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## TSTA EDUCATOR TESTIMONIALS

### Diana Adamson, 30-year educator

Members of the Senate, Committee Members, and Committee Chairperson: my name is Diana Adamson; thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my concerns regarding Senate Bill 3 by Senator Hughes. I am an active member in TSTA, The American Federation of Teachers, and Education Austin since 1998, and I have taught at both the middle and high school levels.

I was awarded the Outstanding Educator Award from Savannah College of Art and Design for the 2019-2020 school year and the Outstanding Teacher Award from the University Chicago in both 2009 and 2020 — the awards from both places are based on student nomination. I was given the Spotlight Teacher Award from UTeach for Exemplary Service as a Mentor Teacher in the Spring of 2020. I was also chosen to participate in Teaching from the Archives: A Workshop for UTeach-LA Secondary English Teachers in the Summer of 2016, and I was asked to be an Outside Evaluator for Humanities Texas Teacher Institute: Teaching the American Literary Tradition, University of Texas at Austin Summer of 2016.

I just completed my 30th year of teaching English Language Arts, the majority of which are at the high school level — 23 years in Austin, and 20 of those years specifically at McCallum High School in Austin Independent School District. I have been the English Department Chair for the last six years. I am honored to have the kind of experiences that I have had in my time working with both young people and adults, and I take my commitment to this profession seriously. There is nothing more important than the growth of our children.

It is without doubt that Senate Bill 3 is extremely important. It is without doubt that we all want what is best for the children of the State of Texas, and it is without doubt that that even though we may disagree about how to achieve the best education for the children of the State of Texas, we all want our children to be educated in such a way in our public schools that they will be well-prepared for whatever advanced education comes after secondary school.

However, it is precisely in the fact that we disagree in the best way to educate our children that leads me to reach out to all of you. If Senate Bill 3 passes, I do not believe that our children will be as well-prepared for post-secondary education as they should be — especially in their admittance to the colleges and universities of their choice. If we limit the highly trained professionals that teach our children to a curriculum that is devoid of ideas such as equity, diversity, inclusion, social emotional learning, discussions of implicit or unconscious bias, multi-cultural competence, and the list goes on, then how can we possibly expect the students in Texas to compete in a world that asks our students to be knowledgeable, higher level thinkers, empathetic, and accountable for their actions beyond the world of academia?

Best teaching practices ask students to look at literature through their own eyes and then make connections to the world around them as to how literature is applicable in the real world. This can only be done if teachers do not feel paralyzed by what they can and can't teach. Planning a curriculum that forces me to fear what kinds of discussion

come about in my classroom based on the literature they read will ultimately silence the voices of all students. It is my job as a teacher to help my students learn how to question carefully and caringly. Good questions, whether asked by me or my students, ultimately bring far more questions than answers. And it is these questions that lead students to dig deeply and to really learn. This is part of the learning process.

It is also part of the learning process for students learn how to work with students who have different ideas and cultures from themselves. Literature teaches students how to appreciate the contributions of a diverse global culture that is becoming smaller as technology continues to bring us all closer together no matter where on the globe we are actually situated. It is important for students to realize their own implicit and unconscious biases in order to move into the global world, to get along with others both in and out of the workforce.

My job as a teacher will be hindered if I am not allowed to have discussions of this nature with my students. Their growth and maturity will be hindered; thus, their abilities to think critically and deeply will be far less developed, and they may not have as many options open to them as they apply to colleges. Honestly, I am not sure how students will do on Advanced Placement tests, ACT, SAT, and even dual enrollment and dual credit courses. It will be obvious that the classroom rigor is lower because teachers will be afraid of repercussions and misunderstandings of the intent of their lessons, and due to lower rigor, students will simply not learn as much as they should. This will not be best teaching practices.

I spend hours and hours in continued education a year. Just during the 2020-2021 school year, I had close to 100 continuing education hours. I am highly trained to teach my course. I am an expert in secondary English Language Arts. I ask you to let me do my job to the best of my ability and teach my English course as the expert that I am.

## Greg Hill, 25-year educator

My name is Greg Hill. I am an educator with 25 years of experience at the high school level. Currently, I teach Geography and African American Studies. I write in opposition to SB 3 by Senator Hughes.

This bill erroneously bans critical thinking of critical topics in Social Studies instruction. The current political battle cry of banning Critical Race Theory has ensnared the curriculum of thousands of districts across Texas in its crosshairs. Teachers, fearing some type of retaliation from parents, politicians and administrators will not have the courageous conversations that students not only crave, but ultimately deserve.

