POLICY BRIEF
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Textbook and Instructional Materials Adoption Policy and Procedures

by Paul Dumas*   **February 2006**

I n the U.S.-affiliated Pacific, the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) are responsible for assisting State educational agencies (SEAs) in the development of appropriate plans and accountability systems to meet the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) and similar DOI initiatives. As a result, many SEAs are revisiting a number of their policies and procedures—including teacher certification; minimum academic standards; assessment and accountability systems aligned with those standards; and instructional programs, including textbooks—to ensure that teaching and learning in the classroom provide all students with an opportunity to be successful.

This paper provides policymakers with information that will assist in decision making regarding instructional program adoption policies and procedures. For the purposes of this document, the term instructional materials refers to textbooks and the associated components of these programs, computer and Internet-based resources, and other resources designed to guide instruction and further learning in the classroom.

Instructional Programs in a Standards-Based Educational System

While the need for challenging standards and aligned assessment and accountability systems is of primary importance, students will attain success only if the instructional program in the classroom incorporates standards-aligned content and proven research-based practices. In a standards-based environment, the instructional program is a critical tool in support of student learning (La Marca, Redfield, & Winter, 2000).

The establishment of high academic standards sets challenging goals for both teaching and learning and places increased demands on teachers (Center for Science Education, 2003). This is particularly true in content areas where teachers may have limited knowledge and in elementary classrooms where teachers have the added demand of teaching multiple subjects. Instructional materials are often second only to teacher knowledge in importance in the classroom (Education Commission of the States, 2006).

High-quality textbooks and instructional materials can provide valuable structure to classroom activities and simplify the many decisions involved in planning instruction. In fact, they are often the main source of lesson content and strongly influence how content is taught. The central role of instructional materials in teaching and learning turns the selection and adoption of resources into an ideal opportunity to further the learning outcomes defined in standards (House & Taylor, 2003). In

fact, a RAND Corporation survey of 2,700 elementary and middle school teachers in California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania found that more than 25% believe that inadequate instructional resources are a moderate or great hindrance to student academic success (Hamilton, Berends, & Stecher, 2005).

It should be noted at this point that it is unlikely that a single instructional program will align perfectly with any particular set of standards or meet the developmental needs of all students. For this reason, the instructional materials available in the classroom need to be diverse and, in some cases, materials may need to be developed or new strategies identified for using existing materials (La Marca, Redfield, & Winter, 2000). It is important that schools and classroom teachers have access to at least a limited amount of funds to acquire instructional materials for their particular context (Finn, 2004).

Instructional Materials Adoption Policies

The high stakes of instructional materials adoption in terms of both learning and the commitment of extensive fiscal resources necessitate the establishment of thoughtful and clear policies and procedures. While all states and territories have provisions for providing textbooks and other instructional materials to students, adoption polices and procedures vary greatly. In general, polices fall into one of two categories: those SEAs that allow local education agencies and schools to independently choose the instructional programs they will use and those SEAs that have a "state-level" selection process (Zinth, 2005).

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The Education Commission of the States' synthesis of state textbook and instructional materials adoption practices (Zinth, 2005) and a more in-depth review of the policies and procedures in six states with state-level selection processes—California, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oregon, and Texas—resulted in the identification of three key components they shared. Where teachers and students have access to quality instructional materials that promote sustainability over time, they found that SEAs had:

- *Legislation or formal policy that calls for teachers and all students to have access to instructional materials that will have a significant positive impact on classroom instruction and student achievement.*
- *Legislation or formal policy establishing the process for funding the purchase of these materials.* These vary greatly from state to state. In some cases this is a state responsibility and in others the local education agencies are responsible. Some jurisdictions have general polices and others set very specific amounts or a percentage of budgets for the purchase of textbooks and other instructional materials—but all, even "non-adoption" states, address this issue through a statute or code.
- *A clearly established adoption cycle.* The identification and adoption of high-quality instructional programs is both a time consuming and expensive undertaking and, given the limited human and fiscal resources available, it is not possible to "do everything at once." Most state policies call for the review of instructional materials in the core content areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies every 4 to 7 years. These adoptions are staggered so that only one content area is considered in any given year. This strategy ensures that instructional materials are current while keeping the financial burden manageable.

