THE CENTER ON
**STANDARDS &
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CSAI Update

Standards-Based Instruction and the Role of Standards in Improved Student Outcomes

When considering standards and standards-based instruction, the key themes that consistently emerge are transparency and consistency. Transparency and consistency must be present in all elements of the teaching and learning process, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, and reporting. For example, with regard to curriculum, standards-based instruction requires educators to articulate clear learning goals (standards) that identify what students should learn and what they should be able to do (effective standards typically include both). Once these standards are then shared with stakeholders, including students, families, teachers, school leaders, and community members. This example promotes transparency (articulating clear standards and sharing them with stakeholders) and consistency (sharing the same standards across all stakeholders).

Standards

To ensure that all students are ready for success after high school, it is important that academic standards establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do, from kindergarten through 12th grade. Academic standards should focus on developing the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that students will need in order to be successful. Standards also provide a way for teachers to measure student progress throughout the school year and ensure that students are on a pathway to success in their academic careers. In practice, this measured pathway means that academic standards specify the scope and sequence of the content that students are expected to learn each year. Academic standards are <u>not</u> a curriculum. Local communities and educators choose their own curricula, which are detailed plans for day-to-day teaching. In other words, academic standards are <u>what</u> students need to know and be able to do, and a curriculum is <u>how</u> students will learn it.

States have moved toward adopting new, rigorous content standards as part of an effort to raise academic expectations for students.[2] An examination of

> "Standards hold the greatest hope for significantly improving student achievement. Every other policy mandate we've tried hasn't done so."
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> —Robert J. Marzano[1]

[1] Scherer, M. (2001). How and why standards can improve student achievement: A conversation with Robert J. Marzano. *Making Standards Work, 59*(1), 14–18. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept01/vol59/num01/How-and-Why-Standards-Can-Improve-Student-Achievement@-A-Conversation-with-Robert-J.-Marzano.aspx.

[2] Phillips, G., & Garcia, A. N. (2015). *Aiming high: Setting performance standards for student success*. Education Policy Center, American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Aiming-High-Setting-Performance-Standards-for-Student-Success-Feb-2015.pdf.

education content standards in the top-performing nations reveals that these standards share three characteristics: focus, rigor, and coherence.[3] *Focus* in education standards requires covering fewer topics at each grade level but going into greater depth on each covered topics. *Rigor* requires introducing high-level topics at an early grade level. *Coherence* requires laying out an orderly progression of standards rather than repeating topics across grades.[4] Prior to 2008, these characteristics were not often included in state education content standards throughout the United States. States' movement toward new standards has not been without controversy, but policymakers and stakeholders have consistently agreed that states need rigorous College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS). The increased expectations of these rigorous content standards are expected to improve student achievement.

Importance of High-Quality Standards

High-quality academic standards provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge that are necessary to succeed in college, careers, and life upon graduation from high school. Such standards are aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers. These standards promote equity by ensuring that all students are well prepared to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad. High-quality standards impact a range of tools and policies, including:

♦   Development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials;

♦   Development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance annually and to provide teachers with specific feedback to help ensure that students are on a pathway to success; and

♦   Development of tools and other supports to help educators and schools ensure that all students can learn the standards.

Standards-Based Instruction

Instructionally, educators implementing standards-based instruction must devise an approach that enables all students to achieve the standards. For assessments, standards-based educators must identify what evidence best reflects students' achievement of those standards, and must design measures that best capture that evidence. Standards-based instruction requires educators to use grading and reporting strategies that meaningfully communicate students' achievement of those standards. Standards-based instruction requires both transparency and consistency in each of previously mentioned areas (instruction, assessment, grading, and reporting): what is taught, how it is taught in order to meet all students' needs, how student learning is evaluated, and how students' learning progress is reported.

