Standards for Evaluation of Instructional Materials

Instructional materials shall be evaluated consistently and systematically to ensure high instructional standards in order to comply with Connecticut General Statutes, regulations of the State Board of Education, Bethany Board of Education (Board) policy, and administrative regulation.

These guidelines are not intended to supplant the professional judgment of staff who evaluate both student and/or teacher instructional materials. Instead, they establish minimum standards for acceptability and provide criteria on which to judge instructional quality.

To accurately portray American cultural, racial, and gender diversity and the varied roles people hold in our society-instructional materials should encourage students to understand the historical roles and contributions of underrepresented groups, the forces that shaped these roles and contributions, and how and why contemporary roles and contributions have changed.

Limitations

It may be inappropriate to require a pictorial or textual item to conform to these guidelines, for example in reprinting a story by a well-known author or in a painting by an artist that makes an important contribution to a particular instructional material. In such situations, discussion material should have been included which explains why a particular attitude was prevalent during a certain period in history, and how and why that attitude has changed.

When examining instructional material for adverse reflection on race, creed, sex, etc., the evaluator should make a qualitative judgment with respect to stories or articles having historical perspective. Any description, depiction, inference, label, or retort found to be, by itself, an adverse reflection should not be judged out of context. Rather, the story or article should be examined for appropriate explanations, discussions or other comments included or immediately attached which may overcome the impact of such offending words or pictures. The instructional material should be rejected only if, on a total basis, the story or article would, in the mind of an average student for whom the material is intended, reflect adversely upon a person.

Materials in a Series

When evaluating instructional materials designed as a graded, non-graded, or multi-graded series, each component shall be judged individually for compliance and without regard to the contents of other components. However, a group or sequence of materials for use exclusively within a particular single grade shall be judged on a total basis for adverse reflections on race, creed, sex, etc. For example, if a package of three (3) different books is designed to be used as fourth-grade readers and a student is expected to complete all books in that school year, any portrayal deficiencies found in one (1) book may be balanced against any exemplary portrayal in another book. However, each of the three (3) books must be judged separately as well.

Specific Criteria for Evaluation of Instructional Materials

1. Gender Roles

   To encourage the individual development and self-esteem of each child, regardless of gender, instructional materials shall portray people in a wide variety of occupational, emotional, and behavioral situations, presenting both everyone in the full range of their human potential. The criteria are:

   a. An absence of descriptions, depictions, inferences, labels, or retorts which demean, stereotype, or patronize any gender.
   b. Instructional materials should reflect accurately contemporary American society, and, regardless of the subject area, contain appropriate references to, or illustrations of, all people.
   c. Mentally and physically active, creative, problem-solving roles, and success and failure in those roles, should be shared similarly between all characters regardless of gender.
   d. Emotions of fear, anger, aggression, excitement, or tenderness should occur among characters regardless of gender.
   e. Traditional activities by one gender should be balanced by nontraditional activities for that gender.
   f. If professional or executive roles, or vocations, trades, or other gainful occupations are portrayed, all people should be represented approximately equally.
   g. In history or current events and on achievements in art, science, or any other field, historically accurate contributions of all genders should be included and discussed.
   h. Imbalance or inequality, when presented for historical accuracy, should, in the student edition of the instructional material, be interpreted in light of contemporary standards and circumstances.
   i. Gender neutral language, for example, “people,” "persons," “pioneers," “they," should predominate.

2. Ethnic and Cultural Groups

   To project the cultural diversity of our society, instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage, eradicate the seeds of prejudice, and encourage the individual development, instructional materials when portraying people (or animals having identifiable human attributes), shall include a fair representation of majority and minority group characters portrayed in a wide variety of occupational and behavioral roles, and present the contributions of ethnic and cultural groups:

   a. Descriptions, depictions, inferences, or labels which demean, stereotype, or patronize minority groups must not appear.
   b. Portrayals of diverse ethnic or cultural groups should not depict differences in customs or life-style as undesirable and should avoid adverse value judgments of such differences.
   c. Instructional materials which reflect contemporary American society should contain references to, or illustrations of, a fair proportion of diverse ethnic groups.
   d. Mentally active, creative, and problem-solving roles, and characters’ successes and failures should be divided in fair proportion between majority and minority groups.

e. Portrayal of minority characters in traditionally restricted roles should be balanced by presentation of nontraditional activities for those characters.

f. Minority persons should be depicted in the same range of socioeconomic settings as persons of the majority group.

g. Depictions of diverse ethnic and cultural groups should go beyond their original cultures and show these groups as an integral part of broader American society.

h. If professional or executive roles, vocations, trades, or other gainful occupations are portrayed, majority and minority groups should be presented therein in fair proportions.

i. In history or current events, achievements in art, science, or any other field are presented, the contributions of minorities, and particularly prominent minority persons, should be included and discussed.

j. Imbalance or inequality of any kind presented for historical accuracy, should, in the student edition of the instructional materials, be interpreted in light of contemporary standards and circumstances.

3. Owners and Labor

a. References or labels which demean, stereotype, or patronize an occupation, vocation, or livelihood should not appear.

b. Where appropriate, accurate acknowledgments should be made to the roles and contributions of entrepreneurs in the history of Connecticut and the United States.

c. Accurate references should be made to roles and contributions of labor in the history of Connecticut and the United States.

4. Ecology and Environment

a. Human responsibilities for creating and maintaining a clean and healthy environment are appropriately portrayed.

b. Wise use of resources, both human and physical, is encouraged.

c. Interdependence of people and their environment are made clear.

d. Effects of environmental problems are identified as are the effects of solving them.

e. Appropriate means of protecting the environment are suggested.

5. Dangerous Substances

a. Hazards of using tobacco, alcohol, narcotics, and restricted dangerous drugs are depicted in illustrations or discussions when references to these substances are included in instructional materials.

b. The use of tobacco, alcohol, narcotics, or restricted dangerous drugs is not glamorized or encouraged by illustrations or discussion references.

6. Religion

a. No religious belief or practice shall be held up to ridicule nor any religious group portrayed as inferior or superior.

b. Portrayals of contemporary American society should, where religion is discussed or depicted, reflect its religious diversity. Except where material deals with a particular historical era, materials in art and music must, where religious aspects thereof are depicted, reflect the religious diversity of contemporary American society.

c. Any explanation or description of religious beliefs or practices shall be presented neutrally and shall not indoctrinates the students in any particular religious belief nor instructs students in religious principles.

7. Brand Names

   Instructional materials shall not contain illustrations of any identifiable commercial brand names, representations, or corporate logos unless such illustrations are necessary to the educational purpose of the instructional material and that purpose cannot be achieved without using such illustrations, or unless such illustrations are incidental to a scene of a general nature. If, under these exceptions, a brand name, representation, or corporate logo is illustrated, prominence shall not be given to any one brand or corporation unless, in turn, such illustration is necessary to the educational purpose of the instructional material and that purpose cannot be achieved without using such illustration.

8. Food

   When instructional materials contain illustrations of foods, there shall be an emphasis on foods of high nutritional value.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes § 10-18a

Regulation approved: September 9, 1991
Regulation revised: June 10, 2015
Regulation revised: March 1, 2017
Regulation revised: April 7, 2021
Policy adopted: March 11, 2026

Source: CABE and BPSD