For example, students in Advanced Placement Human Geography look at the effects that redlining had on urban development in the United States and how that influenced settlement patterns in America's cities through government policy. Regarding gender, students examine the Gender Empowerment Measure to examine the participation rates of women in such things government and business. In African American studies, students look critically at the effects of Jim Crow on the development of American society. Further, this bill will negate the teaching of backlash Civil Rights pioneers like Medgar Evers and Fannie Lou Hamer faced in their quest for equal rights. If teachers choose to avoid these topics, it does a disservice to Texas school children. Fear-mongering the critical issues that create informed, well- educated and college ready Texans under the guise of fighting a law school lesson component only benefits the political bottom line of its supporters.

## Jennifer Wood, 23-year educator

I am Jennifer Wood, an English teacher at McCallum and am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 3 by Senator Hughes; I am also an Ed Austin member. As I have been reflecting on the impact of these recent educational policies have decided how essential my testimony is in opposition to Senate Bill 3 by Senator Hughes. I think, sadly,

I cannot even grasp what it means to not “teach” something as logical and organic as, for example, how racism impacts us all structurally and over time, and I have been, in fact, asked to directly teach implicit bias and its complexities the last several years. I wonder, too, if these policies just become another semantics game-doublespeak. When we are forbidden or required to teach certain things explicitly, the results are inevitably and always subversion, avoidance, or superficiality.

As an ELA teacher, these laws contradict and confuse. There are few things we teach as direct content — we are more skills-based instructors! Students and teachers and texts converge and make meaning — must I censor our bright and savvy students’ insights — the same insights my TEKS require I nurture in them? What a contradiction! The same literature and expository texts that ELA students are required to read by the state are on the high stakes exams the students must take, and these readings convey over and over the same messages and themes the state proposes to censor?! For me, a teacher in my golden years of working with students, these laws become another weight around my body just pulling me down deeper under the water that I can barely keep my head above now.

The new rules and provisions that teachers are now facing in the classroom are leaving me paralyzed. After 23 years of teaching high school English, I just can’t believe that we have to try to swim in the muddy water that these laws are. The language is completely slippery and ambiguous — it leaves one confused and unclear. We are already at the mercy of enormous class sizes of teenagers that get bigger each year, social media, cell phones, and everything we teach, create, grade is online — we are extremely vulnerable, and to think now I have to worry about something that could be interpreted a million different ways. We have also become the caretakers of children and teenagers — trained and required to also facilitate social and emotional learning — an extremely sensitive space to navigate, but next to impossible in the context of these laws.

As an AP English teacher my job is to support students as they read and examine the ramifications of great literature — and by definition, these works have achieved canon status because they challenge readers’ ideological norms — their themes encourage students to question society and history and culture, and often they are asked to see a certain “side” or point of view they haven’t seen before; *Beloved*, for example, by Toni Morrison! Not all “sides” can be justified at all in this profound narrative, and students may feel sad and some even guilty or “bad” — especially if they didn’t know much about this aspect of history. Literature, the best literature, always breaks my heart a little, makes me want to do better, or leaves me a bit sad. When I feel badly, it’s often for a good reason, and often forces me to act in a positive way.

These new provisions cloud all of this and seem to purposely do so. They seem misdirected and definitely lack understanding of academia, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. It’s almost as if the politicians don’t want the students of Texas to have that critical edge that they need to compete in a modern world.

## Sarah Spurrier, 20-year educator

Members of the Senate, Committee Members, and Committee Chairperson: my name is Sarah Spurrier; thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my concerns regarding Senate Bill 3 by Senator Hughes. I am the local Arlington TSTA President and have been active in TSTA for much of my career. I teach at the high school level and have taught World Geography, Pre-Advanced Placement World Geography, World History and United States Government and currently teach Advanced Placement Human Geography and Women’s Studies.

I have been nominated for teacher of year at my high school and an A.W.A.R.E. (Arlington Will Award and Recognize Educational Excellence) nominee for the school district. I have also worked as an Advanced Placement Reader in Human Geography for the College Board for the past four years.

I just completed my 20th year of teaching Geography at James W Martin High School in the Arlington Independent School District. I have been the Geography Level Leader for the past 8 years. I have written geography curriculum for the district, presented numerous district training courses and worked with many student teachers throughout my tenure. I also sponsor the U.I.L. Social Studies competition team and had a student place at the State competition this year, in 6A. I also sponsor the U.I.L. Social Studies competition team and had a student place at the State competition two years ago that is currently a student studying at the University of Texas in Austin. I also provide the adult contact for our Junior World Affairs Council club that works with the Dallas World Affairs Council to bring different world programs and experiences to our students. I am the Rho Kappa, the Social Studies National Honor Society Sponsor. Rho Kappa is a part of the National Council for the Social Studies, of which I am a member. I am also a member of the National Council for Geography Education. As you can see, I am devoted to my students and honored to be able to bring different kinds of experiences to my students. I enjoy my career because I do not see my work as just a job. I value the interactions and educational experiences that I have had with the young people of Arlington for the past 20 years.

