



August 25, 2020

The Honorable Keven Ellis
Chair, Texas State Board of Education
P.O. Box 151453
Lufkin, TX 75915

Dear Chairman Ellis and Members of the State Board of Education:

On behalf of the 53,000 physician members of Texas Medical Association (TMA) and Texas Pediatric Society (TPS), we sincerely appreciate the hard work of all State Board of Education (SBOE) members, Texas Education Agency (TEA) staff, workgroup appointees, and content advisors to revise the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for health education. In particular, we applaud the virtual public hearings in June, which were well-executed and maximized public participation under the difficult circumstances of COVID-19.

We were pleased to learn SBOE members found the comments in TMA and TPS' June 28 comment letter constructive. Thank you for directing Workgroup F to consider our letter during deliberations this summer. It clearly communicates the value SBOE places on medical expertise and accuracy in Texas' health education curriculum standards.

The Health Education TEKS Review Final Recommendations from Workgroup F contain numerous improvements consistent with physicians' comments. Among those TMA and TPS intend to fully support during upcoming public hearings are:

- Improving specificity, medical accuracy, and age-appropriateness of student expectations related to sexually transmitted infections (STIs). We especially appreciate the emphasis on naming STIs with medically accurate terms, listing specific modes of STI transmission, and describing methods of STI prevention including vaccines and certain contraceptives;
- Retaining TEKS language that emphasizes both abstinence and availability of other reproductive health choices;
- Adding student expectations at early elementary grades on the importance of personal boundaries and how to respond to violations of personal boundaries, and retaining language related to consent as it relates to physical intimacy;
- Using terms of sexual risk avoidance and reduction to describe sexual activity among unmarried persons of school age;
- Relocating eating disorders standards to the mental health strand and improving medical accuracy of language used to describe disordered eating;
- Reframing self-harm standards to emphasize the importance of emotional support;
- Requiring vaping be included in instruction on the health risks of tobacco; and
- Retaining strong language around the importance of immunizations for preventing spread of infectious diseases;

Physicians value every opportunity to work with education leaders toward our shared goal of health education standards that support healthy, productive futures for Texas children. The physicians of Texas commend the substantial progress toward this goal evident in the final Workgroup F recommendations.

We look forward to expressing support for these and other proposed standards during September's hearings.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diana L. Fite, MD". The signature is stylized with large, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Diana L. Fite, MD
President, Texas Medical Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tammy Camp, MD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the name.

Tammy Camp, MD
President, Texas Pediatric Society

CC: Members of the Texas State Board of Education