A Benchmarks-Based Approach to Textbook Evaluation

By Gerald Kulm, JoEllen Roseman, and Michelle Treistman

In today's classrooms, textbooks serve as tool and tutor, guidebook and gauge. Teachers throughout the world use texts to guide their instruction, so textbooks greatly influence how content is delivered (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1997). Schmidt, McKnight, and Raizen (1997) identified textbooks as playing an important role in making the leap from intentions and plans to classroom activities, by making content available, organizing it, and setting out learning tasks in a form designed to be appealing to students.

To make the most effective use of a textbook, however, teachers must decide which textbooks are appropriate for their needs. A teacher needs to determine the extent to which a textbook focuses on and is aligned with a coherent set of significant, age-appropriate student learning goals that the teacher, school, or district has identified as integral to the understanding of and progress in a particular academic subject. They must also assess how well a textbook's instructional design effectively supports the attainment of those specified learning goals. The only way to gain this information is through careful evaluations of textbooks and other curriculum materials.