

Texas Classroom Teachers Association

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Testimony to the Senate Education Committee Regarding CSCOPE By Holly Eaton, Director of Professional Development and Advocacy January 31, 2013

Thank you for inviting us to be part of this important discussion on the role that curriculum management systems like CSCOPE play in the lives of educators. We have been hearing from our members about CSCOPE for years. In fact, the concerns we'd been hearing mounted to such a level in 2010 that we felt it was necessary to schedule a meeting with the state CSCOPE Directors at Regional Education Service Center 13 to relay the concerns as well as discuss potential remedies.

At that meeting, the CSCOPE director gave us a brief history of CSCOPE: it had started 5 years earlier as a curriculum consortium effort of several Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) entitled the Texas Education Service Center Curriculum Collaboration. RESC 13 was the fiscal agent for the program, operating as a 501c3 nonprofit. At that time, 19 out of the 20 RESCs were participating in CSCOPE (except Region IV) which has its own curriculum management system, and 741 districts were participating. We were told that the system was purchased at the district level, and mostly used district-wide, but there are some districts using it only at a few campuses.

We then began our discussion about the concerns we'd been hearing from our members, which we had compiled under several broad categories: concerns with the actual substance of some of the CSCOPE curriculum pieces, particularly in certain subject areas; lack of corresponding instructional materials; and burdensome requirements for detailed and scripted lesson plans.

Regarding specifics about concerns expressed about some of the CSCOPE curriculum, we heard statements like "I have serious concerns about the curriculum (Algebra 2 in particular) for the average student," and from an 8th grade math teacher, "There is not any flow of {the CSCOPE} lessons taught. There is no decent spiraling so the kids forget one lesson to the next. There are tons of mistakes. They talk about negative percents (I didn't know such an animal existed). Having to rewrite lessons b/c C-Scope lessons are so bad."

We also heard complaints about the poor quality of lessons in the CSCOPE English Language Arts curriculum.

Aside from these subject-specific programmatic concerns, it was pretty clear during our discussion that the majority of the concerns we'd heard from our members had to do with how the program was being implemented at the local level. One of the main themes that we'd heard

During the interim years, we have had continuing discussions with our leadership about their experiences with CSCOPE, and although some have found it useful or at least not objectionable, complaints continue about the one-size-fits-all application of the system to all teachers by districts.

Fast forwarding to 2013, we continue to receive complaints from members about CSCOPE as its use is becoming more pervasive amongst Texas school districts. In fact, at our just concluded annual convention, we conducted an informal survey of our Representative Assembly in which we asked them whether their school districts were using CSCOPE. Although not a scientific finding, it was striking to see the show of hands of those whose districts were using CSCOPE, with approximately 80% of the delegation raising their hands.

Further, our delegates adopted a position related to CSCOPE in which it supported requiring, prior to school district adoption of major curriculum initiatives, that the district provide evidence of significant teacher input, disclosure to the public of the costs, and a review of alternatives considered.

Simply put, this is what we believe is the most practical and best way to address the problems resulting from local implementation of CSCOPE. It makes sense to us, that much of the potential difficulties that our members and various news accounts report about CSCOPE could be avoided with upfront input from teachers and the community about the best use of curriculum initiatives such as CSCOPE, as well as a review of the costs associated with that use, and alternatives considered.

Finally, we do want to point out a dynamic that we have observed related to the widespread use of CSCOPE among school districts. There appears to be tension between RESCs being asked to be more self-supporting, and the issues that arise when RESCs being asked to be both a resource and serving as a vendor to school districts. Since RESCs are widely considered the local arm of TEA, which administers the accountability system, anything coming from them is given some automatic credibility among those who are trying to raise those test scores.

We again appreciate this opportunity to share with you our experiences regarding CSCOPE and look forward to continuing to work with you to find solutions.