

An overview of the curriculum development and review process that focuses efforts on establishing a guaranteed and viable curriculum for 21st century learners with methodology that honors the professional expertise and collaborative efforts of the faculty.

Somers Curriculum Development and Renewal Process

Achieving our Vision

Somers Central School District
Summer 2014

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Introduction

This work was accomplished during the summer of 2014. It represents collaborative efforts by teachers across disciplines and reflects our beliefs about curriculum and instruction. Our focus remains on using all of our resources most effectively and efficiently to impact student learning in a positive way.

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Curriculum Development and Alignment in a Professional Learning Community

The concept of a **Professional Learning Community**¹ (PLC) provides an organizing framework for answering four guiding questions about student learning:

What do we want students to know, understand, and be able to do?

How do we know what our students know and are able to do?

What will we do if they don't know, understand, or are not able to do?

What we will do if they already know, understand, and are able to do?

Curriculum Development

Understanding by Design

Our Curriculum development process begins with a focus on the first of these questions – *What do we want students to know, understand, and be able to do?* Students in the same grade or the same course should have common expectations for learning – this is the meaning of a **guaranteed curriculum**. Teachers who teach the same grade, subject area or course collaborate to create **consensus maps** – curriculum maps that reflect the agreed upon learning targets for all students learning that curriculum. It is through work in a PLC that teachers come to understand what is most important. The process of understanding comes through study of the applicable learning standards and knowledge of curriculum development methodology that is grounded in the work of Jay McTighe's and Grant Wiggins' *Understanding by Design*².

Using an Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, teachers work “backwards” to first identify the desired learning that students will have acquired at the end of the unit. Part of this process involves connecting the unit to standards, identifying **essential questions** and **enduring understandings** and finally, identifying the conceptual **knowledge** and **skills** that students should have once they've completed work in the unit.

Power or Priority Standards

In order to ensure that curriculum (and units within the curriculum) are **viable** curriculum design also requires the curriculum writers to identify the most important learning for the unit of study. We cannot teach, nor should we expect that students will develop deep learning of everything related to topic or subject. Since time is finite, we identify the most critical, indeed the most essential learnings. This learning is directly connected to essential questions and the notion of

¹ DuFour, R. (1991). What is a Professional Learning Community? *ASCD Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.

² Pearson, 2005.

enduring understandings. When we ask what is absolutely essential for students to know and be able to do and connect this learning to the standards that drive the creation of our curriculum, we identify the **power** or **priority standards**.

The educators and authors Larry Ainsworth and Douglas Reeves are widely considered to have coined the term “power standards.” In Ainsworth’s 2003 book, *Power Standards: Identifying the Standards that Matter the Most*, he defines the concept and outlines a variety of strategies schools could use to select or create power standards. Reeves wrote the foreword. The book proposes three criteria for selecting power standards:

- **Endurance:** Standards that focus on knowledge and skills that will be relevant throughout a student’s lifetime (such as learning how to read or how to interpret a map).
- **Leverage:** Standards that focus on knowledge and skills used in multiple academic disciplines (such as writing grammatically and persuasively or interpreting and analyzing data).
- **Essentiality:** Standards that focus on the knowledge and skills necessary for students to succeed in the next grade level or the next sequential course in an academic subject (such as understanding algebraic functions before taking geometry or calculus, which require the use of algebra).³

Rubicon ATLAS Curriculum Mapping Software

Maps are drafted, revised and shared in the district’s Rubicon ATLAS online curriculum mapping tool. The full site is open to every district staff member and a public site releases parts of the curriculum maps to the wider community.

The process of Curriculum Mapping is defined as

- A system for focused conversation
- An instrument for transparent partnerships
- The hub of all curriculum initiatives
- The central nervous system that sparks curricular discussions
- A commitment to a guaranteed and viable curriculum for all students

This definition, adapted from ATLAS Rubicon, captures our beliefs and hopes for mapping. Our district has always focused our work around three elements of education – curriculum, instruction and assessment – with a focus on improving results for students. Curriculum mapping works to align our written curriculum with the taught curriculum. Use of an online mapping tool (ATLAS Rubicon) allows the curriculum to be a “living” document. One that can be easily accessed by all teachers.

Mapping is:

- A way to “sharpen and focus the curriculum to ensure a consistent core curriculum for all” students.
- A way to link our curriculum with standards (e.g. State and Common

³ <http://edglossary.org/power-standards/>

Core) and district values (e.g. Habits of Mind, Global Awareness, 21st Century Skills).

- A way to build common vocabulary and understandings about key elements of curriculum.
- A way to develop common assessments of student learning.

