



May 19, 2009



Dear Texas Lawmaker:

Representing a cross-section of leaders in education and business, we strongly support House Bill 4294 – a critical measure that will allow more Texas classrooms to enter the 21st century and better serve our schoolchildren.



Put simply, HB 4294 would give school districts the flexibility to use their textbook allotment to buy a much wider range of approved instructional materials that best meet the needs of their students. HB 4294 is jointly authored by Chairmen Dan Branch, (R-Dallas; Higher Education); Rob Eissler (R-The Woodlands; Public Education); Rene Oliveira (D-Brownsville; Ways and Means); and Mark Strama (D-Austin; Technology, Economic Development and Workforce). HB 4294 received overwhelming support in the House of Representatives. It is sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Plano, Chair of Senate Education).



As you know, school districts currently may only use their state textbook allotment to buy hard copy textbooks (or their electronic complement). However, many districts are using local tax dollars to buy other learning materials to augment these textbooks, while many textbooks sit unused.



HB 4294 would give districts the flexibility to use some of their textbook allotment for what are often more innovative and updated learning materials. This would mean textbook allotment dollars would not be spent on books that are not being used and districts wouldn't be forced to spend scant local tax dollars on other materials.



HB 4294 does not mandate any new expenditures or the purchase of new curricula by local school districts. Districts that wish to use their entire textbook allotment on approved textbooks can do so.



HB 4294 recognizes that Texas school children reflect a diverse mix of learning styles and backgrounds, and that many school districts – outside the textbook funds they receive – are rightly putting cutting-edge content and tools into their local classrooms.



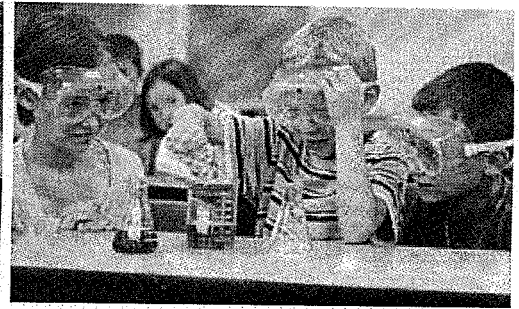
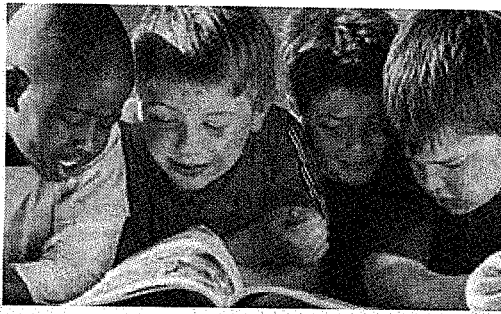
In today's 21st century learning environment we can no longer so narrowly define learning tools as hard copy textbooks and limit state funding to these basic materials. To do that fails to capitalize on what is best for Texas students.



HB 4294 has broad-based, bipartisan support and is viewed by educators as a vital tool to better prepare students for a global, knowledge-based economy.



Vote YES on HB 4294.



HB 4294:

Local Control, Flexibility for Texas Schools

To properly prepare our children for a global economy, Texas must do more to offer educators access to a broader range of instructional materials and technological equipment.

Under current law, Texas school districts may use their state textbook allotment solely for the purchase of hard copy textbooks (or their electronic equivalent) that are adopted by the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). This short-sighted, antiquated approach to curriculum development is not only undermining the ability of teachers to do their job, it is cheating Texas school kids.

Some school districts are warehousing SBOE-approved textbooks and using local tax dollars to purchase, and even develop, innovative learning materials. It's time for change. We must be smarter about the use of our education dollars – and how they are spent – to ensure our kids are receiving the best education possible.

House Bill 4294 will empower local districts to do what is best for their students and free them to use their textbook funds to purchase a much wider range of relevant, up-to-date instructional materials and technological equipment, as well as traditional textbooks.

HB 4294 is jointly authored by Chairmen Dan Branch, Rob Eissler, Rene Oliveira, and Mark Strama.

