

Textbooks tied to tests

By Gary Scharrer- San Antonio Express-News

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AUSTIN — The annual standardized tests for public school children wouldn't be rewritten or adjusted to cover Texas' new math curriculum standards unless lawmakers pay for new textbooks to help teach it, the [State Board of Education](#) tentatively decided Friday.

“We've heard teachers and parents loud and clear that it's not fair to kids and teachers to make them be tested on something that we've not provided the materials for them to learn,” board member [Thomas Ratliff](#), R-Mount Pleasant, said after a unanimous board vote.

However, board member [David Bradley](#), R-Beaumont, who was out of the room when his colleagues voted, criticized the policy and said he would try to talk them out of it before a final vote in April.

The Legislature's unwillingness in recent years to fully fund textbooks and other instructional material has been a sore point for the board, which is responsible for developing curriculum standards that guide textbook companies.

But Bradley called the board's action “unwanted and misleading,” a mistake that sends the wrong message.

He noted that Senate Bill 6, which Gov. [Rick Perry](#) signed into law last year, specifically dedicates 40 percent of the [Permanent School Fund](#) allocation to go to school districts — distributed on a per-student basis — for instructional material.

“The districts have the ability to buy whatever they want, when they want,” he said.

The Permanent School Fund contains land holdings, oil and mineral rights and a variety of investments worth more than \$25 billion.

The board determines how much of the investment earnings can flow to school districts each year. Currently, that's roughly \$750 million a year, of which 40 percent could generate close to \$300 million for instructional materials.

Math textbooks and other materials covering the new math curriculum standards will cost about \$350 million for kindergarten through 12th grade, according to the [Texas Education Agency](#).

The new curriculum, already adopted by the board, is scheduled to take effect for the 2014-15 school year.

The Legislature still would need to appropriate the money earmarked from the Permanent School Fund for instruction materials under SB-6, and lawmakers often park dedicated funds simply to help certify a balanced budget, Ratliff said.

“This is just raising the ante – saying we're not going to make teachers and kids learn the (new) curriculum until the state and the State Board of Education do the right thing and put (new) instructional materials in the classrooms,” Ratliff said.

Texasans spend about \$52 billion a year on public education and finding \$350 million for books and materials to teach a new math curriculum should not be a big deal, House Public Education said Chairman [Rob Eissler](#), R-The Woodlands.

“Instructional material is the first thing we should be concerned with and not the last,” Eissler said.

Board member [Michael Soto](#), D-San Antonio, agreed with Ratliff on the need for a specific hammer to force legislative action. He expects the money to flow to school districts without a hitch.

“I see no reason why (textbooks) won't be available in classrooms in the fall of 2014 as we currently anticipate,” he said.

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