



Opposition to HB 3979

Placing unnecessary and inequitable restrictions
on lesson planning and pedagogy

May 17, 2021

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input in opposition to **House Bill (HB) 3979** by Rep. Steve Toth. ATPE appreciates the Legislature's renewed focus on the importance of civics education and American founding principles in teaching students to become active, informed, and engaged citizens. ATPE agrees wholeheartedly with Gov. Greg Abbott that all classrooms should be environments in which young Texans learn, without bias or fear, about the topics that have shaped and continue to shape the American experience. Unfortunately, HB 3979 would have the opposite effect.

1. HB 3979 would inappropriately bypass educators and the well-established SBOE process for review and adoption of curriculum standards.

Chapter 7 of the Texas Education Code places the responsibility for adopting statewide curriculum standards with the State Board of Education (SBOE), not the Texas Legislature. The SBOE adopts and reviews the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) on a routine basis through a well-established process that involves current classroom teachers and other educators and considers input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. **HB 3979 attempts to bypass this important and deliberative process and inappropriately inserts the Texas Legislature into the role of writing classroom curriculum.**

2. HB 3979 would misapply curriculum standards to dictate instructional methods.

Texas curriculum standards provide the minimal instructional content that must be covered. However, selection of pedagogical approaches and supplemental content is left to local districts and educators based on the foundational principle that professional educators should be entrusted to select the approach that will inspire optimum engagement from individual students while incorporating local community standards. When writing curriculum standards, the SBOE does not dictate how classroom teachers are to present or supplement the mandated curriculum. Yet in addition to outlining what a teacher must teach, HB 3979 presumes to mandate how a teacher must teach in addition to restricting the campus and district role in shaping curriculum based on local input from parents and voters. **HB 3979 would mandate how content is delivered, which is the purview of neither the SBOE nor the Legislature.**

3. HB 3979 would have a chilling effect on teaching civic engagement.

To personalize and engage student interest in concepts such as liberty and the American system of government, educators often refer to current, real-world examples. Subsection (h-3) places broad, vague, and ill-defined restrictions on discussion of contemporary issues, which could cause many educators to abandon the pedagogical practice of making content relevant out of fear of violating this law. This subsection would also prohibit educators from teaching civic engagement through hands-on activities such as encouraging their students to interact on a personal level with their elected representatives.

4. HB 3979 is not needed.

The Social Studies TEKS for kindergarten through high school already include multiple specific references to the American founding documents. A brief review of the social studies TEKS would confirm that much of the content mandated under HB 3979 is duplicative of material that is already required.

ATPE's opposition to HB 3979 stems not from any convictions about particular theories or pedagogical approaches that should or should not be incorporated into classroom instruction. As the state's largest association of educators, we respect and trust the highly trained and credentialed professionals in our membership ranks to make those decisions. We believe the Legislature should do the same. HB 3979 would usurp responsibility that currently rests with educators and the SBOE for crafting curriculum, and in its attempt to do so, fundamentally misunderstands the way Texas curriculum standards are applied in actual classroom settings. Furthermore, the vague and arbitrary restrictions under HB 3979 would have a chilling effect on classroom instruction and efforts to motivate civic engagement.

ATPE respectfully urges legislators to OPPOSE HB 3979.

For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.