



Curriculum Quality Rubric

A Self-Assessment Tool for Districts



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FIRST EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2017, the first edition of *Supporting Excellence: A Framework for Developing, Implementing, and Sustaining a High-Quality District Curriculum* was published and distributed to member districts of the Council of the Great City Schools. Developed through the combined efforts of Council staff, school and district academic leaders, and other experts, the framework defines the purpose and principles of a high-quality district curriculum and provides actionable recommendations for developing, implementing, and continuously improving such a curriculum to ensure that it reflects shared instructional beliefs and high expectations for all students. It also includes annotated samples and exemplars from districts around the country.

As defined in the framework, a curriculum is the central guide for teachers and all instructional personnel to indicate what is essential to teach and how deeply to teach it throughout the district so that every child has access to rigorous academic experiences and instructional support in meeting academic standards. A district curriculum is not simply a textbook or a set of materials. It is the district's guide for planning a coherent instructional experience that systematically builds student readiness for college and/or careers within and across grade levels from pre-kindergarten through high school. As such, it should effectively guide the work of all instructional staff who support and supervise teaching and student learning.

In the course of our ongoing curriculum development and implementation work with member districts, we have received repeated requests for a companion resource—a rubric districts can use to operationalize the curriculum framework and assess future curriculum development efforts. To this end, the Curriculum Quality Rubric was designed for districts to use following a careful review of the principles and guidance laid out in the original framework.

The rubric is aligned to the content and structure of the *Supporting Excellence* framework, allowing districts to individually assess the extent to which their curriculum reflects the seven key features of an effective curriculum outlined in the framework document. It provides detailed descriptions of what it looks like, in practice, to have a curriculum that **requires substantial revision**, one that is **minimally effective**, and one that is **effective** in each of these categories. Moreover, a fourth rating—**ideal**—should provide districts with a direction for ongoing improvement and progress. We encourage districts to be honest about where their curriculum falls short, and to use this tool to engage in a process of self-assessment that is both candid and constructive.

Key Feature 1 of a Strong Curriculum

A district's curriculum documents reflect the district's beliefs and vision about student learning and achievement.

References:

See *Supporting Excellence*,
Key Feature 1

Requires Substantial Revision	Minimally Effective	Effective	Ideal
<p>The district has not developed or has not effectively communicated an instructional vision or beliefs about how students learn best and what they are capable of achieving.</p> <p>It has also not communicated an expectation of effective support or instruction for diverse learners or articulated the importance of creating culturally inclusive learning environments.</p> <p>The district relies on the adopted textbook or online materials as its sole guide for teaching and learning.</p>	<p>The introduction to the curriculum references the district's instructional vision and beliefs about how students learn best and what they are capable of achieving. However, this instructional vision is not consistently reflected throughout the central document and accompanying resources.</p> <p>The district has articulated an expectation that schools should serve all students, but teachers are left without sufficient guidance or resources for supporting diverse learners or creating culturally inclusive learning environments.</p>	<p>The introduction to the curriculum directly references the district's instructional vision and beliefs about how students learn best and what they are capable of achieving. These beliefs are reflected throughout the central document and accompanying resources.</p> <p>Additionally, the district has articulated a commitment to serving all students, and the curriculum provides teachers with general guidelines and resources for supporting diverse learners—from struggling students to gifted and talented students—and for creating culturally inclusive learning environments.</p> <p>This curriculum guidance includes sample units and exemplars of student work and instructional approaches that teachers can use as templates as they develop lessons to meet the needs of all of their students.</p>	<p>The introduction to the curriculum directly references the district's instructional vision and beliefs about how students learn best and what they are capable of achieving. These beliefs are reflected throughout the central document and all accompanying resources.</p> <p>Additionally, all guidance and resources provided to teachers—including explanations of district standards, sample units, and exemplars of student work and instructional approaches—clearly reflect the district's commitment to serving a diverse student body, and inspire educators to set high expectations for all learners, from struggling students to gifted and talented students.</p> <p>The curriculum also provides explicit guidance to teachers on how to create culturally inclusive learning environments, including lessons or units that allow students to make connections to their respective communities and share diverse perspectives.</p>

Key Feature 2 of a Strong Curriculum

A district's curriculum documents are clear about what must be taught and at what depth to reflect college- and career-readiness standards for each grade level.

