

STANDARDS FOR EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR SOCIAL CONTENT

2013 EDITION (EXCERPTS)

Research has documented that the interests, prejudices, and ideas children develop as they mature are influenced directly by everything they see and hear. Much of a child's early development takes place in school; therefore, instructional materials contribute to a positive or negative school experience. The California Legislature recognized the vital role of instructional materials in the formation of a child's attitudes and beliefs when it adopted *Education Code* sections 60040 through 60044, 60048, and 60200 (see the Appendix).

In addition to providing positive school experiences and encouraging students' aspirations, instructional materials should reflect a pluralistic, multicultural society composed of unique individuals. The *Education Code* sections referenced in this document are intended to help end stereotyping in instructional materials by showing diverse people in positive roles contributing to society. Instructional materials used by students in California public schools should never portray in an adverse or inappropriate way the groups referenced in the laws.

Purpose of Standards

The laws require that instructional materials portray accurately and equitably the cultural and racial diversity of American society; the male and female roles; and the contributions of minority groups, the disabled, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals, and males and females to the development of California and the United States. These requirements imply that instructional materials must also help students to understand both the historical roles and the contributions of women and minorities in other societies; the forces that shaped those roles and contributions; and how and why the roles and contributions of contemporary American women and minorities differ from those of women and minorities at other times and in other cultures.

Many evaluators are needed to review the large number of instructional materials that are submitted to the California Department of Education. Those materials must be examined for legal compliance with the various social content requirements specified in the *Education Code*. Evaluators must use individual judgment to determine whether materials do in fact comply. This document provides reasonable, systematic standards on which evaluators may base their judgments so that the evaluation will be as consistent and equitable as possible.

There are standards pertaining to age and nutrition that are not referenced in statute. These standards are based on policies adopted by the State Board of Education. As such, the standards regarding those areas must be considered by those who review for

compliance. Policy areas are identified by the date of Board approval, not by statutory code sections.

In applying the standards to instructional materials, evaluators should consider special circumstances under which compliance is not required. Those special circumstances are described below.

Special Circumstances

Less than full compliance may be allowed under the following special circumstances:

1. *Literary, historical, and cultural perspectives.* When examining instructional materials for adverse reflection or roles, an evaluator must make a qualitative judgment of classical or contemporary literature (including folktales), music, art, stories, or articles having a particular historical or cultural perspective. Complete compliance with the guidelines may be inappropriate in some cases. What might be considered an adverse reflection or a failure to portray appropriate roles should be judged in the context of high-quality literary works. Discussion material should be included in the teacher's edition of instructional materials indicating that, although a particular attitude toward women or a minority group was prevalent during a period in history, that attitude has changed or is changing.
2. *Reference to humans.* Not all instructional materials need to include references to human beings. For instance, math problems described solely in abstract terms or stories about animals without human attributes are perfectly acceptable in instructional materials but are outside the scope of the standards. In addition, materials that contain references to children need not include references to adults even though this omission may limit the scope of the roles and contributions that can be presented.
3. *Special purpose—limited portrayals.* Several kinds of circumstances make it necessary to modify requirements regarding proportion and balance of portrayals. These circumstances do not eliminate the need to carefully review for adverse reflection or derogatory references, but they do make it difficult to achieve the usual kind of required balance.
 - a. *Narrow focus—limited scope and content.* An evaluator must consider the number of characters presented and the relationships among them; if the material includes only three or four main characters or if all of the main characters are members of the same family, obviously it will be unrealistic to expect portrayal of a wide diversity of ethnic groups or roles and contributions. If the setting is restricted to a limited locale, such as an inner-city ghetto or a sparsely settled desert region, the possibilities for showing a wide range of socioeconomic groups in a wide range of activities are necessarily limited. Materials with a narrow focus and/or

limited portrayals should be clearly identified as such so that no false impressions are conveyed.

- b. *Infrequent use*. The materials are designed to be used infrequently (example: a test to be administered only two or three times a year).
 - c. *Small group*. The materials are part of a small group of materials that are designed for a special purpose (example: an enrichment series of pamphlets with fewer than eight pamphlets per grade level).
 - d. *Audience*. The intended audience is other than students (example: parents).
 - e. *Ancillary materials*. These materials are part of the core program and support the basic program (example: workbooks, test booklets, transparencies, tapes, and slides).
4. *Series*. When conducting a compliance review of a series of instructional materials designed to be used as a basic program, an evaluator must judge each grade level individually without regard to the content of any other component. However, it is important to consider certain exceptions referred to previously under “Special purpose.”
 5. *Teachers’ materials*. Evaluators must use the standards for reviewing students’ and teachers’ materials. Two considerations are especially important in connection with teachers’ materials: (1) In no case may instructions in a teacher’s edition designed to counteract noncompliant pictures or text in a student’s edition be given any weight in the evaluation of the student’s edition. (2) Instructions to the teacher about students’ activities that could reasonably be expected to cause adverse reflection or represent roles inaccurately must be considered noncompliant even though those instructions are not seen by the student.

People with Disabilities

Education Code Sections 50501, 60040(b), and 60044(a)

Purpose. The standards promote the development of a perception of people with disabilities that is clear and undistorted, without fear, distrust, loathing, amusement, ridicule, contempt, or pity.

Method. The standards will be achieved by depicting the involvement, activities, and contributions of people with disabilities as an integral part of society.

Applicability of Standards. The standards regarding adverse reflection and proportion of portrayals must be applied in every instance. The other standards require compliance when appropriate.

Whether a disability is temporary or permanent is of no particular significance to evaluators. In programs for persons with disabilities, a disability is a disability regardless of duration.

1. *Adverse reflection.* Descriptions, depictions, labels, or rejoinders that tend to demean, stereotype, or patronize disabled persons are prohibited.
2. *Proportion of portrayals.* Instructional materials that depict a broad range of human activities must include some representations of people with disabilities except as limited by special purpose or the need for accuracy.
3. *Roles.* The presentation of people with disabilities in instructional materials should not be significantly different from the portrayal of nondisabled persons except as is necessary to identify them as people with disabilities.
4. *Emotions.* Materials should not convey the impression that people with disabilities are any different from other people in their emotions or their ability to love and be loved.
5. *Achievements.* When developments in history or current events or achievements in art, science, or any other field are presented, the contributions of people with disabilities must be included when it is appropriate and historically accurate to do so.