

Why Should We Ensure Students Have Access to a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum?

To improve student achievement, educators must determine the *power standards*—learning standards that are most essential because they possess the qualities of endurance, leverage, and readiness for success at the next level; “the first and most important practical implication of power standards is that leaders must make time for teachers to collaborate within and among grade levels to identify the power standards” (Reeves, 2002, p. 54).

“The staff in the effective school accepts responsibility for the students’ learning of the *essential curricular goals*” (Lezotte, 2002, p. 4, emphasis added).

Professional learning communities are characterized by an academic focus that begins with a set of practices that bring clarity, coherence, and precision to every teacher’s classroom work. Teachers work collaboratively to provide a rigorous curriculum that is crystal clear and includes a compact list of learning expectations for each grade or course and tangible exemplars of student proficiency for each learning expectation (Saphier, 2005).

The first step in curriculum development is to “identify desired results. What should students know, understand, and be able to do? What content is worthy of understanding? What ‘enduring’ understandings are desired? What essential questions will be explored? [This step] calls for clarity about priorities” (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, pp. 27–28).

One of the keys to improving schools is to ensure teachers “know the learning intentions and success criteria of their lessons, know how well they are attaining these criteria for all students, and know where to go next in light of the gap between students’ current knowledge and understanding and the success criteria”; this can be maximized in a safe and collaborative environment where teachers talk to each other about teaching (Hattie, 2009, p. 239).

“Implementing a strategy of common, rigorous standards with differentiated resources and instruction can create excellence and equity for all students” (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009, p. 133).

A high-reliability school provides students with a guaranteed and viable curriculum focused on enhancing student learning. The curriculum is focused enough that it can be adequately addressed in the time available to teachers. All students have the opportunity to learn the critical content of the curriculum. Individual teachers do not have the option to disregard or replace content that has been designated as essential (Marzano et al., 2014).

“The only way the curriculum in a school can truly be guaranteed is if the teachers themselves, those who are called upon to deliver the curriculum, have worked collaboratively to do the following:

- Study the intended curriculum.
- Agree on priorities within the curriculum.
- Clarify how the curriculum translates into student knowledge and skills.
- Establish general pacing guidelines for delivering the curriculum.
- Commit to one another that they will, in fact, teach the agreed-upon curriculum” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 91).

“If we want to mobilize concerted action and a deep shift in practice then governments, districts, and schools need to develop clarity of outcomes and build shared understanding of these by educators, students, and parents” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 83).

References

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