

Priorities when Implementing a New Curriculum

Entire grade level teams and departments, as well as building faculties as a whole, must work together when implementing a new curriculum. This should be an exciting and productive time — not a time of anger or resentment. Everyone in the building must take the opportunity to rally around that subject and do everything possible to make the implementation a success. As stated in an earlier E-Hint, working together to implement a new curriculum should demonstrate three essential characteristics. These characteristics are what research has proven makes professional learning communities successful. One, there should be a focus on learning, not simply on teaching. Two, there should be a culture of collaboration; and three, there should be a focus on results.

Change often seems overwhelming. During the year of teaching (and learning!) a new curriculum, it is necessary to *set priorities* for the most important things to change. At CLI, we have found that schools with successful implementations set the same priorities. These initial priorities or “things to do” include asking all teachers to:

- Organize all materials by outcome, either in folders or in notebook binders.
- Create year-long pacing guides for each outcome.
- Make notes about what methods and activities work well for each outcome. These notes can be made on “forms” that are provided by the district for unit lesson plans, or teachers can use whatever kind of note system they choose — whatever works well for an individual teacher is fine. The notes should be kept in each folder or notebook section almost like a “cover sheet” for that outcome plan.
- Create formative and summative assessments to match the new curriculum.

Grade level teams should be given time to work together on a regular basis and each faculty meeting should have the new curriculum as a standing agenda item throughout the year. These structures are necessary to promote a collaborative culture and to enable teachers to get the above priorities accomplished. During these meeting times, teachers should work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice.

Organizing materials by outcome is most often the first step. This seemingly simple job is the foundation for everything else that follows. No longer will it be possible to start on page one of your textbook and continue straight through till the end. Text pages need to be examined to find which pages “go with” each outcome. Workbook

pages, resource pages, games, videos, literature, magazine articles... everything you use should be sorted by outcome.

You should also make a plan showing how much time you are going to spend on each outcome. It is no longer an option to simply run out of time and not "get to" certain outcomes. We are now required to give all students the opportunity to learn our grade level curriculum and the standards aligned to that curriculum. Pacing guides give us the guidelines to follow to keep things moving along. Most often if we run out of time it's because we aren't leaving *out* things that are no longer in the new curriculum!

Each outcome is a unit — a collection of smaller concepts and skills that are together for a reason. It is essential that students know the reason or "big idea" holding the components together. When each component is taught we must teach directly to what the both the verb and concept say. This examination of what the *students are to do* should cause us to plan activities and methods very carefully. It may feel as if we are back in our first year of teaching — taking nothing for granted and planning every lesson with deliberate intention. As we find methods and activities that match the new components it will be in our best interest if we write them down! The following year these notes will help us remember what matched and worked well and as the years progress, we will have a whole collection of great ideas to use with each component of every outcome. Think of the notes as "journal" entries you keep. Put the notes in each outcome folder along with the list of materials, and you have the basics for a "unit plan" for that outcome.

Just as should be the case with *any* curriculum (textbook-driven or not), teachers must give assessments to see if students have learned. As teachers teach a new curriculum, they must think carefully about whether "old" tests match the new curriculum. If they do truly match — great! But if they do not match, new or modified assessments must be created. This can be done individually the first year, or grade level teams and departments can work on developing and administering common assessments. Administering common assessments helps teams identify how each student performs, and then the team can call on each other to reflect, share ideas, materials, strategies, and talents. This focus on results — data — is what should help you pinpoint and make decisions about what is working and what is not regarding your instruction. This focus on learning will then force each grade level team or department (and the entire faculty) to make plans for how to respond when any student experiences difficulty in learning.

Implementing a new curriculum has a purpose — to increase student learning. When these plans are carried out and modified for *every child* that needs corrective help, student learning as a whole will increase.