Core Function	Curriculum, Assessment, and Instructional Planning	Effective Practice	Engage Instructional Teams in developing standards-aligned units of instruction

Indicator: Units of instruction include standards-based objectives and criteria for mastery. (5103)

Explanation: The units of instruction developed by teacher Instructional Teams organize the curriculum for a course (or subject area for a grade level). After plotting out the curriculum for the year, organizing it into chunks (units), and aligning it to standards, the Instructional Team develops the components for formative assessment, including specific objectives and criteria for mastery.

Questions: Do your Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction? Do the units include specific, standards-aligned objectives and criteria for mastery as guidance for instruction and as the basic components of formative assessment?

How can progress be made? Since progress in proficiency is measured on state assessments of their own standards – which in turn may be based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) – they are the logical and most constructive starting point for planning improvements. District and school staff can make a careful analysis of their state standards for each grade level (Chubb, 2005; Just for Kids, 2006; Redding, 2006). One useful approach is for district authorities and those assigned to each grade to take responsibility for a given grade or combination of grades. They can first set forth knowledge, skill, and other standards requirements for that grade. They can then examine the degree to which the standards are covered in any special district and school requirements, in textbooks and other instructional materials, and in lesson plans of individual teachers or groups. It is then helpful for staff to examine whether some of the standards requirements are taught in previous grades. If so, they can avoid unnecessary duplication or simply plan to provide some initial review and assessment of what students should know. Staff can also review the prerequisites to the requirements to be sure they are provided in previous grade levels. To ensure grade level continuity, staff with responsibilities for a given grade can meet with those of adjacent grade levels.

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. 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).

In Mazarano's five Levels of School Effectiveness (2012), Level 5 is A Competency-Based System That Ensures Student Mastery of Content. His first Leading Indicators is: Students move on to the next level of the curriculum for any subject area only after they have demonstrated competence at the previous level. The four examples he gives are: (1)

Clear criteria are established for each essential element regarding minimum scores that demonstrate competence; (2) A system is in place that tracks each student's status on the essential elements for each subject area at the student's current level; (3) Student status and progress for each essential element in each subject area is continually monitored; and (4) When students reach criterion scores for the essential elements at a particular level within a subject area, they immediately start working on the elements at the next level (p. 16).

His second Leading Indicators is: The school schedule is designed to accommodate students moving at a pace appropriate to their backgrounds and needs. The four examples he gives are: (1) Grade levels are replaced by competency levels; (2) Multiple venues are available simultaneously (e.g., at the same time) for students to learn and demonstrate competency in the essential elements for each level of each subject area; (3) Online competency-based instruction and assessment is available in the essential elements for each level of each subject area; and (4) The time it takes for students to move through the various levels of the curriculum for each subject area at each level is constantly monitored (p. 16).

And his third Leading Indicators is: Students who have demonstrated competency levels greater than those articulated in the system are afforded immediate opportunities to begin work on advanced content and/or career paths of interest. The three examples he gives are: (1) Students who have demonstrated the highest level of competence within a given subject area are provided with opportunities for even more advanced study within that subject area; (2) Students who have demonstrated competence adequate for high school graduation begin and receive credit for college work; and (3) Students who have demonstrated competence adequate for high school graduation begin and receive credit for work toward a trade that is of interest to them (p. 17).

His five examples of Criterion (Lagging) Indicators for Level 5 are: (1) A written master plan is available articulating the criterion scores necessary to demonstrate competence for each essential element at each level for each subject area; (2) Reports are available that indicate each student's current status for each essential element at each level for each subject area; (3) A written master plan is available articulating the alternate pathways a student might take to learn and demonstrate competence in each essential element at each level for each

subject area; (4) A written master plan is available articulating how students can pursue advanced content, work on college credit, and pursue careers of interest; and (5) Reports are available depicting how long students are taking to move through the curriculum for each subject area at each level (p. 17).

In a 2013 issue of *In Conversation*, John Hattie discusses his eight "Mind Frames" or ways of thinking that together must underpin every action and decision in schools and systems, as presented in his book *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*. Mind Frame 1 is "Teachers/leaders believe that their fundamental task is to evaluate the effect of their teaching on students' learning and achievement." According to Hattie, "I think what happens to us as educators is that, more often than not, we perceive our role in the education of students as being one of implementing the curriculum, of planning and delivering lessons, of making sure the education we're offering meets the needs of students and so on. And that's all very worthy. But it's also part of the problem. When a student succeeds in the classroom, we tend to say, 'Look, this student is high achieving; he put in a lot of effort; she did her homework; they all completed the tasks we asked of them.' What we don't say is, 'and we had an impact on them and on their learning.' And the problem with this fairly typical mindset is that we think that the success has to do with the student, or with the curriculum, or with the activities that are taking place. We rarely think in terms of our own role in the learning – as a teacher or as a leader. So what I am trying to get at with this first mind frame is recognition that when we are in schools and when we are in classrooms our fundamental role is to evaluate our own impact. When this is acknowledged, then I believe that all those other things that make a difference – like teaching methods, resources, sequence and so on – actually work. I have studied this over many years, and I used to think that the success of students is about who teaches where and how and that it's about what teachers know and do. And of course those things are important. But then it occurred to me that there are teachers who may all use the same methods but who vary dramatically in their impact on student learning. And added to this, even in a class where the teacher uses one method brilliantly, you'll still find half a dozen students who just don't get it that way. And this is directly linked with research on expectations. Teachers who have

high expectations of their students are more likely to lead them to have high expectations of themselves and of their own achievement, and so on. And so what follows from this notion is that it's not about what teachers know and do but rather about what they think. One of the origins of this viewpoint is the research of Carol Dweck who looked at whether teachers' beliefs – for example, beliefs about whether intelligence is fixed or changeable – are a predictor of student performance. So this notion of evaluating our own impact, I think, is really quite critical in making a difference in student achievement and success" (p. 3).

References and Resources

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