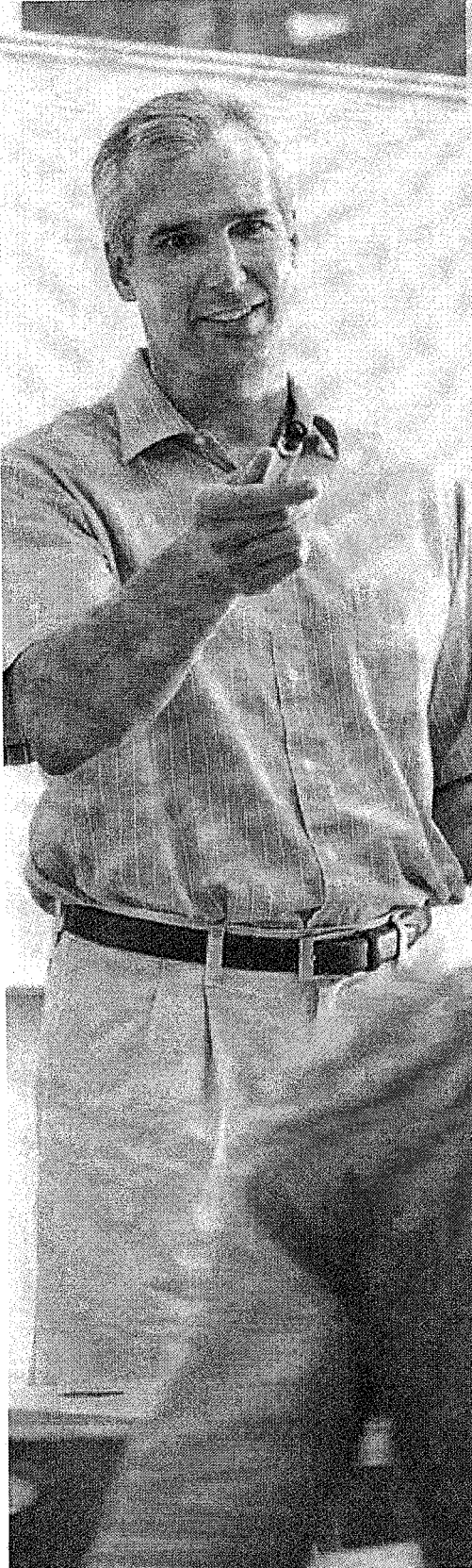
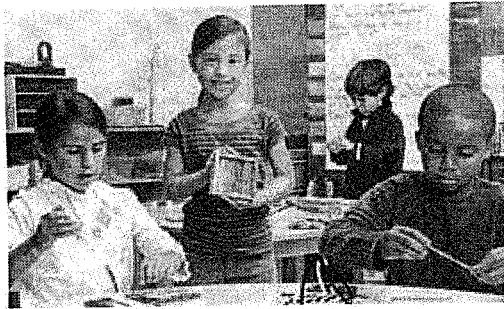
Empowering Local Districts

Local control and flexibility are the watchwords of HB 4294. The measure will allow school districts to use their textbook allotted funds to buy state-approved learning materials and technology that best meets the needs of their own students. Specifically, the measure will . . .

- Allow schools that rely on textbooks for successful instruction to continue to purchase and use textbooks;
- Establish a Texas Education Agency Commissioner's List of approved instructional materials and supporting technology equipment that districts may also purchase with their textbook fund allotment;

continued on reverse





Empowering Local Districts, *continued*

- Establish a minimum requirement that districts and charter schools purchase a classroom set of SBOE-approved textbooks for all curriculum.
- Ensure districts are not required to buy books that will go unused, nor rely on outside funding for state-approved educational materials they believe best meet their students' needs.

Also in the spirit of local control, HB 4294:

- Does not mandate that districts purchase any materials beyond the textbooks approved by SBOE;
- Does not mandate that districts spend any of their textbook funds or any other monies on technology, computers or any educational equipment or curriculum that the district does not wish to purchase.

Time for Change

HB 4294 recognizes that Texas school children reflect a diverse mix of learning styles and backgrounds, and that many school districts - outside the textbook funds they receive - are putting new, cutting-edge and relevant content and tools into their local classrooms.

State funding for "textbooks" is critical, and in today's 21st century learning environment we can no longer so narrowly define learning tools as hard copy textbooks and limit state funding to these basic materials. Not if we expect our students to be prepared for a global economy.

Let's spend our money wisely and give all of our schools the local control and flexibility to buy the materials they need to help their students succeed.

Vote Yes on HB 4294

Legislative advertising by TechNet Texas, Geoff Wurzel, executive director,
1122 Colorado St., Austin, Texas 78701.

