



House Public Education Committee Hearing
March 20, 2023
Written Testimony opposing HB 1605

Chairman Buckley and Members,

My name is Kelsey Kling with American Federation of Teachers Texas, testifying against HB 1605. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of our 66,000 members in the great state of Texas.

While we appreciate the spirit of the bill to alleviate teachers' burden of planning and locating instructional materials, the bill largely misses the mark and, in the process, creates additional administrative burdens for teachers across the state.

When it comes to paperwork relief, enrichment subject areas are completely left out of the bill. This seems particularly harsh when enrichment subjects and courses, including innovative courses and CTE, have historically seen fewer state-adopted materials and more often these teachers have to find or create instructional materials. We are curious as to why only certain teachers have been identified by the bill as deserving of relief from these processes.

The instructional materials portal required of the new bill would require ALL teachers to make available ALL instructional materials. For the subset of teachers, and there are thousands, not covered under the auspices of Open Educational Resources (OER), this places a massive burden on them as well as districts to create, upload, and maintain a portal. Parents should have the right to access curriculum materials, as is already provided for in the Texas Education Code, but this adds an unnecessary burden to already overworked teachers. Adding more teacher burnout in the name of transparency will simply drive more teachers from our classrooms.

The bill would transfer the majority of the instructional materials review and adoption process to an appointed commissioner and would do so in a manner that would exempt him from following state procurement law and rule. This is unacceptable. Historically, the elected State Board of Education has conducted these reviews using teachers and other experts in the field in an open and transparent manner. This process can be cumbersome, but it honors stakeholder input. Without the guardrails of these laws, taxpayers will have no insight into what is being spent or the quality of the product being purchased.

Further, the bill incentivizes districts to use the materials via an allotment. Most of these materials have been available for use since early in the pandemic and a majority of districts opted not to use them. Even when a two-year pilot that provided funding for training and implementation was carved out of COVID relief funds, participation was minimal. One wonders if these materials are of such great quality, why would a district need the promise of money to adopt them? But in a system starved of resources, many districts would flock to these OER materials not because of the quality, but because of the funding. And in doing so, many highly effective teachers would be forced to upend proven teaching methodologies in favor of canned, one-size-fits all curriculum that cannot possibly account for the individual needs of every student.