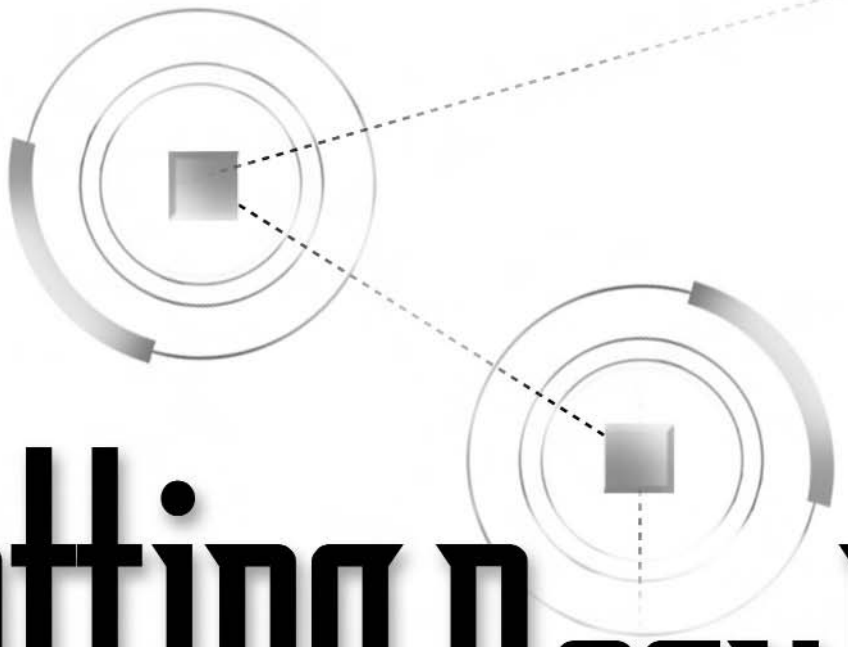
Getting Results with Curriculum Mapping

edited by Heidi Hayes Jacobs



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Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia USA

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Foreword

Curriculum mapping addresses some of the most critical questions for any work team:

- Who is doing what?
- How does our work align with our goals?
- Are we operating efficiently and effectively?

Educators who nurture the growth of each child form a work team from prekindergarten to postsecondary school. They take their work seriously and are aware of the awesome responsibility of preparing children for life roles. Yet, as an institution, education is a business in which teachers at one level have little knowledge of the curriculum and instruction that takes place at other levels. Teachers follow the district or school curriculum and use required materials, but they have little opportunity to share a dialogue with fellow teachers about what they are teaching and how the overall educational program is working for students.

Besides the problem of time for professional dialogue, the work team must deal with problems in the curriculum. Teachers purchase supplementary materials over time to bolster this or that topic or skill, or they move to a different grade level and take favorite materials with them. Eventually, the curriculum becomes cluttered with "stuff" that may or may not support educational efficiency or effectiveness.

Curriculum mapping is an invaluable tool that can help schools clean their closets. Since Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs wrote her best-selling book, *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K–12* (1997a), schools have been sifting, sorting, aligning, and organizing their curricular closets. Teachers create individual curriculum maps that identify by calendar months the topics, skills, and assessments they are addressing. They then analyze individual maps through the grades and courses to assess vertical articulation and alignment to academic standards.

Primarily, mapping enables teachers to identify gaps, redundancies, and misalignments in the curriculum and instructional program and to foster dialogue among teachers about their work. As Dr. Jacobs points out in Chapter 1 of this book, however, curriculum mapping is ultimately targeted to the outcomes of "measureable improvement in student performance . . . and . . . a process for ongoing curriculum and assessment review."

This book, *Getting Results with Curriculum Mapping,* paves the way for educators involved with, or considering, curriculum mapping projects. In Chapter 1, editor and contributor Dr. Jacobs sets the stage for the field reports that address frequently asked questions, shares stories about implementation and strategies from individual schools and school districts, and then paints the power of and shows the need for curriculum mapping.

A key feature of this exciting new book is that it represents diverse voices from around the country. We read stories about curriculum mapping initiatives from public, private, and special education populations; from principals and central office leaders who are charged with planning, implementing, and motivating staff members; and from the teachers who share, evaluate, align, and refine their curricular and instructional programs.

In Chapter 8, for example, Joseph Lachowicz, who works in an alternative education program in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, describes how curriculum mapping has critically supported the work in 11 distinct alternative education populations drawn from both court-based and community-based programs. Because most teachers in those programs teach multiple subjects, mapping has allowed them to align the critical standards, skills, activities, and assessments; to integrate across subjects when feasible; and to communicate with other teachers and their administrator on a month-to-month basis.

The contributors to this book honestly report the low points and high points in the mapping process: low points when some teachers resist, when the direction becomes confused, or when lack of time makes the job appear overwhelming; and high points when teachers become excited about their jobs as they collaborate about their work and discover where they can make connections with fellow teachers.

Through the stories in this book, strong themes of leadership and process emerge that can change the efforts of any organization.