The Dallas Morning News

Dallas Morning News

Editorial: Texas House does right on funding, textbooks

01:32 PM CDT on Friday, May 15, 2009

For those just tuning into this year's Texas Legislature, the big education issue has been the rewrite of the state's accountability system. Creating new measures for schools has obscured other topics, like how much money the state flows into schools.

That's funny because school funding normally dominates the spotlight. People, including us, usually holler for more funds. This year, lawmakers have assuaged those concerns.

The House just approved \$1.9 billion for schools over the next two years. The cash will accomplish several objectives, including raising teacher salaries and keeping Dallas and Houston from having to share tax revenues with less-wealthy districts.

The latter item matters greatly to Dallas students. The Dallas school district has some handsome property wealth, which determines whether the state considers a district rich or poor, but its students largely come from poor families.

It would be loony for a district with so many students who qualify for free lunches to ship part of its tax revenues to another district with a similar type of student. The state essentially would have been gutting programs for one set of poor students to help another set.

Texas' share-the-wealth method of financing schools arose out of disparities between districts' abilities to fund their work. The only way to flatten the disparities is for the state to invest more money directly into schools.

The House has tried to do that; the Senate needs to match its leadership.

Another relevant school issue is Dallas GOP Rep. Dan Branch's proposal to let school districts decide whether to spend their textbook allotment on traditional ink-on-paper books or electronic versions. The House has approved the option, and the Senate Education Committee needs to hear it next week.

The bill makes sense. No district is forced to go the electronic route, but those that wish to do so now have a choice.

Clearly, we are living in an electronic age. Students learn electronically in ways they didn't as recently as 10 years ago. Why not give them the chance to learn their material online, where course content can be modernized more quickly?

Branch's good bill may rattle traditional textbook publishers, but the Senate should follow his lead. Students deserve this option.

Star-Telegram.com

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

PUBLIC SCHOOLS: Texas lawmakers can equip schools with flexibility, choice

April 27, 2009

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By KARI RHAME

Deer Park ISD

Special to the Star-Telegram

When I was a teenager, a book report was a simple undertaking because I was blessed to grow up in a home with plenty to read and was particularly fortunate to have access to our family's set of encyclopedias. At the time, they were the go-to resource for school projects.

From aardvarks to Zulus, my knowledge of the world around me was shaped in large part by the hundreds, if not thousands, of hours I spent perusing the pages of the encyclopedia and filling my mind with important, interesting and sometimes arcane facts.

My success in the classroom was aided in large part by the good fortune of having an encyclopedia at my finger tips — with unrivaled content and depth.

My, how times have changed.

Today, printed encyclopedias gather dust as the world around us — in math, science, technology, geography, politics and more — changes and adapts at rapid-fire pace. We test and test and test to ensure that our students are reaching core competencies and milestones, but are we giving them all the tools they need to succeed?

Unfortunately, we're not, but there's hope.

Looking into the classrooms of our state, I too often see schools following outdated models of education dependent on one form of learning: the printed word or traditional textbooks.

It is frustrating to see how beholden we are to a one-size-fits-all method of educating tomorrow's leaders.

Our future economy and our international competitiveness are directly dependent on the quality of the education we provide to our children today, and, like our international

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

PUBLIC SCHOOLS: Texas lawmakers can equip schools with flexibility, choice

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competitors, we must equip our schools and our students with every available resource that will engage and educate them.

During this session of the Texas Legislature, I'm proud to be part of a broad-based, bipartisan effort to give our local educators more choice and financial flexibility to create a curriculum that will best meet the needs of their students.

House Bill 4294, by Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, offers some hope and a workable solution that ensures that our students get the textbooks, educational materials and technology they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

Legislation being considered will ensure that Texas schools can buy the latest textbooks as well as state-approved instructional materials and supporting technology using their textbook fund allotment.

If we are to prepare students to live and work in a highly competitive, interconnected world, we can — no, we must — offer them classrooms and curricula that deliver rich content, in a compelling, deeply educational and proven format.

It's time for a change — a change that will give our school districts more local control to deliver the best education they can.

We owe it to our students to support every effort to grab their attention, open their minds and give them every opportunity to compete in the global work force of today and tomorrow.

Times have changed since I pulled out my encyclopedia to read about the Soviet Union or the earliest computers, and the way students learn has changed with it. So, let's give teachers and school districts the flexibility and choice they need to tailor their educational curriculum to meet the modern needs of the very diverse student populations they serve.

