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**Board of Directors*

November 10, 2021
Superintendent & Strategic Staff Agenda
ZOOM Webinar | 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

10:00 – 10:05 a.m.	Welcome and Opening Remarks <i>Dr. Michael Hinojosa, President</i> <i>Dr. Curtis Culwell, Executive Director</i>
10:05 – 10:20 a.m.	TSA Legislative Initiative Update <i>Dr. Michael Hinojosa, President, Dr. Jeannie Stone, Vice President & Legislative Chair</i>
10:20 – 10:45 a.m.	State and Federal Update <i>David Thompson, Chris Borreca, Thompson & Horton</i> - Rep. Krause letter - Governor / TASB letter
10:45 – 11:10 a.m.	Legislative Update <i>David Anderson, Todd Webster, Kate Kuhlmann, HillCo Partners</i> - Elections - SBEC Contract Abandonment
11:10 – 11:35 a.m.	School Finance Update <i>Tracy Ginsburg, Amanda Brownson, Janet Spurgin, TASBO</i> - Student Attendance Accounting - PEIMS Changes - Comptroller: \$12B GR left unspent
11:35 – 12:00 p.m.	Accountability & Assessment Update <i>Dee Carney, HillCo Partners</i> - TEA Updates - Accountability Reset: What We Know Now
12:00 p.m.	Adjourn



SAVE THE DATE: In-Person TSA Meeting at TASA Mid-Winter – February 2nd

Echoes of 'Red Scare'

Will Texas repeat a McCarthy-like probe into books in schools?

By EMILY DONALDSON

Staff Writer

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Heightened scrutiny over how schools teach history — and whether it was patriotic enough or indoctrinating kids — spurred the Texas lawmakers to investigate.

Five House members were charged with studying the state's textbooks with the desire that they emphasized the "glowing and throbbing history of hearts and souls inspired by wonderful American principles and traditions."

The year was 1962.

Now new fears about censorship in Texas classrooms have reignited as a state lawmaker opened an investigation into districts that carry any of the hundreds of books he's listed that largely deal with race, gender identity or sexuality.

But even six decades ago, at the height of schoolhouse scrutiny, a former House member charged with investigating textbooks cautioned against state overreach.

"When the time comes when the State Legislature dictates selection of library books in our local school districts, a serious blow will have been dealt to freedom and democracy," Rep. Ronald E. Roberts, D-Hillsboro, wrote then.

Roberts served at a time when the textbook approval process was mired in controversy and protests against specific sections of books were frequent. Some feared Texas' textbooks were obscenity-filled or designed to subvert America's youth.

This was just a few years after Sen. Joseph McCarthy famously held investigations into Communism's influence on the media and federal government.

Texas' House Textbook Investigating Committee held hearings across the state, which were suddenly halted after they became so rancorous and the lawmakers received

threats.

The legislators couldn't agree on any conclusion. Each eventually submitted their own individual reports to the Legislature in a move that reflected the heightened discord over what students should learn in school.

'Patriotic education'

Now recent maneuvers at the Texas Capitol to investigate books and curriculum echo this era, historians and educators say. Lawmakers spent months on anti-critical race theory bills that restricted how teachers discuss racism and current events in the classroom or promoted "patriotic education."

And in late October, Rep. Matt Krause, R-Fort Worth, launched an investigation into whether schools have purchased or stocked any of the more than 800 books he's identified. He also asked schools to identify any content or curriculum that "might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress" because of their race or sex.

Krause has declined to comment on how he chose the books on his 16-page list, which districts are under investigation or on any possible repercussions for schools that admit to carrying such texts.

In a recent radio interview, Krause said the list of books was not exhaustive and noted that even if a book is on the list, it may not mean it is "problematic." It could mean that it has some content that may be touched by new laws passed by the Legislature, he added.

But educators see the Fort Worth Republican's investigation as "akin to the Red Scare, but this time with scurrilous accusations against our teachers and librarians," said Zeph Capo, the president of the Texas chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, in a statement.

History of scrutiny

Texas lawmakers continued to worry about eliminating communist themes from the classroom and bolstering the teaching of American history well into the late 20th century.

During the late 1940s, the State Board of Education unanimously voted to hold up the distribution of a geography textbook until the publisher took out sections that seemed to glorify Russia.

