

## Fidelity to the New Curriculum

In scientific research, certain conditions need to be followed carefully in order to have reliable results. Procedures are put in place to ensure variables are isolated because the influence of extraneous variables can greatly affect the outcome of an experiment in a favorable or negative way. Implementing a new curriculum is similar to conducting a scientific investigation in that it is important to follow a set procedure. Conditions need to be controlled, and progress needs to be carefully followed and monitored so the results are accurate.



Photo Credit: [Louis Reed](#)

*Clarification: Curriculum is not the same as a textbook, textbook series, or program. Rather, it includes the unit outcomes and individual learning targets (components) that supplemental resources like textbooks or programs must align.*

### Focus on the Curriculum

With the external mandates of ever-higher expectations for student achievement, school officials are tempted to try a variety of methods, strategies, and programs to gain rapid results. Sometimes a combination of programs is put into place with the hope of greater gains in student learning. However, greater gains are not always the result, even when using research-based programs with proven success. Instead, several variables are thrown into the mix with the lack of fidelity to one method or program. A conglomeration approach doesn't allow for educators to determine what really is making the difference. Furthermore, the mixture can even produce negative results. For example, it may seem like it would be helpful, but adding new resources or other instructional programs while implementing a new curriculum

creates divided attention for the teachers. When a new program is put into place at the same time as a new curriculum, it is hard for teachers to know what to "follow," or how to merge the two, and it is impossible to determine which is truly affecting the results. If a new program is adopted within the district, it is recommended to pilot the program through another curricular area, or if that isn't possible – to wait another year for adoption, until the new curriculum has been validated.

### Supporting the Long-Range Plan

One of the first steps of action a Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC) performs is developing a long-range plan for the district. The CCC purposely staggers developing curriculum for the areas of math, language arts, social studies, and science so only one core area

is implemented during a school year. Not only does this help preserve the sanity of teachers responsible for multiple content areas, but it allows the new focus to be on one core area per year.

Also included on the long-range plan is the validation of the new draft curriculum. Throughout year two of the cycle, all teachers of the target subject are expected to frequently provide feedback to Subject Area Committee (SAC) members so needed changes can be made to the curriculum before it is adopted as a final product. Teachers are specifically looking to see if students struggle with a particular outcome or component and if the pace proceeds as expected so the curriculum will be completed by the end of the year. They should also note additional materials needed or professional training that would supplement instructional requirements within the curriculum. Collecting this information allows the SAC to make changes to the draft curriculum and request any necessary professional development training. It also allows the committee members to help guide the selection of supporting resources, which takes place during year three of the long-range plan.

## Assessing the Curriculum for Results

During the year a new curriculum is implemented, students may have some growing pains due to increases in expected knowledge or skills. Teachers may have to review some concepts to get students ready to learn or create stepping stones when skills are expected at earlier levels. The pains of the transition from the old to the new curriculum decrease in the following years. In the meantime, frequent checks of student understanding must take place not only to guide instruction but also to help validate the curriculum. Assessing student learning exclusively on the curriculum is critical. If new resources or old assessments are utilized instead of tightly aligned assessments, results are invalid and we won't know the true impact of the curriculum. Reliable results are needed before changes can be made and the curriculum approved as a final document.

By modeling the carefully placed steps of scientific study, a newly adopted curriculum can be implemented with validity and reliability. Fidelity to the curriculum has to be the priority in order to gain the desired results.