I write this letter in opposition to Senate Bill 3. One of my goals as an educator is to create engaging, and authentic learning experiences for my students. Senate Bill 3 will curb this completely. Geography centers around the spatial relationship between the earth and people, meaning that every day in my classroom we discuss people and their relationships with “why there?” Why is this group in power here, why does this group have land here, why does this group speak this language here, why is this land losing water resources here, why does this dam block resources from this group and so forth. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Geography require students to look at current events and their impact on the location. I would no longer be able to allow classroom discussion or interactive activities that encourage discussion for fear of backlash if Senate Bill 3 passes. My course, my 20 years of work would be turned into a seminar course where there is no, or if any, very little student involvement for fear of discussion that leans to one side. So, what if the bell rings and only one side of the argument was discussed? Talking to many of my colleagues, many are concerned about putting their careers on the line for worry of where one class discussion might go. So, what would be our plan as classroom teachers? To stop all discussions. Our classrooms would become the “sit and get” style which is completely against any educational data that supports how students learn.

For my Advanced Placement students, if I do not teach the course by the College Board certified Course and Exam Description, then the course will not be certified as an Advanced Placement course. I will not lose, but my students will. Texas students will lose college credits, college scholarships and college entrance, especially to top tier schools, to students from other states who have the certified AP coursework. Senate Bill 3 will be detrimental to our students.

Again, I stand in opposition to Senate Bill 3. As a social studies teacher we provide the framework for our students to investigate all sides of an issue. We do not need the daily threat of losing our jobs in order to teach our students.

Thank you, Sarah Spurrier

## Kevin Gillion, 17-year educator

I am Kevin Gillion. My pronouns are he/him. I have taught high school Spanish for 17 years in Austin ISD, and I am an active member of Education Austin. I am here to oppose Senate Bill 3 by Senator Hughes.

Among my regular duties, I have served as Department Chair of World Languages in two schools, sponsored the GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance) for over ten years, and sponsored No Place for Hate for six years.

The scholar Bell Hooks said, “I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions — a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.”

I interpret this as a call to introduce the many and varied stories of people who speak Spanish in order for students to analyze historic and current events with the objective to take control of their own learning and reach independent conclusions about what is happening in the world.

Four to five percent of high school students go on to become fluent in the second language they study. So, what do we hope for the remaining 95 percent to take away from our so-called elective? Human stories, curiosity, and empathy for people who speak the target language.

I do not relish explaining that people who practice the culture I study experience genocide and discrimination, or the dire poverty and hunger resulting from it. Nevertheless, I would be a liar if I neglected to present the struggles of Spanish speakers along with the incredible advances, creations, cultural practices, and resistance that span over 500 years of conquest, colonization, rugged survival, struggle, and hard work by an extremely diverse group of people.

George Orwell said, “The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.”

In both *Animal Farm* and *1984*, George Orwell criticized the hypocrisy of the Soviet Union, with its liberatory propaganda attempting to obscure the corrupt authoritarianism that was the true core of its government. In the West there is a claim to value objectivity and evidence — that the truth always comes to light. If our society truly values such objectivity, then no one should be threatened by evidence or perspectives that offer a counter-narrative to the pollyannaish and inaccurate ‘master-narrative’ that so many of us are taught.

Orwell also said, “if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” Now, more than ever, is a time for difficult discussion and introspection for the youth of this country. If they are denied that opportunity, they will enter adult life expecting cartoonish happy endings, relying on the lazy thinking of stereotypes, and incapable of functioning in a democracy. I ask to retain the right to serve my students by challenging them to draw their own conclusions based upon evidence and narratives of the people and cultures studied. Please rescind this dangerous bill and focus on truly serving the public by repairing the electrical grid and increasing funding of public education.

## Robert Bucher, 15-year educator

My name is Robert Bucher, and I teach at McCallum High School in Austin. I’m a member of Education Austin with 15 years’ experience in the classroom. I’ve taught US History and World History, but my most beloved class is AP Psychology. I’d like to discuss the implications that this SB 3 might have on the teaching of this class as well as highlight how this bill would threaten the teaching of so many concepts along several disciplines within the social sciences and humanities.

I could go on about how this bill reads like official Soviet educational policy meant to impress Stalin or Mao, but I fear it would fall on deaf ears. Instead, I’d like to focus on specific topics in AP curricula that would need to be jettisoned from Texas classrooms for fear of running afoul of this draconian law; specifically, the concepts of implicit bias and heuristics.

