

## LETTER TO SBOE MEMBERS:

### **What is the history of the speech credit?**

In 1996 the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Mike Moses, and the State Board of Education, in response to requests from the business community, charged the Texas Speech Communication Association with creating a course that would equip graduates with communication skills essential for success in the workplace. For twelve years the SBOE has consistently added the half credit of speech to graduation requirements.

### **What exactly do students learn in Communication Applications or Professional Communication?**

This is probably the most misunderstood area of the speech credit. While speech education did begin with a focus on public address (as early as the 1800's) it has evolved to include and emphasize the following:

- verbal communication (word choice, conflict resolution, bias language),
- nonverbal communication (tone of voice, body language, eye contact),
- listening skills (critical, active, relational),
- intrapersonal communication (how communication with yourself influences your communication with others),
- interpersonal communication (communication with another person- interview, coworker, customer, spouse, child, etc),
- small group communication (problem solving, leadership)

The business community has asked repeatedly for these skills over public speaking skills due to their more frequent use in the workplace. These skills are all part of the TEKS for Communication Applications and Professional Communication.

### **Why can't other courses (such as debate) count for the speech credit?**

Other courses would teach these skills within a limited context. The debate courses are excellent examples. Students in debate learn to listen for certain details in order to attack an opponent and answer her arguments. However, debate omits intrapersonal communication and small group communication in its focus on public speaking. Communication Applications is a "survey course" that allows students to learn about interpersonal, intrapersonal, and small group communication as well as listening skills in a *variety* of contexts.

### **Why should the SBOE mandate this credit as opposed to leaving it to local school boards?**

Communication skills are a global issue, not a local one. We live in a time of great mobility. The students of Buda, TX will become the workforce of Austin. While HB 5 mandates that students of different regions of Texas should learn skills that will assist them in finding jobs near their homes, the skills taught in Communication Applications and Professional Communication cross all regional boundaries and thus ought to be a part of all the endorsements. It is essential that the SBOE ensure all students in Texas receive this instruction so that the workforce of Texas grows stronger.

Additionally, it is an unfortunate fact that many school boards will not mandate this course if it is not endorsed by the SBOE. When push comes to shove, courses not required often get set aside. In fact,

earlier this summer, the TSCA was informed of high school principals who were already planning to cut the speech credit from their 2013-2014 course guide because they saw HB5 did not list it as a graduation requirement. This situation occurred recently with Tech Apps when it was no longer required by the SBOE. While some districts kept Tech Apps as a local requirement, many did not.

One could argue that even if the SBOE did mandate speech, that doesn't guarantee it will be taught correctly. But if the SBOE does not mandate it, you can guarantee that some students won't receive it at all. You are in a position to guarantee every student has access to learning vital communication skills.

**What are some ripple effects that could happen if the speech credit is not required?**

HB 5 mandates, in Sec.A28.014, that secondary schools prepare students for university studies through dual-credit opportunities. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board supports this effort. Speech communication is offered through many community colleges for dual credit. It is often a natural entry point for students attempting their first college class. Enrollment numbers in dual credit programs would drop.

Furthermore, the business community may question the SBOE's detachment from speech after so many years of support. You have seen the research that TSCA has provided outlining the needs and desires of businesses to hire workers who are communication competent.

Finally, we depend on communication courses to increase the safety of our society. Many students in Texas will lose the ability to learn how to effectively communicate. As children burrow deeper and deeper into social media and games, they are losing the ability express themselves in face to face situations. The headlines continue to roll in on the latest school shooting or bullying incident. Our Texas children need to learn how to appropriately express themselves verbally and nonverbally to decrease violence in our state.

**How is the TSCA willing to compromise?**

If the SBOE chooses not to reinsert the half credit of speech into graduation requirements, the TSCA still advocates that as many students as possible are required to pursue the half credit through the HB 5 endorsements. The business and industry and technology preparation endorsements outlined in HB 5 specifically mention the need for communication education. TSCA representatives stand ready to assist SBOE members in advising where specific needs outlined in the endorsements would best be met through the communication courses.