References:

See *Supporting Excellence*,
Key Feature 2

Requires Substantial Revision	Minimally Effective	Effective	Ideal
<p>The district curriculum provides a list of standards for each grade level, with no explanation of how to interpret these standards and no indication of the depth of knowledge students are expected to demonstrate at various grade levels.</p> <p>The curriculum may call attention to certain “power standards” for each grade, but fails to clarify whether these are the only standards teachers are expected to cover, and the consequences of omitting standards that are not designated as “power standards.”</p> <p>Teachers are not provided with exemplars of units or student work that might help them develop a common understanding of grade-level expectations for student learning.</p> <p>The curriculum provides no look-fors or guidance for classroom observations, and there is no expectation that administrators are to visit classrooms on a regular basis to ensure that grade-level standards are being met.</p>	<p>The curriculum guidance provided to teachers identifies what needs to be taught at each grade level, but does not sufficiently address the depth of knowledge students are expected to develop in these areas at various grade levels. Moreover, this guidance may not cover all standards.</p> <p>The curriculum provides teachers with some exemplars of lessons, units, and student work, but does not offer clear explanations of how the work illustrates the intent of the standards and the district's grade-level instructional expectations.</p> <p>The district provides general guidance to administrators for observing classrooms, but these visits focus more on instructional strategies than grade-level content.</p>	<p>The curriculum guidance provided to teachers clearly describes what needs to be taught—and the depth of knowledge students are expected to demonstrate—at each grade level.</p> <p>This guidance includes annotated exemplars of units and student work that illustrate the intent of the standards and the district's grade-level expectations.</p> <p>The district provides clear guidance to administrators on what to look for in classroom instruction for each unit and at each grade level they observe to ensure that grade-level standards are being met.</p>	<p>The curriculum guidance provided to teachers clearly describes what needs to be taught—and the depth of knowledge students are expected to demonstrate—at each grade level.</p> <p>This guidance includes detailed explanations and exemplars of units and student work that are clear and detailed enough to lead to a shared understanding of district grade-level expectations. In addition, more explicit guidance is provided in areas where student achievement is stagnant districtwide.</p> <p>The district provides clear guidance to administrators on what to look for in classroom instruction for each unit and at each grade level they observe to ensure that grade-level standards are being met. Moreover, shared professional development opportunities ensure that classroom observation techniques and metrics are calibrated and consistent across classrooms and school sites.</p>

Key Feature 3 of a Strong Curriculum

A curriculum builds instructional coherence within and across grade levels consistent with college- and career-readiness standards for each grade.

References:

See *Supporting Excellence*, Key Feature 3

Requires Substantial Revision	Minimally Effective	Effective	Ideal
<p>The curriculum lists district college- and career-readiness standards for each grade level.</p> <p>It does not address what was taught in the previous grade or how specific concepts, knowledge, or skills will serve as a foundation for learning in later grades.</p>	<p>The curriculum guidance provides a cursory description of how concepts, knowledge, and skills should progress within a particular grade.</p> <p>It may reference learning from previous grade levels, but there is little clarity around how specific concepts and skills lay the foundation for learning in later grade levels.</p> <p>What students learn—and the suggested instructional approaches employed—may or may not reflect what and how they have learned in previous grades.</p> <p>The curriculum guidance provides teachers with sample units and lessons, but they do not sufficiently emphasize how the units are designed to develop specific concepts or skills in a coherent or consistent manner over the course of a year.</p>	<p>The curriculum guidance clearly lays out the progression of concepts, knowledge, and skills within and across grade levels.</p> <p>This includes identifying what students have learned in the previous grade, how that learning should advance over the course of a school year, and how it connects to the next grade level.</p> <p>The curriculum guidance provided to teachers therefore includes exemplary units, lessons, and strategies to help them deliver instruction that is consistent with how and what students have learned in previous grades.</p> <p>The curriculum guidance provides support to teachers in addressing unfinished learning and gaps in students’ knowledge as they work to meet grade-level expectations.</p>	<p>The curriculum guidance clearly lays out the progression of concepts, knowledge, and skills within and across grade levels.</p> <p>This includes identifying what students have learned in previous grades, how that learning should advance over the course of a school year, and how it will serve as a foundation for learning in subsequent grade levels.</p> <p>The curriculum guidance provided to teachers therefore includes numerous exemplary units, lessons, and strategies to help them deliver instruction that is consistent with how and what students have learned in previous grades, but with increased rigor and depth consistent with college- and career-readiness standards at each ensuing level.</p> <p>The curriculum guidance alerts teachers to typical student misconceptions and provides clear guidance on how to address unfinished learning and gaps in knowledge. It also provides resources and strategies for re-engaging students and providing additional enrichment opportunities for students performing at advanced levels.</p>

Key Feature 4 of a Strong Curriculum

A curriculum explicitly articulates standards-aligned expectations for student work at different points during the school year.

