



## Science Laboratory Materials

Recently science teachers around the state have been unable to use easily available products for lab materials. Such items as food products defined as “candy” have been termed as unacceptable for classroom use.

While district policy has the ultimate definition of such matters as a local control issue, and district guidelines supercede suggested practice, it is important to discuss guidelines for using any substance (including materials defined as candy) as lab materials.

Teachers of science are urged to engage student interest in science and to use inexpensive, everyday items to help students understand important TEKS-based scientific concepts and skills whenever possible. The National Science Education Standards highlight the need for science teachers to connect new learning based on tactile, sensory models.

The *Texas Safety Standards Handbook*, a TEA publication, available at <http://www.tenet.edu/teks/science/safety/safetymanual.html>, encourages the active learning of science as “Science experiences allow students to inquire, explore, and observe things that are brought into the classroom specifically to stimulate student investigation.” Further it states, “When conducting field and laboratory investigations, students are to follow home and school safety procedures and environmentally appropriate and ethical practices. Students must demonstrate safety practices during the field and laboratory investigations and make wise choices in the use and conservation of resources.”

When substances, including food items and candy, are used as learning tools in a laboratory setting with specific and well defined TEKS-related concepts, these substances become powerful learning lab materials, and do not interfere with regulations regarding students eating candy at school.

It should be noted that lab safety rules state that students **never** eat or drink any substance used during laboratory exercises unless the teacher instructs otherwise. Allergies and student preferences are also very important for teachers to be careful to address.

Materials exposed to laboratory surfaces and/or handled by students may provide unsanitary conditions. Many teachers offer leftover candy as an incentive for student progress and have the students return at the end of the day to recover these items to take home with the approval and supervision of parents.

Administrators should use discretionary judgment to allow lab materials connected to sound instructional use. When the proper precautions have been taken, and articulated lesson plans clearly show benefits to using candy as a lab material, such permission is warranted.

If you have further questions, or need any assistance, please contact Chris Comer, Director of Science at [chris.comer@tea.state.tx.us](mailto:chris.comer@tea.state.tx.us) or Irene Pickhardt, Assistant Director of Science at [ipickhar@tea.state.tx.us](mailto:ipickhar@tea.state.tx.us), or phone the Texas Education Agency’s Curriculum Division at (512) 463-9556.