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## CSCOPE SERIES

By Ann Work

Sunday, December 16, 2012

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Ginger Russell has made it her mission to fight CSCOPE, but it hasn't been easy.





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## Some teachers at odds with CSCOPE

### System to help with test scores often found lacking

By Ann Work

Sunday, December 16, 2012

Stan Hartzler has been a math teacher for a long time. The 40-year teacher has written textbooks, taught college math, and given hundreds of presentations on how to teach his subject.

So when he was hired in August 2012 to launch a robust attack on Luling Independent School District's failing math scores, he brought a solid understanding of what his students needed.

But Hartzler would soon become a casualty in a growing state controversy when, shortly after his hire, his superintendent adopted a new teaching system called CSCOPE. It organized each day's classroom topics — minute to minute — and provided scripted talking points and lessons.

He required Hartzler to use it exclusively, despite Hartzler's protests.

Hartzler tried.

He used every quadratic equation, every calculator exercise, and all the algebra tile work.

But it felt like a concoction of leftovers that would seriously harm students — particularly the disadvantaged ones — because it left out so much.

"The course in algebra is not there," he said. "I regard this as being fraudulent."

Hartzler decided to analyze CSCOPE's Algebra 1 curriculum. He would use the same methodology that he used to earn his doctorate when he screened 141 algebra textbooks and their combined 435,000 math exercises.

When he applied the same analysis to CSCOPE, he discovered that CSCOPE gutted a quarter of a typical book's content.

It deleted and weakened so much of the rest that he decided he must protest CSCOPE and risk going to jail — or resign.

"I feel like I'm aiding and abetting some fraud here," he said. "I'd compare this to a surgeon who is forced to use filthy scalpels."

He resigned Dec. 3.

So what is this teaching system that so stymied Hartzler?

CSCOPE is an online curriculum for teachers designed to help them plan and deliver lessons that will meet state requirements.

The online system works without textbooks.

If teachers follow it, they're assured by their administrators — who have been told by the regional Education Service Centers who created it — that they will be giving all students what they need to pass state tests.

At a time in education when good test scores trump all, a promise like that is a lottery win to administrators and school boards. Since 2006 they have purchased it in droves.

In six years, 875 of the 1,032 Texas school districts adopted CSCOPE, each one leasing it annually from the ESCs for about \$7 per student, sending millions to TESCCC, the nonprofit arm of the state's regional service centers.

North Texas' Region 9 school districts signed on like all the rest.

All but one of its 37 districts convinced their school boards to pay for the online system and trained their teachers to use it.

All Wichita Falls Independent School District schools use CSCOPE. So do Bright Ideas Charter School and Wichita Christian School. City View ISD in northern Wichita Falls remains the one holdout who prefers its own curriculum, written by its own teachers.

Statewide, CSCOPE boasts 90,000 users who oversee about 3 million of Texas' 4.8 million children.

The transition to CSCOPE was an under-the-radar nonevent until recently, when frustrated teachers like Hartzler began growing so dissatisfied by demands to use the scripted lessons that they began speaking out on chat boards and websites and leaking some of its most controversial content.

Until then, teachers had dutifully honored a nine-page nondisclosure document that their superintendents required they sign.

The document prevented them from showing the curriculum and its lessons to anyone.

In November, conservative media personality Glenn Beck highlighted a pirated CSCOPE lesson on his radio talk show.

The world history lesson included an activity that compared the Boston Tea Party to an act of terrorism.

Beck was equally outraged at CSCOPE doctrine in pirated lessons that was pro-Islamic. He objected to other lesson Web links that characterized Christianity as a cult.

When Beck analyzed a pirated first-grade unit on the environment, he found words like "environmental action" and "sustainability," buzzwords for the United Nations Agenda 21 globalization plan.

"All of this is Agenda 21!" he said. "All of it!"

He wondered aloud that such lessons had been taught in Texas schools previously known for their conservatism. "I'm very concerned about Texas," Beck told his radio audience. "If we lose Texas, we lose the country."

Teachers' opposition to CSCOPE, according to anonymous posts on teacher chat boards and websites, is broad.

Teachers brought many of their concerns to the most recent State Board of Education meeting Nov. 15 in Austin, where they gave the SBOE instruction committee a combined six hours of testimony about CSCOPE, which is available on the Texas Education Agency website at [http://www.texasadmin.com/agenda.php?confid=TEA\\_CI111512&dir=tea](http://www.texasadmin.com/agenda.php?confid=TEA_CI111512&dir=tea).

Teachers faulted factual, grammatical and typographical errors in documents that appear not to have been proofread.

Master teachers reported a dumbed-down approach with a liberal, students-teach-students philosophy.

Teachers singled out controversial content, such as a link in a world history lesson that described Christianity as: "a small, often brutally persecuted cult (that) rose to become the dominant religion of the West."

Retired teacher Janice VanCleave, who opposes CSCOPE and is searching for a credible reason why so many superintendents would buy it, theorizes that CSCOPE is a possible conspiracy pushed on them by the Texas Association of School Administrators and Texas Association of School Boards.

She believes they pushed the new curriculum to superintendents to promote weaker education for an eventual adoption of a better, national agenda of government-controlled education.