Leadership

Leadership is the key to successful change. As Dr. Valerie Truesdale states in Chapter 2, "Initiatives are not successful because they are not sustained." Leadership is critical to sustaining the efforts of the work teams. Leaders set expectations; see that goals, tasks, and deadlines are set and met; encourage talk about initiatives to keep them alive; and value the work efforts by finding time for teachers to meet and accomplish required tasks.

In Chapter 6, Mary Ann Holt draws on her experiences with curriculum mapping in her roles as principal and curriculum consultant to provide administrators with practical advice on (1) creating a planning team within the staff to support initiatives, (2) providing training to other staff members, and (3) presenting a clear definition of mapping to the staff. (You will enjoy Holt's "treasure hunt" activity to help staff members understand the point of mapping.) Holt shares strategies for answering questions from the staff, for determining how to free up teacher time for mapping, and for using checklists to keep teachers focused during the initial phases of mapping.

Process

Leaders pay attention to *process* when introducing and implementing an initiative. Curriculum mapping as a process relies on the ability of the work team to collaborate, conceptualize, compromise, and listen. Throughout the chapters of this book, readers will find quality examples of process planning—from goal setting, to task and time line development, to mapping review strategies, and to motivating and facilitating work teams.

Getting Results with Curriculum Mapping is both a timely and timeless resource for all educators who need to revisit process. It reminds us to periodically sift, sort, and organize, and it saves us from spinning our wheels by showing us the way. The contributions from the various roles, schools, and perspectives encourage us to work smarter by using technology as a mapping tool. Dr. Jacobs presents a new and exciting view for the use of technology in curriculum and instruction. She provides practical suggestions for using technology to map, evaluate, share, refine, and alter curricula that can replace or reduce the time-consuming, paper-eating sea of handwritten wall charts.

In Chapter 5, Stephen O'Neil, who was the curriculum director at Minnehaha Academy, a private school in Minneapolis, Minnesota, describes how effective computers can be in curriculum mapping. He shares one of his faculty member's reflections and advice:

"getting [the] curriculum together in a computer format [allows it to] be easily updated in the future. [Mapping] is a 'fluid' process."

In Chapter 7, Bena Kallick and James Wilson contrast the effectiveness and efficiency of "computer software mapping" with unwieldy "paper mapping." They remind us that communication is enhanced and curriculum can be more effectively coordinated when teachers can see the content and skills being taught by others in their grade level or department. Computer technology allows teachers and administrators to quickly and easily see not only the particular content and skills being taught, but also the frequency with which the content and skills appear across grade levels.

Kallick and Wilson make another strong point by suggesting that computer technology can be used at the district level to bring coherence to the overall educational program in today's standards-based environment. Site-based management practices led to disparate types and interpretations of data. Conversely, computer technology that shows systemic views of curriculum maps can ensure overall program coherence and can lead to stronger educational programming for all students.

This helpful new book reflects a deepening of the mapping process by looking at applications and experiences from the field, and it answers the myriad questions that inevitably arise with any new initiative. Emphasizing the bedrock premise that mapping "just makes sense," the chapters deal with practical issues such as getting started, consensus building, and rethinking the way schools are organized to make decisions.

This book supports grassroots curriculum evaluation and decision making. Building administrators and teachers—the work teams closest to the students—evaluate and determine the best curriculum plans for students. In the process, such work teams become intimately familiar with what students need to know, understand, and be able to do.

In Chapter 4, Jennie Johnson and Dr. Ann Johnson share the mapping journey of the school district in Ankeny, Iowa, a strong district that became even stronger. They describe the critical role of building curriculum facilitators: two at each elementary school and three at each secondary school. These facilitators performed many tasks, including setting goals with their staff members and principals and determining inservice needs, products to be developed, and time lines to be met. They ensure that the initiative for mapping and program improvement doesn't fizzle out by monitoring the mapping work and providing the critical quality control component. Curriculum frameworks for the Ankeny Community School District, based on the data from each school's map, were aligned with standards and assessments, bringing coherence across district programs.

The Ankeny District provided the time and training needed to get the job done well. It also altered the focus of ongoing Saturday classes for staff development or graduate credit to include training in curriculum

mapping and other related district initiatives. As Johnson and Johnson state, "Curriculum mapping became the hub that focused the work of the district on enhancing student achievement. Every aspect of the work in the district emanated from that hub, and the hub served as an organizing force for bringing together the group of dedicated professionals . . . allow[ing] teachers and administrators to become dreamers and confident risk-takers in their quest to help all students become independent and lifelong learners."

A strong curriculum is the foundation for strong teaching and learning. Curriculum mapping *is* the logical hub for the work of school improvement. When teachers realize the benefits of curriculum mapping, they say, "Why didn't we do this years ago? I finally know what students are learning before and after their year with me, and I now have a curriculum that is clear, uncluttered, and focused."

—H. Lynn Erickson
Curriculum Consultant and Author

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As a genuine 21st-century shift in our practice, mapping requires knowledge and courage. I am indebted to the countless teachers, administrators, technology programmers, and staff developers in the field who have shared their suggestions as we journey through curriculum mapping. In particular, I want to thank my family, Jeffrey, Rebecca, and Matt, for their constant love and support. They are always with me.

—Heidi Hayes Jacobs