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Texas State Board of Education
William B. Travis Building
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas, 78701

To the Members of the Texas State Board of Education:

At the request of our members in the state of Texas, the National Council for Geographic Education has coordinated with the American Association of Geographers and American Geographical Society to prepare this letter in response to proposed changes to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) state standards for 9th grade World Geography Studies. Texas educators and organizations, representing the interests of the students they teach across the state, have earnestly engaged in the Social Studies TEKS Review. The purpose of this letter is not just to advocate for the discipline of geography in Texas schools but to also to focus attention on the voices of Texans who want children in the state to become geographically informed citizens.

Our organizations speak in a unified voice to urge the Board to reject recommendations by content advisors that would redefine the purpose of geography education in the terms of historical geography and the teaching of basic geographic content knowledge about world civilizations, empires, and wars. Instead, we encourage the Board to preserve language in the standards that encourages the following student outcomes:

- Ability to think geographically about the historical and contemporary world using geographic knowledge and concepts.
- Understanding of topics and processes in physical geography.
- Knowledge of contemporary world issues related to human settlement and migration, economic geography, and human-environment interactions.
- Ability to apply geographic knowledge, skills, and perspectives, including the use of geospatial technologies, to examine contemporary social and environmental issues in different world regions.

It is unquestionably important to ensure young people in Texas and across the country receive opportunities to learn geographic content knowledge about the world. However, the proposed changes to the TEKS geography standards would take the field of geography education back to an era of rote memorization and gazetteer-style learning that the state rightly rejected decades ago.

Over the years geographers and geography educators in Texas have actively advised the Texas SBOE about the state’s geography standards and the importance of engaging youth in powerful geographic learning experiences in which they acquire not only content knowledge, but learn to think critically about the world using geographic concepts, inquiry skills, and applications of geospatial technologies.

Geographically preparing students for future careers and informed democratic citizenship requires learning about contemporary world issues, not just the historical world. The proposed changes to the TEKS geography standards would seriously weaken the quality of geography curriculum and instruction in ways that limit the state’s capacity to develop a workforce capable to using geographic knowledge and skills for economic development, environmental protection, infrastructural improvements, border security, and other issues of prime importance to the state.

The proposed changes to the TEKS geography standards would also greatly reduce the effectiveness of the state’s professional teaching workforce. Teachers will be discouraged from practicing effective methods of teaching geography, including field study, inquiry, problem-based learning, and geospatial analysis – pedagogies that make the subject more accessible, interesting, and useful to youth of all backgrounds.

To conclude, we would note that the proposed changes to the TEKS geography standards are being advocated by content advisors who are not geographers. To ensure Texas youth receive the best geography education, we hope the Texas SBOE will defer to what geographers and geography educators believe should be the focus of their subject’s standards in the TEKS. Doing so will also strengthen the teaching of history and civics given the integrated nature of the state’s standards for social studies.

Sincerely,



Thomas Herman, Executive Director
National Council for Geographic Education



Gary Langham, Executive Director
American Association of Geographers



Dr. Marie D. Price, President
American Geographical Society