

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee
HB 4294 – Laptops and Loss of State Board of Education Authority
by Donna Garner
5.19.09

We citizens want to have access to the types of books that are put in front of our children's and grandchildren's eyes. We presently have that access through our elected Texas State Board of Education members.

The Board, in conjunction with the Texas Education Agency under Commissioner Robert Scott, has worked exceedingly hard; however, we do not want to surrender the authority over our public schools to the unelected Commissioner and TEA staffers.

The Board has produced new-and-improved English / Language Arts / Reading standards (TEKS) that will begin implementation in the fall.

The Board also went through a grueling process to adopt world-class Science standards; but the end result is a standards document that excites science students, educators, and parents.

Social Studies standards are in the pipeline right now. Because the SBOE saw some problems occurring in the wording of the first draft, they quickly redirected the process.

Math standards are to be adopted in the subsequent years.

The system of adopting standards and then textbooks is working the way it is supposed to work. Please do not mess it up through unintended consequences.

The Texas Technology Immersion Pilot (TTIP) took place during school years 2004 through 2008. The U. S. Department of Education chose Texas in which to conduct this \$20 Million pilot program to see whether immersing students in laptop computers would significantly improve student learning.

The TIPP study says repeatedly that students made no statistically significant academic progress in TAKS reading, social studies, and science; TAKS writing even went down. TAKS math showed small improvements among Cohorts 2 and 3 but none in Cohort 1.

Even though students were heavily immersed with expensive laptops (\$1,100 - \$1,600 per student) and teachers were trained extensively in immersion strategies for over four years, little-if-any positive student academic achievement was attained.

- Instead, laptops broke, costing large sums to repair.

- Student self-directed learning did not show positive gains.
- Laptop students during all but the fourth year attended school less regularly.
- Cohorts 2 and 3 did not improve their reading achievement.
- Control group students did better in writing than did the laptop immersed students.
- Cohorts 2 and 3 improved their math scores a bit, but Cohort 1 did not sustain the positive effect into the high-school years.
- Cohort 2 did not improve their 2008 science or social studies scores.
- The researchers concluded, "Given the financial and logistical challenges of implementing and sustaining the Technology Immersion model, statewide implementation may not be possible."

Here is the link to the Texas Technology Immersion Pilot Program:

(http://tcer.org/research/etxtip/documents/y4_etxtip_final.pdf)

LIST OF COMMON PROBLEMS WITH LAPTOP IMMERSION SCHOOLS

1. The software and hardware constantly need to be updated, costing thousands of taxpayer dollars. Laptops become obsolete after three or four years of use.
2. The equity issue would be a possible lawsuit waiting to happen. How could Texas make sure that the laptops and technology equipment in Highland Park ISD are equitable to the laptops in Edgewood ISD?
3. How can 49% of the student population who is considered "disadvantaged" pay for broken or missing laptops? (Withholding a report card for missing or destroying a textbook is one thing, but replacing a \$700 - \$800 laptop would be another.)
4. What does the school/teacher do when a parent reports that a student's laptop is missing?
5. What about students carrying laptops back and forth to school? Isn't this an open invitation for robbers to hit on students?
6. Laptops and backpacks are heavy. Students would have to bring them home nightly if all of their textbooks were digitized. Students also would have to

recharge laptop batteries at home. How durable are lightweight laptops that must endure hard student use? This is not the same type of careful use that an adult would give to a laptop.

7. How about the child who accidentally damages his laptop by dropping it out of his unzipped backpack? I wonder how durable these laptops would be if they were accidentally dropped down a flight of stairs?

8. Parents object to laptops because they feel they limit oversight of their children's activities.

9. A publisher somewhere with the click of a mouse could theoretically change the outcome of the Civil War! Who could and would keep track of changes in all textbooks? Who and what kind of a publisher is behind the mouse?

10. School computer labs are constantly having to rewrite codes to block more and more porn sites, yet students find ways to slip around the system. In fact, many students enjoy the challenge of finding backdoors to school computer systems.

11. If everyone had laptops, the chances of online bullying and mischief would be greatly multiplied.

12. Laptops on every desk put a barrier between the student and the teacher. Laptops become the "authority" rather than the teacher.

13. Students' attention is needlessly distracted.

14. Teachers cannot monitor every student and every screen.

15. Cheating is increased.

16. Individual student progress is hindered because they become dependent on online sources instead of capturing information in their heads.

17. Providing a class set of hardcover textbooks per classroom means that only a few selected students per class could take their textbooks home to study and do homework. If storms should knock out the Internet or other problems should occur, students would not come to school having finished their homework.

18. What would a teacher do if a student said his laptop froze or malfunctioned last night? How would a teacher be able to hold students accountable for finishing their homework when such excuses would obviously be used by irresponsible students?

19. Student laptops would of necessity cause students to read sophisticated text much less because they are simply not going to read classic pieces of literature nor other pieces of lengthy text on a computer screen.

We in Texas want to keep our system of electing State Board of Education members who are accessible to citizens' input, and these Board members should have authority over the setting of curriculum standards and the adopting of textbooks that are aligned with the standards.

I believe that it is not a wise use of taxpayers' dollars to provide laptops for all classroom students; and I do not believe laptops should ever replace the direct, systematic instruction of a teacher working face-to-face with a classroom of students. The Texas Technology Immersion Pilot study confirms my beliefs.

Donna Garner
236 Cross Country Drive
Hewitt, TX 76643
(254) 666-2798
Wgarner1@hotmail.com