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Contact: John Bender, 512-626-5949
Nancy Siefken, 512-658-2731

Funding for math at stake in legislative session

Texas educators are asking lawmakers to place a top priority on replacing outdated math instruction materials that predate the assessment test students must pass for grade advancement and graduation.

“It is crucial that the legislature approve funding this spring to ensure that teachers have updated math textbooks, lesson plans and supporting material in their classrooms when school starts next fall,” said Michelle King, public affairs representative for the Texas Association of Supervisors of Mathematics. “It will be disaster if textbook funding is once again held hostage or used as a bargaining chip on other issues.”

In April, school districts will begin submitting orders to replace materials for middle school and high school math courses for the next school year. Updated math materials for elementary grades are scheduled for the following year, fall of 2008. Funding for both years, approximately \$500 million, must be included in the two-year budget that legislators are now drafting.

“It is unrealistic to expect continued improvement in student performance unless teachers and students have classroom materials that match up with the state’s required curriculum,” King said.

Nancy Siefken, Legislative Director for Texastextbooks.org, a coalition of educators, parents and publishers, said the state appropriation for new math materials is one of several critical issues facing the legislature this session.

Other issues include:

- **Ending the delay on replacing reading and language arts materials.** In last year’s special session, legislators halted the process for updating textbooks, which has already caused a one-year delay in the adoption of new reading materials based on the latest research in reading instruction. Legislation is required to restart the review and adoption process to avoid further delays in getting new reading materials into classrooms.

WWW.texastextbooks.org

512-658-2731

- **Increased funding for classroom technology.** Legislators must increase funding for the technology allotment to school districts to help purchase the latest technology for delivering instructional material to students. The current allotment is less than \$30 per student and has not been increased in two decades. However, additional funding for computers and other equipment should be in addition to, and not at the expense of, funding to develop new content for educational materials.
- **Preserving an efficient and equitable textbook funding system.** Proposals to dismantle the state textbook fund and distribute the money to school districts would destroy a fair and efficient distribution system that is rated one of the best in the nation. The current statewide system ensures that every child in every school receives new textbooks on a regular schedule. If funding is disbursed to school districts, textbooks funds could be diverted to other uses and undermine the Texas Constitution's guarantee of state-provided textbooks for every student.

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