

After a five-month study of history textbooks offered to students in Indiana, the Indiana State Board of Education released some findings and recommendations to school leaders in Indiana. The Board was originally concerned that most of the social studies textbooks offered by textbook companies were “boring and dry as dust” and felt that they were not acceptable to engage student interest and thereby enhance learning. After researching, talking with Indiana educators, and evaluating their findings, they offered the following Open Letter to all teachers and administrators in Indiana on the date listed.

Indiana State Board of Education
Room 225 State House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2798



February 6, 2009

An Open Letter to Indiana Educators about Textbooks, Computers and Instructional Materials

Indiana’s students deserve effective instructional materials from which they can learn. This applies both to content and to format.

Content: Engaging Student Interest in Social Studies

As we noted in our Statement and Action Regarding Social Studies Textbooks taken as a group we perceive that many of the available social studies textbooks do not provide content that is interesting, engaging and supportive of effective and interested student learning. **There are exceptions: we can identify, for example, an individual social studies text written to tell the story of the United States in a manner conducive to student interest rather than a lengthy amalgamation of facts for memorization.** (Confirmed by Mr. David Shane, Indiana State Board of Education member on 2/9/09, as referencing *America: The Last Best Hope* by Dr. William J. Bennett.)

But as a board we have expressed our concern that the now standardized form of social studies textbooks – jammed full of facts without interesting prose, racing through data without telling the story (good and bad) of our country – may jeopardize both student interest in history as a subject and the effective learning of the country’s principles and values as a predicate to participating as a citizen of our nation.

You should feel no obligation to utilize the standard form of social studies textbooks. To the contrary, we urge schools to move cautiously and not adopt social studies textbooks without giving thought to what book or other instructional materials can best help bring social studies to life. We continue to encourage local districts and educators to make content decisions that are premised on presenting material that both aligns to the state’s subject matter standards and engages students’ interests, that detail the complexity of the human experience and elicit richer student consideration of the history, values and principles important to the meaning of America, its past and developing place in the world and the fabric of its culture.

This is critically important in United States history as a foundation element of educating students toward good citizenship. We believe the same principles apply in other curriculum areas as well.