



CALL TO ACTION

Stephanie Hirsh

Let's embrace what high-quality curriculum can do for all students

I remember how excited I was to begin my teaching career. My principal handed me my keys, my textbook teacher's edition, and the district curriculum guide. I spent hours imagining how I would transform my classroom into an amazing learning space.

I assumed there would be guidance to ensure my success, but that wasn't the case. Instead, curriculum meetings focused on how to ensure the chapters were sufficiently covered by the end of the year. I turned to my department chair for guidance. She offered to observe and give me feedback. After one observation, she confided that I was the first teacher to ask for feedback and she wasn't prepared to help me. I was on my own.

Today, I imagine all the critical skills for life I never taught my students: missed opportunities to reinforce reading and evaluating texts, discerning points of view, making a persuasive argument, and more. But how was I to know without the colleagues and materials to guide me in developing my lessons?

PIVOT TO CURRICULUM

Learning Forward's pivot to high-quality curriculum and team-based professional learning, as outlined in our recent report, *High-Quality Curriculum and Team-Based Professional Learning: A Perfect Partnership for Equity*, is a direct effort to address that need for guidance.

Why focus on curriculum? Because we have never before been deliberate in



identifying instructional materials that clearly align with standards we expect students to master. Nor have we been intentional in aligning our PLC cycles to deep study and discussion of what is in the materials before we start building lessons and assessments for students.

Also because we have never before had such compelling evidence of the power of these kinds of materials in the hands of teachers. If we are truly committed to equity, we must embrace those things that make the biggest difference for students who need the most support.

And because we have long heard that the biggest mistake associated with adoption of new standards was lack of support for teachers and coaches — and, as a result, the misconception that this is just a slight change in what you already do.

TEACHERS WHO GET IT

What does it mean when we say that teachers recognize the importance of a curriculum and planning quality lessons with colleagues? These teachers:

- Know deeply the standards and prerequisite skills students are

required to master.

- Are skilled at the pedagogical content strategies essential to ensuring all students can access the curriculum.
- Are confident in their ability to plan and sequence lessons that lead to student mastery of standards.
- Share responsibility for student success.
- Use a PLC process that focuses them where their students struggle with standards and how their instructional materials are designed to address it.
- Evaluate instructional materials through a personalized learning lens that considers Universal Design for Learning, student culture, and specific learning needs.
- Know how to select instructional materials that align to standards and translate them into powerful lessons and assessments that facilitate high levels of learning.

What would you add to this list? Does this match what you see in your school or district? Read our report at www.learningforward.org/perfectpartnership as a starting point for further conversation.

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