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Inspectors find 5 of 7 area high schools short of textbooks

History, English, chemistry and foreign language classes didn't have enough to go around as law requires.

By Paul Clinton

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State-mandated reviews of instructional materials at five lower-performing South Bay high schools show shortages of textbooks in history, English, chemistry and foreign language classes, county records show.

School administrators said they have taken steps to correct a problem discovered in September when classes started, according to inspection reports provided to the *Daily Breeze*.

State law enacted after a landmark education reform lawsuit requires that each child have a textbook to take home in each subject area. For the third consecutive year, the Los Angeles County Office of Education conducted the state-mandated reviews on behalf of the state.

In the South Bay, county inspectors visited seven high schools in the Centinela Valley Union High and Los Angeles Unified school districts.

Textbook shortages were reported at Banning, Carson, Gardena, Lawndale and Leuzinger high schools.

Texts at Hawthorne and Westchester high schools were deemed sufficient.

The schools were selected for reviews based on their placement in the state's 2003 achievement measure (the Academic Performance Index). Textbook reviews were conducted at schools that appeared in the state's bottom third.

Schools deemed to be insufficient have eight weeks to purchase the necessary books.

"It's always a serious issue if the school is short, but generally it's remedied," said Georgina Verdugo, associate general counsel for LAUSD. "It puts it on everybody's radar here."

Two of the Centinela Valley district's schools -- Lawndale and Leuzinger -- were found to have an insufficiency of English textbooks.

The greatest deficiencies were found at Leuzinger High (with a shortage of 1,249 books) and Lawndale High (984).

Many classrooms did have full sets, but not all students had take-home copies, according to Centinela Superintendent Cheryl White.

White said the only reason students weren't given those take-home copies was that "homework

assignments are usually out of a novel, not the textbook."

However, the Williams legislation is specific to textbooks, requiring that in-class and take-home sets be available to all students. Centinela Valley has rectified the problem, White said.

"We have now purchased every book that we were short for students to take home, which they're doing at Leuzinger and Lawndale as we speak," she said. "I think the intent of the (Williams) legislation is excellent and I believe in and support it 100 percent. Our students really do have access to any textbooks that they need."

At LAUSD high schools, students spent almost two months without books in chemistry, Japanese, Spanish, English, history and government.

Of the 650-book shortage at Gardena High School, many of the texts were in chemistry, which is not required for graduation.

This year, 670 students signed up for the college preparatory course, up from the 552 chemistry students a year ago, Principal Russell Thompson said.

"It's creating a whole college culture here," Thompson said. "We're expecting them to prepare for college."

The final batch of books was handed out Wednesday, Thompson said. For the first two months of school, chemistry teachers handed out worksheets and asked students to use class copies of the texts.

"The notes helped, but the books would have been better," said Shaikyia Brand, a 12th-grader. "The notes served their purpose."

A day earlier, the 17-year-old was handed her used Japanese textbook.

At Carson High, the shortages stemmed from confusion during the school's development of a storage room to house the books. Also, extra classes were added during the summer when administrators weren't present to order the books, Principal Kenneth Keener said.

Carson is still waiting for Spanish books, which were short when a cluster of students added the class after the school lost a French teacher, he added.

"It had a domino effect and we were short books," Keener said. "It does make us accountable because it makes sure every student has a book."

As of Wednesday, Banning High School had been deemed to be in compliance, said Rene Jackson, LAUSD's executive liaison administrator.

By spotlighting shortages in instruction materials, the Williams legislation has largely cured a more widespread problem, said Aaron Bruhnke, the Harbor Area representative with United Teachers Los Angeles.

"The district has been very responsive to the textbook needs of the district," Bruhnke said. "I don't really think it's a systemic thing anymore. ... We just don't have the textbooks problems that we had prior to Williams."

The reviews stem from a class-action lawsuit filed in 2000 by Eliezer Williams, a San Francisco

County student.

Williams claimed education agencies failed to provide lower-income public school students with equal access to instructional materials, safe facilities and qualified teachers.

The case was settled in 2004 and led to state legislation requiring the textbook reviews. It also established a complaint procedure for parents to report inappropriately assigned teachers and facilities and restrooms in need of repair.

**Staff writer Shelly Leachman contributed to this story.**

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