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THE NATION

Booklet That Upset Mrs. Cheney Is History

The Department of Education destroys 300,000 parent guides to remove references to national standards.

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Jean Merl
Times Staff Writers

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WASHINGTON — The Education Department this summer destroyed more than 300,000 copies of a booklet designed for parents to help their children learn history after the office of Vice President Dick Cheney's wife complained that it mentioned the National Standards for History, which she has long opposed.

In June, during a routine update, the Education Department began distributing a new edition of a 10-year-old how-to guide called "Helping Your Child Learn History." Aimed at parents of children from preschool through fifth grade, the 73-page booklet presented an assortment of advice, including taking children to museums and visiting historical sites.

The booklet included several brief references to the National Standards for History, which were developed at UCLA in the mid-1990s with federal support. Created by scholars and educators to help school officials design better history courses, they are voluntary benchmarks, not mandatory requirements.

At the time, Lynne Cheney, the wife of now-Vice President Cheney, led a vociferous campaign complaining that the standards were not positive enough about America's achievements and paid too little attention to figures such as Gen. Robert E. Lee, Paul Revere and Thomas Edison.

At one point in the initial controversy, Cheney denounced the standards as "politicized history."

In response to the criticism, the UCLA standards were heavily revised, most critics were

mollified and the controversy faded — but not for Cheney and her staff.

"Helping Your Child Learn History" is not unique. The Education Department produces a series of similar booklets on topics such as science, geography, reading and math. The booklets are designed to encourage parents to get involved in their children's education. Often, they contain passing references to the kinds of curriculum standards that scholars and educators have developed in recent years to improve school courses. More than 9 million copies of such booklets have been distributed.

Seldom have the booklets sparked controversy. That changed this summer.

As the wife of the vice president, Cheney has no executive position in the federal government. But when her office spotted the references to the National Standards for History in the new edition of the history booklet, her staff communicated its displeasure to the Education Department.

Subsequently, the department decided it was necessary to kill the new edition and reprint it with references to the standards removed. Though about 61,000 copies of "Helping Your Child Learn History" had been distributed, the remaining 300,000-plus copies were destroyed. Asked about the decision, one department official said they had been "recycled."

The Times obtained a copy of the booklet as originally printed.

A new version of the booklet, the basis for the version that is being printed, is on the Education Department's website. It has been edited to remove references to the standards.

For example, a clause in the foreword was removed that suggested President Bush supported instruction based on teaching standards that had been developed for various academic subjects.

Also missing from the department's Internet version is a suggestion that parents ask whether their children's curriculum incorporates the National Standards for History. An Internet address for the standards in a list of more than a dozen websites for parents was also removed, as well as a footnote elsewhere in the text that shows where to find more information about the history standards.

When The Times initially approached the Education Department to inquire about the booklets, the department issued a statement saying it had taken the unusual action because of "mistakes, including typos and incomplete information."

Later, Susan Aspey, the department's press secretary, admitted that typographical errors were not the reason. Asked about the role of Cheney's office, Aspey responded:

"The decision was ours to stop distribution and reprint. Both offices were on parallel tracks and obviously neither of us were pleased that the final document was not the

accurate reflection of policy that was approved originally."

A representative for Cheney said her office did not order the destruction of the booklets. "Unequivocally, [neither] Mrs. Cheney nor her staff insisted on having the history publication recalled," said spokeswoman Maria Miller. "And that's just the bottom line."

However, neither department officials nor Cheney's office would discuss the episode in detail. Both refused to allow interviews with the staffers involved.

Individuals with knowledge of the events said complaints from Cheney's office moved the Education Department to act. The individuals spoke on condition of anonymity.

Retired UCLA professor Gary Nash, co-chairman of the effort to develop the National Standards for History, said he found the decision to destroy the booklets after Cheney's office complained "extremely troubling."

"That's a pretty god-awful example of spending the taxpayers' money and also a pretty god-awful example of interference — intellectual interference," Nash said. "If that's not Big Brother or Big Sister, I don't know what is."

According to Michelle M. Herczog, a consultant in history and social sciences for the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the standards have become a resource for many states in developing curriculum guidelines. They are also used to develop textbooks.

"Why the U.S. Department of Education would take that out of a federal document for parents is just beyond me," said Herczog, who was not involved in the development of the standards.

The answer is that, from their inception, the American history guidelines have been caught in an ideological feud.

Cheney led the charge on the original UCLA draft. In a widely read opinion piece published in 1994, she complained that "We are a better people than the National Standards indicate, and our children deserve to know it."

The standards contained repeated references to the Ku Klux Klan and to Sen. Joseph McCarthy, the anti-Communist demagogue of the 1950s, she said. And she noted that Harriet Tubman, the escaped slave who helped run the Underground Railroad, was mentioned six times.

But Revere, Lee, the Wright brothers and other prominent figures went unmentioned, she said.

Such complaints led to revision of the standards.

Recently, when the department decided to update "Helping Your Child Learn History,"

Cheney's office became involved because of her long-standing interest in American history.

Cheney is prominently quoted in the booklet as a "noted author and wife of the vice president." Two books on history that she wrote for children are mentioned in the booklet.

The acknowledgments also credit her office for helping with the guide, which cost \$110,360 to print, Aspey said.

As head of the National Endowment for the Humanities under Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, Cheney approved some of the funding for the National Standards for History project, but she also issued a blistering critique of social science education, which is listed as a resource in the booklet.

The history booklet was first published in 1993. Having made education reform a centerpiece of its domestic agenda, the current administration decided to update the series.

As the Education Department prepared the new edition, Cheney's office reviewed drafts and provided materials but the second lady was not personally involved, an aide said.

The references to the National History Standards were added at the Education Department after Cheney's office signed off on an initial draft that did not mention them. Aspey said it was apparently done for consistency, because such standards were referred to in the department's other guidebooks for parents.

Aspey said mention of the standards implied official approval. "We don't endorse National Standards for History, and the document that was printed is not an accurate reflection of the policy of the government right now," she said.

New York University educator Diane Ravitch, who launched the "Helping Your Child Learn" series of publications as a former high-ranking Education Department official, said it was a mistake to suggest that the history standards were a template for the country.

Nonetheless, Ravitch said, "I would have had a hard time recalling [the booklet], because I think the recall makes a big issue of something nobody would have paid attention to otherwise."

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