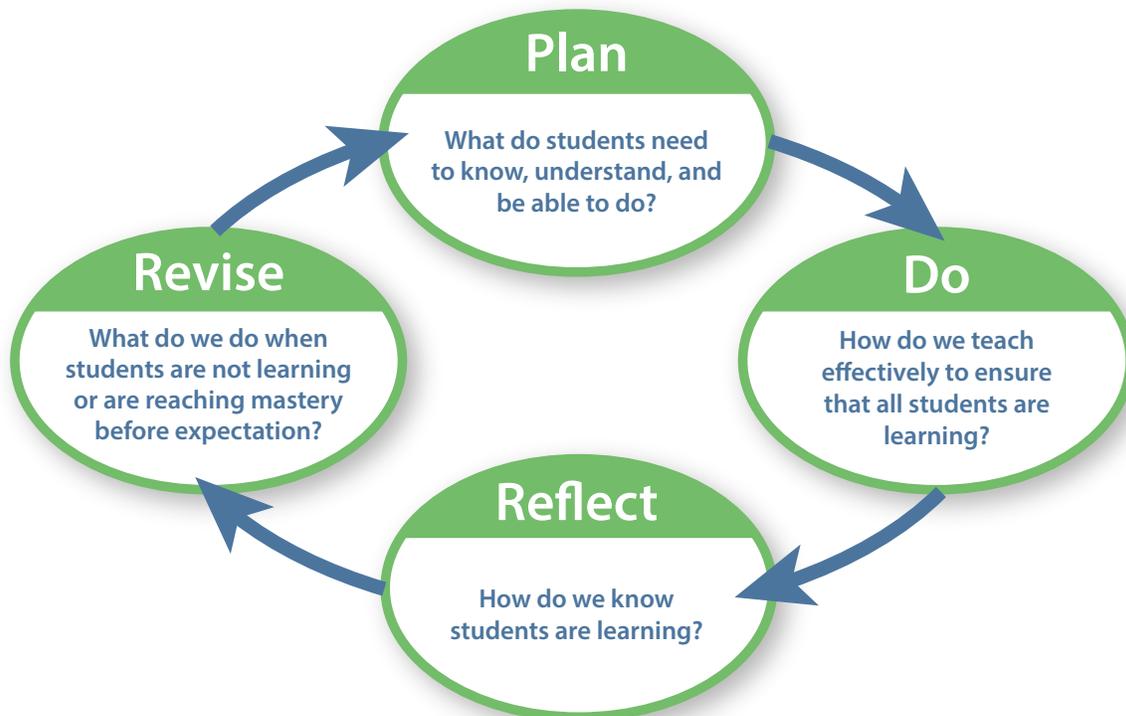## Standards-Based Instructional Cycle

Another way to think about standards-based instruction is as an ongoing teaching-and-learning cycle that ensures that all students learn and master standards and the standards' associated concepts and skills. In this continuous process of teaching and learning, student achievement is frequently measured, through a variety of formats and assessment practices, and students are provided with multiple opportunities to learn until they reach mastery. This teaching-and-learning cycle remains continuous regardless of content area, course, level, or revisions in standards. Comprehensive standards-based instruction involves not only knowing state and district standards; posting standards,

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[3] Ibid.

[4] National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, & Achieve, Inc. (2008). *Benchmarking for success: Ensuring U.S. students receive a world-class education*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association.
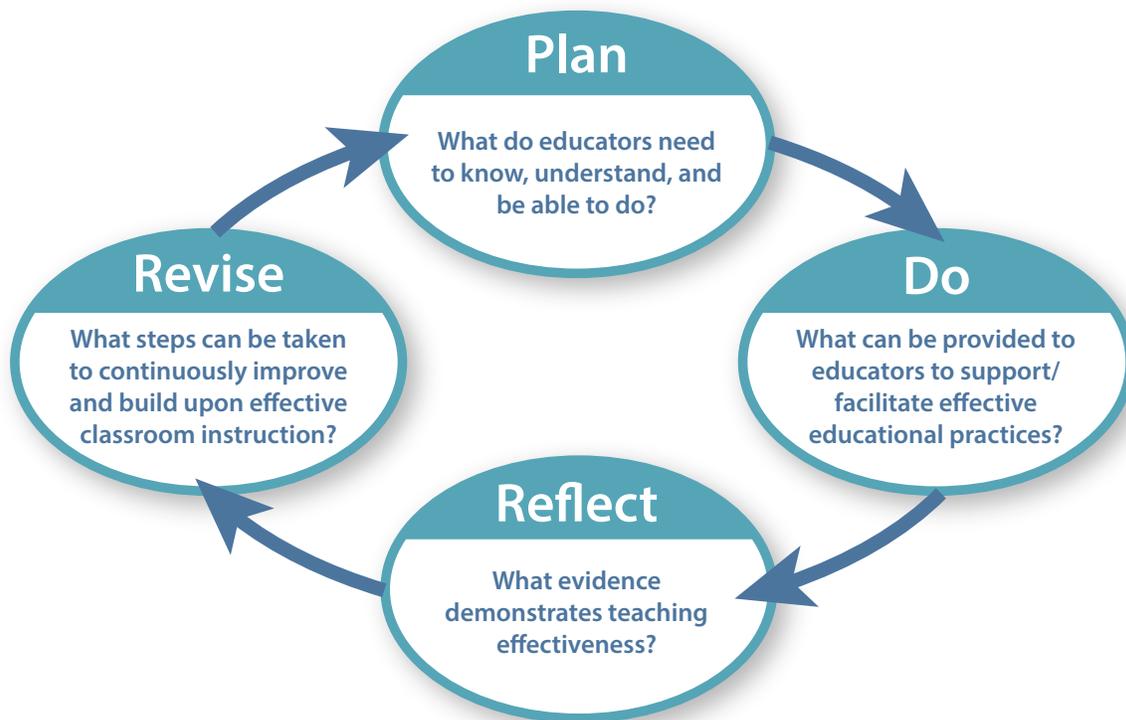
learning goals, or objectives in a classroom; referencing standards in lessons or units; "covering" a curriculum; or using a textbook that purports to align with state standards. It also requires consistently teaching with activities, lessons, and units that are specifically designed to ensure that every child learns the grade-level expectations that lead to mastery of the standards. Standards-based teaching, in every classroom, every day, through a continuous teaching-and-learning cycle, ensures that students learn and master all of the standards and associated concepts and skills.