Our brains make most of our daily decisions quickly, favoring choices that are most comfortable, readily available from experience, or representative of the examples set before us as we develop. This is fundamental to

understanding how implicit bias exists and affects marginalized groups. Although it may upset certain people to discover they're not entirely free of prejudice, it is imperative to understanding social psychology and the study of sociology as a whole.

Forcing teachers to neglect such important topics in the social sciences will not only deprive our students of the development of critical thinking skills and analysis, but it will have the very practical effect of decreased AP exam scores across the board. The snap judgment thinking of mental heuristics and cognitive biases account for a substantial amount of the multiple-choice section of the AP Psychology exam and almost always appear on the extended response section of the test. I would also have to avoid the concepts of in group/out group bias, scapegoating, Gordon Allport's discrimination model, stereotypes and the self-fulfilling prophecy, and the very basis of the unconscious mind and its very real effect on our behavior. These concepts are just a few of topics we must avoid in the psychology classroom if this bill passes, but just think about the effect this censorship of ideas will have across the many disciplines of the humanities.

The clear, practical consequences of this law are plain to see for any teacher, and it speaks volumes about our current state of affairs that politicians are willing to diminish our children's access to education purely for political theater. Stalin would be proud.

## Michael Jennings, 5-year educator

Members of the State Affairs Committee,

I have been a teacher in the Austin area for the past five years. During that time, I have taught various classes from AP Advanced Placement World History to International Baccalaureate (IB) History. These courses would be adversely impacted by the passage of SB3. The stipulations within the bill threaten the integrity and quality of the advanced courses that I teach and therefore limit the benefits of those classes. I believe that the bill in its current form attempts to solve a problem that does not exist and in fact would, in the long term, leave students less prepared to become the future of this nation. If you support the current draft of SB3, I strongly encourage you to reconsider your position.

IB is an internationally accredited curriculum that emphasizes student agency within their learning and in history: the value of diverse perspectives on our understanding of the past. If a student completes the diploma program within IB, they will complete a 2000 plus word essay in each of their classes and a 4000-word paper over the academic question of their choosing. The work students complete in an IB program is comparable to the work an undergraduate completes by their junior and senior year in college. The fact that students are afforded the opportunity to choose their own research topic and collaborate with a single advisor over a fifteen-month period can be instrumental in the growth of the student. Student curiosity drives the experience and makes it invaluable to preparing a student for success at the university level. Students in our IB program routinely make up a significant percentage of the top students in our school and are admitted to prestigious universities.

The current draft of SB3 threatens to adversely impact the quality of the IB curriculum in that uncharitable or cynical interpretations of the current iteration could pressure teachers away from exposing students to challenging texts for fear of their livelihood. IB History is not so much the study of the past, but the study of how we discuss the past in the present. What the past means to us is not solid. It changes and in fact reflects how we see the present. We look at the words of nationalists, fascists, Marxists, and anarchists, racists, and sexists not because I prescribe to any of those ideologies but because if students are to believe in the "the fundamental moral, political, and intellectual foundations of the American experiment in self-government" then they should be exposed to the other ways of life and learn why those ways cannot work. Certain interpretations of this bill could lead to IB

teachers avoiding the use of controversial perspectives in their class. This would directly interfere with the educator's capacity to teach the curriculum that is regarded as one of the most effective in the world. Students in Texas would be put at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers in other states and other countries. If the state of Texas determines that a historian or an event inherently communicate that a certain race or gender is superior to another or any of the other vague stipulations outlined in this bill, and I am prohibited to teach that topic then I am being compelled by the state of Texas to not follow a curriculum the families of the community I serve believe is valuable to their children's future.

To discuss or learn about an idea or concept is not an endorsement of those ideas. If our way of life is so great, then those ideas that challenge the American experiment should be held up next America's past and present and found insufficient. However, a student will never truly know the value and importance of what it means to be a part of this country if they do not understand the alternatives. If communism, fascism, racism, and sexism are insufficient and contradict what it means to be an American, it is our responsibility as a national community to prepare our next generation of leaders, thinkers, and workers to challenge those threats when they confront us. We cannot afford to shirk from them. I became a teacher out of a patriotic call to prepare the next generation of leaders for this nation. America's future is in the hands of our children and if we do not prepare them to be problem solvers and critical thinkers then we are doing a disservice to this nation. The current iteration of SB3 actively weakens the state of education in Texas because it fails to prepare students to challenge the ideas that bill claims is so threatening.

Sincerely, Michael Jennings