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December 15, 2016

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

Science, Grade 6- Grade 8

To: State Board of Education Science TEKS Streamlining Committee

The Board of Directors representing the membership of the Clear Lake Area Chamber strongly opposes the Texas Education Agency's decision to remove space education from 7th grade standards due to "insufficient time for student mastery of content."

As the mission of the Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce is to be "Champions for business success and quality of life in our community" and the home of the NASA Johnson Space Center our organization is committed to space and STEM education. Space education has inspired students for generations not only to get excited about space exploration but has motivated countless students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

Removing space education from 7th grade erases the link between 6th grade standards, which build knowledge of scientific concepts and develop independent STEM investigation skills, and 8th grade standards, which capitalize on students' emerging ability for independent scientific investigation and reasoning about matter, energy, forces and motion relevant to solar system exploration. The rationale given for the proposed deletion of space education from 7th grade is "insufficient time for student mastery of content" directly conflicts with recommendations made by Governor Abbot's charge to Texas education commissioners to increase opportunities for STEM education.

STEM jobs at NASA and other organizations are in top demand throughout Texas. Eliminating this from the curriculum does a huge disservice to our students considering STEM fields, especially as they make a decision to enter the STEM workforce pipeline. Removing space education from 7th grade curriculum will mean that Texas 7th grade teachers and students will simply not have the option to study space exploration, a key entry point into STEM engagement.

Space education is essential in the state of Texas because Texas provides many critical components of the United States' ongoing space program and contributions to global space endeavors. We believe that Texas students should have every available opportunity to understand and think critically about space-related STEM topics in order to have the choice to enter STEM fields. Texas is a hub for space exploration and supplies tens of thousands of jobs in STEM fields, the home of NASA Johnson Space Center. Exploration of our planet, solar system, and beyond provides opportunities for problem solving in a unique environment. New technology developed for space is also used for the benefit of all mankind.

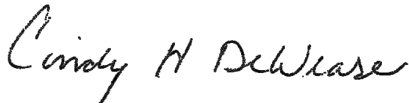
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If Texas is going to maintain preeminence in the global economy we must teach students about space exploration, one of the hardest pursuits of any nation. Texas' role in space exploration will generate pride in our state's ability to participate in global space partnerships. Whether students choose to study space or work in oil and gas and other STEM fields, students will understand complicated issues in our STEM-driven world. The Board of Directors of the Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce believes that there should always be sufficient time given for students to engage with and master STEM and space-themed content, one of the most critical areas of knowledge in today's global economy.

Our Board of Directors urges the TEA to prioritize STEM and space education for students at all levels. We believe that TEA has the power to influence our state's economic status and opportunities for all of our state's children in a positive manner by ensuring that all STEM topics are accessible throughout the curriculum. We believe that all students can learn, given the opportunity, and we urge the TEA to continue to provide those opportunities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cindy H DeWease". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Cindy Harreld DeWease  
President and CEO