It's time to empower Texas schools and give them every chance to do what they know will work for their students.

Kari Rhame is chief technology officer for the Deer Park school district and past president of the Texas Computer Education Association. www.tcea.org

The Dallas Morning News

The Dallas Morning News

March 26, 2009

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Irving ISD uses online textbooks, so unused copies state must buy sit in a warehouse

By KATHERINE LEAL UNMUTH / The Dallas Morning News
kunmuth@dallasnews.com

Thousands of textbooks and other materials worth an estimated \$4.6 million sit unused in an Irving school district warehouse. No one knows how many \$50-\$75 textbooks sit unused in school bookrooms or storage warehouses across Texas.

Irving ISD officials say the problem stems from two major factors: the increased use of computer-based instructional materials and the reluctance to issue textbooks to each student for fear they might lose or damage them.

"It's not like you've gone and thrown a million dollars off the top of a building, but I think we could do better things with the money," said Lea Bailey, Irving ISD's director of learning resources. "I don't think we're being wasteful. I think we could probably revise the process and make better use of taxpayers' money for sure."

The Texas Education Agency, which regulates public schools, budgeted \$500 million for textbook purchases in 2008-09.

The Texas Constitution requires the state to provide free textbooks to public school children. Historically, the state has met that requirement by buying a book in every subject for each child.

In recent years, however, more districts are allowing teachers to keep 25 or 30 books in their rooms for use during school hours. But they don't issue a book to each child. And that's why many books – purchased by the state – sit unused in school bookrooms and warehouses.

The way textbook publishers package their products compounds the problem, according to experts familiar with the business. In effect, many publishers will not sell computer-based versions of their textbooks unless the state agrees to buy the paper version as well. Publishers characterize the computer-related materials as "free" along with the textbook purchase.

This so-called "bundling" strategy has exacerbated the problem in Irving because the district has issued laptops to all high school students, meaning they have little need for paper books.

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"If we don't need a textbook; we shouldn't have to have one," Bailey said. "But we don't have the right to the online textbooks if we don't buy the physical ones. That's just the way the pricing structure is set up."

The wastefulness of the current system is prompting the Legislature to find a solution.

A bill by state Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, would allow the state to purchase just "electronic books," which includes computer discs, online content or downloaded PDF files. It also proposes using technology funding to buy the laptops and computers to view them.

"The current one-size-fits-all is textbooks," he said. "This bill is about giving school districts the flexibility to be able to order online books or other instructional materials that are vetted and not be forced to buy textbooks, which sit in a warehouse."

Branch proposes that districts be required to provide at least a classroom set of books – paper or electronic – to students rather than issuing materials to each individual student. This level of access to "books" would meet the constitutional mandate to provide free books to each student, he said.

Not everyone online

Jay Diskey, executive director of the Association of American Publishers school division, said he has not analyzed Branch's bill and declined to comment on it. In general, he said, many poor students throughout Texas do not have access to computers at home or in school and need textbooks.

Diskey characterized his industry's transition from paper to computer-based products as a "slow movement."

"The challenge of the publisher is to work with school districts that have different resources," he said.

Irving is unusual because it issues a laptop to each high school student.

"The campuses say we don't need this book, we're working on the laptop," said Bailey, the Irving ISD administrator. "So we take them back [to the warehouse]."

But Irving is not the only Texas school district to struggle with how to store unused books.

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Karla Christman, who manages textbooks for the Brazosport ISD, said some of the struggle is unnecessary. School districts should distribute books to each child, she said, and not store them just because they are afraid they'll get lost or destroyed.

Christman, who is president of the Textbook Coordinators Association of Texas, said all of the books sitting in warehouses in Irving and other districts might not be entirely wasted. A computerized inventory system allows districts to ship stored books to another district that needs them.

"The biggest problem is if nobody needs them, you're stuck for quite a while with them," she said.

Running out of room

The reason that many teachers don't issue textbooks to each child is simple. When a textbook becomes outdated after six or seven years, the school district is required to send them back to the state for disposal. The district has to pay the state for lost and unaccounted-for books.

Irving MacArthur High School principal Cynthia Bean this year began pushing teachers and students to make more efficient use of their district-issued laptops. She has cut the number of paper textbooks kept on campus. Teachers use "classroom sets" as back-ups.

"It just becomes too cumbersome to tote around those big textbooks when in fact we have an online version of the text for them," she said. "We're transitioning and the whole industry is transitioning."

