



Indicator: Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction for each subject and grade level. (5094)

Explanation: Aligning instruction to the curriculum and standards is a lot of work. Developing aligned units of instruction, with differentiated lessons and formative assessments is even more work. When teachers work in teams to produce units of instruction, they learn from each other and share the load. Also, the common units form a basis for comparison of strategies when teachers teach the same subjects. Well-constructed units ensure good vertical and horizontal instructional articulation.

Questions: Is the development and refinement of instructional units done by your Instructional Teams? Do the teams work from a common template? How are the unit plans reviewed?

There has been much excitement in the last few years about professional learning communities. Professional development, conferences, books—it is hard not to see the concept splashed anywhere and everywhere education is mentioned. At the core, what is a professional learning community? It is a team of people who share similar roles and responsibilities. An instructional team, made up of same grade level, subject, or a cluster of grades works together to develop materials, share ideas, and brainstorm solutions. Within this scope is the development of units of instruction. With the adoption, in many states, of the Common Core Standards, this task becomes, once again, of prime importance. Teachers will need to reevaluate their units of instruction to make sure they are aligned with the Common Core. This would seem like daunting work—it IS daunting work, however, when shared across instructional teams, it becomes much more manageable.

Redding (2007) gives a succinct explanation of the work of instructional teams:

In an effective system, teachers, working in teams, build the taught curriculum from learning standards, curriculum guides, and a variety of resources, including textbooks, other commercial materials, and teacher-created activities and materials. Instructional Teams organize the curriculum into unit plans that guide instruction for all students and for each student. The unit plans assure that students master standards-based objectives and also provide opportunities for enhanced learning. (p. 95)

A unit of instruction is typically three to six weeks of work within a subject area for a particular grade level or course sequence. To pool teacher expertise and secure a guaranteed, taught curriculum, an Instructional Team can develop a plan for each unit. The plan is shared by all the teachers who teach that subject and grade level. The alignment process serves two related purposes: It serves as a check on guide/text/test congruence, and it provides teachers with an organizational structure for their own planning (Glatthorn, 1995).

The unit plan is developed by the Instructional Team to define a unit of instruction and outline the standards and target objectives (typically grade level) addressed in the unit of instruction.

The Instructional Team:

1. Determines the concepts, principles, and skills that will be covered within the unit.
2. Identifies the standards/benchmarks that apply to the grade level and unit topic.
3. Develops all objectives that clearly align to the selected standards/benchmarks.
4. Arranges the objectives in sequential order.
5. Determines the best objective descriptors.
6. Considers the most appropriate elements for mastery and constructs criteria for mastery.
7. Develops pre/post-test items that are clear and specific and would provide evidence of mastery consistent with the criteria established. (p. 103)

Hattie (2012) also writes about the usefulness of teams, “Within a school we need to collaborate to build a team working together to solve the dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning and critiquing lessons, learning intentions, and success criteria on a regular basis” (p. 171–172).

References and Resources

- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers. Maximizing impact on learning*. Abingdon, Oxdon: Routledge.
- Horowitz, A. R., Uro, G., Price-Baugh, R., Simon, C., Uzzell, R., Lewis, S., & Casserly, M. (2009). *Succeeding with English language learners: Lessons learned from the Great City Schools*. Council of the Great City Schools.
- Redding, S. (2007). Systems for improved teaching and learning. In H. Walberg (Ed.), *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement* (pp. 91–104). Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation and Improvement.
- The George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education. (2008). *Promoting Excellence: Guiding Principles*. Arlington, VA.

For Special Education

One of the primary purposes for including special educators on instructional teams should be to increase capac-

ity for developing effective structures and conditions to support system-wide continuous improvement of teaching and learning for all students with disabilities. With the inclusion of special educators on instructional teams, the development and implementation of standards-based individual education programs (IEPs) can take shape. The process of developing standards-aligned units of instruction that consider the needs of students with disabilities also supports building deep understanding of knowledge, standards, and pedagogy, as well as the capacity to apply evidence-based instructional practices demonstrated to be effective in increasing student academic achievement and functional performance for all students with disabilities.

Source: *Inclusion Policy and Practice*. Thomas P Lombardi, Editor Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation. Bloomington, Indiana U.S.A

References and Resources:

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

IRIS Center for Training Enhancements

Benefits of aligned IEP's include higher expectations, focused and collaborative instruction, and increased exposure to curricular content. In a study by McLaughlin, Nolet, Rhim, and Henderson (1999), special education teachers indicated that when IEP's were aligned with state standards, students with disabilities had improved exposure to subject matter with focused instruction to meet challenging goals. These researchers also found that collaboration between special and general education teachers was greater when they worked with a student with an aligned IEP. When using aligned IEP's, educators tended to focus on high expectations rather than on student deficits (Thompson et al., 2001). In sum, the aligned IEP changed teachers' pedagogy and attitudes to ensure that students with disabilities had access to the general education curriculum. As special education students gain greater access to state content standards, their test scores should improve and the achievement gap between special education and general education should decrease.

Source: *Aligning IEP's with State Standards and Accountability Systems*. Published by The Access Center for Improving Outcomes for All Students K–8.

References and Resources:

- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities <http://www.nichcy.org/disability>
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education <http://nasdse.org>
- The Access Center for Improving Outcomes for All Students K – 8 www.k8accesscenter.org

For English Language Learners

Ensure that ELL personnel are included in instructional teams to develop curricula to address the linguistic needs of ELLs. Members of instructional teams must be encouraged to collaborate across program and content areas to design and implement instruction that is aligned to both content and English language proficiency standards. Providing a variety of modes of instruction for ELL students to access the content is essential to increase achievement. For example, if the school can utilize native language instruction in core content areas in conjunction with content-based ESL instruction, research has found this to be the most effective method of instruction for ELL students who have low-levels of English proficiency. Another evidence-based method is sheltered instruction. Furthermore, ELL students can benefit from teachers using a variety of instructional approaches such as cooperative, inquiry-based and experiential learning that address multiple modes of learning and advance students' English language development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

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