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Curriculum and Instruction: Introduction

Center on Instruction/National High School Center

Many curriculum and instruction strategies can lead to school reform and improved student learning. Student performance data are integral to both; large group student data identify and support the implementation of research-based instructional programs, while student- or class-level data inform instructional changes that serve the academic needs of individual students. Data can be used to confirm whether instructional programs align with state academic standards, and ensure vertical alignment among grade levels.

Data systems should allow for the collection, interpretation, and use of data to drive instructional change at the classroom, school, district, and state levels. Additionally, data about teachers' instructional practices can help determine the fidelity of implementation in instructional programs and can supply information about professional development priorities.

Among some of the specific curriculum and instruction strategies schools might consider with an eye toward comprehensive instructional reform are:

- *Response to Intervention*, which is a multi-level instructional framework. It includes the use of universal screening for all students as well as core instruction. Students demonstrating a need for support receive increasingly intensive interventions and ongoing progress monitoring.

- *Differentiated instruction*, an instructional approach in which a teacher incorporates an array of research-based instructional and organizational practices as a means to accommodate student differences in learning.

- *Accelerated instruction*, a strategy especially useful in reading and mathematics instruction. Rather than the slow-paced and reduced curriculum that remediation models have used, in this strategy teachers accelerate instruction of students to help them overcome educational deficits and "catch-up" to their peers. The successful use of this strategy increases the likelihood that even struggling students will be prepared to enroll in challenging grade-level courses.

- *Incorporated technology* has recently received attention for its potential to support instruction in all content areas and for all grade levels.

At the high school level, curriculum and instruction are geared toward preparing students for postsecondary success. While the topics in this chapter have implications for all K-12 grade levels, four strategies specific to high

school are addressed: (1) accelerating instruction of basic reading 9-12; (2) accelerating instruction of basic math 9-12; (3) providing advanced coursework; and (4) implementing competency-based instruction.

Students who enter high school as struggling readers will most likely have a harder time in content area classes, not just in English/language arts. Most high school teachers assume students have sufficient reading comprehension levels and strategies that allow them to learn content in all classes. However, data now suggest this assumption is incorrect. High schools must provide basic instruction in reading and embed literacy strategies in all content area classes for every student to master high school content. Similarly, providing accelerated instruction in mathematics is essential for students who enter high school several grade levels behind. At the same time, high schools are challenged as they also seek ways to provide all students with more opportunities to enroll in advanced coursework.

This chapter closes with a discussion about implementing competency-based instruction, the fourth high school-specific strategy about non-traditional strategies for students to demonstrate content mastery.