



Jim Broadway's Illinois School Policy Updates

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Texas board influences Illinois students' textbooks

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, State School News Service

Texas State School Board member Don McLeroy believes Earth is only 6,000 years old and thinks science books should reflect that “theory” as an alternative to Darwin’s whimsical idea. His colleague on the board, Cynthia Dunbar, believes public schools are a “subtly deceptive tool of perversion.”

McLeroy was denied the board’s chairmanship last year when even the Texas Senate saw his comments on “creationism” as too overdrawn. Dunbar is completing her first – and last – four-year term on the board. But her influence will be felt far and wide, *perhaps even in Illinois*, for a decade.

The two are part of a conservative majority that [decided a week ago](#) the content of textbooks that will be used in Texas for the next ten years. Texas schools can buy board-approved books only. That makes them a purchasing bloc textbook publishers cannot ignore.

The books will [describe America](#) as a “constitutional republic.” They don’t use the word “democratic” in the Lone Star state anymore. The books will stress the “Judeo-Christian influences of the Founding Fathers” [omitting Jefferson’s views, of course] but downplay separation of church and state.

The kids will have to learn the dangers of “government interference” in the economy [but probably not about Enron] and the tragedy of abandoning the “gold standard.” They will not learn much about the Civil Rights Movement or even that Tejanos fought and died alongside Davy Crockett at the Alamo.

If Texas influences textbook publishers so profoundly, how can we prevent such reactionary teachings from polluting the classrooms of Illinois?

Perhaps [SB 3547](#) will help.

Rolling smoothly through the Senate, this bill simply asserts that “A school district may provide students with instructional materials in an electronic format.” Electronic textbooks could replace back-breaking volumes the kids now have to tote around, and they can be more educational than ideological.

You should know that the Illinois Learning Standards – knowledge and skills descriptions aligned with the state’s tests – were written in 1997. Folks with ideological agendas swarmed to influence them. Foes of “evolution” fought even to exclude the word. It was a nasty fight.

The ILS surely will be updated in the future, not this year but sometime soon. As we will see then, Illinois is home to a lot of folks who think their beliefs – and nothing contrary to what they believe – should be taught to every student. It will be a stressful updating process.

It is not as if all beliefs are necessarily bad. [Here’s an article](#) about a teacher in Arizona who believed a bit of old-fashioned etiquette would improve the learning environment. What if boys opened doors for girls? Or stood when they entered a room? Sounds extreme, right?

The teacher was surprised to see how quickly respect for others replaced the incivility that so distressed him prior to his exercise in “politeness training.” How bad would that be in the classroom? (Don’t tell a legislator, however. First thing you know, it will be a mandate.)

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