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New English Language Arts and Reading curriculum standards approved

A less repetitive, more grade-level specific set of English Language Arts and Reading curriculum standards will go into use in Texas classrooms in the fall of 2009 after having been approved by the State Board of Education May 23 on a 9-6 vote.

The process of revising the 1997 standards began in 2005. Hundreds of teachers, numerous experts, national facilitators, and State Board of Education members worked on many drafts of the document over that time.

The standards ultimately approved by the board represent a blending of a document crafted by teacher work groups, with the help of facilitators from StandardsWork, and a version drafted by a coalition of English teachers. Many of the same teachers worked on both documents.

“This document is a very good one. We know our teachers will use it. We hope you will embrace this document,” board member Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands, said.

Other board expressed strong concerns about being asked to approve a draft document that emerged on the final day of deliberations. Consequently, the board agreed to go through the document page by page, spending several hours looking at the latest revisions.

The often contentious, extensively debated adoption process ultimately resulted in standards that put more emphasis on the teaching of grammar than do the existing Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Also in a departure from the existing standards, the board agreed to provide Texas teachers with a list of “reading resources websites” that provides a compilation of reading materials, which teachers may use at their own discretion.

Passage of the English Language Arts and Reading TEKS now creates a ripple effect throughout the Texas education system. Professional development on the new standards will be provided to teachers during the next school year.

New textbooks and other instructional material based on the new TEKS will go into the classrooms in the fall of 2010 and 2011. State standardized tests will ultimately reflect the new curriculum framework.

Work continues on standards for other curriculum areas.

Teams of teachers are now working on revising curriculum standards for science and career and technical education. Social studies will then be the next content area addressed.