References:

See *Supporting Excellence*,
Key Feature 4

Requires Substantial Revision	Minimally Effective	Effective	Ideal
<p>The curriculum does not provide any guidance to teachers or administrators on the level of proficiency students are expected to demonstrate in their classroom work and assignments—or the complexity of the texts they are expected to be reading—at different points throughout the school year in order to be on track to meet grade-level college- and career-readiness standards.</p> <p>There is no guidance or expectation that teachers or schools review student work or share their findings in any systematic way, depriving the system of an important source of real-time data on student progress and the opportunity to intervene early on when students fall behind or fail to meet grade-level standards.</p>	<p>The curriculum is not clear enough in articulating the district's expectations for the level of proficiency students are expected to demonstrate in their classroom work and assignments—or the complexity of the texts they are expected to be reading—at different points throughout the school year in order to be on track to meet grade-level college- and career-readiness standards.</p> <p>Some guidance such as performance indicators and exemplars of student work may be provided to teachers, but this guidance does not cover all standards and lacks the context and detail necessary to provide teachers with a clear illustration of various performance levels.</p>	<p>The curriculum explicitly identifies the level of proficiency students are expected to demonstrate in their classroom work, tasks, and assignments—as well as the complexity of the texts they are expected to be reading—at different points throughout the school year in order to be on track to meet grade-level college- and career-readiness standards.</p> <p>This guidance includes a set of key performance indicators aligned to district standards, as well as annotated exemplars of student work clearly illustrating various performance levels at different points during the school year.</p>	<p>The curriculum explicitly identifies the level of proficiency students are expected to demonstrate in their classroom work, tasks, and assignments—as well as the complexity of the texts they are expected to be reading—at different points throughout the school year in order to be on track to meet grade-level college- and career-readiness standards.</p> <p>This guidance includes performance indicators for each unit aligned to district standards, annotated exemplars of student work that clearly illustrate various performance levels at different points during the school year, and guidance to teachers on how to move students to the next level.</p> <p>The curriculum guidance also targets areas where students across the district have typically under-performed, providing strategies and resources for advancing proficiency in these focus areas throughout the school year.</p>

Key Feature 5 of a Strong Curriculum

A curriculum contains scaffolds or other supports that address gaps in student knowledge and the needs of ELLs and students with disabilities to ensure broad-based student attainment of grade-level standards.

References:

See *Supporting Excellence, Key Feature 5*

**A Framework for Raising Expectations and Instructional Rigor for English Language Learners*

A Framework for Re-envisioning Mathematics Instruction for English Language Learners

Common Core State Standards and Diverse Urban Students: Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Requires Substantial Revision	Minimally Effective	Effective	Ideal
<p>The curriculum does not communicate the message that Tier 1 classroom instruction is designed to serve the needs of diverse learners, nor does it provide scaffolds or supports to teachers in helping ELLs and students with disabilities access grade-level standards.</p> <p>The curriculum leaves it up to individual teachers to devise and implement instructional approaches that address gaps in knowledge and unfinished learning, and for meeting the needs of ELLs and students with disabilities, as appropriate per IDEA and 504 individual plans.</p> <p>The curriculum does not address the need to develop students' academic language or vocabulary.</p>	<p>The curriculum includes language stating that Tier 1 classroom instruction is designed to serve a diverse array of learners, and provides a list of scaffolds and other supports for the instruction of ELLs and students with disabilities.</p> <p>However, the scaffolds and instructional strategies provided are not consistently aligned to grade-level standards, and teachers are not provided with the guidance necessary to know when and how to employ (and continue to revise) various strategies in their classrooms to meet evolving student needs. There is also no guidance on when and how to gradually "fade" or remove scaffolds, as appropriate per IDEA and 504 individual plans.</p> <p>The curriculum may provide a limited set of sample activities and/or links to classroom videos, but these resources are not easily accessible to all teachers or sufficiently vetted in terms of quality and alignment to district standards.</p> <p>The district curriculum provides a list of vocabulary words by content area.</p>	<p>The curriculum clearly articulates how Tier 1 classroom instruction should serve a diverse array of learners, and provides scaffolds and other supports for addressing gaps in student knowledge and for helping ELLs and students with disabilities access grade-level standards.</p> <p>The curriculum guidance is explicit in the purpose of these scaffolds, when and how to employ (and continue to revise) them to meet evolving student needs, and when and how to gradually "fade" or remove them, as appropriate per IDEA and 504 individual plans.</p> <p>In addition, the curriculum provides examples of activities and/or links to videos of classroom techniques to support all learners.</p> <p>The district curriculum provides guidance on developing academic language and vocabulary to ensure that all students are equipped to access grade-level standards.</p>	<p>The curriculum clearly articulates how Tier 1 classroom instruction should serve a diverse array of learners, and provides scaffolds and other supports for addressing gaps in student knowledge and for helping ELLs and students with disabilities access grade-level standards.</p> <p>All instructional materials and scaffolds are carefully vetted and reflect an understanding of the specialized educational needs of ELLs and students with disabilities. The curriculum guidance is explicit in the purpose of these scaffolds, when and how to employ (and continue to revise) them to meet evolving student needs, and when and how to gradually "fade" or remove them, as appropriate per IDEA and 504 individual plans.</p> <p>In addition, the curriculum provides annotated examples of activities and links to videos of classroom techniques to support all learners.</p> <p>The district curriculum provides explicit guidance on developing academic language and vocabulary across content areas, including the two main elements of Focused Language Study (FLS) and Discipline-specific and Academic Language Expansion (DALE), to ensure that all students are equipped to access grade-level standards.*</p>