Curriculum Maps are the by-product of mapping. The term mapping is a verb. It constitutes active engagement and collegial participation in ongoing curriculum work. Curriculum Mapping does not perceive education as a static environment since learning, and learning about learning, is in continual motion. Our hope is that the professional community we build around the process of articulating our curriculum will help us to focus the desired outcomes for students as they move from grade to grade and course to course.

Our online ATLAS mapping tool increases communication across all district schools and classrooms. This ensures students and their families with common experiences and assessed learning.

Using the methodology of Heidi Hayes Jacobs, our goal is to use existing mapping information to drive our examination of current practice and future work. This approach provides for “real time” examination of the taught curriculum and the assessed curriculum. Our maps reflect what is actually happening in classrooms.

Assessment

Once knowledge, understanding and skills are identified, teachers must identify how they will know that students have learned. This shifts the focus to the second PLC question: *How do we know what our students know and are able to do?* and teachers involved in the curriculum development process begin collaborative creation of varied assessment tools to most effectively determine student learning. Whether these assessments are for a unit of study or provide a summative picture of learning (a final exam), they capture evidence of essential learnings. In order to assure consistency for students, these assessments must be developed, administered, and scored **collaboratively**. These assessments provide an understanding of what our students know, understand and are able to do and how that learning relates to the identified **power standards**.

As part of collaboratively reviewing the results of their assessments, teachers decide what instructional course of action they will take for students who have not learned those essentials. In addition, they decide what instruction will look like for students who have demonstrated mastery. Based upon student performance, they evaluate the effectiveness of their assessments and make necessary adjustments to these instruments. They also use assessment data to make decisions about curriculum – revising units of study, adding or deleting content, identifying stronger resources – to ensure that essential learning is targeted by what is taught.

Instruction

The final two questions:

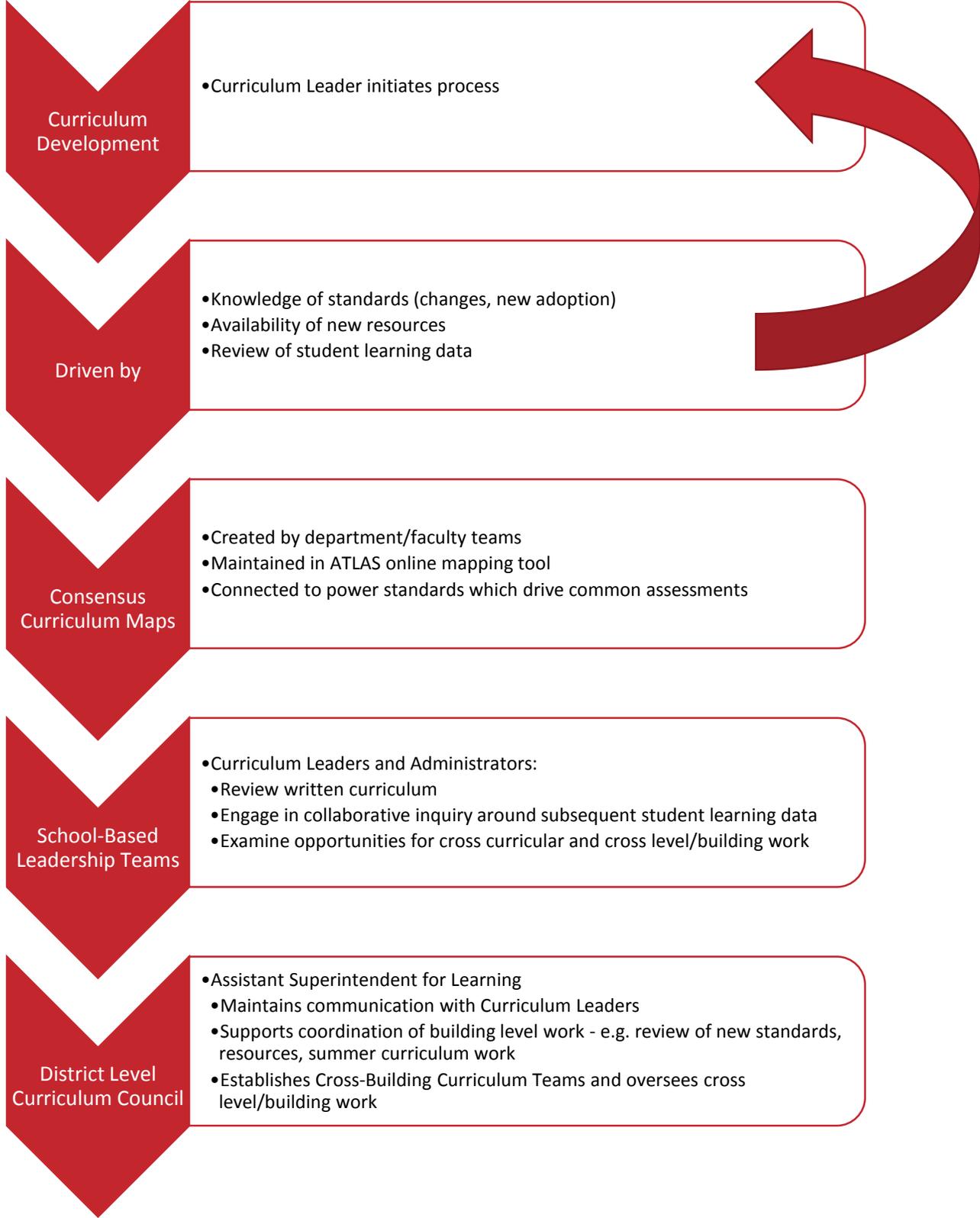
What will we do if they (students) don't know, understand, or are not able to do?

