

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

The Importance of Teacher Input and Validation in Curriculum Development

Usually, when we think of curriculum development, we think of those staff members who are directly involved with the process through Subject Area Committees (SACs) working with the oversight of the Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC). However, the classroom teachers who are not a part of either type of committee are still a key part of the Curriculum Leadership Institute process. In the CLI Model, the individual teacher's input into the development and validation of the curriculum is critical to student success in accomplishing the curriculum.

Every teacher has a *right* to have input into the curriculum. The first opportunity is during the first year of the SAC process when teachers fill out questionnaires and then participate in interviews about the curriculum they actually teach in a given subject area. These questionnaires and interviews serve as the basis upon which the curriculum document is built. Every teacher also has a *responsibility* to provide complete, accurate information on the questionnaires and in interviews. Without this input, the SAC does not have all of the information needed to provide a clear, comprehensive curriculum for the prescribed subject. Classroom teacher information is vital.

The second opportunity for a teacher's *right* to voice an opinion about what should be in the curriculum is in the second year of the process — the validation year. The validation year is a one-year window of opportunity for problems and concerns to be voiced so they can be dealt with by the SAC. Of course, the SAC has had the best intentions of making the "perfect" curriculum document for the district. SAC members spent many hours in analyzing the real curriculum, discussing the mission of a given subject area, identifying the purposes of each grade in accomplishing that mission, and debating changes. Despite this, we at CLI have yet to see a curriculum document that didn't require revisions of some sort during the validation year. It is often only in classroom practice that any problems in a written curriculum can be discovered. Thus, each teacher who teaches the target subject has a *responsibility* to use the new curriculum and to document his or her concerns during that time on a validation form created by the SAC.

Although informal discussion can be helpful in identifying specific concerns, a SAC must rely on written documentation when it comes to making specific changes. On a purely practical level, the SAC may represent fifty to one hundred teachers or more who teach a given subject. No one SAC member should be expected to remember a comment mentioned in the hallway or teachers' work room. Written comments also allow SAC members to fulfill their responsibility of giving teachers specific feedback related to their concerns.

These opportunities and their importance may not be obvious to the classroom teacher not involved in a SAC or CCC, especially in a district that is relatively new in using the CLI Model. This part of the process may be very different from what was expected using other curriculum development models. We suggest that early in the curriculum development process, these opportunities and responsibilities are clearly communicated to all staff members so each teacher can see how he or she is a key part of creating a high quality curriculum for all students.