

## **TABE Testimony Before MALC**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Dr. Iliana Alanis, President of the Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE). TABE reviews and analyzes the state of bilingual education in Texas schools, studies legislation at both state and national levels and advocates for over 800,000 English Language Learners in our public schools their teachers and their families. TABE is committed to the implementation of educational curricula, policies and effective bilingual-bicultural programs that promote equal educational opportunity and academic excellence for all Texas children. I am also an assistant professor at the Univ of Tx at San Antonio in the College of Education and Human Development. But probably of most importance, I am the mother of a 6-year old—who is one of the 4.7 million students who will be impacted by the passage of these new standards.

As president of TABE I am not only concerned with the content of the state's social studies curriculum but also appalled at the state's curriculum development process. For even before experts and teachers finalized their work on the proposed social studies standards, members of the far right hijacked the process by inserting evangelical political activists to scrub the curriculum of such crazy notions as the inclusion of minorities and the negative ramifications of a racist society. This process undermines the hard work, research and professional judgments of teachers and outside experts who attempted to create coherent standards.

In response to this, outgoing member McLeroy has stated that their efforts amount to a desire that our children learn the Republican version of our great state and country as that would be “like Superman; truth, justice & the American way”. I say to you that these efforts have nothing to do with the historical truth, social justice or the American way; a way in which we stand on the broad shoulders of those who have come before us. These changes to our social studies curriculum amount to nothing more than individual ideology and are offensive to many.

It has been well documented that there is an attempt to “white wash” our social studies curriculum, and TABE joins the many that condemn this action. Nonetheless, efforts by conservative members of our State Board have resulted in the removal of crucial events in our history. What we need to understand is, “Whether one deems our present society as wondrous or awful or both, history reveals how we arrived at this point. Understanding our past is central to our ability to understand ourselves and the world around us” (Loewen 1995, p. 13). Yet the SBOE has effectively altered our understanding of our rich cultural heritage and replaced it with a selective history that gives students a skewed understanding.

For example, Dolores Huerta was removed because it was alleged she was a socialist, while Helen Keller remained even though it is well known she was a radical socialist who never wavered in her belief that our society needed radical change—a fact few Americans know because our schooling left it out. There are other omissions or rewriting of our history for example, minimizing the role of woman & minorities in the Civil Rights Movement. These erroneous interpretations have stolen from us the important facets of our history, leaving only melodramatic minutiae. Ignoring the discussion of historical conflicts that are perceived as controversial and irrelevant to the dominant culture denies students the right to grapple with issues of oppression and democracy in U.S. society.

Not even music was immune. The Board recently removed hip-hop and Tejano music and replaced them with country music, justifying it as the genre for family values. Last time I checked, country music is filled with lyrics about drinking excessively and cheating on one’s spouse. Essentially The omission of popular culture from our social studies curriculum leads to the exclusion of students whose schooling is disconnected from their life experiences.

With regard to the separation of church and state and evolution; Don McLeroy has been quoted as saying “evolution is hooey”. Additionally, David Bradley, commented on his opposition to students learning about critical thinking as saying “this critical thinking thing is gobbledygook”. As a university professor in a

teacher preparation program the need for critical thinking on topics such as evolution theory and mainstream hegemony is crucial if we are to prepare students and teachers to think logically as they form their own opinions and beliefs about who they are as individuals and who we are as a society.

Board member Cargill has been quoted as saying "One of our goals is to emphasize the unity that all Americans have achieved as a result of the melting pot effect, so bringing attention to group distinctions is not necessary." While there is nothing wrong with optimism, it can become something of a burden for students of color, children of working-class parents, or members of any group that has not achieved socioeconomic success. The optimistic approach prevents any understanding of failure other than blaming the victim and ultimately produces a distorted account of our history. Given the demographic composition of our Texas schools, the rose-colored nature of this social studies curriculum is problematic. This was never more evident than this November when my 6-year old came home talking about pilgrims and Indians holding hands across a table for a Thanksgiving dinner. An event we continue to teach although it never happened.

In the long run it hurts children's self image to swallow what this social studies curriculum teaches about the fairness of America and the inaccurate picture of minority contributions to the building of this country. Additionally, many students of color identify social studies as one of their least favorite subjects in school. This can be traced to a curriculum in which students of color cannot find themselves in which students of color are not represented in the intellectual achievements of people who look like them. Our children need to see the brilliance of their legacy.

Research documents the need for students to learn about events that are interesting and important to them, events that relate to their lives and futures. Isolationist, myopic historical curriculum will not reach students of color. Rapid assimilative education can have negative effects on students of color (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Students adopt negative traits of the majority culture at the expense of their ethnic heritage, or they simply reject assimilation and refuse to

accept the norms of society. Students however, will start identifying with their social studies curriculum when the curriculum stops presenting inaccuracies, half-truths, and incomplete accounts of our past. To succeed, teachers and the required curriculum must help students learn how to ask questions about our society and its history and how to figure out answers for themselves. At this crucial task this social studies curriculum fails miserably.

Texas needs transformative leaders who promote the importance of academic equity for historically marginalized populations. When the curriculum is culturally relevant, students can connect new knowledge to their own experiences, thus empowering them to build on their personal background knowledge. Curriculum that is culturally responsive capitalizes on students' cultural backgrounds rather than attempting to override or negate them. It favors instruction appropriate to the ethnic background of the learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant curriculum espouses three tenets:

- Students experience success.
- Develop cultural awareness.
- Learn to think critically about surroundings.

Culturally relevant instruction promotes students as change agents. Learners are encouraged to question the hegemonic race and class system in the United States. With agency, the teacher persuades the students to speak out, make a difference, and institute real change. Educators have a responsibility to teach a culturally diverse population to the best of their ability regardless of an objectified course of study. To reach these students, teachers must incorporate instruction that ties community and ethnic strands with the institution of schooling.

Lastly, I understand that there have been legislative efforts to disband the State Board of Education, but one should seriously think about the consequence of

those actions as it could lead to Governor appointments of all SBOE board members. If the Board is eliminated then who would decide upon policy and instructional materials, the Commissioner of Education--- a position also appointed by the Governor? No, what we need is a State Board of Education that is seriously committed to helping all Texas students and their teachers because our very future viability depends upon it.

Our hope is the SBOE will delay the final adoption of social studies curriculum standards but our understanding is that they will not.

Thus, TABE would ask the SBOE to

1. Maintain the process that allows classroom teachers and scholars; who are true experts in the appropriate fields of study to make final changes to the draft of the standards and finally,
2. To ensure the new draft is a fair, accurate and a more realistic picture of Mexican American people and all cultures and their contributions to this great country.

Thank you for your time and I will be happy to take any questions.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (1995). But That's Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, 34 (3), 159-165.

Loewen, J. W. (1995). *Lies my teacher told me*. Touchstone, New York: NY.

Portes, Alejandro & Rumbaut, Rubén G. (2001). *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.