After all, she claims, CSCOPE was released in 2006, the same year TASA launched its educational mission of "vision learning," a constructivist philosophy that is "so opposite of the Texas Education Agency vision," she said.

VanCleave remains one of CSCOPE's most ardent critics.

She stumbled upon CSCOPE innocently enough. After teaching science for 27 years, VanCleave retired and began a new career writing children's science and math activity

books. She traveled as far as the geographic South Pole to research and write 52 books, all published by industry giant Prentice Hall.

Her books have been translated into 15 languages for 3 million children.

Then one day she volunteered at her local school to tutor failing science students. When she asked to see the classroom lessons, she was denied.

Teachers told her they now used a program called CSCOPE and were bound by a nondisclosure agreement that forbade them from sharing its content with her — or anyone. She learned the new curriculum promoted online searches, not textbooks, and used a methodology of teaching science that flip-flopped traditional instruction.

"First you introduce the facts," she said of the traditional approach. "CSCOPE wants them to come in and talk about, 'What do you think this means?' They're spending time on kids talking about something they don't know anything about."

Her research uncovered one lesson that began by asking students to design an experiment that illustrated osmosis. "You can define osmosis all day long, but as far as setting up an experiment, they can't. Let's not waste their time. Let's first tell them how to do it," VanCleave said.

Some of the most engaging activities were never explained, she said. "It's like a magic show. Wow! We got their attention. ... Then they go on to something else."

Seven weeks ago VanCleave launched a website at [www.txcscopeview.com](http://www.txcscopeview.com) to present her research and solicit teacher comments, which have come in droves.

n "It is insane to expect math students to teach each other complex math concepts where they have no prior knowledge."

n "There is no reteach time. So your kids better get it the first time."

n "Some lessons are way over their heads, and some are low-low."

n "Can you imagine your students' learning being dependent on the teaching of other students for almost every lesson? Ridiculous!"

VanCleave has her own question: How do children learn to study without textbooks?

Now VanCleave says she suspects a conspiracy to rid school districts of their veteran teachers — maybe all teachers.

She cites CSCOPE training materials that identify veteran teachers as troublemakers and the scripted delivery plan that's designed to be used by anybody.

"Anyone think that these teachers know CSCOPE is not good and are trying to alert the public?" she said.

Regardless of how effective it is or isn't in the classroom, CSCOPE has reached notable milestones since it was introduced six years ago.

For example, 80 percent of Texas school districts obtained approval from their school boards to purchase the curriculum.

WFISD School Board President Kevin Goldstein said recently that he has never viewed CSCOPE but only seen papers his child has brought home.

"I've yet to find a school board member that signed this (nondisclosure) contract and reviewed CSCOPE before purchasing it," VanCleave said.

One longtime teacher — who testified before the SBOE but requested anonymity with the media — called CSCOPE a real-life example of the old fable, "The Emperor's New Clothes."

Just as all the kingdom told the emperor that he was dressed in his finest — and not buck naked — so nearly all the school districts in Texas have paid millions annually to lease CSCOPE even though no one knows if it truly works.

"It would take hours to click on all the different links (in the lessons). That's the problem," she said. "No one has actually read it. No one! Everybody assumes someone else has read it."

Ed Vara, Texas Education Service Center academic director, confirmed in a question-and-answer session at a meeting with Tea Party proponents that CSCOPE had no outside oversight.

"No, we don't currently contract with others to do that," said the Region 13 official.

That troubled Gail Lowe, SBOE member for District 14, which includes Wichita County. "Materials of competing publishers are required to undergo public scrutiny and review, and are subject to penalty for factual errors," she said.

Lowe cited a double standard that existed for CSCOPE when the Texas attorney general refused a request by VanCleave to view the curriculum under the Freedom of Information Act.

The attorney general ruled that CSCOPE was allowed to keep its materials proprietary, citing copyrights.

Textbooks are copyrighted but open to all, Lowe said.

"CSCOPE materials, unlike traditional instructional materials, are inaccessible to parents and taxpayers in general, which seems to run counter to guarantees in the Texas Education Code for the opportunity to review classroom teaching materials," Lowe wrote in an email.

Chapter 26, Section 26.007 guarantees parents access to teaching materials and tests.

Lowe said she is concerned that many administrators perceive that CSCOPE has an inherent "stamp of approval" simply because it is available through the statewide network of Educational Service Centers. "When actually, it is not subject to the same scrutiny as other instructional materials," she said.

Apparently, that's the dirty secret known only to teachers — until now.

Education is supposed to give an increasing sophistication that spirals back to reteach — not the haphazard approach of CSCOPE.

"It's like a hospital that's taken apart all of their procedures and practice," she said.

"You doggone know you're going to lose some of their patients."

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[Click here to view links for Texas CSCOPE Information.](#)



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## CSCOPE: Kids teaching kids

By Ann Work

Monday, December 17, 2012

**Editor's Note:** This is the second in a five-part series on CSCOPE, the curriculum used in most Region 9 school districts. Tuesday's story: The state director responds to eruption of criticism.

You don't send children to public school to give their opinions, said retired educator and CSCOPE critic Janice VanCleave.

The author of 52 science activity books for children, VanCleave objects to the philosophy driving CSCOPE, the curriculum used in 36 of the 37 Region 9 school districts and in 875 of the 1,032 school districts throughout Texas.

