

MANAGING CURRICULUM **AND** ASSESSMENT

A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE



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MANAGING CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

A Practitioner's Guide

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Figures	v
Preface	1
Introduction	3
Section I: The Big Picture: Concepts and Fundamentals.....	5
Overview of Curriculum Management Planning	6
Needs Assessment.....	8
Curriculum Development Cycle.....	10
Comprehensive Assessment Plan	13
Scope and Sequence Development.....	16
Curriculum Guides	19
Instructional Materials Selection Process.....	23
Assessment Design and Development	25
Staff Development and Curriculum Implementation.....	29
Monitoring Curriculum Delivery	32
Assessment Implementation and Data Use	35
Program Evaluation	37
Section II: Nuts and Bolts.....	41
How to: Needs Assessment	42
How to: Curriculum Development Cycle.....	45
How to: Comprehensive Assessment Plan.....	46
How to: Scope and Sequence Development	49
How to: Developing Curriculum Guides	59
How to: Instructional Materials Selection Process	65
How to: Assessment Design and Development.....	71
How to: Staff Development and Implementation of a New or Revised Curriculum.....	73
How to: Curriculum Monitoring	75
How to: Assessment Implementation and Data Use	77
How to: Program Evaluation	79

Section III: Sample Forms and Letters	87
Needs Assessment	88
Curriculum Development/Review Cycle	92
Assessment Plan Development	98
Scope and Sequence	102
Developing Curriculum Guides	113
Materials Selection	121
Assessment Design	131
Staff Development and Implementation	135
Monitoring	140
Assessment Implementation and Data Use	146
Program Evaluation	154
 Glossary	 159
 Suggestions for Further Reading	 163
 Useful Web Site Links	 164
 Index	 167
 About the Authors	 171

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Process and Function in Curriculum Management.....	6
Figure 1.2	The Curriculum Management Model	7
Figure 1.3	A Sample Curriculum Development Cycle.....	11
Figure 1.4	Overview of District Assessments.....	15
Figure 2.1	A Sample Curriculum Development Cycle	45
Figure 2.2	Abbreviated Sample of Backloaded Scope-and-Sequence Matrix	54
Figure 2.3	Task-Tracking Matrix for Basic Steps in the “Nuts and Bolts” Section II	82
Figure 3.1	Teacher Needs Assessment Survey	89
Figure 3.2	Needs Assessment Data Summary Memo.....	90
Figure 3.3	Prioritized List of Needs Assessment Data.....	91
Figure 3.4	Curriculum Revision and Materials Adoption Cycle	93
Figure 3.5	Curriculum Revision Process (by year).....	94
Figure 3.6	K-12 Curriculum Revision Cycle	95
Figure 3.7	K-12 Curriculum Revision Cycle and Textbook Adoption Plan....	96
Figure 3.8	Curriculum Revision Team Timeline—Year 1	97
Figure 3.9	Assessment Philosophy	99
Figure 3.10	Sample Test Descriptions.....	100
Figure 3.11	Testing Overview.....	101
Figure 3.12	Team Selection: Letters and Forms.....	103
Figure 3.13	Sample Training Materials.....	104
Figure 3.14	Test Item Deconstruction Samples	106
Figure 3.15	Articulated Scope-and-Sequence Matrix, K-5 Science.....	107
Figure 3.16	Bloom’s Analysis: Description and Activity	108
Figure 3.17	Time Allocations	110
Figure 3.18	Feedback on Scope and Sequence Draft.....	112
Figure 3.19	Tips for Writing Guides.....	114
Figure 3.20	Sample Guide Formats.....	115
Figure 3.21	Abbreviated Sample of Curriculum Guide	116
Figure 3.22	Sample Pacing Guide.....	119
Figure 3.23	Matrix for Analysis of Guide Quality.....	120
Figure 3.24	Principal and Teacher Communication about Review Process....	122
Figure 3.25	Timelines for Materials Selection	123
Figure 3.26	Letters to Textbook Companies; Interview Questions	125
Figure 3.27	Initial Review of Texts; Deep Alignment Analysis; Review Summaries	128
Figure 3.28	Information about Piloting.....	129

Figure 3.29	Samples of Materials Evaluation Summaries after Piloting	130
Figure 3.30	Timeline for Assessment Development Process	132
Figure 3.31	Sample Planning Guide for Instruction and Assessment	133
Figure 3.32	Test Specifications for One Quarterly Test	134
Figure 3.33	Sample Staff Development Calendar.	136
Figure 3.34	Sample Parent Brochure	137
Figure 3.35	Sample Monitoring Plan	141
Figure 3.36	Teacher's Planning Guide	142
Figure 3.37	Curriculum/Textbook Feedback Form (Teachers).	143
Figure 3.38	Linkage of Student Work to Standards & Objectives (Teachers)	144
Figure 3.39	Linkage of Student Work to Standards & Objectives (Principals)	145
Figure 3.40	Computer Generated Report	147
Figure 3.41	Hand Analysis: Math	148
Figure 3.42	Hand Analysis: Reading	150
Figure 3.43	Hand Analysis: Writing	151
Figure 3.44	Ten Tips for Effective Use of Data.	152
Figure 3.45	Data Mentors	153
Figure 3.46	Program Evaluation Template	155
Figure 3.47	Sample Program Evaluation Plan and Related Documents	156
Figure 3.48	Executive Summary for Program Evaluation	157

PREFACE

Curriculum is an area of education that is characterized by a lack of agreement about its definition and nature. There are those who have divorced themselves completely from much curricular practice at all and want to talk about curriculum only as a discourse on politics and culture. These are mostly academians. And that dialogue can be a lively and interesting conversation. However, rarely does it ever get connected to the world in which most classroom teachers and administrators live and toil. When it comes to laws and expectations like those of *No Child Left Behind*, most academians have little to say except to condemn them as unwise laws. However, practitioners need advice on how to respond to such requirements, even those which may be based on fallacious assumptions about school effectiveness, in order to make the most and best of what is included for the children they are pledged and paid to serve.