What we will do if they (students) already know, understand, and are able to do?

Focus the last component of the process and call for ongoing conversations, review of practice, lesson study and identification of resources. Providing students with assured curriculum experiences requires a careful review of a variety of instructional resources combined with a solid knowledge of research-based instructional strategies. The use of the term “instructional resources” is deliberately intended to expand 20th century alignment between curricular teaching objectives and textbooks to a full array of 21st century learning materials. New teaching and learning tools – especially those related to instructional technologies help us to differentiate and personalize learning more easily. Teachers must consider learning styles that match 21st century students just as they examine new standards, trends, and discoveries in their subject areas. Collaborative study of best practices and examination of resources ensures that students have access to all the materials and tools that promote deep learning.

Curriculum Development Process

Figure 1



Curriculum Leaders

To drive the response to our PLC questions Somers relies upon the leadership of our district's curriculum leaders. Curriculum area leaders along with grade and team leaders work in PLCs to pursue the responses to our PLC questions. They work through the processes of curriculum mapping, assessment development and data analysis and collaborate with colleagues to identify effective instructional strategies and best resources to support student learning.

The role of the Curriculum Leader is key in facilitating professional learning and coordinating efforts related to the curriculum development and review process. The Curriculum Leader is responsible to the building Principal and Assistant Principal, as well as the Assistant Superintendent for Learning and works collaboratively with colleagues within and across buildings. The job entails 10 months of participation as well as attendance at the Summer Curriculum Leaders Retreat (when in session).

Some of the critical aspects of the Curriculum Leaders' role is to:

- Be knowledgeable of New York State and National standards
- Maintain connection with state, local and national networks (e.g. NYSED, PNWBOCES and national curriculum organizations)
- Build an effective body of evidence related to student learning in a curriculum area. This is accomplished through the collaborative development of local assessments as well as the use of benchmark and state assessment data and a review of all of the above to ensure that curriculum and instruction is targeted to ensure student learning in relation to the critical/power standards.
- Participate and organize Data Inquiry meetings to review student learning data in the aforementioned body of evidence
- Engage PLC in periodic curriculum review and analysis
- Participate in setting building and curriculum specific goals as well as in the creation of action plans to meet set goals
- Plan, facilitate and keep records (agendas and minutes) of regularly scheduled meetings in order to
 - Promote professional conversation about current best practices and research as these relate to curriculum, assessment and response when students struggle to learn or already have achieved learning
 - Develop/revise curriculum maps and common assessments
 - Review common assessments and other student work/assessment data to inform curricular decisions and instructional practices
 - Map curriculum within our district ATLAS system

Curriculum Leaders are active members of each building's Leadership Team. They support professional learning of their colleagues through the development of shared experiences including common reading, classroom observations, review of student work and use of district resources (LEARN suite/Teachscape, coaches, etc.). Their communication with colleagues is

clear and ongoing. It invites participation of all professionals and respects shared ideas and input while helping to maintain a focus on the district vision of success for all students.

With knowledge of standards, resources and ongoing examination of student learning in relation to these, the Curriculum Leaders play an important role in identifying, purchasing and maintaining appropriate and up-to-date instructional resources.

Curriculum, Instructional Resources and Assessment Renewal Process Overview

The Somers Central School District maintains, reviews and implements a multitude of curriculum for a variety of content areas. Very often changes in state and or federal standards, enacted legislative changes, availability of instructional resources, and educational research may prompt more intensive modifications to the identified district programs. Through the use of our ATLAS online Curriculum Mapping tool our curriculum maps are living documents that reflect timely changes in standards, research and resources.

Curriculum Renewal Process

Curriculum development and enhancement is a teacher-based process ensuring K-12 coordination across all four schools (Figure 1). A key methodology applied during the renewal process is the active involvement of all teachers in mapping curriculum. In reality, all teachers deliver the identified content, skills, and assessment. Clearly, the teacher is the only educational professional who knows and can speak to the work that is transpiring in a curriculum area. The teacher delivers the curriculum and can attest to its fidelity and viability.

