

September 3, 2020

To: Members of the Texas State Board of Education

From: Suzi Kennon, President, Texas PTA

Re: Health Education Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) Final Recommendations

Texas Parent Teacher Association (Texas PTA), the largest child advocacy association in the state representing over 500,000 members, is grateful for your unwavering service and applauds your commitment to public education during these uncertain times. As each of us continue to care for the health of our own families and children, Texas PTA recognizes that we must also look ahead to the future health of **all** Texas students.

At its core, Texas PTA's purpose is to promote the welfare of children and youth at home, school, places of worship, and throughout the community; to advocate for laws that further the education, physical and mental health, welfare, and safety of children and youth; to promote the collaboration and engagement of families and educators in the education of children and youth; and to engage the public in united efforts to secure the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social well-being of all children and youth.

In that context, the content and structure of the updated Health Education Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are of paramount importance to the wellbeing of all youth in Texas.

Further, the results of Texas PTA's spring survey of our members, the response rate for which was the highest of any survey conducted by Texas PTA, indicate decisively that parents support the teaching of abstinence plus standards in public schools. Texas PTA parents were asked,

“Do you believe sex education should be taught in schools?” An overwhelming 87.64% of Texas PTA survey respondents answered ‘yes’.

and

“Along with teaching abstinence as the safest way to avoid unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, should sex education in public schools provide medically accurate information about topics such as contraception, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, and healthy relationships in 8th grade and higher?” 91.37% of respondents were supportive of this type of education in the classroom.

Texas PTA applauds the State Board of Education, content advisors, and workgroup members for their collaborative effort throughout the entirety of this process. **As such, Texas PTA urges SBOE members to maintain many of the updates found in the latest Workgroup F draft.**

- I. **Texas PTA supports standards that include factual and data-driven information about contraception, prevention of STIs and healthy relationships, taught in an age-appropriate manner.**

As health education courses are not required at the high school level, Texas PTA, in alignment with the Texas Medical Association (TMA) and Texas Pediatric Society (TPS), supports the inclusion of these student expectations in middle school so that all students will receive a base of knowledge they will be able to rely upon as they grow into adulthood.

No doubt there are parents who prefer to teach their children these concepts at home, and parents may opt their children out of any or all lessons. But it is essential to consider that not all students have parents who have accurate information or feel comfortable teaching their children about sex. It is important that those students have access to accurate information in an age-appropriate manner. Texas PTA believes that all students deserve the opportunity to receive information that will keep them safe and healthy. **Texas PTA strongly supports including the following two topics at Grades 7-8.**

Topic Area: Abstinence and Contraception

Texas PTA urges you to maintain the following components found in the final recommendations:

- Maintain the addition of new student expectations at Grades 7-8 and Health 1 to identify and describe various contraceptive methods; and
- Maintain TEKS language that emphasizes both abstinence and availability of other reproductive health choices.

Topic Area: Sexually Transmitted Infections

Texas PTA urges you to maintain the following components found in the final recommendations:

- Maintain the contraception and STI standards at grades 7-8;
- Maintain the use of the clinically correct term, “sexually transmitted infections” (STIs) instead of “sexually transmitted diseases”;
- List the signs and symptoms of the most prevalent STIs for which students are most at risk, including HPV and HIV/AIDS; and
- Maintain information on the importance of prevention methods and treatment for STIs.

- II. **Texas PTA supports standards that use de-stigmatizing language and that are specifically designed to help students be mentally strong and prepared to cope with personal challenges and identify healthy and unhealthy relationships.**

Topic Area: Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

Identifying and navigating healthy and unhealthy relationships are critical skills. Even at the youngest ages, students are faced with the challenges of both flourishing and broken friendships, respecting the

bounds of a teacher-student relationship, and setting personal boundaries and respecting the wishes of others. The final recommendations contain positive language on traits of healthy relationships, prevention of dating violence, and respect. The TEKS include a framework of healthy friendship and communication skills in early grades, with information on healthy romantic relationships and marriage in older grades. **We urge you to maintain these standards in the final recommendations.**

III. Texas PTA supports education aimed at protecting children and youth from the exploitation and victimization of human trafficking.

Texas PTA strongly supports the addition of TEKS on human trafficking and sex trafficking. **We urge you to maintain these standards in the final recommendations.**

IV. In an effort to reduce tobacco use by youth, Texas PTA supports education relating to the harmful effects of both vaping and traditional tobacco products.

Topic Area: Physical and Mental Harms of Dangerous Substances, Illegal Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco

Texas PTA is acutely aware of the misinformation surrounding the risks of vaping. Student testimonials have made clear a belief among the majority of youth that vaping is a healthy alternative to cigarettes, is non-addictive, and that vape devices do not contain nicotine. Texas PTA has seen an outcry from parents, school administrators, and legislators regarding the recent uptick in vaping among students. **We urge you to maintain language in the final recommendations that includes vaping in instruction on the health risks of tobacco.**

Thank you again for your service to Texas students. Please keep them at the forefront of your minds as you consider amendments to the final recommendations document.