



STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION APRIL MEETING

The State Board of Education held its April meeting last week by Zoom. The meeting covered a pared-down agenda and went off without a hitch.

Members spent a bulk of their time Thursday and Friday adopting final amendments to the state's first African American ethnic studies course. The course will be available as a high school elective, recommended for grades 10-12, and is designed to develop a deeper understanding of the historical roots of African American culture through the guided study and analysis of history, literature, arts and sciences through the lens of the African American experience. Members approved the new course by a unanimous vote and were conscious throughout the process how this course might likely serve as a model for other ethnic courses to follow.

In other actions, the board cleaned up rules related to career and technical education (CTE) and aligned graduation requirements with recent legislation requiring the board to consolidate high school technology application TEKS into the CTE rubric. Revisions also add a new career cluster in energy to align with revised programs of study. The board also approved the four-year CTE education plan for the state of Texas to comply with the reauthorization of federal Perkins funding.

In its standing update on the review of the TEKS, staff presented that the science TEKS rewrite is temporarily on hold until workgroups are able to meet face-to-face given the challenge of being productive virtually and the fact that these workgroups had not yet had an opportunity to meet for the first time. The health TEKS workgroups are continuing according to schedule because the initial face-to-face meetings had been held prior to social distancing orders.

The board also considered assessing damages worth \$113,494 against Origo Education, a vendor of math instructional materials, for persistent failure to comply with contract. The board debated whether or not to assess the fine from the date the company was originally notified of noncompliance, which would have increased the fine to \$1.3 million. Staff voiced concern over the cost of defending the larger fine in court, and Origo has promised to pay the \$113,494 fine immediately upon invoice. The board set a payment deadline of June 1, 2020. Returned funds will go back into the instructional materials fund.

The meeting ended with members praising the hard work of educators who continue to educate Texas students while at home caring for their own families. Member Sue Melton-Malone (R-Waco) said that she was "blown away by Texas teachers." Member Georgina Perez (D-El Paso) echoed the support but reminded the board of the limitations of virtual learning and the soon-to-be realized ramifications of uneven student outcomes given the many students who lack access to the internet.

The board is expected to convene again in May to take up items that were originally on this week's agenda but were postponed due the nature of the meeting format. Chairman Keven Ellis (R-Lufkin) expects the date to be decided and made public later this week.