

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

The Responsibility of High School Teachers On a Subject Area Committee

An ideal Subject Area Committee (SAC) has one SAC member representing each grade level. This makes a SAC of thirteen members (one teacher for each grade level, K-12). However, at the high school, many subjects have courses that are not distinguished by "grade level," especially in the area of electives. So when the Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC) is ready to appoint SAC members, they must be sure that enough high school teachers are on the committee to represent all courses taught. For example, two teachers may teach three or four different courses each and thus could be the representatives for all of those courses. On the other hand, suppose we had four high school teachers on the SAC — one each for biology, general science, anatomy, and physics – but no one who had ever taught chemistry. We should not expect teachers on the SAC to write the curriculum for a course none of them has ever taught, so in this case, we would either need to add a chemistry teacher (making five high school SAC members) or try to find teachers who teach more than one course so that we could keep the number at four, but have all courses represented.

Most SACs are given about 9-10 days of release time and/or summer work to complete the development of their curriculums. Consider that for each grade level or course, a SAC member must research, analyze, make decisions, match standards, and write high-achievement units and components. This is time-consuming but it *is* a reasonable expectation for each teacher on the SAC to complete one grade level or at least one course. However, no matter the size of the district, the CCC needs to address the workload of the high school SAC members.

Districts often have so many courses (or so few teachers) at the secondary level that expectations for curriculum writing are not realistic. Many high schools have numerous electives in some subject areas. And some small high schools may only have one or two teachers in a whole department. For example, suppose a high school has only two social studies teachers, but offers nine social studies courses. (American History, American Government, World History, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, Law, and Current Events and Issues.)

It is unrealistic to expect two people to do a quality job of preparing aligned curriculum for each of those courses in the 9-10 days allotted. In this case the CCC must make a decision, and the most common options are:

1. Provide for those high school teachers to have some additional release time or summer days.
2. Have the high school teachers start with the required courses first, and be specific about the CCC's expectations (e.g. get at least three courses written this year); then provide time for the teachers to prepare the rest of the courses in Year Two. If this option is selected, it needs to be reflected on the district's Long-Range Plan.
3. Recommend that the SAC look at eliminating some of the electives, and offer fewer courses. (Many times this is a natural result of aligning the curriculum K-12).

The CCC agenda should include making a decision regarding this secondary level issue at the beginning of each new SAC, since the number of courses varies from one subject to another. SAC members need to be told at the beginning of the year what the expectations are so they can pace themselves accordingly.