

District 15 GOP candidates weigh in on SBOE decisions

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Texas State Board of Education District 15 Republican candidates Anette Carlisle and Marty Rowley came back from the board's meetings in Austin with differing opinions on how involved the board should be in district-level decisions.

Carlisle said she is concerned the board gets bogged down in details that should be left to individual districts. Rowley said he thinks the board needs to be involved in details such as curriculum standards, but it must maintain a balance so it doesn't overpower local districts.

The board gave preliminary approval Friday to new math standards for schools statewide, but moved to block implementation unless the Legislature provides funding for new textbooks.

Carlisle, the Amarillo Independent School Board president, said that is a welcome approach because schools wouldn't be able to teach the state-mandated Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum and meet accountability standards if the state didn't provide districts money to buy materials.

"That's going to be welcome at the local level," she said. "If you expect students to have specific knowledge and you don't provide instructional materials to match that set of knowledge, how can you expect them to adequately learn it?"

Rowley, an Amarillo attorney, said the board's decisions on issues such as the math standards show it is becoming more aware of how the Legislature's \$4 billion funding cut in 2011 affected individual school districts and classrooms.

"I think it's important that state government recognize the impact of mandates on our school systems, particularly in regard to funding," he said.

Carlisle and Rowley are running for the seat currently held by Bob Craig, R-Lubbock, who will not seek re-election. Steven Schafersman, D-Midland, is the only Democrat to run for the position but did not attend last week's board meetings.

Schafersman, a consulting scientist who said he works in the petroleum and environmental industries, said he has long been a critic of the board for how it implements curriculum standards because it often makes adjustments to the standards before adopting them.

"The standards are in far worse shape than they would've been if they had just adopted them as given to them by the experts," Schafersman said.

Based on the textbook provisions included in Friday's vote, new math curriculum standards from kindergarten through eighth grade would take effect for the 2014-2015 school year when new books are available; and in 2015-2016 for grades nine through 12 when those books are ready, said Debbie Ratcliffe, a spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency. Lawmakers are not in session currently and don't reconvene until January 2013.

Ratcliffe said it's difficult to estimate how much state funding would be needed to purchase new books for the curriculum standards, but that "a very rough estimate for K-12 math material" would be around \$350 million.

Ratcliffe said during "the last budget cycle or two, there was a problem with purchasing textbooks," and that the cuts meant authorities had to postpone a plan to buy science books for all grades last year.

Carlisle said she thinks the state board should focus its attention on broader education issues that set outlines for districts rather than spend time on specific curriculum guidelines such as when students should be able to count by fives or tens. Carlisle said students don't all learn at the same rate and teachers should have discretion about how fast to go through lessons with their students.

"One-size-fits-all does not work anywhere in Texas, the United States or Amarillo," she said.

Rowley said he thinks it is important for the state to be involved in curriculum and accountability issues because all taxpayers are paying for the state education system.

"We all have a vested interest in the effectiveness and productivity of our schools," he said. "There is a legitimate interest on the part of the State Board of Education that our schools are accountable, but at the same time implementation and the decisions as to how the classrooms are conducted and how kids are taught should be left up to the local districts."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.