

January 15, 2004
By Facsimile: 916-319-0172/0161

Commissioner Stan Metzenberg
Chair, Electronic Learning Resource Subcommittee
California Curriculum Commission
Sacramento, CA

Dear Commissioner Metzenberg:

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), I write to express our comments and concerns regarding the eighteen changes to the California Learning Resources Network (CLRN) proposed by the California Curriculum Commission's Electronic Learning Resource Subcommittee. SIIA and our member companies have long worked with California officials and educators to deliver technologies that meet education needs, as well as to ensure educators have the information necessary to make informed curriculum and technology decisions. We look forward to working with you, your fellow Commissioners and other stakeholders to ensure any changes to CLRN help students and educators better access and effectively integrate appropriate electronic learning resources aligned to state standards.

SIIA is the principal trade association of the software and digital content industries, representing more than 600 leading high-tech companies that produce software and electronic information for business, education, consumers and the Internet. Many SIIA member companies provide education software, digital curriculum, computer-based assessments and other technology tools, while all depend on the nation's schools for a skilled high-tech workforce. SIIA and our member companies believe technology and electronic instructional materials are important tools for effective education and student success in the 21st century.

SIIA has been pleased to work in recent years with state education leaders to ensure CLRN meets educator needs and considers publishers' perspectives. CLRN provides a valuable clearinghouse service to California educators – reviewing publishers' voluntarily submitted electronic learning materials to help educators identify resources that align with state standards and meet legal requirements. We also recognize the need for periodic review of CLRN's criteria and process, as well as the Instructional Materials Adoption Process and funding, to ensure continued serving of California's education needs in the face of an evolving environment.

To that end, we encourage the Commission to lead California's efforts and embrace innovative electronic curricular resources that differ from print-based materials in their design and delivery, not for change sake, but to ensure educators and students with diverse teaching and learning styles and needs can take advantage of the full array of options to meet state standards. We would be pleased to work with the Commission to help update CLRN and IMAP review criteria and processes that hold to the same high standards, but adapt to the unique factors of technology-based curricular materials.

While we could agree with a number of the recommendations with modest changes, there are a number, some of which are outlined below, that either require additional clarification of terminology and intent and/or raise significant concerns. In general, we are concerned a number of proposals: (1) do not appropriately recognize many of technology's unique and value-added benefits; (2) would create a process that biases many innovative and important electronic learning resources that meet student needs for accessibility, differentiated learning, etc.; and (3) would ultimately exclude many resources and limit the choices for California educators and students to use electronic learning resources for instructional and curriculum needs.

SIIA bases its comments on a number of assumptions regarding the current and potential design and role of electronic learning resources:

- Electronic learning resources and adopted programs are not necessarily distinct, and likely will not be in the future. In fact, electronic learning resources are increasingly being used as a core instructional program and have the potential to augment and replace print-based programs in the future. However, technology is not yet sufficiently accessible for many schools and students to take full advantage of an electronic core curriculum, and so some development of electronic resources suitable for adoption is progressing at a modest pace. As technology deployment expands, we encourage policies, review processes and funding streams that support continued innovation and do not close the door on new and better options.
- No single instructional material or program – adopted or not adopted; primary or supplemental; electronic or print – is sufficient to address the unique learning needs of each student. Use of multiple learning resources and media expands instructional options and allows for reinforcement, remediation, differentiated instruction, and the filling of curriculum gaps. Electronic learning resources are particularly beneficial for students who learn at a different pace or learn best through alternative modalities. No matter the material, the primary criteria to determine appropriateness should be alignment to state curriculum standards.

Following are SIIA's comments on several specific Commission recommendations:

Commission Recommendation #1: *CLRN will list, and feature the electronic components of state-adopted instructional materials in the core areas of Reading-Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and History-Social Science.*

Commission Recommendation #6: *Electronic components of state-adopted materials do not need to meet any additional criteria, beyond state-adoption.*

- These “components” are now included in the CA adoption review (IMAP), while CLRN is focused on “supplemental” electronic resources. The two review criteria/processes are different. How would the two review processes be coordinated so as to ensure an efficient, consistent and non-duplicative review process as well as effective outcome? How would the change be made so as to neither confuse educators nor create a cumbersome process for publishers? It would not seem productive for one resource to be included in two distinct state review processes.
- Many such “components” are not intended to stand on their own, separated from the core textbooks with which they are packaged. Some are not available separately. Some are also not instructional, intended for direct student use, and/or aligned to state standards – the primary CLRN review criteria – including many teacher resources, tools, etc. Would the CLRN review

therefore appropriately focus only on only those resources that are both used by students, intended for distribution and use on their own, and therefore suitable for CLRN review and inclusion? If not, what purpose would be served by such CLRN review and inclusion?

- SIIA assumes this CLRN review process would remain voluntary for publishers to be consistent with the current CLRN submission process. Any mandatory review process for electronic components of state-adopted materials should be built into the IMAP.

Commission Recommendation #3: *Complementary resources should be compatible with the pacing plans of adopted programs, particularly for reading and math programs in grades K-3, and their scope of sequence.* [Note: “Complementary Resources” are defined by the Commission as “supplemental electronic learning resources that meet CLRN criteria but are not state adopted.”]

