



New Challenges Require District Curriculum Councils to Revisit Curriculum Governance Policies

by Stu Ervay



America is beginning to change. So are its schools. The reasons are obvious. The COVID 19 Pandemic is one of them.

Other important reasons are associated with social disparities, funding, shifting governmental policy, and the purpose of education in a developing 21st Century.

School boards, curriculum councils, teachers, and administrators are under more pressure than ever. Parents and school patrons demand solutions to nearly unsolvable problems. Most of which involve virtual learning, social distancing, and learning quality.

Meeting agendas often include topics shown below:

- keeping students engaged using distance education,

- the role of curriculum and instructional design,
- the extent to which students are “falling behind,”
- internet access,
- availability of electronic tools like computers,
- budgets that sustain the many changes in learning configuration,
- family support systems,
- teacher salaries and morale, and
- the health of both teachers and students.

These topics have long been areas of concern. They are challenges made worse by the pandemic.

The first three topics in the list should be discussed as priorities by the curriculum council. They need both immediate and long-term attention. Subsequent E-Hints will offer ideas for solving immediate issues. However, now is a good time to ensure long-term policies are still in place and working.

Three are most important:

1. **Ensure your district has a clear policy for academic program development, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation.**

If there is a policy in place, is it being adhered to by the board, curriculum council, and administrative staff? If not, how can that problem be addressed?

2. **Make certain your district has a long-range plan of action, a process that systematically upgrades the quality of curriculum, instruction, and assessment of student learning over time.**

If a plan of action exists and is up to date, is it being followed according to policy provisions? If not, what can be done to resolve that problem?

3. **Clear intentions for student learning called mastery statements are more essential than ever!**

Teachers need mastery statements to guide their planning, instruction, and assessment. Parents and school patrons want to know what is expected of students. Three kinds of mastery statements are essential:

- a comprehensive description of what students who complete a district’s full curriculum will know or do
- descriptions of what students who complete each subject area in the district’s curriculum will know or do

- an accurate statement of what students will know or do after completing each subject at grade level

If those three actions were taken years ago, today's unique challenges might require a few modifications.

We suggest the process start with your curriculum council. Recommendations can then be made to the administrative staff and board of education.