Instructional Program Adoption Process

The selection of instructional programs involves a relatively large outlay of public funds and is important to the community, particularly parents. Because of this, the selection and procurement process must be fair and open. This is accomplished by:

- *Establishing a standing committee to oversee instructional program adoptions.* This committee is relatively permanent and usually includes a senior staff member of the educational agency; representatives of the procurement and budget offices; as well as one or more school administrators, teachers, and community members. This committee is charged with ensuring that the overall adoption process is thorough and meets all of the applicable legal requirements. The standing committee is usually also responsible for establishing a reasonable timeline for each review cycle—from the invitation to publishers to the selection and delivery of materials. This timeline needs to be efficient, while allowing for informed and thoughtful decision making. These committees are generally fairly small, having 10 or fewer members.
- *Establishing ad hoc committees with the content area expertise and broad representation necessary to review, evaluate, and make recommendations in the subject area under consideration at a particular time.* The ad hoc selec-

tion committees need to have a deep knowledge of the content area, approved standards and learning expectations, proven teaching practices, the school context, and the community as a whole. For this reason, these committees are often quite large and usually include specialists from the department of education; representatives from higher education; school administrators; one or more teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools; and several community members, including one or more parents. This group is responsible for determining the appropriateness of the instructional programs submitted for review based on the quality of the materials, their alignment with established standards, and other identified criteria. The ad hoc committee is responsible for making adoption recommendations to the appropriate decision makers.

- *Establishing and sharing procedures for soliciting materials for review.* These procedures include a publicly announced invitation to publishers and other potential providers of instructional programs to submit materials. This is often a 2-step process that first calls for publishers to respond with a letter of intent followed by the department of education inviting interested parties to complete a more extensive submission package and provide an appropriate number of copies of materials for review.

The announcement of a particular instructional materials adoption includes information regarding the adoption under consideration, the selection criteria, and other information that can assist publishers in deciding whether they have appropriate materials available. At this point, publishers are usually asked to describe the materials they would like to have considered and identify contact people for future communication. It is very important that this process follow all of the relevant procurement procedures. Because the potential pool of interested parties is so extensive, most departments of education are now including Web announcements as part of this process.

The additional information required in the 2-step submission package varies greatly from place to place. In most cases, materials providers are asked to show that they are able to meet the timelines indicated on the adoption plan, to provide the committees with a detailed correlation of their materials to the relevant content standards, and to provide the necessary number of copies of all materials to be considered for review. Some jurisdictions require publishers to submit a formal bid, including a cost proposal, and outline the materials and services that will be provided as part of the adoption at this stage, while others wait until materials have been reviewed and selected before requesting a formal bid. It should be noted that a number of states charge publishers a fee for participation in the process from this point onward as a means of offsetting some of the costs associated with the review process.

The stated purpose of all of the instructional programs adoption policies and procedures is to ensure that schools and students have access to the best available teaching and learning resources. At the same time, they all recognize the need for local flexibility. Provisions to allow flexibility include:

- *Adopting multiple approved instructional programs for each content area.* The number of approved programs in each content area varies from state to state and from one content area to another. In most cases, there are three to seven approved sets of materials from which local education agencies may choose.
- *Establishing a process for local education agencies to obtain endorsement to use instructional resources not included in the approved materials list.* There are a variety of reasons, not the least of which is local context and language, that teachers and children could benefit from using materials not on the "approved" list. There needs to be a mechanism for reviewing and approving these exemptions.
- *Ensuring that some level of funding is set aside for discretionary use at the school and classroom level.* Although these funds do not need to be extensive, schools, teachers, and students benefit from the ability to acquire instructional materials that meet their very specific needs. This is not usually included in state-level policies and procedures because these costs are supported by local funds but it is an important consideration nonetheless.

