

PREPARING UTAH EDUCATORS ON PRINCIPLES FOR CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

In the last few years, the Utah State Legislature and the Utah State Board of Education have passed bills and rules to ensure that all instructional materials and classroom instruction in Utah’s public schools are consistent with the principles of unalienable rights, equal opportunity, and individual merit. This document shares guiding principles from all laws and policies governing instructional materials and classroom instruction and presents possible implications these principles may have for Utah’s educator preparation programs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTION

The following principles should guide the selection, approval, and use of instructional materials and classroom instruction in Utah’s public schools. Instructional materials are defined in Utah Code as textbooks or materials used as, or in place of, textbooks and which may be used within the state curriculum framework for courses of study by students in public schools, including textbooks, workbooks, computer software, online or Internet courses, and audio and video media ([Utah Code 53E-4-401](#)). Classroom Instruction is defined in Board Rule as any course material, unit, class, lesson, activity, or presentation that, as the focus of the discussion, provides instruction or information to a student ([Board Rule R277-328](#)).



UNBIASED AND IMPARTIAL

Content of instructional materials and classroom instruction should be unbiased and examine various counterpoints to a topic in an impartial manner. Educators shall acknowledge differences by looking for the good in everyone, including oneself, and showing due regard for feelings, rights, cultures, and traditions ([Board Rule R277-328](#)). Educators can show respect and consideration for cultures and beliefs by not advocating for or elevating one culture over another or promoting one belief over another. As a further reference, [Utah Code 53G-10-202\(4\)](#) states: “School officials and employees may not use their positions to endorse, promote, or disparage a particular religious, denominational, sectarian, agnostic, or atheistic belief or viewpoint.”

Instructional materials and classroom instruction should defend intellectual honesty including freedom of inquiry, speech, and association ([Board Rule R277-328](#)). Intellectual honesty is an applied method of problem-solving, characterized by an unbiased, honest attitude, which can be demonstrated in several different ways (see [USBE Educational Equity Definitions](#)):

- One's personal beliefs or politics do not interfere with the pursuit of truth.
- Relevant facts and information are not purposefully omitted even when such things may contradict one's hypothesis.
- Facts are presented in an unbiased manner, and not twisted to give misleading impressions or to support one view over another.
- References, or earlier work, are acknowledged where possible, and plagiarism is avoided.

Content presented to students through classroom instruction and instructional materials should serve as role models of various counterpoints to a topic and presented in an impartial manner. For example, educators may create opportunities to recognize personal responsibility in contributing to conditions that preserve the rights of all individuals and to avoid the repetition of past harmful actions by individuals and groups. Educators may also cultivate supportive conditions that focus on learning and remove barriers to allow students to have accessible pathways to resources and opportunities ([Board Rule R277-328](#)).



■ SAFE AND RESPECTFUL

Classroom instruction and instructional materials should foster learning environments that are safe and respectful of all students and educators ([Board Rule R277-328](#)). Principles and strategies of inclusion, as they pertain to students and educators with diverse abilities and backgrounds, should be implemented. Inclusion is the practice of ensuring students feel a sense of belonging and support, including providing students with disabilities access to general curriculum and engagement in regular education classes with peers without disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate ([Board Rule R277-328](#)).

Instructional materials and classroom instruction shall not promote or endorse a student or educator's sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, or membership in any other protected class as inherently superior or inferior. A student or educator's sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity does not determine the content of the student's character including the student or educator's values, morals, or personal ethics. Classroom instruction and instructional materials may not suggest that a student or educator bears the responsibility for the past actions of individuals from the same sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other protected class as the student or educator and that a student or educator should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment because of



the student or educator's sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or membership in any other protected class ([Board Rule R277-328](#)).

Instructional materials and classroom instruction should not contain sensitive materials as outlined in [Utah Code 53G-10-103](#), unless the instructional material is for medical or family and consumer science courses.

Instructional personnel, including student teachers and interns, are responsible for ensuring instructional materials and classroom instruction are consistent with the principles of individual freedom. The principles of individual freedom are defined by the Utah State Legislature as follows ([Utah Code 53G-10-206](#)):

- All individuals are equal before the law and have unalienable rights.
- No individual is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously solely by virtue of the individual's race, sex, or sexual orientation.
- No race is inherently superior or inferior to another race.
- No person should be subject to discrimination or adverse treatment solely or partly on the basis of the individual's race, color, national origin, religion, disability, sex, or sexual orientation.
- Meritocracy or character traits, including hard work ethic, are not racist nor associated with or inconsistent with any racial or ethnic group.
- An individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, does not bear the responsibility for actions that other members of the same race or sex committed in the past or present.

■ SUPPORT DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Instruction and instructional materials should support collaboration with diverse community members to understand, recognize and appreciate what we all have in common as humans, including acknowledging diverse cultures, languages, traditions, values, needs, and lived experiences ([Board Rule R277-328](#)). Please note that "diverse communities" refers to the larger community a student engages and encounters in and outside of the school setting. Educators may establish Professional Learning Communities that are committed



to continuous improvement, individual and collective responsibility, and identifying underperforming students in need of supports ([Board Rule R277-328](#)).

■ IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS ■

Educator preparation programs that recommend candidates for a Utah professional license ensure candidates enrolled in their programs know and understand all laws and policies governing instructional materials and classroom instruction in Utah. Guiding principles for classroom instruction and instructional materials should be shared and discussed with candidates during classroom learning activities and practiced during a candidate's clinical experiences. Mentors and supervisors of program candidates should exemplify these guiding principles and encourage candidates to engage in self-assessment, goal setting, and reflection on these guiding principles.

Educator preparation programs that are also Local Education Agencies (i.e., school districts or charter schools) may have additional responsibilities to ensure these guiding principles are included in their programs. For example, learning experiences provided by these programs could be interpreted as professional learning under the law or rule and may be subject to additional requirements and assurances (see [Utah Code 53G-10-206\(2\)](#) and [Board Rule R277-328-3](#)).



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