So many books are stacking up in Irving's Ratteree Career Development Center—which also houses cosmetology and auto tech programs—that construction workers are expanding the warehouse.

Fire inspectors repeatedly warned district officials that it was unsafe to stack boxes of books in the warehouse aisles. Therefore, the district commissioned the \$118,000 building expansion.

Bailey said the \$4.6 million worth of books and other instructional materials stored in the warehouse is "a lot of money."

The Dallas Morning News

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WHY BOOKS SIT UNUSED

In the Irving ISD alone, millions of dollars' worth of textbooks are stacking up in a district warehouse. Many of them might never be used because of a gradual move to an online curriculum.

Another contributing factor: Many teachers don't issue books to each child for fear they might lose or damage them.

No one knows how many textbooks might be sitting unused in school bookrooms and warehouses throughout Texas. A random list of textbook prices:

1. *Algebra 2* (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill), \$65.73. (same price if district chooses online or text)
2. *Precalculus With Limits: A Graphing Approach* (McDougal Littell), \$72.57.
3. *Kindergarten Math* (SRA/McGraw-Hill), \$22.38 (same price online or book)
4. *Math Grade 5* (Saxon), \$57.85. (text and online)
5. *Latin* (Cambridge University Press), \$51.22
6. *German 3* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston), \$55.20
7. *Spanish-Middle School-Realidades 1* (Pearson Education), \$56.45

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency

PATH OF A TEXAS TEXTBOOK

This is the process Texas uses for adopting textbooks for public schools:

- The State Board of Education issues a proclamation identifying subject areas under review and estimates of the number of books to be purchased.
- Publishers submit bids and offer instructional materials for review to the Texas Education Agency and state textbook review panels.
- The review panels evaluate the books and identify errors. Then they submit the evaluation to the education commissioner.

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- The commissioner recommends a list of textbooks that meet standards, and the State Board of Education chooses which books to adopt for classroom use.
- Publishers provide descriptions of materials to school districts, which can request one sample.
- Local school boards look at the textbooks approved by the state board and select the ones they want to use.
- Districts order the books through TEA, and publishers ship orders during the summer.
- State government pays for the books.
- After several years, the books become outdated and the school district returns them to the state for disposal. The district has to reimburse the state for lost or unaccounted-for books.

For more information, go to [http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/text books/adoptprocess/overview.html](http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/text%20books/adoptprocess/overview.html)

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency

SA Opinion: Flexibility and Choice: Enabling 21st Century Learners to Succeed

May 4, 2009

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Johnny Veselka - Special to the Express-News

More than two years ago, a group of 35 Texas superintendents convened to begin examining the culture and structure needed in our public schools so that today's students have the opportunity to acquire 21st century skills necessary to compete in our global economy. They came together as a community of learners to create a new vision for public education in Texas and determined that it is time to begin disciplined dialogue, stimulate questions, identify problems, and frame issues that will eventually lead to strategic actions at the local level.

Following a series of meetings and extensive focused discussion, this group produced a document titled *Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas*, outlining a framework for transforming Texas public schools in ways that will help our students succeed in today's world.

At the heart of this dialogue was a recognition that the digital environment in which we live and work will have more impact on the generation and transmission of knowledge than anything since the invention of the printing press. The world in which we live is truly global, connected, and increasingly competitive, and our public schools must transform themselves in order to educate our students so that they will survive—and thrive—in this environment.

The 81st Texas Legislature has a unique opportunity, in the coming weeks, to help transform the learning environment in our elementary, middle, and high schools by passing House Bill 4294. This legislation, jointly authored by Rep. Dan Branch (R-Dallas), Rep. Rob Eissler (R-The Woodlands), Rep. Rene Oliveira (D-Brownsville), Rep. Mark Strama (D-Austin), and Rep. Jimmie Don Aycock (R-Killeen), has a growing list of more than 40 House members who have signed onto the bill as co-sponsors.

HB 4294 needs more than the backing of legislators; it needs the support of all Texans. Its passage will free millions of dollars in state textbook funds annually so that local schools can invest in electronic content and other instructional materials that reflect the realities of the digital era, where students are not just consumers of knowledge, they are creators of knowledge.

