

Serving Texas
Students by
Seeking
Historical
Accuracy
About Jews,
Judaism &
Israel in
Textbooks &
Curricula

EDITION 4
FALL
2014

The Texas Social Studies Textbook Adoption: Positive Outcomes for Jews, Judaism, and Israel

By: Pat Epstein, PEI Education Liaison

But we still need your help!

What we have done

In 2009, the Public Education Initiative (PEI) began its mission of promoting high quality, accurate education for Texas students. By building positive, professional relationships with members of the State Board of Education (SBOE), Texas Education Agency (TEA) professionals, and educators throughout the state, PEI was successful in securing over two-dozen changes and corrections to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards specific to Jews, Judaism, and Israel.

Some of these changes were integral to an accurate narrative regarding the creation of and ongoing challenges faced by the State of Israel. Others addressed the Holocaust and Jewish contributions to Western Civilization. All were essential to providing Texas students and teachers with high quality, accurate, and balanced educational resources. During this time frame, PEI also worked with the SBOE on other issues, including developing a more transparent process of textbook review and supporting Jewish community member nominations to the State Textbook Review Panels.

What's next?

At their September meetings, the SBOE will hear public testimony regarding publishers' print and digital submissions for adoption. The media focus will likely center on the political aspects of the adoption process; however, it is important that our readership knows that PEI's work on behalf of the Jewish community has been largely positive and well-received. Based on PEI's and the Institute for Curriculum Services' (ICS) ongoing work, multiple corrections to the textbooks have already been secured; however, there is still work to be done.

PEI testified at the September 16, 2014, SBOE meeting in support of the 14 textbook reviews completed by ICS (SPRING 2014 newsletter). These reviews were submitted by PEI, the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas, the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas, and the Jewish Federation of Fort Worth and Tarrant County. The reviews focus on quality, accuracy, and balance regarding Jews, Judaism, and Israel. We asked the SBOE to require that publishers work with ICS to make the remainder of our submitted corrections in order to be placed on the state's approved list for adoption and ultimate use in Texas classrooms.

What you can do to help

Please write the SBOE in support of PEI's work and the ICS reviews. If you are a member of PEI's statewide parent network, you should have received an email with letter writing tips.

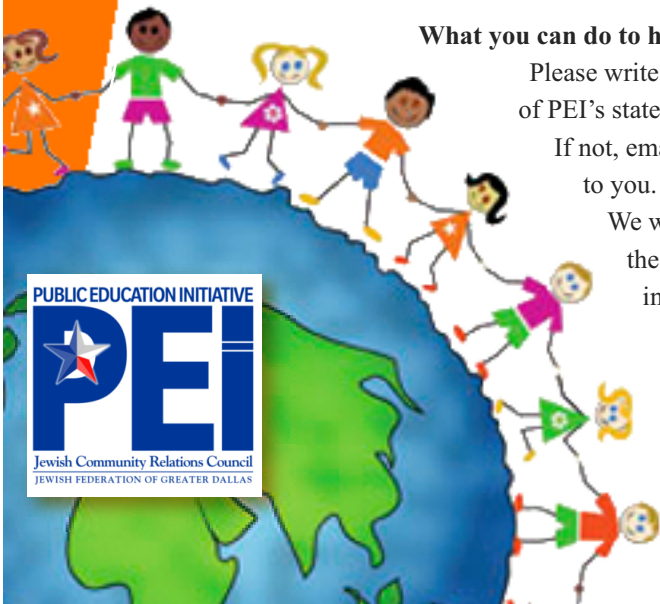
If not, email Pat Epstein (see page 2 for contact information), and she will send a sample to you. Please share this information with others and encourage them to write as well.

We would like for SBOE members to receive input from Jewish families throughout the state. We thank you in advance for your support of our work which will result in more accurate education for students throughout the great State of Texas.

Navigating the Holidays... in a Nutshell

Missing school for religious observances is excused and DOES NOT COUNT AS AN ABSENCE. This includes time for travel. Furthermore, a student who misses school for a religious observance "...shall be allowed a reasonable time to make up school work missed on those days."

