



The curriculum was analyzed to determine how well it addresses the attributes of a quality curriculum as described in *Ensuring Quality Curriculum: How to Design, Revise or Adopt Curriculum Aligned to Student Success* by Angela Di Michele Lalor. This report shares the results of that review.

## Executive Summary

It is clearly evident that the school values the role that a written curriculum plays in helping teachers to make informed decisions about classroom instruction that impacts student learning. It is also evident that the school understands and embraces the idea that curriculum is a “living document” that should be revised based on implementation and teacher’s deepening understanding of curriculum. Both are evidenced by the existence of new templates and written documentation of revisions.

While the curriculum documents address the attributes of quality, they would benefit in further refinement. All grade level curriculum documents need to be updated to the New York Next Generation Learning Standards. Content specific documents also need to be upgraded to the most recent content understandings and included discipline specific processes such as the social studies practices and the standards for mathematical practices. Performance assessments (projects), while they exist in some grades and disciplines, need further development and alignment to be considered assessments that produce as well as measure learning.

In order to accomplish the above, it is recommended that the school continue to create new curriculum documents that reflect the curriculum design process: what students need to know and be able to do (essential question, big ideas and standards), how the teachers will know students have learned it (assessment) and what the students can do to learn (learning activities). By doing so, teachers will develop a deeper understanding of how to use the curriculum to inform instruction and best meet the needs of their students.

## Data Analysis

Data analyzed for this review included curriculum maps, unit maps and teaching point calendars for reading, writing, social studies, science and mathematics. Each curriculum documents was evaluated for evidence of the following attributes of quality:

**Organizing Center:** A unit’s organizing center is communicated through the unit title, essential question and big idea and identifies the most important learning for the unit. All units of study within a curriculum should be organized around centers that are worthy of the time and energy set aside for their pursuit, and that reflect the overall intent and purpose of the curriculum.

**Standards Alignment:** A quality curriculum will ensure strong alignment to standards selected by the school that reflect the community’s values and priorities. Standards include content standards, process standards and/or dispositional standards. A quality curriculum will clearly identify those standards that are taught and assessed in each unit so teachers can make

purposeful decisions about what to teach and how to teach it, and can share learning targets with their students.

**Standards Placement and Emphasis:** In a quality curriculum, all standards are taught and assessed by the end of the year, providing students with multiple opportunities to practice the skills embedded in the standards. Placement and emphasis of standards throughout the year is influenced by factors such as the overall intent of the standards, grade-level focus standards, gradual-release of responsibility, and developmentally appropriate practice. A standards analysis tool should be used not only to track placement and emphasis but should also be accessible to stakeholders interested in the scope and sequence of learning targets in a particular grade level or course of study.

**Assessment Types and Moments:** Each unit within the curriculum includes different types of assessments (information recall, product, demonstration and process) that are used for different purposes. The type of assessments used within each unit should be congruent with the learning targets being measured. Multiple assessments should be used in units when it is determined that more than one type of assessment can be used to measure a standard. The use of multiple measures provides teachers with a variety of data sources for determining what their students know and are able to do, and how to best address their needs. In addition, each unit includes assessments that serve different purposes: diagnostic assessments to determine what students know and are able to do, as well as identify student misconceptions; formative assessments to check for student understanding; and summative assessments to determine what students have learned.

**Curriculum-Embedded Performance Assessments:** A quality curriculum includes assessments that produce as well as measure learning. These assessments are the key to creating engaging, meaningful, and cohesive units. They are an integral part of all units and not separate events. A performance assessment is considered curriculum-embedded when it

- measures the most important learning for the unit
- is congruent and strongly aligned to the standards identified in the unit
- has an authentic audience and meaningful purpose
- links to diagnostic and formative assessment moments
- includes rubrics and checklists that can be used as instructional as well as evaluative tools.

**Instruction:** Learning experiences include information about what students will do, why they will do it and what the teacher will have as evidence of student learning. They strongly align to the standards for that unit and address content, process, and dispositions. Learning activities are designed to engage students in their learning. Teachers can use the learning experiences as a basis for designing lessons that allow them to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of their students.