This is a book by intelligent practitioners who have lived and worked in many school districts. Their view of curriculum practice is not mere technique, nor mindless sequencing of “magic steps” to minimally comply with laws and regulations. The authors are not “arm chair” advisors or distant consultants. Rather, they are thoughtful practitioners who have “walked the walk.” And it just hasn’t been an aimless walking about. Rather, the authors of this book have labored not only in school districts and schools in which they were employed as teachers and administrators, but also in countless others as curriculum auditors, curriculum leadership consultants, and subject area content experts. They know what it is to intervene in the daily affairs of schools and school systems. They have encountered the skeptics and the naysayers. They have persevered and have made a difference. Their book is a kind of passing of the torch of their learnings to others. Even if you think you know what they have done, just reading about it will provide some new insights you may not have considered before. It has been my pleasure to have worked with all of the authors as colleagues, so I know the educator who lives in each of them. Theirs is the kind of idealism that is respectful of the educational enterprise in which we all believe.

I was once told that the definition of “organizational love” was *disciplined caring*. These authors not only care deeply about schools, children, and learning, but they also have labored in the cause of organizational love, and they continue to do so in a disciplined way. What they have written is an example of the discipline that is necessary to be responsive to the curricular requirements confronting educators in these times.

Perhaps the highest tribute one colleague might pay to another is to note, as I do, that if my professional reputation were on the line for the curriculum/or-

ganizational study I had to do, these are the people I would want on my team. They are practical, tough-minded, and excellent teachers.

So open these pages with confidence. What these authors have to tell you they have done, and the practices work. There are, of course, many other things one could write about these days concerning curriculum. But the litmus test has been and will continue to be most important in the work place of classrooms and schools. If that is where you also toil, you will discover that this book is an invaluable resource.

– *Fenwick W. English*
R. Wendell Eaves Distinguished Professor of Educational Leadership
School of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

INTRODUCTION

Suppose you want to travel with a large group of people from one side of the country to the other, starting and ending at the same time, while traveling in separate vehicles. Along the way you have certain locations at which you must meet at pre-determined times. How do you proceed?

You could tell everyone to get in their cars and head out, letting luck, chance, and individual talent determine your success. Or, you could plan your trip, creating a map and timeline that are feasible and checking progress along the way. While both methods might get you to your goal, only one will do it efficiently and effectively.

Guiding a large group of students from kindergarten through high school graduation is a similar journey. They can travel without a map, hoping that the talents of the drivers lead them in the most efficient, effective path. Or they can follow a sequential plan designed to maximize their use of time, align their learnings, and check their progress. Which idea can be replicated, and which one provides the most opportunity for success?

While traveling without a map in today's educational environment might be adventurous, it often comes at an expensive price. Duplicated services, curricular gaps, misaligned tasks, mismatched resources, and disparate achievement performance are all symptomatic of on-the-fly design. Each one creates an obstacle to learning for the student and a poor use of resources for the district. Today, the stakes are too high for success to be left to chance.

Across the United States there is increasing emphasis on high-stakes assessment, student learning standards established by states, and the needs of school districts to improve curriculum alignment with national, state, and local goals and expectations. Requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind* law have increased the urgency of improving student performance, and educators are literally scrambling to determine how to meet those needs as expeditiously and effectively as possible. Teachers, library media specialists, and administrators have sought expertise in curriculum design, delivery, evaluation, and management, often with very limited financial and human resources upon which to draw during these efforts.

The purpose of this practitioners' handbook and the accompanying CD is to provide the basic elements of a curriculum management system that will help school districts address the need to improve student learning in as practical a manner as possible. The emphasis throughout the book on alignment of the written, taught, and tested curriculum provides a framework for quality control of a district's educational program. The guidance presented here draws heavily upon the foundations of curriculum management initiated and developed by Fenwick English. Further resources are the many school systems in which the authors have observed, trained,

or coached educators or in which they have themselves worked to implement changes congruent with the guidance offered.

While many states have developed student learning standards and frameworks, most are not specific enough to provide clear and precise objectives for teaching and learning in the classroom. Thus it is imperative that local school districts develop curriculum that will support teachers' instructional efforts to provide students equal access to the learning implicit in state standards and the assessments through which students are to demonstrate the knowledge and skills learned.

The handbook is organized into three sections. Section I provides a general overview of the activities critical to the design, development, and subsequent management of an effective curriculum system. Section II addresses more specific steps that demonstrate how to carry out the activities described in Section I. For several of the actions, Section III offers sample documents and templates. The same samples and documents are included on the CD so that district practitioners will not have to recreate them. The handbook further contains a glossary of terms, a suggested reading list for use by educators, and information regarding professional backgrounds of the authors.

Possible uses of the handbook and CD are varied. For example, the overview (Section I) might be sufficient for expanding understanding of the basic elements of a sound curriculum system by board members, administrators, and teachers. The "how to" steps of Section II might be most helpful to individuals charged with specific roles in stages of curriculum design, delivery, evaluation, or management. Certainly those practitioners are the ones likely to find some of the Section III examples particularly useful.