

DESPITE FLEXIBILITY AND FUNDING, SCHOOLS STILL OVERWHELMINGLY OPTING FOR PRINT OVER TECHNOLOGY

Parents overwhelmingly support mobile devices

The vast majority of instructional material allotment funding spent to date has gone to purchase instructional materials and not technology, despite the fears of the *State Board of Education*.

Opinions on Senate Bill 6, passed during the special session, have been split: The State Board of Education, which is losing power in the deal, is leery of it. The *Texas Textbook Coordinators Association* has been supportive of it, although the new environment has been called “the Wild Wild West.” And the *Texas Computer Education Association*, of course, has readily embraced the shift, which gives school districts broad latitude to make instructional material choices.

Jennifer Bergland of the *TCEA* led a session at the *Texas Association of School Administrators’* Midwinter conference this morning. She compared the impending passage from print to digital to the anacronym of her own generation.

“Many of you are thinking, ‘This, too, shall pass,’ but where I think things are going, and what I’m going to share with you today, is that 10 years from now, students will no longer be thinking of printed textbooks,” Bergland. “They’ll talk about printed textbooks the way we talk about party lines.”

But school districts have not been quick to embrace the shift. Given broad latitude to spend the new *instructional material allotment (IMA)* on printed textbooks, digital textbooks, technological devices, technology training and even wireless hubs, most school districts have clung to the printed and digital material. School districts can even choose materials that are open-source or only conform to part of the curriculum requirements.

In fact, *Texas Education Agency* data indicates that of the 65 percent of the IMA that has been spent to date, a total of 97 percent has gone to printed and digital instructional materials, Bergland said. Only 3 percent, or \$10 million, has gone to technology. Bergland said she was hopeful, with materials now out of the way, districts might begin to think of future additional technology purchases. However, districts can roll forward IMA balances.

Survey data collected in Texas indicate a strong preference to move to mobile Internet usage via smart phones, even more so than personal computers. And the vast majority of parents, regardless of income level, have indicated they would be willing to purchase mobile devices if their children could use them at school.

Students don't want, as some on the SBOE have suggested, a PDF version of existing textbooks, Bergland said. Surveys indicate they want video chat rooms, online tutors, virtual labs and text with both animation and simulations.

She urged school districts to establish a plan to move to digital in the next handful of years. The cornerstone of that plan, Bergland said, should be to see those instructional materials through the users' eyes. Teachers want broad test bank questions and good ancillary materials. Students want something they enjoy.

"I sat on a national panel that was talking about digital textbooks, and the publishers said, 'We don't know who to create for, the buyers or the users,'" Bergland said. "And I thought, 'That's a very good question.' I'm going to challenge you to try to stop thinking about what a teacher wants to purchase and start thinking about what is the best kind of content for your students."

Expenditures from the current school year for instructional materials are approximately \$75 per student and could rise to \$100 per student in future funding cycles. High-growth school districts have seen slightly more funding.

By Kimberly Reeves

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