## Overview of Curriculum Design as a Collaborative Process

(The content in this resource document draws on documents developed by theOhio Leadership Advisory Council <http://www.ohioleadership.org/>)

**Ohio’s Team-Based Curriculum Practices**

*Ohio’s Leadership Development Framework* (OLAC, 2013) outlines expectations for district curricula and indicates that the instructional program is to provide full access to challenging content, aligned with rigorous standards, for all students and student groups, to prepare all students for a productive life in the modern, global economy, and to alleviate achievement-expectation discrepancies.

The essential leadership practices in *Ohio's Leadership Development Framework* listed below are pertinent to the discussion of creation of curriculum. These practices must be embedded in the work that district leadership teams (DLTs), building leadership teams (BLTs), and teacher-based teams (TBTs) do around curriculum (Throughout this document, when leadership teams are referenced, the content applies equally to community school leadership teams [CSLTs]):

* Implement high-quality standards-based instruction, aligned with the district's curriculum and goals for instruction and achievement;
* Assure that the district curriculum is the taught curriculum in all schools, that the established district curriculum is used as the framework for all TBT work, and that instruction is aligned with the big ideas and essential questions embedded in the curriculum;
* Ensure the delivery of high-quality instruction that follows research-based practices, engages students, incorporates culturally responsive practices, and relies on ongoing progress monitoring;
* Provide full access to core instruction—aligned with the district's established curriculum and priorities for instruction and achievement—for all students, regardless of label;
* Monitor student achievement and growth to ensure that each student is making adequate progress toward achieving district/building learning goals for all students.

*For additional information, go to the OIP Stage 3 Module and review the section on the DLT: Curriculum Alignment: Ohio's New Learning Standards.*

**Prioritizing Curriculum Standards**

In determining which standards should be of highest priority, district leadership teams take into account the standards’ likely importance for readiness, leverage, and endurance (Ainsworth, 2014) in regard to their students’ advancement:

* Readiness priorities are determined by leadership teams’ analysis of how necessary a standard is in the students’ attainment of requisite knowledge and skills for moving successfully to the next achievement level, such as the next grade level.
* Leverage priorities are determined by leadership teams’ analysis of how useful a standard is in helping students advance in more than one academic discipline.
* Endurance priorities are determined by the leadership team’s analysis of how useful the standard is in promoting knowledge and skills that students will need over a long time, perhaps a lifetime.

## Deconstructing the Standards

"Deconstructing" the critical standards is a technique educators can use to infer from the full text of the standards exactly what is most important for students to know and be able to do (Ainsworth, 2014; Ainsworth 2011). The deconstruction process includes identifying the verbs that denote student learning and the nouns that delineate concepts and content to be learned. Once deconstructed," the standards have greater clarity for teachers and students alike and can easily become the basis for assessment design; full-text standards are often clumsily or confusingly worded and thus are difficult upon which to build assessment tasks and items.

Rather than view standards as discrete items, educators should consider the interrelationships among the essential ideas underlying the content standards and the ways in which they could be taught at the same time (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011), not just for efficiency of instruction and learning, but for depth of understanding.

A "backward design" process can help identify relationships among standards. Backward design includes working from standards "back to" the enduring understandings and essential ideas contained within them. Wiggins & McTighe (2011) also advocate teachers’ applying six facets of understanding when creating assessment tasks: explanation, interpretation, application, shifting perspectives, empathy, and self-assessment. Their contention is that students reveal their understanding most effectively when they are provided with authentic opportunities to exercise these six facets as applied to complex tasks. Their argument is that effective curriculum development using the "backward design" process helps teachers avoid an activity-based or textbook-coverage curriculum.

*For more information on developing clear learning targets as part of effective formative instructional practices, go to* [*www.FIPYourSchoolOhio.org*](http://portal.battelleforkids.org/ohio/race_to_the_Top/FIPYourSchoolOhio.html?sflang=en) *and view the Foundations of Formative Instructional Practices (*[*Module 2: Clear Learning Targets*](http://portal.battelleforkids.org/ohio/Race_to_the_Top/FIPYourSchoolOhio/Online_learning/Foundations.html?sflang=en)*).*

Another important element ensuring high-quality curriculum is creating critical, higher-order essential questions if the state has not already identified them. The role of these questions is to invite students into a unit of instruction (Ainsworth, 2011) and then to advance students' progress toward an enduring understanding of the concepts and skills.

Essential questions should get at the big ideas of the standards. According to Ainsworth, (2011) big ideas—whether broad, topical, or both—help students scaffold their understanding so they can eventually make further generalizations and connections to other units of study within a discipline and to other disciplines (p. 129). These ideas are the lasting understandings they will take with them from the curriculum. A big idea for science, for example, is "Energy changes forms but never disappears."