A CSCOPE Power Point slide identifies its constructivist learning theory as a philosophy of Russian behaviorist Lev Vygotsky, she said.

It elevates children to teacher, charging them with the responsibility of figuring out what they must learn to be successful. It champions small group work, students teaching one another, and discovery learning.

It rejects textbooks as old school, favoring online searches.

It sounds good, teachers admit, but in practice, such a philosophy betrays students and muzzles teachers.

"In CSCOPE, children are coming up with their own ideas. The teacher's job is to hedge them in so they don't go too far off track," Van Cleave said. "Some of the very young teachers, fresh out of college, kind of like this, but they do not have their skills down yet. Kids kind of like it because all answers are OK, there's very little structure, and very little 'You have to do this.' But there's a lot of 'You have to do this' in education."

Disadvantaged children will suffer most, since they need more repetition than most children, according to Jeanine McGregor, an educator specializing in brain research.

"Minorities and the poor come to the table bringing very little information. They're field-dependent. They depend on what's in front of them. What do they get? Only what is in front of them. If you have five other kids in a group with limited experiences, that's what they walk away with. Research shows this method is very time-consuming," McGregor said.

McGregor knows two parents who have sought medical attention for their children suffering stress from constantly floundering in a sea of CSCOPE ambiguity. They miss the well-defined directives, she said.

"I read a blog today about a teacher saying she used to have 90 percent passing TAKS. She now has below 40 percent passing CSCOPE tests, setting students up for failure," she said. "If this is a cure-all, prove it."

One teacher who addressed the State Board of Education in its Nov. 15 meeting but requested anonymity for this report told the Times Record News she faulted CSCOPE for adopting decades-old unproved theories from Vygotsky for a space-age audience. "Do you know how much current brain research we have on how children learn? Since 1980 and the advent of MRI machines? And they have to use some old Russian guy?"

She spoke with sorrow about the first generation of elementary children whose foundational years were built on CSCOPE.

"CSCOPE babies, we call them," she said. "A generation of children now in middle schools. They will never recoup the formative years in elementary school. That pavement is laid."

She predicted they will be deficient in basic geography, math facts recall and writing skills.

The monster statewide acceptance of what she called a weak plan that excludes parents at every level cannot be overstated, she said.

"As a taxpayer the saddest fact is that while schools are throwing money to the wind purchasing CSCOPE each year, students are often going without field trips and instructional material that has quality and substance."

CSCOPE documents also claim connection to Linda Hammond, a proponent of the nationalized Common Core movement that Texas has rejected in favor of its own standards.

VanCleave's website, [www.txcscooperreview.com](http://www.txcscooperreview.com), drew teacher complaints about the CSCOPE philosophy.

n "The assumption (in CSCOPE) is that all whole group learning is bad, and all cooperative group learning is good."

n "It brings students to the application level immediately before they have actually acquired the skill being taught."

n "In a literature class, the lesson plan asked students to pull out cellphones and play their ring tones, with the rest of the class inferring why they chose those ring tones."

n "They say discovery will make you remember it. True, but you can't discover everything. How do you discover the capital of France is Paris?"

Teachers object to CSCOPE the most when required to use it exclusively instead of as a resource that they can dip into for ideas when they need them.

"So with a curriculum that dictates exactly what is done every day, down to the exact activities, what happens when Johnny, Miguel, and Sara are absent?" writes one teacher on the [www.txcscope.com](http://www.txcscope.com) website. "What happens when Charlie and Isaac don't get it? What happens when the school has a pep rally during a single class period and the whole class falls a day behind? What happens when Bobby misses a week because his grandpa in Seattle passes away? What happens when your student with fetal alcohol syndrome brings marijuana to school and gets put in 'In School Suspension' for three weeks? What happens when you have a child in your class that speaks very little English? These are actual occurrences. Honestly, they happen every day of every school year."

Curiously, even though the regional service centers wrote CSCOPE, it is not considered a product of the state, and the Texas Education Agency offers no opinion on it, according to DeEtta Culbertson, TEA spokesperson.

"We don't write curriculum. The board approves curriculum standards, then the districts go from there. ... It's local control," she said.

Local districts have the freedom to choose whatever materials they want to use to help meet state standards, she said, and most chose CSCOPE.

"We have a lot of different components that are contained in our actual system," said Wade Labay, CSCOPE state director.

CSCOPE starts with the TEKS state standards, Labay said, which is the starting point for everything in Texas. CSCOPE clarifies the standards, then builds the standards into "a coherent sequence of instruction," with each activity timed, he said. "If I am budgeting and managing in this amount of time, I should be confident I've addressed what I'm supposed to," he said.

Superintendents learned about CSCOPE through their regional service centers.

WFISD Assistant Superintendent Tim Powers said he continues to like CSCOPE and considers it an "extremely viable curriculum" that has been well thought out. "We tell everybody it's a living, breathing document. It's continually being reviewed," he said. "The reason I'm so comfortable with it is there's not another document that's as closely aligned to (state standards) TEKS as CSCOPE."

However, among teachers, objections to CSCOPE have increased in the past year.

The Texas State Board of Education asked Jeanine McGregor, an education and brain research specialist, to investigate CSCOPE by reading all public documents and comments available on it.