Key Feature 6 of a Strong Curriculum

A curriculum includes written links to adopted textbooks or computer-based products to indicate where the materials are high quality, where gaps exist, and how to fill them to meet district expectations.

References:

See *Supporting Excellence*, Key Feature 6

Requires Substantial Revision	Minimally Effective	Effective	Ideal
<p>The district curriculum simply lists adopted textbooks and online materials without indicating which materials correspond to various standards, units, or lessons.</p> <p>The curriculum does not alert teachers to areas where the materials are weak, unclear, or misaligned to district grade-level standards or instructional approaches.</p>	<p>The curriculum references adopted textbooks, videos, or computer-based products that correspond to each standard, unit or lesson, but does not provide links, page numbers, or annotations.</p> <p>The curriculum occasionally identifies areas where the materials are weak, unclear, or misaligned to district grade-level standards, but does not provide teachers with guidance on how to address these gaps.</p>	<p>The curriculum provides written links or page-number references to—and some annotations for—adopted textbooks, videos, or computer-based products that correspond to each standard, unit, or lesson.</p> <p>The curriculum identifies where the materials are weak, unclear, or misaligned to district grade-level standards or instructional approaches.</p> <p>In order to address these gaps, curriculum guidance refers teachers to supplementary instructional resources or strategies to ensure that classroom instruction meets district expectations.</p>	<p>The curriculum provides written links, page-number references, and annotations for adopted textbooks, videos or computer-based products that correspond to each standard, unit, or lesson.</p> <p>The curriculum identifies where the materials are weak, unclear, or misaligned to district grade-level standards or instructional approaches.</p> <p>In order to address these gaps, the curriculum guidance refers teachers to supplementary instructional resources or strategies to ensure that classroom instruction meets district expectations.</p> <p>Teachers are also provided with guidance on how to address gaps in complexity found in readings, tasks, and assignments. These revisions are used to elevate the rigor of classroom instruction.</p>

Key Feature 7 of a Strong Curriculum

A curriculum provides suggestions for the best ways to measure whether students have met specific learning expectations.

References:

See *Supporting Excellence, Key Feature 7*

Requires Substantial Revision	Minimally Effective	Effective	Ideal
<p>The district does not clearly identify targets for student learning, nor does it provide any guidance to teachers via the curriculum on how to measure student achievement levels or progress.</p> <p>Teachers are generally left to devise their own approaches to determining whether students are meeting or on track to meet grade-level standards, which may introduce high variability across schools and classrooms.</p>	<p>The district sets goals for student learning by grade level and throughout the school year. However, the curriculum provides only minimal guidance to teachers in determining whether students have met or are on track to meet these goals.</p> <p>This guidance may include a reference list of various assessment tools, but lacks the clarity or detail necessary to help teachers know when and how to employ them to effectively gauge student progress throughout the year.</p> <p>The district curriculum provides samples of student work products, but without annotations they may leave teachers with an incomplete or inconsistent understanding of the quality of work the district expects from students and the rigor of tasks that should be assigned to promote that work.</p>	<p>The district sets clear and measurable goals for student learning by grade level and throughout the school year.</p> <p>To help teachers determine whether students have met—or on track to meet—these grade-level expectations, the curriculum provides tools and techniques for assessing student progress in terms of their academic language development; ability to access complex text; writing, listening, and speaking skills; their mastery of key concepts, facts, and procedures; and their use of logic and skills to answer questions and solve problems.</p> <p>The district curriculum also provides annotated samples of student work products that illustrate the quality of work the district expects from students and the rigor of tasks that should be assigned to promote that work.</p>	<p>The district sets clear and measurable goals for student learning by grade level and throughout the school year.</p> <p>To help teachers determine whether students have met—or on track to meet—these grade-level expectations, the curriculum provides detailed guidance and a diverse set of vetted assessment techniques and tools such as customized performance tasks and rubrics to assess student progress in terms of their academic language development; ability to access complex text; writing, listening, and speaking skills; their mastery of key concepts, facts, and procedures; and their use of logic and skills to answer questions and solve problems.</p> <p>The curriculum also provides annotated samples of student work products and performance indicators that illustrate the quality of work the district expects from students and the rigor of tasks that should be assigned to promote that work.</p>

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