HB 4294 is about flexibility. It will allow local school districts the ability to choose cutting-edge, relevant content that will best meet the needs of their students. Schools that

San Antonio Express-News

SA Opinion: Flexibility and Choice: Enabling 21st Century Learners to Succeed

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wish to do so may continue to purchase hardbound, printed textbooks. Or, they may choose electronic textbooks, online curriculum, or other technology-based learning tools and materials that are right for the students in their communities. Schools would have the ability to use state textbook funds to purchase a much wider range of relevant, up-to-date instructional materials and technological equipment. To ease the transition, schools would be required to purchase at least one classroom set of each state-adopted textbook, but beyond that, purchasing choices would be up to schools to meet their students' specific needs.

HB 4294 is about efficiency. Many school districts are already purchasing non-textbook instructional materials to supplement state-adopted textbooks to better prepare their students. This legislation will enable districts to redirect these valuable local and state tax dollars to other areas of the school budget, while using state textbook funds to enrich the classroom experience in ways never before possible.

HB 4294 is about Texas children succeeding on the world stage. Its focus on bringing curriculum and instruction into the digital age paves the way for a college- and workforce-ready student body prepared for success in the 21st century workplace.

Johnny Veselka is executive director of the Texas Association of School Administrators.

Houston Chronicle

Houston Chronicle

Commentary: Give students tools to be globally competitive

April 23, 2009

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By KARI RHAME

Deer Park ISD

When I was a teenager, a book report was a simple undertaking since I was blessed to grow up in a home with plenty to read and was particularly fortunate to have access to our family's set of encyclopedias. At the time, they were the go-to resource for school projects.

From aardvarks to Zulus, my knowledge of the world around me was shaped in large part by the hundreds, if not thousands, of hours I spent perusing the pages of the encyclopedia and filling my mind with important, interesting and sometimes arcane facts. My success in the classroom was aided in large part by the good fortune of having an encyclopedia at my finger tips — with unrivaled content and depth.

My, how times have changed!

Today, printed encyclopedias gather dust as the world around us — in math, science, technology, geography, politics and more — changes and adapts at rapid-fire pace. We test and test and test to ensure our students are reaching core competencies and milestones, but are we giving them all the tools they need to succeed?

Unfortunately, we're not, but there's hope.

Looking into the classrooms of our state, I too often see schools following outdated models of education dependent on one form of learning — the printed word or traditional textbook. It is frustrating to see how beholden we are to a one-size-fits-all method for educating tomorrow's leaders.

Our future economy and our international competitiveness are directly dependent on the quality of the education we provide to our children today and, like our international competitors, we must equip our schools and our students with every available resource that will engage and educate our students.

During this session of the Texas Legislature, I'm proud to be part of a broad-based, bipartisan effort to give our local educators more choice and financial flexibility to create a curriculum that will best meet the needs of their local students.

Houston Chronicle

Commentary: Give students tools to be globally competitive

April 23, 2009

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House Bill 4294 offers some hope and a workable solution that ensures our students get the textbooks, educational materials and technology they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. Legislation being considered now would ensure Texas schools can purchase the latest textbooks as well as state-approved instructional materials and supporting technology using their textbook fund allotment.

If we are to prepare students to live and work in a highly competitive, interconnected world, we can — no, we must — offer them classrooms and curricula that deliver rich content, in a compelling, deeply educational and proven format.

It's time for a change — a change that will give our school districts more local control to deliver the best education they can to all of their students. We owe it to our students to support every effort to grab their attention, open their minds and give them every opportunity to compete in the global work force of today and tomorrow.

Times have changed since I pulled out my encyclopedia to read about the Soviet Union or the earliest computers, and the way students learn has changed with it. So, let's give teachers and school districts the flexibility and choice they need to tailor their educational curriculum to meet the modern needs of the very diverse student populations they serve.

It's time to empower Texas schools and give them every chance to do what they know will work for their local students.

Rhame is chief technology officer for the Deer Park Independent School District and past president of the Texas Computer Education Association.

Austin American-Statesman

Editorial: Allowing textbook money to be spent on technology

May 1, 2009

Editorial Board

Amid all the brainstorming on how best to educate Texas students, legislators have hoisted the accountability system in preparation for an overhaul, kicked the tires on charter schools and jiggled the wires on school financing. State Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, and a host of other notables are even considering legislation to give local school boards the flexibility to use textbook money on technology.

Branch's idea is not a fancy or complicated concept but certainly one that deserves legislative support. The bill would allow school boards to use money allotted for bound, paper textbooks for "electronic textbooks and instructional material that conveys information to the student or otherwise contributes to the learning process."

