

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

Aligning

The word “align” is used so much in education these days that it is in danger of being used incorrectly. Strictly speaking, aligning means to arrange or position in a straight line. So, when we speak of aligning curriculum to the standards or aligning curriculum with assessments, what does each of those mean? Let’s look at them one at a time.

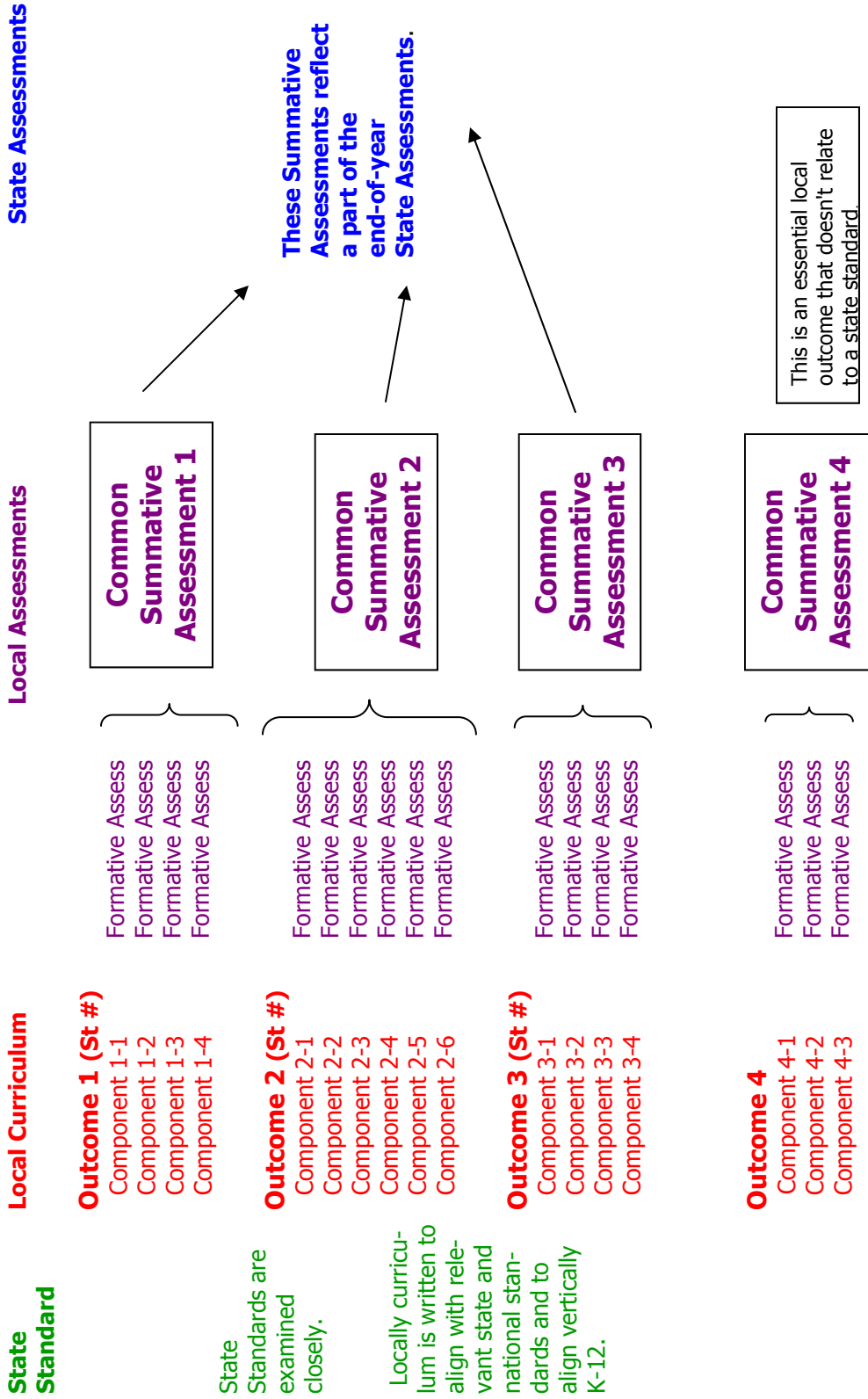
At CLI, aligning curriculum to *standards* doesn’t mean using the standards *as* curriculum. It also doesn’t mean occasionally taking a peak at the standards to get a general idea of what they say. It does mean that the standards should be closely examined and then carefully compared to the local curriculum. After this examination, local decisions are made — how shall each piece of the standards be used, and at which grade levels? The local curriculum is then reworded as necessary, to reflect these decisions. There shouldn’t be any standards left out of the local curriculum. However, there *can* be local curriculum *in addition* to the standards. In some instances, educators feel the standards are not inclusive or rigorous enough to reflect their expectations for students, so they add (or continue to include) outcomes to meet those expectations.

Aligning curriculum with *assessments* means carefully preparing either a formative assessment or a summative assessment for each piece of local curriculum. There should be no more or no less on each assessment than what the curriculum says. At CLI, formative assessments are used to assess “components,” which are the smaller pieces of curriculum that lead to the ultimate outcome. Summative assessments are used to assess “outcomes,” which are the essential *units* of curriculum, and they are a powerful way to show how well students know that curriculum. Additionally, for those outcomes that match a state standard, the summative assessments lead to the end-of-the-year state assessment — and provide a good picture of how well students will likely do on the state assessment.

In many districts, summative assessments are now being prepared in *common*. This means that the same summative assessment is given for each outcome *every year*, no matter who the teacher is. For example, if there are four sections of 5th grade, each 5th grade student — regardless of teacher assigned — would take the same set of common summative assessments. Even when there is only one section of a class — for example, a high school course that only one teacher teaches — that teacher would use the same set of common summative assessments year after year.

The following graphic helps many teachers and administrators “see” the alignment of standards to local curriculum — to local assessments — to the state assessment. Follow the graphic from left to right like a flow chart.

Standards Aligned to Local Curriculum Aligned to Local Assessments



And so on