McGregor has written extensively on accelerated memory techniques that can be used with children. She founded a learning lab in San Angelo where she melded her philosophies of learning with brain research into lessons that had students completing sixth-grade work by the end of second grade.

McGregor presented her independent research to SBOE members on Nov. 15, but she didn't rave about any of its techniques.

She said CSCOPE directed kindergarten teachers to spend 24 weeks teaching the 5-year-olds to count to 20, even though most came in already counting to 10. "That's idiotic in anybody's book," she said. "This is definitely dumbing down."

CSCOPE robs children of their potential, she said. "When you treat every child the same, you mistreat every child."

McGregor's report noted the Marxist ideology attributed to Vygotsky. She said the quality of the materials, which were advertised as "exemplar," were often incomplete, factually wrong, grammatically incorrect and sometimes not aligned with the state standards as promised.

The product was misrepresented, she said, with its philosophy and ideology not clearly explained to anyone.

She also found teachers who reported instances of plagiarism, she said, because they had seen the same lessons elsewhere. She also found reports that much material was not sourced or referenced.

Teachers were intimidated with intricate rubric checklists to analyze how many questions they asked during a lesson and how many questions students asked in response, she said.

Administrators make routine classroom walk-throughs to confirm that teachers are on a CSCOPE task and haven't veered back into favored lessons or techniques, she learned.

"You control the teachers. You control the parents. You actually control the public because there's no public scrutiny," McGregor said.

When SBOE member Ken Mercer, District 5, appeared on the Jason Moore radio show to discuss CSCOPE in November, he said he was unable to view CSCOPE's controversial lesson on the Boston Tea Party. "As a state board member, I couldn't look at it!" he said. "I can't even do my job supporting my parents."

Labay said the lesson was removed from the system and addressed the controversy in a special news release on the official CSCOPE website at [www.cscope.us](http://www.cscope.us)

The downfall of the previous system before CSCOPE was that teachers were tied directly to a textbook that may be long outdated, Powers said. Teachers had to adapt their own lessons to meet the updated state standards, he said.

SBOE President Barbara Cargill told the Times Record News that such reports have led her to ask for more transparency and an open vetting of CSCOPE by constituents, which is typical for curriculum standards and textbooks.

"We are hearing from parents that they want that also with CSCOPE," Cargill said.

She said it's time for CSCOPE writers to review their content.

"Make sure it's grammatically correct, good quality material so we don't have mistakes in the lesson plan content and so we don't have things put in there that are controversial," she said.

After listening to teacher complaints, Cargill said she believes CSCOPE is best used as a resource to what teachers are already using, not as a scripted plan to be followed legalistically.

"We need to remember teachers are professionals. They have been trained to work with children," she said. "Teachers need to have complete freedom with how to use CSCOPE."

Cargill said using CSCOPE should be a decision made by the individual teacher, not administrators. "I want teachers to use CSCOPE in the best interest of their students," she said. "They are the ones who will know how to do that."

Math teacher Stan Hartzler, who quit his teaching job at Luling ISD when administrators insisted he use only CSCOPE, said the curriculum was a shift away from meaningful learning toward a "gee-whiz" agenda.

"It will keep disadvantaged students from understanding what they learn and from standing on their

own in life after school," Hartzler said. "Small wonder that CSCOPE wants to keep things secret."

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## CSCOPE director: It's an option, but teaching is still necessary

By Ann Work

Tuesday, December 18, 2012

**Editor's note:**This is the third installment of a five-part series. On Wednesday read how most local schools use the CSCOPE curriculum and why.

Complaints about CSCOPE made to state board of education members have spiked in the past year, according to SBOE member Gail Lowe, who represents Wichita County.

CSCOPE is a curriculum management system, complete with lessons, that now rules most Texas classrooms, since 875 of the state's 1,032 school districts have adopted it.

While administrators speak glowingly of its state-aligned instruction, teachers express a growing frustration with such a scripted product.

"Someone stopped me at a Lampasas football game last month and said she was serving as a long-term substitute in fourth grade," Lowe said. "She said that week alone, the lessons had grammatical and/or spelling errors on virtually every page, and several answer keys were incorrect."

The next week, Lowe received an email from a teacher who had lived in Wichita Falls but now taught in a school district near Austin. "He said of CSCOPE: 'I became aware of the worst algebra sequence ever, mathematics errors and omissions, and evidence that the lessons had not been proofread, to say nothing of critiqued or scrutinized. Worst is the examination component. Unit tests have only partial relevance of recent units. Rigging appears to create phony evidence of improvement from one unit to the next.'"

She also received complaints about science materials — inaccurate definitions, incomplete instructions on lab activities and poorly written lesson plans.

CSCOPE state Director Wade Labay, who directs production of CSCOPE with a team of 23 in Austin, has addressed such criticism by subjecting CSCOPE's science curriculum to its first outside review.

The review will cover science materials first, then move on to other subject areas.

He told the Times Record News in an interview Nov. 29 that the results would be available shortly.

He is expecting good news, he said. "It will come back very good, we think."

CSCOPE has been sold to 875 Texas school districts, in public and private schools alike, and spends an annual \$25 million budget but, remarkably, accomplished that without any critique or oversight by any outside source — until now.

The report will come from the Austin-based company Resources for Learning, which has done work in the past for the Legislative Budget Board, Labay said.