**Structure and Access:** A quality curriculum is easily accessible to teachers and other vested parties. It contains multiple layers that are linked to each other and provide varying degrees of information. A quality curriculum is integrated into school structures.

## Curriculum Review Results

The following observations were made based on the review of the curriculum documents. Specific grade level summaries can be found in Appendix A. Feedback has also been provided on select curriculum documents. These documents can be found in separate grade level folders that accompany this report.

1. **Organizing Centers:** The organizing center for units were communicated through unit titles, essential questions, big ideas and enduring understanding. While these items were clearly labeled and easy to find, there were often multiple essential questions, big ideas and enduring understandings for the same unit. This indicates a need to clarify these terms and the role they play in curriculum.
2. **Standards Alignment, Placement and Emphasis:** Standards do appear in units, particularly in those units that have been revised in a new unit template. However, standards need to be updated to the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards. In addition, social studies units should include the New York State Social Studies Conceptual Understandings and Practices and science units should include the NGSS performance expectations. The Standards for Mathematical Practice have been included in some of the units. There is no document that provides an overview of the placement of standards in each subject area.
3. **Diverse Assessment Types and Moments:** It is evident that courses include diagnostic, formative and summative assessments and that different types of assessments (information recall, product, demonstrations and process) are used.

Diagnostic assessments are found most often in the writing units of study. They are not always found in all subject areas. Formative assessments are listed in all units. They tend to be generic and include a mix of formal and informal measures. Summative assessments are also listed and primarily include tests and products. Projects are clearly identified in some of the units. These projects could easily be developed into performance assessments that reflect the most important learning for the unit, align to the standards, connect to formative assessment opportunities, have an authentic audience and purpose for the student work, and include a rubric that can be used for instruction and assessment purposes.

4. **Instruction:** Specific skills and content are identified on the original curriculum template. The information is not correlated with specific standards.

Information regarding instruction focuses on teacher practice, rather than student learning activities. The same is true for differentiated instruction.

Unit descriptions are accompanied by calendars that lay out the learning target and language objective for each day, making it easy for the teacher to plan lessons that will address the needs of his/her students.

5. **Structure:** The unit templates vary at different grade levels and subject areas. While the components of a quality curriculum exist in the templates, there are indications that there may be confusion at different grade levels as to how best to use them so they are useful to teacher's decision making.

### **Suggestions and Next Steps**

Based on the data analyzed, the following next steps are suggested. The next steps are grouped by attribute of quality.

#### **Organizing Centers:**

1. Clarify the difference between essential questions and guiding questions, and big ideas and enduring understandings; revise the units accordingly.
2. Create organizing centers that articulate the most important learning for the unit and that can be used in creating or revising performance assessments.

#### **Standards Alignment, Placement and Emphasis:**

3. Update the units to reflect the new standards in each subject area.
4. Complete a standards-analysis document to ensure that all standards are taught and assessed by the end of the year.

#### **Assessment Types, Moments and Curriculum-Embedded Performance Assessments:**

5. Further develop the performance assessments in all units so students have a variety of different ways in which to share their learning.
6. Clarify the purpose of different assessment moments. The purpose of the diagnostic and formative assessments should be clearly stated in each unit.
7. Projects should be explicitly aligned to the standards for the unit.
8. Develop performance assessments or extend the projects that exist so they measure the most important learning for the unit, align to the standards, connect to formative assessment opportunities, have an authentic audience and purpose, and include a rubric.

#### **Instruction:**

- Link the content and skills identified in the unit back to the standards. Be sure this includes skills specific to the content area.
- Instruction should focus on student learning activities that link specifically to the standards, content and skills identified for the unit.

#### **Structure:**

- The curriculum would greatly benefit from an updated format that shows a hierarchy of information and makes connection between what students need to know and be able to

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do (essential question, big idea and standards), how the teachers will know they have learned it (assessment) and what the students can do to learn (learning activities).

- The information contained in the document should be explicitly linked to standards.
- Consider creating interdisciplinary units that explicitly combine standards from different content areas.

It is suggested that grade levels make revisions as they move units into a new template. This will provide teachers with the opportunity to address the above concerns and develop a deeper understanding of how to use the curriculum documents to make classroom decisions.