS "served Texas citizens well, the world is changing and many careers now require more and different mathematics, including an emphasis on mathematical reasoning and complex problem-solving." It is also important to know that the Commissioner's Draft was the base document from which the math writing teams worked to produce the new math TEKS.

The original math TEKS were implemented in 1998-99, and the 2012 revision was the first full-scale revision and update. No wonder it's been a big change and

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adjustment for teachers! To prepare, districts were notified about this transition period well in advance and teacher trainings on the new TEKS were made available starting in the summer of 2013. Those trainings are still available for CPE credit.

I think that the math TEKS review process was one of the best the board has overseen. Having national and state math experts take part initially was critical. Even during the review, there was input from seven other experts appointed by the SBOE, including professors from Stanford and Harvard. The writing teams were instructed to carefully read their reviews and to make needed changes. (Their names are here: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147499967>)

I felt confident, as did other board members, that the math review panels did as instructed and produced excellent, aligned, age-appropriate standards based on current research and based on the guidance and input from math professors and other stakeholders. There was much discussion and many viewpoints given from different sources over several months and the board carefully and thoughtfully considered all input. Ultimately, the board voted 14-0 to approve the new math TEKS. (Member Mary Helen Berlanga was not present.)

For Texas students to be taught math that better prepares them for college or the workforce was a large part of the discussion. Also, raising the bar to national and even international expectations was important. Do we want Texas students at the front of the pack or not? Of course we do. But there are growing pains with the implementation because something on paper can play out very differently in the classroom.

Having said that, I recognize the challenges facing our teachers and students. In the Commissioner's draft, some of the knowledge and skills were moved from one grade to another based on the benchmarks set by the National Math Panel. The math TEKS review panels agreed with these changes, and the board voted to approve them. These changes have been hard on teachers who have been teaching the same lessons for years. It is also difficult for students because of new conceptual methods being used as well as gaps created by the changes. It will take time to adjust to the new TEKS, and I am thankful for the hard work and dedication of our math teachers.

What is being done to help teachers, students, and parents?

- In August, Commissioner of Education Michael Williams announced that the 5th and 8th grade math STAAR tests will not count for passing or retaining students this school year due to the transition.
- The commissioner also recently announced that those tests will be given three weeks later this year, in April instead of March. (Any changes to accountability? Not yet and that is up to the commissioner. I and other board members have encouraged him to use the test questions this year for field test purposes only, not for accountability purposes.)
- The SBOE listened to testifiers speak about the implementation of the math TEKS at its November meeting. We recognize that our teachers and students need time and help with the implementation, so the following actions have been taken.

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- The “such as” examples that were taken out of the TEKS (in an effort to streamline them as requested by educators) are now posted on the TEA website.
- As instructed by the SBOE, Texas Education Agency staff has compiled an additional list of resources to help math teachers and parents at this link:
- [http://tea.texas.gov/Curriculum_and_Instructional_Programs/Subject Areas/Mathematics/Resources_for_the_Revised_Kindergarten - Grade 8 Mathematics TEKS/](http://tea.texas.gov/Curriculum_and_Instructional_Programs/Subject_Areas/Mathematics/Resources_for_the_Revised_Kindergarten_-_Grade_8_Mathematics_TEKS/)
- The agency has contacted the 20 ESCs to encourage them to offer more professional development for the math TEKS. At the link listed above, there is also information about professional development options for teachers.
- I have discussed the challenges of the math implementation with Chair Aycock in the House and with Lt. Governor-elect Patrick’s office in the Senate. The legislature needs to be kept up-to-date on this issue and needs to know that the SBOE and the agency are doing all that we can to help our teachers and students during this transition period.
- An SBOE resolution about the math TEKS implementation will be discussed at our next meeting in February.
- The SBOE will continue discussing this issue with superintendents, teachers, parents and other stakeholders to determine ways to help with the transition to the new math TEKS.

In addition, help is coming from the Texas PTA and from TASA:

- The Texas PTA is working with the agency to produce helpful math webinars for parents. These will be available on the PTA website, hopefully in January.
- The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) is posting more instructional resources for the math TEKS in iTunesU, a free application. At its midwinter conference, TASA has asked agency staff to lead a session about the math TEKS implementation.
- We all have the best interests of our students and teachers in mind. I encourage parents to support and encourage their child's teachers and to be positive with their children. We want our students to be successful and motivated but they need our help during this time of transition. I applaud and thank our teachers who are rising to the challenge to give our students the best math education possible. Thank you for your input on this issue; please feel free to contact me with questions or concerns.

All the best,

Barbara C. Cargill

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Chair, State Board of Education

