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***Curriculum Mapping and Alignment:
A Brief Overview of What Research Says...***

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Curriculum Alignment

What is curriculum?

Often there is a degree of confusion that surrounds the term *curriculum*. When we speak of it, are we talking about the *intended* curriculum—the one that is written out for the world to see—or are we talking about the *implemented* curriculum—the curriculum that the teachers actually teach—or are we referring to the *attained* curriculum—the content and processes that each student really learns? If the written curriculum is based upon the State Standards, Benchmarks, and the Grade Level Content Expectations that each student must learn, then it should be our goal to have all three types of the curriculum be the same. The intended curriculum should be the taught curriculum because it is the curriculum the students must learn if they are to succeed and their success as learners is our goal as educators. Curriculum Mapping and Curriculum Alignment are two processes that can help us do this.

What is Curriculum Mapping?

Curriculum mapping is an ongoing process where each teacher notes what he/she is really teaching during the year on a curriculum map. The map should contain the State Standards, Benchmarks, and Grade Level Content Expectations that are being taught, the assessments that are being used to determine if the students have learned them, the content that is being used to teach the Standards and Benchmarks, and the skills and process that are embedded in them (Jacobs, 1997).

Once each teacher notes this information, the staff gets together in teams and *reads* the maps



to look for areas where there are discrepancies—areas of unneeded redundancy where the same thing is taught year after year or areas where student instructional time is being used for things that do not relate to the State Benchmarks or areas where the State Benchmarks currently are not being taught or are being touched upon too lightly for students to learn them. Working together during this gap analysis process, the staff corrects these discrepancies. This helps get the school/district ready for curriculum alignment (Jacobs, 1997).

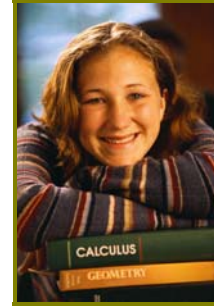
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What is Curriculum Alignment?

Curriculum alignment is the process of making sure that all the key components of the curriculum—assessments, content, resources, and instructional strategies—are in alignment with the State Standards, Benchmarks, and Grade Level Content Expectations and that these components all work together to increase student achievement.

Impact of Curriculum Alignment on Student Achievement:

It is hard to overestimate the importance of fully aligned curriculum that is really being *learned* in every classroom—a curriculum where all formative and summative common assessments are aligned to the State Content Standards, Benchmarks, and Grade Level Content Expectations—a curriculum where all instructional resources are aligned to the assessments—a curriculum that is fully understood by stakeholders. This is more than an ideal. This is a realistic goal that everyone in the school-community has a right to expect—especially the students and their parents. “Access to equal educational opportunity should mean more than having the opportunity to attend school. It should mean that all students have the opportunity to acquire what has been identified as the knowledge and skills essential to their success” (DuFour, 1999). This happens with a



fully aligned curriculum. In fact, 35 years of research have identified 11 factors that are the primary determinants of student achievement... a *guaranteed and viable curriculum* is listed first and refers to the fact that no matter who teaches a given class, the curriculum will address certain content and will be taught adequately in the time allotted (Marzano, 2003).

The second factor is important when we remember that our goal is not content coverage but rather increased student learning. As we create a learner centered school—a school where the needs of learners and an emphasis on learning processes drive all school improvement efforts (including curriculum alignment) (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Lipton and Wellman, 2000), we must come to terms with the inherent dichotomy that exists between the two views. There often is a world of difference between “I taught it” and “the students learned it.” A fully aligned curriculum supported by *common formative and summative assessments* can help eliminate this difference by focusing everyone’s attention on the same instructional goals and seeing to it that these goals are adequately monitored throughout the entire year and indeed, when carried out from one year to the next, throughout the entire learning history of each

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student. This type of attention to detail results in increased student achievement as well as increased professionalism of the entire staff as they come together in *professional learning communities* whose single goal is increased student achievement.



You may be wondering, where do we begin this process? If we begin the curriculum alignment process by first unpacking the standards and expectations so that everyone who is involved in the process has a clear understanding of what the students are being asked to do (Marzano, 1999), then we can use that understanding to develop and align common formative and summative assessments that help monitor and measure the student's ability to perform these tasks. Then we can ask ourselves as a staff, "What do our students need to learn to perform this?" The answer to the question will help us determine as a school/district what we are going to teach and what strategies we are going to use to teach it. Thus high quality formative and summative assessments can help us know what to teach and when to teach it, but if classroom assessments are of poor quality, then instruction can not be effective (Stiggins, 1999) and student achievement will suffer. As Marzano points out:

"A large number of studies has demonstrated that one of the defining features of effective classroom curriculum is that it is organized around specific learning objectives (Fraser et al., 1987). In fact, one review of more than 50 studies found that organizing curriculum around specific learning objectives increased student

achievement by 34 percentile points" (Marzano, 1998).



"In other words, assume that two students of equal knowledge relative to a given content area are assigned to different courses covering exactly the same content. In one course the teacher provides specific instructional goals; in the other course the teacher does not.



Even if the two teachers taught exactly the same way in the two courses using identical examples and assignments, the student in the course in which clear and specific instructional goals were provided would outperform the other student by 34 percentile points on a test designed to measure the specific content addressed in the course" (Marano, 1999).

Curriculum alignment allows us to articulate those instructional goals so that everyone understands them. Therefore curriculum alignment not only sounds like the right thing to do, it is the right thing to do if we want to increase student achievement.

It also is a powerful staff development tool. As everyone comes together in teams to unpack the standards and create common assessments, meaningful conversations occur. As the participants discuss ways to monitor student achievement, the seeds of collaboration begin to grow into professional learning communities that are dedicated to the principle that not only can all

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children learn but that all children will learn at our school—at our grade level—and most importantly in our classrooms.



The change in focus from what is taught to what is learned must be nurtured by the principal.

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