- SIIA is concerned the term “complementary” could create confusion among publishers and educators. “Supplemental” is both the industry standard and the term used by educators. In addition, “complementary” could be easily misinterpreted as free.
- Many electronic learning resources are compatible with the pacing plans and/or sequence of one or more adopted programs. However, it is not necessarily possible to design a complementary resource to be compatible with all of the many adopted programs. Of course, electronic components of a state-adopted material should be compatible to its own adopted-program. Does the Commission intend that every complementary resource must be matched directly to a specific adopted program? To every adopted program?
- Electronic learning resources are often designed to support students for whom the adopted program and pacing plan is not sufficient and must be augmented, doing so through embedded diagnostics and adaptive instructional content. Others are designed to allow the teacher to adapt the use to the pace of the adopted program. It is this flexibility for educators to supplement curriculum, reinforce instruction and provide differentiated learning for students requiring a different pace that provides much of the value for many electronic learning resources. If we are to succeed in the important goal of ensuring all students achieve to the same high standards, we must be prepared to recognize and address their unique learning needs.
- How would this compatibility be determined? Complementary resources are not necessarily intended to fit with adopted programs themselves, but are intended to address and support state standards. It would therefore be more relevant and practical to employ alignment to state standards – the primary CLRN review criteria – as the intermediary to indirectly ensure compatibility between complementary and adopted resources.

Commission Recommendation #4: *Complementary resources will not be so large that they might interfere with or supplant instruction using adopted programs.*

- How does the Commission define “so large?” The issue should not be size, but rather how a resource is used.
- What is meant by “interfere with or supplant instruction using adopted programs”? Any such problems may not be attributable to the resources itself, but likely rather results from instructional and curriculum decisions employed by the teacher. The potential exists for both complementary resources and adopted programs to be implemented either effectively or not effectively.
- How would resources be treated that are too “small” for adoption and too “large” for CLRN? It is not appropriate to both restrict educator options, as well as to cease providing CLRN review

information for such resources. In light of state funding regulations, this change could result in the exclusion of many high-quality and valuable teacher options. This might be especially problematic for after-school and remedial programs more reliant on such resources.

- Educators employ complementary resources to supplement their instruction and provide remediation, reinforcement and differentiation. Student diversity of backgrounds, abilities, etc. often means that no single resource can address the breadth, depth and differentiation of curriculum needed to ensure all students achieve to state standards. CLRN provides a valuable service by helping educators understand which resources meet which state standards.
- Improved teacher training and professional development is important to ensure all educators can make curriculum and instructional decisions that best leverage their talents and the benefits of a given complementary or adopted resource, and thus meet student needs and state standards.

Commission Recommendation #7: *Publishers of supplemental electronic resources must demonstrate that their material fits into the existing scope and sequence of the state board adopted programs and does not duplicate the content of adopted programs.*

- As noted in response to Recommendation #3, many electronic learning resources are designed to fit into the scope and sequence of one or more adopted programs. However, it is not necessarily possible to design a supplemental resource to fit in this way with every one of the many adopted programs, each of which may employ different scope and sequence. Does the Commission intend that a given supplemental resource be matched directly to a specific adopted program?
- Supplementary materials aren't necessarily intended to fit with adopted programs themselves, but are intended to address and support California standards.
- Most adopted programs will themselves “duplicate” the content to ensure depth of coverage. Most importantly, these supplemental materials are, in fact, intended to duplicate, thus presenting the content in additional, different, engaging and reinforcing ways that allow more practice and improved learning. To prohibit duplication would essentially require that supplemental resources not be aligned with state standards, therefore setting them up to be neither state-approved nor educationally useful.

Commission Recommendation #8: *Complementary resources in grades K-8 must be short (in instructional time duration) and highly focused (on a limited number of standards).*

- How does the Commission define “short”? One significant concern is that many electronic learning resources are interactive, and student duration of use is dependent on the student’s needs and progress. This flexibility and personalization is what provides value to many electronic resources. Rather than duration, a better criteria may be whether the electronic resources is organized to allow teachers to quickly and easily identify the part they need, when they need it.
- How does the Commission define “highly focused”? A limit on the number of standards may ignore the value of electronic resources presenting a large scope of content, but in alternative and engaging ways that supplement and reinforce student learning.

Commission Recommendation #16: *Curriculum Commissioners may request to review individual titles, and in rare cases may decide that a complementary resource does not meet the review criteria. If the appropriate subject matter committee of the Commission concurs, the publisher will*

be notified of the reasons, and may appeal the decision to remove the resource through a process modeled after the Legal and Social Compliance Appeal Process.


- SIIA supports the Commission's role in reviewing individual titles, but would urge against its authority for bypassing the CLRN process to unilaterally remove such resources. Such actions would open the possibility for a Commissioner's subjective view that falls outside the CLRN criteria to be a deciding factor.
- Instead, the Commission could audit the CLRN review process by randomly examining titles to identify any cases or patterns of inadequate reviews. If and when identified, the Commission could then take appropriate action to make changes to CLRN review processes, at which point CLRN would again review the resource. In this way, the objectivity and consistency of the CLRN process would be maintained.

Commission Recommendation #17: *The policy expressed in the state curriculum frameworks is that teachers should use the lesson planning materials provided in the adopted programs. They should not be encouraged to write their own plans for integration of technology.*

- Adopted programs do not necessarily include lesson-planning materials for technology integration. Those that do include such plans are likely built around their own electronic components, and may not be suitable for supplemental resources.
- Among technology's benefits is its flexibility. To fully leverage this benefit, educators are best positioned – with guidance from the publisher/developer – to craft a plan for the deployment of electronic learning resources that meet their student's needs.

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association and our member companies, we thank you for your efforts to further enhance CLRN and help provide educators with information important to making decisions around electronic learning resources. We look forward to working with you to ensure the Commission's proposed CLRN recommendations are refined to best meet the needs, present and future, of California's students and teachers. We also look forward to working with you on related issues to ensure electronic learning resources best meet their promise of helping educators increase student achievement. Meanwhile, if we can be of further assistance, please contact me at (202) 789-4444 or marks@siia.net.

Sincerely,



Mark Schneiderman
Director, Education Policy

cc: Rae Belisle, Executive Director, California State Board of Education
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