The development of polices and procedures that collectively address these components provides the foundation of a clear and effective materials adoption process.

Selecting Instruction Programs for Adoption

Instructional programs come in many different sizes and shapes, are developed around different philosophies of teaching and learning, provide different levels of breadth and depth of content, and address the needs of diverse learners to varying degrees. The selection process provides an opportunity for content experts, practitioners, and other stakeholders to review a wide variety of instructional programs to identify those that are most closely aligned with the established learning goals and support effective teaching.

There are three key overarching components of high-quality instructional programs that should guide the work of the selection committee and inform the development of selection criteria (Goldsmith & Kantrov, 2000). These are:

- *Academic rigor.* Does the instructional program provide engaging ways for students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet academic standards?
- *Equity.* Does the instructional program promote high levels of achievement for all students and incorporate tools and strategies for diverse groups of students to experience success?
- *Developmental appropriateness.* Does the instructional program build on students' current knowledge and promote new learning in a manner appropriate for their age and grade level?

The selection criteria used by most educational agencies include components related to content, organization and instructional design, equity and contextual appropriateness, and the quality of guides and supplementary materials to support instructional planning and student learning.

The content of an instructional program is of primary importance. The materials must be current and accurate, as well as aligned with the relevant content standards. Publishers will often provide educational agencies with documents demonstrating the alignment between their materials and standards. While the selection committee can use these as a guide, they should conduct their own determination of the extent to which a program's breadth and depth matches standards. Subject area experts on the committee should also review the materials to verify that they are up-to-date and free of errors.

The organization and design of the materials is second only to content in terms of importance. The materials should present information in a clear, well-organized, and developmentally appropriate fashion. The materials should provide students with opportunities to build conceptual understanding, as well as develop skills through many types of activities that will meaningfully engage a variety of learners. The materials should also support an assortment of research-based teaching strategies. While it is important that skills are mastered, the teaching strategies should include creative opportunities for students to explore ideas and express their learning in multiple ways, both individually and with others. The assessments in the program, both embedded and summative, should reflect the learning goals and experiences of the instructional program.

The equity of instructional programs includes two important areas that need to be reviewed. First, the program should include multiple ways for both students and teachers to interact with content. A high-quality instructional program will accommodate students with a range of learning styles and backgrounds, as well as provide teachers with the resources to engage these and other diverse students in learning. Second, to the extent possible in the Pacific, the situations and illustrations should reflect a variety of contexts that the students understand, and the tasks and activities should be relevant and worthwhile.

Many instructional programs, especially textbook-based programs, include a wide variety of supplementary materials. These materials can be valuable resources for students and teachers and should be considered part of the review process. When reviewing these materials, the selection committee should consider the accessibility and utility of online and computer-based resources in the school context, the ease with which teachers can incorporate these resources in their instruction, and the extent to which fiscal resources will be available to support their purchase.

While the quality and appropriateness of an instructional program should be of primary importance to the selection committee, sustainability should also be considered. In addition to the initial costs of new instructional programs, there are ongoing costs, such as replacing textbooks and supplies, that are a concern to most educational agencies and need to be considered part of the selection process.

Supporting Implementation of Adopted Programs

Establishing policies and procedures to ensure that teachers and students have access to high-quality instructional programs and materials will result in improved teaching and learning only if effective implementation occurs. Textbooks and other resources often constitute the largest share of a school system's discretionary spending. In that light, carefully chosen instructional materials are not only a direct means of improving stu-

dent outcomes, but also a means of matching resources and desired learning to ensure that the very limited funds available are not wasted (House & Taylor, 2003). This is the case when well-designed implementation plans lead to positive changes in teaching and learning.

Education agencies investing valuable resources to ensure that teachers and students have access to high-quality instructional materials must also invest in developing and carrying out a corresponding high-quality implementation plan that blends preimplementation training experiences and ongoing support (Center for Science Education, 2003).

