

Written Testimony for Senate Education Committee: SB2275

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Subject Support for establishing TEKs based on qualified experts
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Senators and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I'm a computer engineer by training and moved to Austin 14 years ago. At the time of my relocation, I was considering jobs in other locations, but decided upon Austin due to a combination of livability, technology, and education in the region. In 1997, two of my coworkers and I left AMD and founded Obsidian Software of which I'm the President & CEO. Obsidian employs 15 people in Texas and sells software to semiconductor companies worldwide. Our ability to grow in Texas depends on a robust education system and a technology friendly climate.

In addition to running a company, I'm very involved in the Texas business community ecosystem and volunteer a considerable amount of time to promote business and entrepreneurship in Texas. Some of my activities include:

Central Texas RCIC Selection Committee Member

Part of the Greater Austin Chamber screening committee that supports the \$200 million dollar Texas Enterprise Fund to identify and fund commercialization and innovation in Texas.

Entrepreneur's Organization

Past-President of EO Austin and currently the Area Director for Texas and Oklahoma EO Chapters. Our membership includes the founders of nearly 500 Texas businesses with 22,000 employees.

Austin Technology Council

Active member of the CEO Roundtable.

Central Texas Angel Network

We provide funding for early stage companies and promote angel investing state wide.

TexChange Austin

Past advisory board member. TexChange promotes technology entrepreneurship and has chapters in Austin, Dallas, and Houston.

All-Boards

Main organizer of yearly event that pulls over 100 volunteer board members from non-profit business groups in Austin.

I have a number of concerns on the process used to create the science TEKs

- 1) The SBOE is changing the science standards to reflect their personal views instead of basing it on the work of the expert scientists and educators.

Given that Texas educators and scientists overwhelming support adopting modern science standards as drafted by experts, I think we can be honest and say the only reason the SBOE is ignoring their advice is to provoke another test case in Creationism similar to those in Kansas or Dover, PA. This course of action would directly hurt my business and the vast majority to Texas companies for many years to come.

- 2) This has caused a media firestorm that is branding Texas as anti-science which damages Texas business.

The very appearance that Texas science education is not up to modern standards, is deficient, or hostile to well established scientific ideas is a very serious concern to Texas employers. Anything that makes it harder to attract industry and employees undermines the massive investment that taxpayers and local business are making to promote Texas as a place where scientific businesses can flourish and prosper. Industries directly affected include all growing business, technology businesses, green energy companies, biotech, or any business that requires employees who use science or value a quality science education for their children.

- 3) With over 770 articles written on this topic in just the last month, we're approaching a tipping point where the activity around this debate will create the permanent perception that Texas is anti-science

According to Google news, 770 articles ran on "Texas Science Standards" in the last 30 days. This includes dozens of major magazines, all the TV networks, late night TV, a week of coverage on CNN, and multiple articles in the WSJ. Every new piece on this controversy harms Texas's image. Just imagine what it would cost to run a PR campaign of similar scope with a pro-science message.

It's also worth noting that the national media has only started to scratch the surface on this issue. We need to recognize the possibility that the people steering the ship at the SBOE might be a bit to colorful to be the best voice of Texas science education. All it's going to take is an hour of internet searches for an intern at 60 Minutes to come up with enough material to turn this into a miniseries.

- 4) We need to take decisive action to demonstrate Texas is committed to science and change the message while we still can. I believe SB2275 will do this.

The SBOE has repeatedly ignored the very experts it was supposed to consult with. The end result is Texas is being labeled as anti-science in the media. Please find a way to quickly reestablish the integrity of this process before the damage to Texas business is irreversible.

Sincerely,

Eric T. Hennenhoefler
Entrepreneur, business leader, and father