

The State Board of Education Takes Action on Policies Affect Enrichment Area Teachers

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(Editor's Note: TFLA often collaborates with TMEA on advocacy issues at the state level. Working together as organizations strengthens our voice. TFLA expresses our appreciation to Bob Floyd for his work.)

The LOTE teachers in Texas need to know about the happenings during the special legislative session as well as the recent actions of the State Board of Education. At the July State Board of Education meeting, the Board adopted the middle school physical education policy in its second and final reading. A copy of that language is posted on the Texas Music Educators Association website, www.tmea.org. There are no language changes from first to second reading, so basically the rules states that districts must simply adopt a policy relating to middle school physical activity. The local district has total latitude about what requirements, if any, are put in place. We look for TEA to release a Q&A document on the new rule, clarifying exactly what it does and does not require.

At its July meeting, the SBOE also began to address the development of a new Recommended Program for graduation that now by law will include four courses of each of the foundation subjects - mathematics, science, English language arts, and social studies. This plan will be implemented with the ninth grade class of 2007. While the SBOE took no action, they asked the TEA staff to draft language for them to consider during the Board's September meeting. At that time they will vote to approve a new plan, following in November with the second reading and vote, thus meeting the legislature's mandate to have a new plan in place by January 1, 2007.

The Board has several options for accommodating the fourth credit of mathematics and the fourth credit of science. One would be to add two credits to the graduation plan, increasing the requirement from 24 to 26 credits. Another would be to cut courses that are currently required in the plan, such as fine arts, technology applications, speech communications, physical education, and / or similar enrichment courses. Finally, the Board could add the fourth credits of math and science and simply decrease electives from 3.5 to 1.5 in the Recommended Program and from 2.5 to 0.5 in the Distinguished Achievement Program.

Testimony was given at the last SBOE meeting by TMEA and others, all speaking to the importance of electives and fine arts in a student's high school plan. This testimony also specifically endorsed the addition of two credits to protect those electives without cutting any currently required Recommended Program courses.

The Board was very receptive to our recommendations. Several members, including Chair Geraldine Miller and longtime Board member May Helen Berlanga, voiced their support for fine arts. They also indicated their desire to protect the one-credit requirement in addition to the flexibility that electives give students to participate in multiple years of fine arts and other elective subjects. In unofficial action, the Board asked TEA staff to bring back language in September that would support the 26-credit plan.

I never believed it was the legislature's intent to limit student electives options by adding a fourth credit of math and science. In my brief visits with Senator Shapiro, Senate Education Committee Chair, and Representative Rob Eissler, House Public Education Committee member, they indicated just that, but the reality is that when you add required courses to the plan through statute, something has to give.

Editor's Note: The SBOE will vote again on this issue in November. It appears that the SBOE will raise the number of graduation requirements to 26.