CSCOPE's origins date back to 2003, when the Texas Legislature told the regional service centers that their budgets would be cut and they needed to become more entrepreneurial, Labay said.

Meanwhile, the service center directors were receiving requests, Labay said, from small school districts asking for help to include all the state's newly updated academic standards and topics into their curriculums.

Seeing an opportunity, the regional service centers teamed up and created an online curriculum — CSCOPE — that could serve them all.

CSCOPE was designed as a completely customizable way to help a teacher frame out his year, including all the teaching points the state required. The online delivery could be updated, corrected and delivered online, more cheaply than textbooks, Labay said.

"It made so much sense," Labay said. "(Teachers) could just focus on instruction."

Administrators agreed, and now CSCOPE has nearly 90,000 users in its system, he said.

Texas legislators also greased the path for CSCOPE when they passed Senate Bill 6 in 2009, which allowed administrators to spend textbook dollars on digital tools.

The regional service centers began promoting their online product to superintendents through statewide administrator conferences, and superintendents used online supply dollars to buy it.

WFISD, for example, has spent \$390,000 since 2009 to lease CSCOPE, plus another \$90,000 for supply kits. Its annual leasing fee is \$107,000.

Some administrators offer CSCOPE to teachers as a resource, a tool for their toolbox.

Others depend on CSCOPE's advertised comprehensive approach to address all the state's requirements and they ask teachers — new and veteran — to use it exclusively.

But forcing teachers to use CSCOPE exclusively was never how it was envisioned, Labay said.

CSCOPE was designed to give teachers a plethora of options, he said.

"We encourage the use of district resources as needed," he said. "So much of a teacher's craft has to be left to the teacher."

It is a campus responsibility to help slower children, he said. CSCOPE doesn't adapt to remedial needs or problems like dyslexia.

Labay has heard the demands for parent access, so his team created the parent portal at [www.cscope.us/parentportal](http://www.cscope.us/parentportal).

It lists simple concepts and key understandings that CSCOPE lessons deliver.

The lists are vague, he said, but the individual customization of CSCOPE means he's not exactly sure how much of the material a teacher or district will use, so he can't give more specifics.

Educators should start opening up about CSCOPE, he said, even though they've signed a document promising to keep lessons confidential.

"Districts need to explain and share what they're doing," he said. "The teacher needs to share. Me, as a parent, I have three boys. I can look at something posted, but I want to know, 'What are you using in the classroom?'"

His office is trying to figure out how to allow educators to be more transparent with CSCOPE, "so they don't feel they're violating user agreements."

The severity of the nondisclosure document has been overemphasized, he said.

"It's more like an iTunes agreement, where you agree not to pass along your user name and password. CSCOPE has answer keys and tests and shouldn't be accessed by anyone but teachers."

But showing a lesson is acceptable, he said.

"Copy it off. Let someone have possession of it. Provide a sample. That's fine. Handouts that go home — perfectly fine. A teacher might log in and let a parent see and print off what we did. Let them look as much as they want," he said.

So who actually wrote CSCOPE? Labay describes a labyrinth of contributors.

"It was primarily service center staff and contract staff, a myriad of different types of individuals that have been part of the process and still are," Labay said. "Now it's more state staff members. All the management leadership is run through here. ... Some things are written by our staff, some by current teachers or former teachers."

During the initial development, there was no central location or any standardized processes in place, he said. Then, in fall 2009, the team centralized its structure and is now housed at Region 13 in Austin. All quality checks run through his office.

He constantly investigates feedback, but not all "errors" are fixed, he said. "It could be a misconception on their end."



CSCOPE is just a starting point for instruction, with CSCOPE giving recommendations, he said.

"The district may change some things," he said.

CSCOPE has included some controversial lessons, many that have been removed from the system, he said.

The Boston Tea Party lesson is addressed specifically at [www.cscope.us](http://www.cscope.us).

That lesson was a teacher's attempt to engage students in the lesson, he said. The Boston Tea Party was the ultimate courageous and patriotic act. "But if you didn't believe that and were a British sympathizer, you might believe it's terrorism. It's a perspective thing," he said.

It probably could have used more clarification, he said.

As for controversial topics like evolution or religion, Labay said, "Your local way of handling these types of topics must come first."

The lesson that called Christianity a cult was citing the Romans' perspective, he said. "The Romans were ruling at that time. It was how they perceived Christianity as Christianity was growing."

Labay said he'd want to know more about a district that uses CSCOPE as the "be all and end all."

"I don't know why they're making the decisions the way they are," he said.

If a school district is weak in science, they might want to use all the science lessons. "I would say that's rare and not encouraged," he said. "We encourage the use of district resources as needed. So much of the teaching craft has to be left to the teacher."

He's proud of the growth of CSCOPE, he said.

"I don't think 875 district leaders would frivolously buy something, get something like CSCOPE, just because. It must mean something to them. The value of what we've put together is evidenced by those who purchased it and keep it. They don't leave. Just about all of them are still using it."

Follow Ann Work on Twitter @AnnWork1.



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## Studying CSCOPE

### Parent reviews curriculum to choose school

By Ann Work

Wednesday, December 19, 2012

Kim McClellan, a Wichita Falls parent of three, searched the Wichita Falls schools to find the one she believed would give her children the best preparation for college.

