

Serving Texas

Students by

Seeking

Historical

Accuracy

About Jews,

Judaism &

Israel in

Textbooks &

Curricula

EDITION 2
WINTER
2014

THE PEI MANTRA

“Become a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem by arming yourself with the facts and working with your district to seek positive solutions for all kids.”

THE NEW SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS ADOPTION:

Where Do You Fit In? By: Talia Kushnick

I have enjoyed meeting with parents around the state to talk about the challenges faced as Jewish families in our public schools. During those meetings, we also talked about PEI’s impact on the adoption of new social studies textbooks in Texas, a.k.a., Proclamation 2015. Since our parent network will be integral to promoting accurate textbook selections at the school district levels in 2014-15, PEI wants to keep you informed about the status of Proclamation 2015.

BACKGROUND

Proclamation 2015 began in 2009 with the writing of new Texas Education Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards. These standards define the information Texas students must master to progress from one grade to the next. They also define the content requirements for educational resources, including textbooks. While most states now follow the federal Common Core standards for their curricula, to date there are no national standards for social studies. This places Texas and its textbooks -- due to the state’s size and purchasing power -- front and center for the development of social studies textbooks that will be distributed here and nationally.

PEI worked closely with educators and the State Board of Education (SBOE) during the TEKS development process to promote accuracy in standards that reference Jews, Judaism, and Israel, and Judaism’s impact on Western Civilization. PEI was successful in securing over two dozen corrections and additions to the TEKS.

FEBRUARY 2014

Textbooks have been written and will be reviewed this summer by panels comprised of educators, business, and lay individuals. Panelists selected by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) are charged with verifying that textbooks align with

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HOT TOPICS: Prayer... The Church, the State, and the Public Schools

By: Pat Epstein

Addressing prayer in public schools is complicated and often feels like navigating a mine-field. Should a concern arise at your school, it is important to take the time to investigate the applicable law, secure accurate information, and arm yourself with the facts. Here are some key points to get you started:

- **Public schools, as extensions of the government, may neither promote nor prohibit religious belief or nonbelief.** Until the 1960s, religious practices, particularly those observed by the country’s Christian majority, remained a part of public life and often included mandatory daily prayers, Bible readings, and devotional exercises in public schools. However, beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the 21st Century, the Supreme Court has consistently ruled that public schools must remain strictly neutral and neither endorse nor oppose religion. This includes school-sponsored prayer. [*Engel v. Vitale* (1962); *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* (1963); *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985)]
- **“Students do not shed their constitutional rights when they enter the school house gate.”** [*Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969)] Students retain their rights to express themselves, including their right to pray individually, in groups, or to discuss their religious views with their peers as long as they

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THE DNA of a SCHOOL DISTRICT

By: Pat Epstein

School districts must adhere to a myriad of legislative mandates and the educational code derived from those mandates; therefore, most are structured very similarly. It's like your children: they have the same "structural" DNA, but that DNA manifests itself slightly differently in each. Districts take on their own personalities based on their size, resources (financial and human), and leadership. And they all welcome parental involvement and community partnerships.

From help in the classroom to chairing a major school bond election or providing a cadre of tutors (as some businesses do), school districts require parent and community involvement if they are to succeed at providing the highest quality education possible. That places the onus "on us" to show up and work. It is up to us to determine our level of involvement, explore opportunities, inform ourselves about the issues in our districts, and to be proactive rather than reactive.

Over the next few months, PEI will develop and share a "road-map" to school district anatomy, including steps for initiating and sustaining parent leadership at all district levels. We would welcome information specific to your districts, and your ideas and suggestions.

Our contact information is below to the right.

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HOT TOPICS: Prayer in School

are not disruptive (underline added). To prevent students from engaging in these non-disruptive activities would violate both their free exercise of religion and free-speech rights. This is the case law that pertains to "See You at the Pole" prayer activities, students gathering to pray during non-curricular hours, etc. [*Tinker*, (1969); *Westside Community Schools v. Mergens* (1990)]

- **HOWEVER, the right to engage in voluntary prayer does not include the right to hold an audience "captive" for that prayer or to compel other students to participate.** This applies to "school-sponsored prayer at school sponsored events", e.g., at football games, graduations, etc., or during the curricular hours at school. The key phrase here is "school-sponsored", and how that phrase is both applied and interpreted. In *Santa Fe v. Jane Doe, et. al.* (2000), the Supreme Court held that a school may not ask students to lead prayers over the public address system before football games; however, things can become more complicated with graduations. The Court noted that when a school retains control over the location, schedule, and content of the student's message, that message "...carries the imprimatur of the school". But, what happens when a district relinquishes that control? More on that in our spring newsletter, as we approach graduation season. [*Lee v. Weisman* (1992) and *Santa Fe* (2000)]

The opportunity always exists for Jewish parents to impact how religion is presented and practiced in our public schools. By having accurate information and approaching the situation as a partner with the school district rather than an adversary, you have the opportunity to become your district's "go-to" parent when serious issues do arise. If you have a concern or question, feel free to contact PEI or your local JCRC to help guide you through the process.

PARENT NETWORK

the TEKS. PEI identified qualified candidates to serve on panels and assisted them with TEA's application process. Based on PEI's work with the SBOE and our nominees for the review panels, we are confident that accuracy about Jews, Judaism, and Israel will be a priority.

YOUR ROLE

Once the SBOE has completed its work, and the social studies textbooks have been placed on TEA's approved list, school districts will begin their own review and selections. At that time, PEI will provide the parents in our network with our textbook recommendations so they are prepared to participate locally.

PEI is currently researching the textbook selection process in the major Texas school districts. We would also appreciate receiving any information you may have, so we can share it statewide.

We look forward to collaborating with you on this important work.



WHAT CAN PEI DO FOR YOU?

- Connect you with other public school parents to build an active, engaged, and effective Jewish parent network in your community.
- Provide information and guidance to help you become an effective advocate in your children's schools.
- Provide resources to share with the leadership and teachers in your schools.
- Promote accurate resources for Texas students at the State Board of Education and the Texas Legislature.
- Provide educators with accurate resources and materials regarding Jews, Judaism, and Israel.
- Serve as your connection to accessing information about what is and is not legal regarding religion in public schools, and provide guidance if issues do arise.

RESEARCH and RESOURCES

PEI offers students, parents, and educators accurate, high quality materials, resources, and lesson plans for teaching about Jews, Judaism, Israel, and Jewish impact on Western Civilization.

Please share this information with the social studies teachers in your schools. All resources and materials are free and may be accessed at:

www.pei-jcrcdallas.org
www.icsresources.org

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