



POLL: BIG MAJORITY OF TEXAS VOTERS SEE CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION AS IMPORTANT, WANT TEACHERS AND SCHOLARS TO SET CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Poll Shows SBOE Out of Step with Everyday Texans, Providing More Evidence for Need to Delay Adoption of Standards, TFN Education Fund President Says

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Large majorities of Texas voters believe separation of church and state is an important constitutional principle and that curriculum standards should be decided by teachers and scholars, not politicians, results of a new statewide poll show.

“Clearly, we have a State Board of Education that is seriously out of step with the attitudes of everyday Texans, especially parents of children who attend Texas public schools,” Texas Freedom Network Education Fund President Kathy Miller said. “Too many board members are putting their own personal and political opinions ahead of their responsibility to ensure that our schoolchildren get an education based on facts and the best scholarship.”

A majority of board members voted in March against requiring high school American government students to learn that the nation’s Founders barred government from favoring or disfavoring one religion over all others. Opponents of the requirement insist that separation of church and state is a myth.

The May 4-12 statewide poll by the national firm of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for the TFN Education Fund shows that 68 percent of likely Texas voters agree that church-state separation is a key principle of the Constitution. Agreement extends across party lines, with 59 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Democrats and 74 percent of political independents believing it is a key principle. (The question wording and poll results are attached as a PDF and available at http://www.tfn.org/site/DocServer/TFNEF_EdPoll_GQRR_5.2010.pdf?docID.)

In addition, 72 percent of Texas voters – and 78 percent of parents – say that teachers and academic scholars should be responsible for writing curriculum standards and textbook requirements for Texas public schools. Only 19 percent prefer that elected members of a State Board of Education do so.

Teachers and scholars spent much of 2009 writing new social studies standards. In January and March, however, state board members made scores of controversial changes to the standards.

The board is scheduled to take a final vote on the standards Friday.

"Scholars, educators, civil rights and education groups, and lawmakers have called on the state board to delay final approval until new expert panels can review the numerous changes board members have made," Miller said. "It seems clear to us that the vast majority of Texans would support that delay so teachers and experts can ensure that the curriculum reflects what children need to know to succeed in college and the jobs of the future."

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner surveyed 601 likely Texas voters. The margin of error is +/- 4.0 percentage points.

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The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund is a nonpartisan research and citizen education organization focusing on public education, religious freedom and civil liberties.