

New curriculum system CSCOPE to bring big changes to schools in Lubbock, across state

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Coronado High teachers Cameron Rinard, left, and Tommy Heisseu participate in a training meeting implementing CSCOPE, a curriculum management system, on Friday at Coronado.

A new curriculum management system called CSCOPE that will be introduced this year for kindergarten through the 12th grades in local school districts — and most of the rest of the state — will change the way school is taught in Texas, local educators say.

CSCOPE has been the source of both optimism and concerns from teachers. It involves the core content areas of math, science, writing, social studies and English/language arts and will unify the learning of the material across the state — which should have several advantages for students.

The system will be used by the Lubbock, Frenship, Lubbock-Cooper and Roosevelt independent school districts and most of the others in the region and state.

“The most valuable piece of CSCOPE is the scope and sequence, which is specifically what skills will be taught and when they will be taught,” said Berta Fogerson, assistant superintendent of the Lubbock-Cooper Independent School District.

Lisa Leach, Lubbock Independent School District assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, called CSCOPE a comprehensive guaranteed curriculum and predicted it would be huge for Lubbock.

“I think the most important thing for us is you have this built-in content. No matter who your teacher is or what campuses you attend, what you are learning is guaranteed,” Leach said.

Fogerson noted the old system where teachers chose their own sequence of teaching had its flaws. If a student transferred from a class where the teacher had not yet taught about the Civil War into a classroom where the teacher had already taught the Civil War, the student would not receive the Civil War teaching, she said.

“From the education standpoint in Texas, we are going to see a lot of consistency in the delivery of instructions across the state,” Fogerson said. “If a student moves here from the (Rio Grande) Valley and comes from a CSCOPE school, they should be able to pick up instruction without there being any gaps.”

CSCOPE will be widespread in the Lone Star State. Texas is divided into 20 education service centers, and 19 of them will be using the system. In Region 17, the center that serves Lubbock County and the surrounding area, 46 of the 57 school districts will be introducing CSCOPE this year, said Linda Rowntree, associate executive director of the Region 17 education service center.

How smooth the transition will be remains to be seen, but Rowntree said the change has not been as difficult as she anticipated.

“One of the things we have been surprised about is how teachers like it. They realize it is a great resource, and the school districts have done a good job of preparing teachers,” she said.

Leach said the curriculum system is comprehensive but not hard for teachers to learn. “Our teachers have been really enthusiastic. They understand this is going to benefit our kids,” she said.

But there are concerns among teachers, as noted by Cherie Jenkins, president of the Lubbock Educators Association.

“Some teachers fear that it does not address the full needs of a child, while others fear it takes away much of the creativity of the teacher,” Jenkins said. “Still others have commented that the lessons seem pretty good. These teachers see it as an advantage that all LISD students will be using the exact same curriculum, enabling them to move from one school to another and stay on track.”

Rowntree said the pacing of CSCOPE is good, and the material can be taught by teachers in the teaching days that are available. Many teachers are pleased to have something in place to ensure they are teaching the material they are supposed to teach at the level of rigor in which they are supposed to teach it, she said.

New teachers like it better than veteran teachers because it gives them closer direction — like a road map of what they should be teaching, Rowntree said.

“CSCOPE curriculum tells us the ‘what’ and the ‘when.’ What each teacher teaches, and when they teach it. The ‘how,’ however, is left up to the teacher so that teachers can infuse their own creativity and decision-making. CSCOPE does have excellent, rigorous lessons included, but they are presented as exemplar lessons and are not a requirement,” Leach said.

Fogerson said veteran teachers can use their own instructional materials that have worked for them in the past in addition to CSCOPE — or in place of it, if they are comparable.

Rowntree said the process that led to CSCOPE began 25 years ago when Texas got into the business of having a state curriculum. A large group of people brought to the table the material they wanted Texas children to learn, and the result was the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), she said.

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test was developed to measure how well the students were learning the TEKS, she said.

The TEKS were pretty vague in many places, which was a problem, Rowntree said.

Fogerson gave an example of a TEKS standard that might say “A student will write a grammatically effective composition,” and the teacher has a lot of room to interpret how to teach that.

It occurred to educators at the state’s education service centers that it made sense to develop a curriculum management system to deliver the state curriculum, Rowntree said. Prior to that, some school districts would spend the entire summer preparing curriculum for the upcoming school year.

Rowntree said most of the districts in Region 17 have been preparing for CSCOPE for most of the past year.

Fogerson said Lubbock-Cooper officials examined CSCOPE, went to the CSCOPE workshops and visited schools in Amarillo and Canyon that had already begun using it.

“Initially, as an administrative team, we did quite a bit of homework for how to implement it,” she said. “We trouble-shooted and found out what didn’t go well with other school districts. We learned right off the bat there was a great deal of resistance in school districts from veteran teachers who have (taught the material) well for years.”

Leach said all of the core-content teachers who will be using CSCOPE this year were given an introduction called “CSCOPE 101” in the spring. This summer, the LISD had 194 workshops training teachers how to use the CSCOPE content for the first six weeks of school, she said.

The Lubbock district built in a schedule to train the teachers every six weeks for the upcoming six weeks throughout the school year, Leach said

Lubbock-Cooper paid its teachers a stipend last summer to attend training for the first six weeks and had 99 percent participation, Fogerson said.

Rowntree said the CSCOPE curriculum should help students who are struggling, as well as ones who are accelerating. Even if a student is as many as four years behind in a certain area, a teacher will be able to refer back to the lessons that are necessary to help bring them to their grade level.

“It’s been a huge initiative because it’s important,” Rowntree said.

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