Each teacher is part of a teaching team, a school team and a district team – all focused on ensuring that students learn. Therefore, communication about curriculum – or “Curriculum Conversations” are held at the building level in department or grade level teams, across teams with the building leadership teams and across buildings in district curriculum meetings held throughout the year and during the summer. Heidi Hayes Jacobs calls on these groups of professionals to, “...coordinate school-based efforts to collect data for curriculum mapping; negotiate points of dispute among teachers, departments, and teams regarding content, skill, and assessment; and present the school’s point of view...”⁴

The work typically starts with Curriculum Leaders, who, with knowledge of standards, resources and student learning data bring focus to the work and help to set goals and create action plans. The Curriculum Leaders work directly with building administrators and the Assistant Superintendent for Learning. It is critical that curriculum work doesn’t happen in a vacuum and that curriculum conversations are connected across departments and buildings.

The Assistant Superintendent for Learning is part of conversations about curriculum and communicates with building administrators and teacher teams to establish priorities and action plans. Our ATLAS Curriculum Maps provide transparency and form the basis of these conversations. Curriculum Leaders and their Departments or Curriculum Teams use the maps to

⁴ Mapping the Big Picture, Heidi Hayes Jacobs

document curriculum, connect with standards, identify power standards, and articulate essential learning. The maps are also a tool for curriculum revision as they allow teachers to identify gaps or redundancies. If there is an identified need for more intense research, development, design and implementation of an area, then the appropriate task force is assembled to initiate the following components of an improvement plan.

Resource Renewal Process Methodology

It is important to establish a clear process with regard to the purchase of programs/resources to support curriculum and instruction throughout the district. This process maintains an efficient use of the district's fiscal resources and minimizes the number of major program purchases in any one school year. During the curriculum development process and once a cross-building or cross-level curriculum team has been formed, the group initiates a multi-step process. This process begins with a thorough and complete evaluation of the identified curriculum and accompanying programs/resources currently in use and provides time for teachers to carefully examine and evaluate the existing curriculum, related instructional resources, research on instructional strategies, identified assessments, alignment with all levels of standards, and the development of an effective professional development plan. The process involves teachers and ensures that the perspective from the classroom is brought forward. A phased approach – typically involving a four year implementation cycle - allows faculty and administration to focus their efforts and establish priorities.

Curriculum Renewal Process

Stage 1: Review Curriculum and Research Materials; Design and Develop Curriculum

- *Convene District/Building Curriculum Review Team and complete needs assessment
- *Engage in Mission/Vision/Values Development or Review
- *Study current Research
- *Begin or Review Curriculum Maps and identify essential learning through UbD process and attention to Standards
- *Evaluate instructional resources (create a pilot plan as needed)
- *Decide on materials and purchase plan
- *Revisit/Update/Design a student assessment plan
- *Create Professional Learning Plan

Stage 2: Implement Curriculum

- *Create common student assessments
- *Implement Professional Learning Plan
- *Communicate with all stakeholders - teachers, students, families
- *Review and update Curriculum Maps
- *Begin collection and analysis of student assessment data

Stage 3: Implement and Review Curriculum

- *Collect/Analyze common student assessment Data
- *Update Curriculum Maps
- *Continue Professional Learning
- *Identify supplemental resources/needs

Stage 4: Evaluate Effectiveness

- *Implement use of supplemental resources
- *Collect/Analyze common student assessment Data
- *Determine curriculum resource effectiveness using common assessment data
- *Update Curriculum Maps
- *Determine next steps

Curriculum Renewal Timeline

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Stage 1: Review Curriculum and Research Materials; Design and Develop Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene District/Building Curriculum Review Team and complete needs assessment • Engage in Mission/Vision/Values Development or Review • Study current Research • Begin or Review Curriculum Maps and identify essential learning through UbD process and attention to Standards • Evaluate instructional resources (create a pilot plan as needed) • Decide on materials and purchase plan • Revisit/Update/Design a student assessment plan • Create Professional Learning Plan 						
Stage 2: Implement Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create common student assessments • Implement Professional Learning Plan • Communicate with all stakeholders - teachers, students, families • Review and update Curriculum Maps • Begin collection and analysis of student assessment data 						
Stage 3: Implement and Review Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect/Analyze common student assessment Data • Update Curriculum Maps • Continue Professional Learning • Identify supplemental resources/needs 						
Stage 4: Evaluate Effectiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine effectiveness using common assessment data • Update Curriculum Maps • Continue Professional Learning • Identify supplemental resources/needs • Collect/Analyze Assessment Data • Determine next steps 						

References

Ainsworth, L., & Reeves, D. (2003). *Power Standards: Identifying the Standards that Matter the Most*. Advanced Learning Press.

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