The implementation of new instructional programs should be viewed as a valuable learning opportunity for teachers—increasing their knowledge of both content and pedagogy. To be effective, these plans should be designed to enable teachers to learn about the new instructional program and how to use it effectively, to provide opportunities for teachers to use the new materials in the classroom under the guidance of coaches and mentors, and to allow teachers to reflect on and share their experiences with each other. The concrete experience of teaching the new program can help teachers change their attitudes and beliefs and lead to lasting change. A well-planned extended implementation process also gives professional developers and content experts the opportunity to deepen content understanding, clarify desired learning outcomes, and build in imbedded assessments of progress while teachers are teaching. School administrators play a critical role in this entire process. Their support and active involvement is often a determinant of success. Like teachers, they must be prepared to effectively carry out their role as instructional leaders (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998).

The California Department of Education is one of the few state-level agencies to address implementation. It has identified essential components to support the implementation of adopted programs and raise student achievement. These components may seem overly prescriptive, but they provide an excellent starting point for implementation discussions. The following statements are based upon California's Essential Program Components (California Department of Education, 2005).

- Schools have and are able to document the daily use of the adopted materials in every classroom for every student.
- Adoption should include the designation of a reasonable amount of instructional time for each of the core content areas. Schools should develop schedules that reflect the instructional time recommendations and perform monitoring to ensure the guidelines are followed in the classroom.
- School administrators should participate in at least 40 hours of training related to new instructional programs as they are adopted, so that the administrators have the skills and knowledge necessary to lead and support the implementation of student instructional programs. This should be followed by 40 hours of site-based support.
- A majority, if not all, teachers should participate in 40 hours of training focused on the content and pedagogical features of newly adopted programs. This should be followed by an 80-hour classroom-based practicum.
- Student achievement is assessed and monitored on a regular basis throughout implementation. The purpose of these assessments is to provide administrators and teachers with timely data to improve instruction and adjust the implementation process, if necessary.
- Teachers receive ongoing assistance and support even after the initial implementation phase has ended.
- Schools and local education agencies provide monthly opportunities for grade-level collaboration focused on teaching and learning at the school. Assessment data collected in the course of instruction should inform these discussions.
- Local education agencies or schools should develop course pacing schedules to ensure that students are given an opportunity to meet standards and grade-level benchmarks.

It is clear that while policies, procedures, and criteria for the adoption of instructional programs are important, they are, in fact, only the beginning of an extended process designed to result in improved teaching and higher levels of student achievement.

Conclusions and Key Decisions

All states have established policies and procedures for the selection of instructional programs that are of high quality and aligned with established standards. These policies vary greatly, but each one of them is intended to ensure that all students are given an opportunity to be successful in school and in the community, upon graduation. These policies and procedures must be clear and fair and include all of the various stakeholders in education and the community. It is also necessary that fiscal policies be established to support these efforts.

The true impact of sound decisions regarding instructional programs is seen in changes in the classroom and rising levels of student achievement. Well-designed implementation plans need to be developed and carried out if this outcome is to be realized. High-quality programs utilized by well-trained teachers will lead to substantial returns.

As SEAs in the Pacific develop and implement a system for adopting instructional programs, numerous decisions will be necessary. Some of these include:

- Determining who will select, fund, and implement instructional programs and how they will work together to do so.
- Identifying ways in which the policies and procedures support the shared goals for Pacific children, while recognizing the diversity of the states, particularly in the areas of language and culture.
- SEAs working closely with textbook publishers, institutions of higher education, and regional service providers to identify creative and effective ways to ensure that administrators and teachers receive the training and support necessary for effective implementation. This will be particularly important in the case of outer island schools. Highly qualified local support teams and extensive use of available technologies may be components of a solution.

This may appear to be a complicated process, but the adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional programs has the potential to make a strong positive impact on

student achievement throughout the Pacific. True collaboration and cooperation across the system make this a very attainable goal.

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