--Texas Education Code (See more on page 2.)



Welcome Back... Just in Time for the Holidays!

By: Talia Kushnick, PEI Outreach Liaison

The laid back days of summer are behind us, and we have once again entered the structure of the school year. **This is also the time to inform your teachers that your children will miss school for Jewish holidays.** By informing them in advance, you preempt any issues that could arise later. A Jewish holiday calendar for the 2014-2015 school year is included below. We encourage you to print it off and share it with your school leadership and teachers.

As we at PEI are always saying, parent involvement is the #1 indicator of student success. Being involved in our schools definitely improves the educational experience of our own children, but it also increases the educational opportunities for all students in the class. This time of year offers many valuable occasions to participate in our children's educational experience. Schools need active, supportive parents in order to thrive.

The start of the school year is the ideal time to let your teachers and school leadership know you are there to help. Schools offer a myriad of opportunities from which to choose, from home room parent to PTA President. Be clear about your interests and availability. Teachers and other volunteers will appreciate your willingness to help and will see you as a supportive presence and ally throughout the year.

We at PEI and the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas wish you a wonderful school year filled with all kinds of learning and growth. Don't forget that PEI is available as a support and resource to you throughout the year.

2014-15 CALENDAR OF JEWISH HOLY DAYS

- This calendar has been prepared to assist schools in scheduling events such as major assignments, examinations, assemblies, field trips and graduation as well as school-related programs for parents.
- The Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Fridays and concludes at dark on Saturdays.
- To avoid penalizing students or workers for their religious observance, schools are asked to be sensitive to the scheduling of events on Jewish holidays and the Jewish Sabbath.
- As with any religion, levels of observance vary among individuals. We respectfully request that schools make reasonable accommodations for members of the Jewish community who wish to observe these holidays.
- Download a three-year version of this calendar that includes descriptions of the Jewish holidays at: www.pei-jcrcdallas.org/parents--public-schools.html.

PARENTS

Ask about your district's policy on absences for religious observances in advance. Some districts require advance and post notice; some just post notice.

THE ADL GUIDE

The Anti-Defamation League's guide, *School & Workplace Accommodations for the Jewish High Holidays: Know Your Rights & Obligations*, provides excellent information and can be accessed at <http://www.adl.org/civil-rights/religious-freedom/c/religaccommod-shighhols/school-workplace.html>.

REMEMBER

BE PRE-EMPTIVE. BE POSITIVE. BE PREPARED.

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Rosh Hashanah* | Sep. 25-26 |
| Yom Kippur* | Oct. 4 |
| Sukkot* (First 2 days) | Oct. 9-10 |
| Sukkot (Intermed. days) | Oct. 11-15 |
| Shemini Atzeret* | Oct. 16 |
| Simchat Torah* | Oct. 17 |
| Chanukah | Dec. 17-24 |
| Purim | Mar. 5 |
| Passover* (First 2 days) | Apr. 4-5 |
| Passover (Intermed. days) | Apr. 6-9 |
| Passover* (Last two days) | Apr. 10-11 |
| Yom HaShoah | Apr. 16 |
| Yom HaAtzmaut | Apr. 23 |
| Shavuot* | May 24-25 |

All Jewish holidays begin at sundown on the previous day and conclude at sundown on the last day.

Holidays marked with an asterisk* denote the Jewish High Holy Days and major Biblical festivals in observance of which labor, including secular studies, is traditionally prohibited. As a result, many Jewish individuals are absent from both school and work.

WHAT CAN PEI
DO FOR YOU?

- Connect you with other public school parents to build an active, engaged, and effective Jewish parent network in your community.
- Provide information and guidance to help you become an effective advocate in your children's schools.
- Provide resources to share with the leadership and teachers in your schools.
- Promote accurate resources for Texas students at the State Board of Education and the Texas Legislature.
- Provide educators with accurate resources and materials regarding Jews, Judaism, and Israel.
- Serve as your connection to accessing information and guidance about what is and is not legal regarding religion in public schools.

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