

the MEL GABLERS'

Educational Research Analysts Newsletter

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How Do You Judge
Health Textbooks?

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THREE DAZZLING TEXAS HEALTH TEXTBOOK VICTORIES

Three days after the November 2004 election, public school textbook reformers won three stunning national victories as Texas' State Board of Education (SBOE) approved grades 6-10 Health programs – victories for abstinence in sex ed, for heterosexual marriage only, for editorial accountability to the people. Losers were those who advocate failed "comprehensive sex ed" (the *condom lobby*); who legitimize same-sex "marriage" through *asexual stealth phrases* in textbooks; and who oppose SBOE power to enforce *general textbook content standards*, to tell publishers what **NOT** to do as well as what **to** do.

"The Texas State Board of Education has approved new textbooks that define marriage as the union of a man and a woman." — *NBC Nightly News*, November 5, 2004

In this Health textbook adoption, Texas law undercut the condom lobby. Events finished it off. The Education Code requires emphasis on abstinence in sex ed and makes contraception info optional. As submitted, therefore, major publishers' student Health texts presented sexual abstinence only. They covered "barrier protection" in their ancillaries, free supplements from publishers to schools that buy their books. The state review panel agreed that this met state standards. It gave each local school district flexibility to decide how much contraceptive instruction is appropriate in their community. Going in, the condom lobby faced an uphill fight to force student Health texts to tout teen contraception.

— first success —

Abstinence supporters let the condom lobby talk at the July public hearing as Americans vacationed, but to its chagrin they dominated the September hearing in numbers, logic, wisdom. Said one, "We have no problems 'preaching' to our youth, 'Don't Do Drugs.' However ... we stumble when it comes to telling our children to not have sex before marriage." Said another: "The main opponents to this abstinence-based text have been rallied by Planned Parenthood, which has a product to sell." In the end, the condom lobby got absolutely nothing on contraception into any major publisher's student Health text. Its chief spokesman abruptly resigned. This was the first great victory. Two more triumphs followed.

*Texas rebuffs condom lobby,
upholds Defense of Marriage Act,
asserts democratic control.*

The Drama Behind the Headlines

The condom lobby made sex ed in Health texts the only issue at the hearings. Yet there was another concern. Our reviews found that some of those books redefined marriage to include same-sex "couples" through multiple asexual stealth phrases. This meant publisher nullification of Texas' Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which declares same-sex "marriage" and "civil unions" against public policy and void in the state. With time running short, heroic SBOE conservative Terri Leo resolved to challenge this at the November Board meeting, which would vote on approving these texts for local adoption.

— second success —

She brilliantly succeeded. The national media, poised for debate on contraceptives, pounced instead on the marriage issue; and most of our elected SBOE dared not scuttle her motion to reject books that nullified Texas' DOMA. Seeing this, *suddenly publishers would make revisions*. Mrs. Leo also happened to have two-column lists on each of the five texts in question, one column quoting each illegal passage, the other telling exactly how to reword it. Literally overnight, marriage became a union of a man and a woman, or husband and wife, instead of two "partners," two "individuals," or two "people." Publishers revised eight passages on this, some of them quite lengthy. It was the second great victory.

"Health Textbooks in Texas to Change Wording About Marriage" — *New York Times* headline, November 6, 2004

— third success —

The third great victory was that Texas' SBOE again debunked the myth that it cannot and will not enforce general textbook content standards. General textbook content standards are a *democratic restraint by Texas' elected SBOE on elitist editors and otherwise unaccountable authors*, telling what they must not do. Texas' defense of its DOMA in textbooks is a model for other states with DOMAs to emulate. All other states should insist on the Texas edition of these books. One seldom sees three so great simultaneous textbook victories in a lifetime. In the same week as the presidential election, *God engineered this Texas Health textbook approval outcome, and the other side knew it, and was helpless.*