

## Aligning Instruction (Vertically and to Standards)

*Center on Instruction*

If students are to demonstrate proficiency on state standards, cognitive demand and classroom content must align to standards and assessments (Bhola, Impara, & Buchendahl, 2003). Alignment of curriculum, assessment, and instruction requires analysis of standards, policies, and practices in states, districts, schools, and classrooms (LaMarca, Redfield, & Winter, 2000; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Porter, Smithson, Blank, & Zeidner, 2007). Alignment of instruction links the content of state standards and district curriculum frameworks (the intended curriculum) with what is actually taught in the classroom (the enacted curriculum) (English, 1980; Blank, Porter, & Smithson, 2001). Processes for alignment vary in complexity and evidence of effectiveness (Bhola, Impara, & Buchendahl, 2003; Porter, Smithson, Blank, & Zeidner, 2007).

In all cases, for teachers to identify and activate the explicit connections between instruction and standards, and therefore improve student performance, they must be involved in the process of making those alignments. (Applebee, 1996; Koppang, 2004; Langer, 2001).

When instruction that is aligned to standards is implemented in classrooms, students should be able to perform at higher levels of proficiency on assessments. Analysis of student performance data can then become a useful tool to provide powerful guidance when schools make resource allocations, introduce changes in curricular emphasis, establish connections across grades and content areas, select instructional materials, and develop processes for building professional capacity (Bhola, Impara, & Buchendahl, 2003; Gamoran, Porter, Smithson, & White, 1997; LaMarca, Redfield, & Winter, 2000; Blank, Porter, & Smithson, 2001).

### Action Principles

#### For State

1. Provide guidance about the alignment between state standards and assessments (e.g., areas of emphasis, cognitive demand, use of data to determine degree of alignment of instruction to standards) and provide examples, release test items, and disseminate policy interpretation (Bhola, Impara, & Buchendahl, 2003; LaMarca, Redfield, & Winter, 2000; Porter, 2002).

#### For District

1. Provide support (technical, expertise, and resources) for an alignment process that considers resources, local context, and intended outcome (Bhola, Impara, & Buchendahl, 2003; Porter, Smithson, Blank, & Ziedner, 2007).
2. Support capacity-building for school staff and faculty members to help them understand the analysis and make strategic plans to implement action steps to address instructional adjustments and needed resources (Bhola, Impara, & Buchendahl, 2003; LaMarca, Redfield, & Winter, 2000; Porter, Smithson, Blank, & Ziedner, 2007).

#### For School

1. Conduct investigation to align school/teacher enacted curriculum, state standards, and local curricula, including articulation across grade levels and content areas (Bhola, Impara, & Buchendahl, 2003; Blank, Porter, & Smithson, 2001; English, 1980; Glatthorn, 1999; Kurz, Elliot, Wehby, & Smithson, 2009; McGehee & Griffith, 2001; Porter, Smithson, Blank, & Ziedner, 2007).
2. Provide resources (e.g., time, expertise, planning support, professional development) to enable teachers to incorporate changes required to align instruction with standards (Blank, Porter, & Smithson, 2001; English, 1980; Koppang, 2004).
3. Build capacity to monitor and maintain alignment between curriculum standards and classroom instruction, including use of formative data (Blank, Porter, & Smithson, 2001).

## References and Resources

- Applebee, A. N. (1996). *Curriculum as conversation: Transforming traditions of teaching and learning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bhola, D. S., Impara, J. C., & Buchendahl, C. W. (2003). Aligning tests with states' content standards: Methods and issues. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 22(3), 21-29.
- Blank, R. K., Porter, A., & Smithson, J. (2001). *New tools for analyzing teaching, curriculum, and standards in mathematics & science: Results from survey of enacted curriculum final report*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/19/5d/9a.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/19/5d/9a.pdf)
- English, F. W. (1980). Curriculum mapping. *Educational Leadership*, 37(7), 358-359.
- Gamoran, A., Porter, A. C., Smithson, J., & White, P. A. (1997). Upgrading high school mathematics instruction: Improving learning opportunities for low-achieving, low-income youth. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19(4), 325-338.
- Glatthorn, A. A. (1999). Curriculum alignment revisited. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 15(1) 26-34.
- Koppang, A. (2004). Curriculum mapping: Building collaboration and communication. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 39(3), 154-161.
- Kurz, A., Elliot, S. N., Wehby, J. N., & Smithson, J. L. (2009). Alignment of the intended, planned, and enacted curriculum in general and special education and its relation to student achievement. *The Journal of Special Education*, 43(3), 1-15.
- LaMarca, P. M, Redfield, D., Winter, P. C., Bailey, A. & Despriet, L. H. (2000). *State standards and state assessment systems: A guide to alignment*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/1a/33/5d.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/33/5d.pdf)
- Langer, J. A. (2001). Beating the odds: Teaching middle and high school students to read and write well. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 837-880. Retrieved from <http://cela.albany.edu/reports/langer/langerbeating12014.pdf>
- Martone, A., & Sireci, S. G. (2009). Evaluating alignment between curriculum, assessment and instruction. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(3), 1-76.
- McGehee, J. J., & Griffith, L. K. (2001). Large-scale assessments combined with curriculum alignment: Agents of change. *Theory into Practice*, 40(2), 137-144.
- Porter, A. C. (2002). Measuring the content of instruction: Uses in research and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 31(3), 3-14.
- Porter, A. C., Smithson, J. L., Blank, R. K., & Zeidner, T. (2007). Alignment as a teacher variable. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 20, 27-51.