

TO: Chief Executive Officers
Chief Instructional Officers
Chief Student Services Officers
Chief Business Offices

FROM: James Todd, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

RE: Burden-Free Access to Instructional Materials: Regulatory Provisions

This memorandum outlines the regulatory provisions in California Code of Regulations (CCR), title 5, [§ 54221 Burden-Free Access to Instructional Materials](#). Background information and requirements of the new regulation are provided.

Background: Advancing Vision 2030 Through Burden-Free Instructional Materials

The unwavering commitment of the California Community Colleges to eliminate barriers to student success has never been more critical as we advance Vision 2030. For over a decade, our system has sought to remove the student financial burden of instructional materials. Our collective efforts — from pioneering Zero-Textbook-Cost (ZTC) programs to achieving remarkable Open Education Resources (OER) adoption rates — directly support our Vision 2030 goals of increasing Equity in Access, Equity in Support, and Equity in Success.

Toward that end, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors approved regulatory action, adopting California Code of Regulations (CCR), title 5, [§ 54221 Burden-Free Access to Instructional Materials](#). The regulation was filed with the Office of Administrative Law and the California Secretary of State on July 1, 2025, and becomes effective July 30, 2025. College districts have 180 days from July 30, 2025, to conform their policies and procedures to the regulatory requirements, with a deadline of Jan. 26, 2026.

The intent of this regulation is to strengthen access and affordability by ensuring governing boards develop or enhance policies that advance the availability and use of burden-free instructional materials. The urgency of this regulation cannot be overstated when we consider the profound impact of instructional material costs on student success. According to the [2021-2022 California Student Aid Commission Student Expenses and Resources Survey](#), students face \$938 per year in costs for required materials — a financial barrier that forces nearly 72% of students to avoid certain courses or even change their academic majors due to textbook and other material expenses. Nearly 35% of California college students reported not having enough money to pay for instructional materials ([BFIM Report](#)). Perhaps most troubling, 65% of students report attending classes without required materials, directly undermining their ability to fully engage in their educational experience and achieve the learning outcomes we all envision in Vision 2030.

Developing Policies to Support Burden-Free Access to Instructional Materials

The new regulation requires that district governing boards adopt policies guaranteeing student access to textbooks and supplemental materials on the first day of class. Practices that meet this requirement include adopting and adapting open educational resources (OER) or providing initial textbook chapters in accordance with copyright allowances. In addition to first-day access, governing boards must also adopt policies that strengthen student access to all other instructional materials before they are required in any course. The goal is to reduce both financial and administrative burdens on students throughout the term. While advancing these efforts, district policies must uphold faculty responsibility and academic freedom in the selection of instructional materials. Additionally, the regulation calls for college districts to support student-centered practices that promote the use of zero-cost and OER materials.

Specifically, district policies are expected to support and leverage resources to implement and sustain zero-textbook-cost (ZTC) degrees, as authorized by [Education Code section 78052](#), and to prioritize the use of OER to complete degrees and career technical education certificates. When OER is widely available, especially in general education courses, district policies should support adopting these resources accordingly. Additional measures include establishing lending programs, maintaining library resources that ensure immediate access to course materials, and enabling early disbursement of financial aid pursuant to federal regulations ([34 CFR §668.164\(i\)](#)). Districts are also encouraged to promote timely completion of financial aid files and to utilize direct aid and support programs that enhance student financial stability.

The regulation defines instructional materials as all required items for a course — including textbooks, supplemental materials, and supplies. “Textbooks” are identified as the educational resources listed in a course syllabus, while “supplemental materials” include a broad range of additional learning supports such as lab manuals, workbooks, required software, journal articles, interactive websites, and readers.

System Support to Further Burden-Free Instructional Materials Efforts

Chancellor Christian has long been a champion for our systemwide ZTC and OER efforts, and the Chancellor’s Office continues to advocate for resources that support the curation, maintenance, and utilization of OER across our system — especially as these sustainable materials can directly impact student access and success. As college leaders, governing boards, general counsels, and district staff begin to engage the provisions of the new regulation, please know the Chancellor’s Office has and will continue to invest significant resources and staff time in supporting local efforts.

The resources and support that are — and will be — available as colleges undertake the provisions of the new regulation include:

- **Forthcoming Empowerment Memo to Support Policy Development:** subsequent guidance regarding OER/ZTC, meeting day one access for textbooks, and other instructional materials (supplies and supplementary materials) is forthcoming to support the development of local policies consistent with the Burden-Free regulation.

- **RFP for Systemwide OER Platform:** In fall 2025, an RFP process will identify a comprehensive OER platform to support all colleges with advanced features and technology to foster utilization and sharing of OER content, augment accessibility support, and create a repository of content and graphics to adapt as needed.
- **Systemwide Burden-Free Instructional Materials Taskforce:** In 2022, the Burden-Free Instructional Materials Taskforce engaged student challenges by accessing instructional materials, efforts, and opportunities to further scale Open Educational Resources, and how to address the often-hidden or prohibitive cost of other instructional materials. In 2023, the task force delivered [19 comprehensive recommendations](#) for achieving burden-free instructional materials. In 2024, a new Burden-Free Instructional Materials Implementation Taskforce was formed. This Taskforce is currently charged with translating the 19 recommendations into actionable strategies and coordinating systemwide implementation — all with the goal to co-build a sustainable infrastructure for systemwide burden-free instructional materials. The outcome will be an action-oriented report in 2026 with strategies for sustainable financial solutions, strategic planning considerations, and customized technical assistance for faculty, administrators, and staff.
- **ZTC Program and OER Adoption:** The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office received a one-time legislative appropriation of \$115 million in 2021 to fund the Zero-Textbook-Cost (ZTC) Degree Grant program and subsequently provided grants to colleges for the purpose of eliminating textbook costs by primarily supporting Open Educational Resource (OER) utilization in ZTC degree and CTE academic pathways. These grants are empowering colleges to develop and implement OER-supported ZTC program pathways, directly cutting costs for students and promoting equitable access. To date, 115 colleges received a minimum of \$520,000 in grant funding to develop at least 3 ZTC pathways at each institution, supporting a goal of providing over 1,000 state-wide ZTC pathways to students by Fall 2027. In support of our ongoing OER adoption and maintenance, the [ASCCC OERI](#) continues to support the systemwide utilization of OER through [curated content collections](#) by discipline, course identification number (C-ID), and transfer model curriculum (TMC), as well as providing ongoing faculty professional development and support from OER Liaisons.

Advancing Local Plans, Goals, and Priorities through Burden-Free Instructional Materials

Colleges and districts should recognize this regulation as a strategic opportunity to formalize and strengthen policies that directly advance their existing institutional commitments to student success. This regulatory framework provides governing boards with the tools to codify burden-free instructional materials initiatives that likely already align with college equity plans, strategic goals, and board priorities. By integrating these requirements into your existing governance policy, districts can create a unified approach that connects your local Vision 2030 implementation efforts with concrete policy action that furthers the goals of increasing Equity in Access, Equity in Support, and Equity in Success.

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If you have questions about this memo, please email Chad Funk, Specialist, Educational Services and Support Division, at CFunk@CCCCO.edu.

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