When she learned a few months ago that the Wichita Falls Independent School District had adopted the CSCOPE curriculum, she eagerly researched it.

But she came away unimpressed — even wary — because of teacher comments posted online that criticized CSCOPE as a cookie-cutter approach that introduced a wealth of material but didn't help children fully master it.

She also was swayed by a Lubbock newspaper article that quoted English teacher Kimberly Thomas saying she believed CSCOPE diluted the curriculum, even while administrators claimed it raised the bar.

"I have not talked to a single teacher who likes this program," Thomas said in the article.

McClellan also read reports that teachers were unhappy with CSCOPE and retiring early to escape it. "There is something not right," McClellan said.

While its quality may be up for debate, there's no argument that CSCOPE has become the bread and butter of instruction in North Texas.

It dominates North Texas schools so much that all but one of Region 9's 37 school districts use it. City View ISD is the lone holdout, preferring to use its own curriculum, written by its own teachers.

Administrators who put the CSCOPE management system and lessons in their schools are unanimously hopeful that STAAR tests scores in spring 2013 will prove the curriculum is as good as it's been advertised.

Such a conclusion is unclear now.

The new STAAR state test began in spring 2012, so it won't be until spring 2013 that schools will have new data to compare with that first year's performance to judge CSCOPE's effectiveness.

Meanwhile, WFISD, the largest district in the region, requires teachers to use CSCOPE without straying, according to WFISD Assistant Superintendent Tim Powers.

The district paid \$107,000 to lease the curriculum for 2012-13, up from \$97,000 the year before.

In total, WFISD has paid \$390,000 to lease the program for its 14,000-plus students and invested another \$90,000 to buy supply kits for teachers to make lesson planning easier.

Across town, Bright Ideas Charter School incorporates CSCOPE into instruction as a supplement when needed, according to Superintendent Lynda Plummer.

"We use CSCOPE as it was intended, not as a script," she said. "We use it as a resource, as a source of master lessons, which are on target for STAAR testing. We use it to keep on track."

She pays \$1,381 annually to lease CSCOPE, the price tag based on enrollment. She does not require her teachers to sign nondisclosure agreements.

"We like it," she said.

Wichita Christian School also adopted the program three years ago and uses it as a tool — not in its entirety — that is blended with its own foundation of Christian education, according to Superintendent Karla Wallace.

She believes it is especially helpful to new teachers.

"It could never be an end-all for us because it's missing the key piece for a Christian education — the integration of biblical principals," she said. "Some of our teachers use it extensively, some not that much."

She has not been bothered by content others found controversial or slanted to a Marxist, pro-Islamic or anti-Christian ideology. "We have found it to be so rich in its abundance of materials. It would be impossible to use everything," Wallace said.

While administrators applaud it, the opinions of local teachers — who are immersed in CSCOPE daily — are hard to read.

Most do not want to endanger their jobs by complaining to the media, but a few spoke out quietly when guaranteed anonymity.

- One secondary teacher said when she announces she'll use a CSCOPE activity that day, she's met with a chorus of groans.
- "Everybody I know is behind the calendar," said one elementary teacher.
- "There's not much depth," said another, who said she went elsewhere to find material on the presidential elections.

- A high school teacher faults CSCOPE for not spiraling back to review material, but constantly forging ahead to new material.
- Another said CSCOPE incorrectly assumed all children started with the same knowledge base.
- One new teacher, for whom the curriculum is supposedly the most helpful, said CSCOPE requires her to have so many supplies and supplementary texts available that she still could spend hours planning each lesson.
- Retired WFISD high school science teacher Shelby Patrick said his three-year experience with CSCOPE before retiring in 2012 was one of "basic frustration" because of time pressures.

"It is very difficult for the classroom teacher to accomplish the myriad of activities required of them. CSCOPE also has weekly assessment tests that are supposed to be administered by the teacher. It is impossible to get it all done," Patrick said.

WFISD's history with CSCOPE dates back to 2009.

WFISD adopted CSCOPE under Superintendent George Kazanas who, along with Assistant Superintendent Tim Powers, recommended CSCOPE to WFISD board members.

Before CSCOPE, teachers followed the list of state standards the best they knew how, using textbooks and other resource material to flesh out the state's required topics. The approach was as individual as the teacher.

Powers promised that CSCOPE would bring continuity, good ideas and assurance that all state topics would be hit and met. He predicted the transition would be difficult and phased in requirements slowly to give teachers time to adapt.

Since then, WFISD leadership has shifted to newcomer John Frossard, who stepped into WFISD's top spot in August. He was unfamiliar with CSCOPE, since he had not used it in his previous role as a curriculum director.

Teachers soon began complaining to Frossard about CSCOPE, while others told him they liked it well enough. In response, he dispatched his curriculum specialists into the schools several days a week to evaluate their concerns.

"CSCOPE, in theory, takes some of the variability out of teaching," he said. "Over time, it should evolve into something strong."

However, teachers are individuals, he said.

"There will be different degrees of implementation." He wouldn't expect all schools throughout the district to be on the same lessons at the same time, even though statewide consistency is a goal openly promoted by CSCOPE.

"If that were the case, education would be more of a science than it is," he said.

Frossard said one of his goals this year is to study CSCOPE and verify that its alignment of information from grade to grade is in place as advertised, he told board members.

