



Indicator: The district provides a cohesive district curriculum guide aligned with state standards or otherwise places curricular expectation on the school. (5642)

Explanation: Managing the curriculum, aligning it to standards, and keeping it up to date is a big job. At the school level, teacher Instructional Teams are the group best equipped to fleshing out the curriculum and aligning it with instructional plans. But providing the overall roadmap for the curriculum, with its alignment to standards, is usually what the district does, albeit with the help of teachers and curriculum experts. This indicator says that the district provides a cohesive district curriculum guide OR otherwise places curricular expectations on the school. This means that if the district does not provide a guide, it should expect that the schools do.

Questions: Does your district provide schools with a curriculum guide aligned with standards? By what process is this guide developed and updated? If a guide is not provided by the district, how does the district define and communicate its expectation that the school will do this work?

The high-performing school districts studied became more explicit about what was to be taught using skills and knowledge included on state assessments as guides, all of which resulted in more standardization across schools. While this is considered to be common practice for school districts, it was the intensity and single-mindedness with which it was done which was uncommon. The curriculum guides developed in these districts – in contrast with many others – were used continuously, not filed on shelves. This is a lesson any district engaging in reform should take seriously.

Explicit, focused efforts should be made to ensure alignment of the written, taught, and tested curricula. This process of curriculum alignment and mapping should be comprehensive and integrated across grades.

The process will require a shift in some districts from site-based decision making to more centralized direction about what will be taught. Such a shift ensures everyone – in all schools – is aiming in the same direction. It also permits district resources to be used in a more focused way. For example, intensive teacher and curriculum development can be provided on the district-wide approach to teaching reading.

In addition, this more uniform approach to instruction is likely to have disproportionately positive effects on students most at risk and greater impact in schools with greater challenges. As an example, in a district with high intra-district student mobility, the shift to a more uniform approach means that a student moving from one district school to another will be more likely to be able to pick up at close to the same spot in the curriculum.

Common practices might include intensive efforts to align content taught across grades and the development of pacing guides, with cross-district and cross-grade teams of teachers assigned to work on these tasks. Teachers in districts studied who participated in such work groups reported having a much clearer idea of what was taught in prior grades – as well as the academic expectations for their own. Opportunities to work together also helped them to feel both

more professional and more personally invested in their districts' reform efforts.

In addition to pacing guides and sample lessons, districts should consider developing networks of instructional experts, such as mentor teachers or content area specialists working in the central office, to support teachers as they begin to teach the “new” curriculum. Finally, district leaders should put in place mechanisms – for example, requiring principals to spend more time in classrooms – to monitor whether the intended curriculum is actually being taught.

Source: Gordon Cawelti & Nancy Protheroe, In Walberg, *Handbook on Restructuring and Substantial School Improvement*.

References and Resources

Cawelti, G., & Protheroe, N. (2007). The school board and central office in district improvement. In H. J. Walberg (Ed.), *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement*. Retrieved from www.adi.org. See Download ADI Publications.

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