

Public Testimony
Janice Lombardi
President, Texas State Reading Association
www.tsra.us
October 18, 2006

*"The man who doesn't read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them."
Mark Twain US humorist, novelist, short story author, & wit (1835 - 1910)*

As President of the Texas State Reading Association, I represent several thousand educators from across the great state of Texas who are avid supporters of literacy – the reading of books, newspapers, magazines and, yes, even the new literacies of technology.

Literacy is more than an important goal for Texans. The printed pages of books have led students into worlds of heroes, history and hope.

After all, does Oprah have an "Oprah's Computer Club"; "Oprah's Software Club"; "Oprah's Technology Club"? No. Oprah connects to the written text through "Oprah's Book Club".

At a time when the reading of books is at an all time high, can we, in Texas, say we need something different?

On behalf of the Texas State Reading Association, I want to express my support for the current textbook adoption procedure in Texas as mandated by the State Board of Education and paid for by the Permanent School Textbook Fund.

TSRA educators who will soon join together in Austin in November at our annual state conference to anxiously await news about state-adopted reading and language arts materials. We have always been assured that the state's textbook adoption list matches the state's student expectations.

Additionally, we know that the adoption committees represent each area of the state of Texas and that the 'vetting' of the materials through this unbiased process, untainted by influence, make it a model for other states to follow.

Presently, Texas, California and New York have the clout to persuade publishers to lead the textbook development process because of the very procedure that this body now contemplates dissolving.

I have said much about books and literacy. I have one final point.

Please note that if literacy is the goal, technology is only a tool. It is an ancillary extension of the teacher.

A quick fix? A miracle cure? No.

Technology is not the teacher.

The Texas State Reading Association believes that well-intentioned techies and even some “special interest groups” have placed too much emphasis on the value of the physical hard drive and less emphasis on the value of the “book” that tells about the hardware.

Do you ever wonder why each hard drive or software program is always accompanied by a book or printed material? Because reading printed material is the most important purveyor of knowledge and the most prevalent.

Can technology open new worlds? Yes, indisputably. But it can never replace a book or a teacher.

Thomas Jefferson (1743 - 1826) once said, “I cannot live without books”. It is the hopes of the Texas State Reading Association that the state of Texas cannot live without books either!

“Without words, without writing, and without books, there would be no history; there would be no concept of humanity.” Herman Hesse (1877-1962)