That perplexed board member Bob Payton.

"It was my feeling we were getting it aligned with our curriculum, CSCOPE," Payton said in a recent board meeting.

In fact, proper alignment had been advertised as one of CSCOPE's hallmarks.

"In theory, it should," Frossard said. "It depends who you talk to about CSCOPE."

WFISD secondary math curriculum specialist Ward Roberts knows CSCOPE more intimately than most administrators because he was one of the CSCOPE's many early writers, back before WFISD began leasing the program.

He wrote a series of lessons for algebra 2 and pre-calculus.

"The good parts," he joked.

The yearlong project was hard and time-consuming, he said. "There was a lot of back and forth. I'd spend a lot of time working on one, send it in; they'd say, 'That's not really what we were going for. You forgot this, this and this. Redo it,' " he said.

The lessons don't have bylines because so many people have a say in each one, he said.

CSCOPE's math program is a good one, he said, but he agrees with the criticism that it has little practice material for students.

"It's more about developing the concepts. Teachers have to rely on textbooks for extra practice problems. But we have those resources easily available," Roberts said.

Steve Henderson, WFISD secondary science curriculum director, sat down Nov. 19 with his curriculum team to plan out the spring semester.

"Our curriculum is the best of CSCOPE and the best of what we've always used," he said.

He'd grade CSCOPE's lessons A-, he said. "Our teachers like to make their own changes."

They do struggle with the pace, he said.

"There are so many things that come up in high school with athletics, choir and band trips. That's why those after-school tutorials are so important."

Powers, who oversees WFISD instruction, said the expectation is that teachers will use CSCOPE faithfully.

"There's not another curriculum that's more closely aligned (to state standards). I make no apologies about it," he said.

Because the state spends \$35 per child just on testing, he thinks CSCOPE's \$7.37 per child cost is a deal.

"Even the comptroller came out and said it was the best bang for our buck."

Susan Combs, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, listed CSCOPE as a "smart practice" in her Financial Allocation Study for Texas report, released in September.

She estimated districts had saved themselves \$4 million apiece by purchasing CSCOPE instead of reinventing the wheel in each town.

WFISD teachers do sign a nondisclosure agreement, but it's still "the most wide-open curriculum we've ever had," Powers said. "We will be 100 percent open about it."

At Wichita Christian School, Wallace said no parent has ever asked to see the curriculum but she would gladly show it.

She is not bothered that CSCOPE has had no outside review.

"Neither did any of the curriculum that teachers created before CSCOPE," she said.

Teachers must always use their discretion with any product, she said, "but it doesn't mean that we don't read anything that we don't agree with. A well-read person can defend their faith and ideas."

Her teachers are educated, certified professionals who can be counted on to present only the best material, she said.

Jesse Rogers, president of Midwestern State University, said Tuesday he was learning about CSCOPE from Times Record News reports.

Although the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board had shown him sample questions from the new STAAR state test, he had not been introduced to CSCOPE and had no way to view it.

He sympathized with teachers who were using it because a pre-prepared curriculum like CSCOPE would be difficult for most college professors to use — including himself, he said.

"I always thought my major job in the classroom was to adapt the course on the move," Rogers said. "I'd ask, 'How is the class handling this?' then work ahead or not. Maybe you slow down and do more problems, or you speed it up."

To slavishly follow a preplanned course would take away much of the teacher's freedom and professionalism, he said.

"Our job is to pace the class."

However, everything done at the college level, from literature to chemistry, revolves around critical thinking skills, something CSCOPE apparently prioritizes, he said.

He couldn't comment on the curriculum's philosophy or gauge how well it would help students transition to college work, he said, even though he will eventually be faced with educating the students who have been prepared by it.

The Wichita Falls community offers several different educational options at the K-12 level besides CSCOPE.

Christ Academy uses a fully online curriculum in which students use laptops at a work-at-your-own pace schedule that they help create.

Notre Dame Catholic School operates with the curriculum of the Fort Worth diocese.

City View ISD uses a curriculum written and aligned by its own teaching staff.

McClellan, who selected Christ Academy for her own children, urges parents to study whatever product their children's school is using.

Though she has researched the various instructional approaches in town, she has been surprised to find that many parents are not interested in discussions about them.

Most are nonchalant, she said.

They brush off talk of graduation rates and college remedial classes, telling her of their children's educations, "Oh, they'll be fine."

But it's time for parents to tune in and educate themselves on how schools are educating their children, she said.

"It's like sending my child to camp and not even knowing what they are doing," McClellan said. "Or picking an insurance policy and not even looking at the fine print! Why would we do that? Why would we not look at the fine print of the education for our kids?"

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## Mother takes fight to CSCOPE

### Parent sees anti-Christian teachings

By Ann Work

Thursday, December 20, 2012

Ginger Russell has made it her mission to fight CSCOPE, but it hasn't been easy.

When she sent an email to the superintendent of a school district near Dallas and explained the bias and indoctrination she had found in the CSCOPE curriculum that his district was using, she received the following email in return: "This is absolute nonsense! You are either crazy or ridiculously mistaken. As a Christian and patriotic American, I am most offended by your lies! Take me off your mailing list immediately, and find a shrink."

