

May 15, 2009

By Facsimile: 512-463-7467

The Honorable Florence Shapiro
Chair, Senate Committee on Education
Texas Senate
PO Box 12068 – Capitol Station
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Senator Shapiro:

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), I write with regard to H.B.4294, relating to textbooks, electronic textbooks, instructional material, and technological equipment in public schools. SIIA believes the bill takes important steps toward modernizing the Texas adoption system to better meet educational needs in this digital age. We look forward to working with you to move the bill forward – with further enhancements outlined below – to ensure the legislation truly provides Texas students and educators with access to a full range of quality electronic and other 21st century instructional materials.

SIIA represents more than 500 leading software and digital content companies, including some based in Texas. Many SIIA members publish educational software, digital curricula and related technologies and services for use in education in Texas and around the country.

SIIA and our member companies have long advocated for reform of the adoption system in Texas and in other states to better support adoption of electronic and online instructional materials. While some progress has been made with recent reforms, the Texas adoption system – which was originally designed for textbooks and other print-based materials – still includes many barriers to electronic materials. H.B.4294 takes important steps toward addressing these challenges.

We encourage further consideration of the following issues as H.B.4294 moves forward:

- ensuring an open, inclusive and transparent process by which the Commissioner calls for, reviews and approves instructional materials;
- clarifying that funding is focused first and foremost for instructional materials and content, and that interest in technology equipment does not compromise resources or attention away from investment in high quality content;
- providing school districts the flexibility to select electronic instructional materials instead of – and not just in addition to – a classroom set of textbooks;
- further clarifying the allowance that electronic instructional materials may be submitted, updated and improved in a timely manner (versus remaining static for six or more years);
- more explicitly supporting varied price models of electronic and online instructional materials, including per-computer and per-school (versus per-student) and annual subscription (versus one-time purchase); and

- detailing other elements of the Commissioner's adoption process to ensure it is free of various barriers to electronic and online materials that are inherent in the current system.

As you know, students and educators are eager to use technology to enhance and transform teaching and learning. And electronic instructional materials are poised to meet this need, with the most innovative now fundamentally redefining the textbook for the digital age. Quality electronic instructional materials – in addition to being learner appropriate, aligned to state standards, and built around effective pedagogy – can provide the following educational benefits:

- engaging and interactive through use of multimedia,
- adaptive and personalized to meet individual learning needs and pace;
- keep knowledge current and information accurate;
- enhance accessibility for physical or learning disabled students;
- support accountability through integration of assessment, instructional management and other instructional tools; and
- expedite delivery, increase portability and generally enhance flexibility to meet evolving and diverse curriculum needs.

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association and our member companies, we thank you for considering our views on H.B.4294, and we look forward to working with you as this legislation advances to ensure students can take advantage of the full array of instructional materials to meet state standards and educational needs. Meanwhile, if we can be of further assistance, please contact me at (202) 789-4444 or marks@siia.net.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Schneiderman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" being more prominent than the last name "Schneiderman".

Mark Schneiderman
Senior Director of Education Policy