Translation: Today's students might be more comfortable consuming information from a computer screen than a traditional textbook.

Branch's bill is being promoted by a diverse group of legislators including state Reps. Rob Eissler, R-The Woodlands; Warren Chisum, R-Pampa; Mark Strama, D-Austin; and Rene Oliveira, D-Brownsville. It is scheduled for a vote in the House on Saturday.

The bill also enjoys the support of an array of business and educational groups.

Giving local school boards that kind of flexibility is the ultimate in local control. The bill also recognizes that reading styles of have changed radically in Texas and across the United States. Today's students have been raised in front of computer screens. Allowing school boards to supplement traditional paper textbooks with material prepared for computers is a recognition that times and learning styles have changed.

Limiting local districts to using state textbook money for traditional bound paper textbooks denies that reality.

This is a not a bill whose time is just now coming. That time came a while back, so this bill allows local districts to catch up. The House shouldn't balk at the opportunity to encourage students to learn in a technologically efficient manner.

As noted previously, that's not a fancy or complicated concept. It's a reality of modern life, and school districts should be given the flexibility to adapt to it.

Waco Tribune-Herald

Waco Tribune-Herald

Kari Rhame, guest column: 21st-century learning tools

May 4, 2009

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KARI RHAME Guest column

DEER PARK, Texas — When I was a teenager, a book report was a simple undertaking. Our home had books aplenty and a set of encyclopedias.

My knowledge of the world around me was shaped in part by the hundreds, if not thousands, of hours I spent perusing their pages.

My, how times have changed.

Today, encyclopedias gather dust as the world around us changes at a rapid-fire pace. We test and test and test to ensure our students are reaching core milestones. But are we giving them all the tools they need to succeed?

Unfortunately, we're not. But there's hope.

Looking into the classrooms of our state, I too often see schools following outdated models of education dependent on one form of learning: the traditional textbook. It is frustrating to see how beholden we are to a one-size-fits-all method for educating tomorrow's leaders.

Like our international competitors, we must equip our schools with every available resource that will engage students.

During this session of the Texas Legislature, I'm part of a broad-based bipartisan effort to give our local educators more choices and financial flexibility to create a curriculum that will best meet student needs.

House Bill 4294 would ensure that students get the educational materials and technology they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. That would include, with the use of each school's state-approved textbook fund allotment, purchasing things other than traditional textbooks — like electronic textbooks and various software programs.

If we are to prepare students to live and work in highly competitive, interconnected world, we can — no, we must — offer them classrooms and curriculum that deliver rich content in a compelling and proven format.

Waco Tribune-Herald

Kari Rhame, guest column: 21st-century learning tools

May 4, 2009

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It's time for a change — a change that will give our school districts more local control to deliver the best education they can to their local students. We owe it to our students to support every effort to grab their attention, open their minds and give them every opportunity to compete in the global workforce of today and tomorrow.

Times have changed since I pulled out my encyclopedia to read about the earliest computers.

Now those computers are at students' fingertips or should be.

So, let's give school districts the flexibility and choice they need to tailor their educational curricula to meet modern needs.

Let's give Texas schools every chance to do what they know will work for their local students.

Kari Rhame is chief technology officer for the Deer Park Independent School District and past president of the Texas Computer Education Association.



El Paso Times

May 5, 2009

Editorial: School books: Electronic texts may be the next page

El Paso Times Staff

The whisper of pages turning could soon be replaced by fingers tapping on a keyboard. Last week, the Texas House of Representatives gave a preliminary OK to allow schools to use their textbook funding allotment to buy approved electronic materials.

That would allow information to be downloaded for students to receive through laptops or electronic readers. That would at least partially replace the "old" hardback books, which still have their proponents.

Hardback textbooks don't have to have batteries recharged, don't rely on electricity, aren't as easily broken as computers and don't receive unintended programs such as porn.

On the other hand, computers or readers are more easily updated, aren't as cumbersome, can provide more information, can use a lot more photos and graphics, are more interactive than textbooks and take up less room than books.

Schools would still be able to buy traditional textbooks if they wished.

But state Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, who sponsored the measure, said, "Traditional textbooks are a vehicle to deliver content. But for many students that vehicle is quickly becoming a horse and buggy."

This measure would help to bring Texas' education system more up to date.

It's certainly worth a try.