Russell was unmoved. "I am at an age in my life where threats against me for standing up for righteousness further inspires me to keep on," she said.

Russell has teamed up with her mother, longtime educator and author Janice VanCleave — who created the [www.txcscopeireview.com](http://www.txcscopeireview.com) website that is critical of CSCOPE — in a mission to alert the public to Texas' most popular curriculum that they believe will harm children for a lifetime.

They are just two of a growing number of Texans who are speaking out about CSCOPE.

Russell has been particularly troubled that Wichita Christian School would adopt a curriculum where she believes anti-Christian, pro-Islamic bias had been documented and has contacted them several times about it.

"I do not think for one minute your teachers are promoting the teaching of Islam or Marxism in your school, but you are promoting and funding their agenda by purchasing it," Russell wrote.

Wichita Christian School Superintendent Karla Wallace said Wednesday that she doesn't believe CSCOPE could possibly be as offensive as Russell claims.

Janice VanCleave confessed that sometimes she wants to drop the whole thing and go back to writing her popular activity books.

"Every time I decide I'm sick of this, tired of all this negativity, then I get something from a teacher who is so thankful that there's hope," she said.



Math teacher Stan Hartzler, of Luling ISD, resigned his teaching position this month after being forced to use CSCOPE exclusively. He will fight from the sidelines now by trying to enlist legislators to give the State Board of Education the authority to oversee CSCOPE, he said.

"Daggummit, this is replacing textbooks everywhere. (They) need to be scrutinizing this like (they) do the textbooks," he said. "CSCOPE could be doing anything, and I think they are doing anything, and they're making a bunch of money at it, too."

Jeanine McGregor, who researched CSCOPE at the SBOE's request, continues to dig into the program, unearthing more questions than answers.

She is particularly intrigued about CSCOPE's murky money trail.

The TESCCC, the nonprofit arm of the Education Service Centers that owns CSCOPE, appears to have a monopoly in the state that no competitor can puncture.

What about their tax returns? What about the millions of dollars involved?

"I still have so many unanswered questions," McGregor wrote in an email.

If CSCOPE were a business, it wouldn't be handled with such secrecy, she said.

"There's got to be another answer. The most powerful aspect of this is the framework of control — teaching everybody the same thing on the same day, no public scrutiny, a ruling by the attorney general saying you don't have to reveal this to the public."

One teacher said she will continue to voice her objections to CSCOPE, even when it is not used exclusively. She earned her master's degree in curriculum and instruction and testified before the SBOE in November but has asked that her name be withheld for this report.

"I see each lesson as a stone in a road that's going somewhere. Those stones have to take a person to a destination. If you have a textbook, you can very easily flip through that textbook and see the evolution of the lessons. CSCOPE is not readable. Even with all the background that I have to read through those lessons — it's a daunting task. It's not transparent."

If someone were to read CSCOPE in its entirety, a picture would emerge, she said.

"Most people have not seen the picture because it's hard to," she said. But one should look no further than the lessons, she said.

"You don't even have to get into Islam or whether there's Agenda 21. The lessons are so bad that nobody would call it a good education. Just standing on that alone is shocking."

The lessons are affecting 3 million Texas children.

"If we had 3 million kids affected by a vaccination or a stomach virus, we'd be up in arms," she said.

Parents will have to speak out because teachers can't, Russell said.

"Parents, unlike teachers, can confront the superintendents and board members," Russell said. "Parents can communicate with other parents and make them aware. Teachers are scared to speak out for fear of losing their jobs."

VanCleave recommends that parents ask administrators why they purchased an unapproved supplementary instruction material and forced teachers to use it.

Parents should request to see their children's lessons and tests and urge their friends and neighbors to do the same, Donna Garner said.

"Hopefully they will then go to their local school administrators and voice their outrage over CSCOPE, making the administrators afraid to purchase CSCOPE in the years to come," Garner wrote in an email Monday.

SBOE Chairman Barbara Cargill saw firsthand the disconnect between administrators and teachers over CSCOPE during the November SBOE meeting. They need to agree on the best way to meet student needs, she said.

"When teachers feel they may lose their jobs, that's not really a happy workplace situation," Cargill said. "If our teachers are happy, our students will be happy."

That must include transparency in the teaching materials, she said.

"I think the leadership of CSCOPE understood and got the message (Nov. 15) that parents and teachers want more openness and transparency, and I think they'll cooperate with that," Cargill said.

Legislator Dan Patrick, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, wrote Tuesday on his Facebook page that he planned to call a public forum on CSCOPE. Questions need to be answered, he wrote.

"We need total transparency concerning any program that is now in the vast majority of our schools in one form or the other. Any system where the Chairman of the State Board can't get a password to explore their site in detail for six months, requires teachers to sign an agreement that could subject them to criminal penalties, and is not easily transparent to parents, needs to be closely examined by the Legislature."

WFISD Assistant Superintendent Tim Powers, who helped bring CSCOPE to WFISD, won't demonize the curriculum, though he admits it's not a perfect document. "I've asked staff, 'If you can find another curriculum, we'll certainly take a look at it.' I haven't had any takers."

Meanwhile, Russell continues to contact educators to warn them about CSCOPE. She said she will fight on — for the children's sake.

"It has been a battle but one I am willing to fight in hopes of saving our country," Russell writes. "Our children deserve better than this."

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