SBOE member Vernon Singleton cautioned at the time that one of the chief dangers was the loss of faith in democracy because of writings that teach “our nation’s accomplishments are insignificant, our heroes were selfish, that strong centralized government is more important than the opportunities for personal freedom and initiative.”

Such fears appeared to fuel a 1961 resolution where lawmakers declared the need for textbooks to teach the traditions and philosophy of America “to inspire young people to revere our fundamental principles of this greatest Country in all the world.”

When the five-member committee was appointed to study content in textbooks and began holding hearings, lawmakers recognized the complex nature of the committee’s task from the start.

“I felt that, in the wrong or fearful hands, this committee could become an instrument to undermine the confidence of the people of Texas in our public schools,” Rep. John C. Alaniz, D-San Antonio, wrote in his final report.

When the committee started hosting hearings in January 1962, meetings were dominated by “the ultra-right and the John Birchers,” and educators were largely absent, Alaniz wrote. The John Birch Society was founded during the time of the Cold War as a far-right group that fought against signs of communism in American society.

Testifiers complained that books mentioning the United Nations were “communistic or socialistic” and texts that “failed to mention or glorify our early American heroes” were part of a communist plot, Alaniz wrote.

Many of those commenting appeared not to have read the textbooks they discussed, he observed.

Committee report

In his own final report, Rep. Nelson Cowles, D-Hallsville, wrote that American history textbooks showed a pattern of portraying America's flaws and failures.

"A history book which fails to create a feeling of pride in our nation and a love of country, should not be adopted for use in our public schools," Cowles wrote. "Every textbook used in our schools should be prejudiced and biased in favor of individual freedom, freedom of enterprise and our Republican form of government."

Eventually, each of the five committee members submitted their own recommendations about how the textbook approval process should change and what flaws existed with the stock of available texts.

Today, the primary power to approve textbooks remains with the elected State Board of Education. And the SBOE itself has often been the source of intense debates over political hot-button issues such as evolution, sexual education and ethnic studies.

'Un-Texas'

How far lawmakers should weigh into local matters has long been at issue.

Over the summer, a Leander ISD mother asked Texas legislators to add teeth to legislation that sought to restrict how teachers talk about race and current events. She said she didn't trust local school boards to enforce the anti-critical race theory law.

Diane Birdwell, a Dallas history teacher, testified against the bill in Austin and found the mother's testimony troubling.

"That is McCarthyism, pure and simple," Birdwell told lawmakers. "That should send a shiver to any conservative who believes in local control, who believes in holding back government overreach, who believes in the power of educators that they all say they respect."

Now while Krause's inquiry reminds scholars of the 1962 investigation, it is distinct in that it narrowly focuses on local decisions, the texts that local school boards,

campuses and teachers have a hand in picking. The 1962 committee's work centered more broadly on textbooks, which have state oversight.

Historian Jeremi Suri, a professor in the University of Texas at Austin's history department and at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, has found the recent statewide interest in classroom matters out of line with most of Texas history.

In general, most Texans don't want state lawmakers delving into local school affairs, Suri said.

"This is a member of the state Legislature from Fort Worth, who seems to think that the Legislature should tell people across the state what they should read and what they shouldn't read," Suri said. "I can't think of anything that's more un-Texas."

Teachers at risk

Texas parents or organizations have previously confronted school boards with concerns over individual books, but those were dealt with at the local level, Suri said.

Evaluating classroom books is not a simple or straightforward task, so determining their place in a district should be done community by community, educators say.

Many of the books on Krause's list are novels or literature that don't necessarily deal with hard facts or truth the same way that historical textbooks do, said Jonna Perrillo, an associate professor of English Education at the University of Texas at El Paso.

"You can't really say whether novels are factual or not," Perrillo noted, giving the example of the current debate over the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison.

The novel is set after the Civil War and recounts the story of a family of former slaves. While it deals with historical events, it is not about chronicling the past. Rather, it's about what those events and characters mean to readers, which is much harder for any one person — or lawmaker — to define, she said.

"So much of this debate has been focused on history and hard patriotism curriculum, and I think English teachers have been waiting on this," Perrillo said. Krause's investigation and Texas' new law restricting classroom discussion in all subject areas

are “putting a whole other sort of classrooms and teachers at risk and under the spotlight.”

Digital archivist Spencer Bevis contributed to this story.

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