Once the critical standards have been selected, "deconstructed," and used for assessment design, teachers should translate them into student-friendly language. TBTs are uniquely situated to facilitate student learning and student ownership of their own learning. Team members use team time to focus on constructive discourse and reflection about effective instructional practice, including strategies used to support student engagement and self-monitoring of progress. They also communicate expectations to community members, including students and their parents and families. Establishing clear learning objectives for what all students should learn and be able to do, aligned with the district and school's focused goals, strategies, and actions for instruction and achievement, is a necessary and critical step in setting the stage for students to assume responsibility for learning on an ongoing basis.

*For more information visit the following modules:*

* *OIP Stage 3: for DLT/CSLTs Implementation and Monitoring: Curriculum Alignment: Ohio's New Learning Standards: Implementing and Monitoring.*
* *OIP Stage 3: for BLTs Implementation and Monitoring: Curriculum Alignment: Ohio's New Learning Standards: Implementing and Monitoring.*

**Aligning the Curriculum**

Critical standards should be aligned both vertically (i.e., across grade levels in the district) and horizontally (i.e., among teachers teaching in the same grade or content area) throughout the entire system. The horizontal and vertical alignment process should be followed with active solicitation of feedback from colleagues as described below. District leadership team, building leadership team, and teacher-based team members coordinated efforts can ensure a clearly articulated curriculum that effectively guides the work of teachers in every classroom.

TBTs provide a forum for developing shared understanding of the district's instructional priorities aligned with critical standards and for increasing the coherence and consistency of instruction across the district. TBTs, using the Ohio 5-Step Process design common classroom formative assessments aligned with these critical standards, and monitor both adult implementation of agreed-on instructional strategies and individual student achievement and growth to ensure each student is making adequate progress in meeting the established critical standards. Using the district's designated communication systems allows core standards and targets to be posted in increments—for example, by grade level or subject—with a time frame for feedback so that everyone in the district can comment and discuss or post feedback.

*For additional information about the role of DLTs, BLTs, and TBTs in aligning curriculum, particularly in the reference to Ohio's New Learning Standards, go to the OIP Stage 3 modules listed below:*

* *OIP Stage 3: for DLT/CSLTs Implementation and Monitoring: Curriculum Alignment: Ohio's New Learning Standards: Implementing and Monitoring.*
* *OIP Stage 3: for BLTs Implementation and Monitoring: Curriculum Alignment: Ohio's New Learning Standards: Implementing and Monitoring.*
* *OIP Stage 3: for the TBTs Implementation and Monitoring: Curriculum Alignment: Ohio's New Learning Standards: Implementing and Monitoring.*

**Mapping the Curriculum**

The goal of curriculum mapping is to create a document that details what a teacher will teach during the school year, including specific concepts and skills, laid out month-by-month and week-by-week. Curriculum mapping allows teachers to create continuity of education from grade to grade and year to year (Colosimo, 2009). Molineaux (2008) lists several additional benefits of curriculum mapping, noting that the mapping process—

* helps educators identify instructional gaps and redundancies;
* encourages regular curriculum review;
* clarifies teachers' professional development needs;
* encourages teacher collaboration;
* provides direction for novice teachers;
* gives teachers a sense of ownership of the curriculum;
* keeps various stakeholders informed about what students are learning;
* provides a measure of school accountability;
* helps administrators make informed decisions.

Udelhofen (2005) writes that curriculum mapping is not a separate set of tasks to be completed in isolation from other school initiatives; rather, it serves as the interactive center for the processes and dynamics of school improvement. She states further that as teachers and administrators face school improvement initiatives such as higher accountability, standards alignment, curriculum integration, and assessment issues, curriculum maps become valuable tools to help build capacity for meaningful change and improvement. Curriculum mapping is a process that engages all staff in curriculum reform and development.

*Please visit the section on Curriculum Alignment within the online learning module: OIP Stage 3: for District Leadership Team (DLT)/Community Leadership Teams (CSLT) Implementation and Monitoring.*

*A curriculum mapping toolkit with templates is available at:* [*http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Science/Transition-Tools-Ohio-Learning-Standards-K-1/Alignment-Toolkit-Phase-2-Revision-of-District-Cur*](http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Science/Transition-Tools-Ohio-Learning-Standards-K-1/Alignment-Toolkit-Phase-2-Revision-of-District-Cur)

## Conclusion

## A primary goal identified in *Ohio's Leadership Development Framework* is that district leadership teams (DLT), building leadership teams (BLT), and teacher-based teams (TBTs) ensure that the established district curriculum is used by all teachers in each school. The processes outlined here and in related resources, including the OIP five-step process resources, offer districts and schools guidance and tools for a collaborative approach to designing a relevant and challenging curriculum for all students.

## References

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