Throughout every district, standards-based teaching requires focus on and fidelity to a continuous cycle of teaching and learning, along with challenging work, persistence, and strategic use of time and resources. Put in simple terms, a standards-based teaching-and-learning cycle continually answers four critical questions:[5]

Plan
What do students need to know, understand, and be able to do?

Do
How do we teach effectively to ensure that all students are learning?

Reflect
How do we know students are learning?

Revise
What do we do when students are not learning or are reaching mastery before expectation?

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[5] DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

A parallel cycle at the state and district levels is needed to support teachers in their standards-based instruction:

Plan
What do educators need to know, understand, and be able to do?

Do
What can be provided to educators to support/ facilitate effective educational practices?

Reflect
What evidence demonstrates teaching effectiveness?

Revise
What steps can be taken to continuously improve and build upon effective classroom instruction?

Implementation

Certain fundamental systemic conditions must be in place within districts and schools in order for the approach described in this brief to be effectively delivered in all classrooms. The following list of conditions does not describe all of the organizational systems that are needed to support effective teaching and learning practices, but does highlight several critical conditions that must be in place in order to reach that goal.

♦ Leadership at each level (state education agency, local education agency, school) should be focused, well-informed, and visionary. These individuals should be creative and motivated, and should generate the conditions that are needed to create highly motivated students, develop productive relationships, and engage students in learning for meaningful purposes.

♦ Curriculum must be delivered through evidence-based instructional strategies, with tools and resources made available to every teacher, along with ongoing, high-quality professional development.

♦ Support and coaching must be provided for all instructional staff to continually improve their individual performance.

♦ Leaders must continually monitor the professional practices of staff as they plan, collaborate, teach, assess, and adjust classroom instruction.

♦ Teacher and administrator evaluation systems must be well designed and must support implementation of best practices, including accountability of all staff, that are known to have the greatest effect on student learning.

♦ State and local education agencies and schools need creative and strategic allocation of resources, clear improvement goals and action plans, and effective methods to meaningfully engage families and the community.

Organizing an entire educational system around high student achievement requires a thoughtful, systemic approach to teaching and learning, in which standards, curriculum, assessment, professional practices, and professional development are carefully designed and mutually reinforcing. It requires dedicated and stable leadership at each level of the system, and that an implementation plan be established and followed. Such a systemic approach to instruction requires concerted, carefully orchestrated activity across the system. Successful implementation of standards-based instruction requires that the ideas of transparency and consistency are kept in mind while adapting instructional practices to the unique and complicated contextual characteristics of different students, classrooms, and schools. Implementation efforts succeed when leaders adapt and apply proven strategies and methodologies to their own varied and diverse contexts and settings.

Resources & State Examples

Standards

- ♦ The Standards Review and Revision Toolkit includes information, examples, and associated resources to help state education agencies execute a research- and best practices–based standards review and revision process.

- ♦ The purpose of Understanding Proficiency is to leverage the Smarter Balanced performance tasks to support professional development that can help operationalize CCRS to inform and enhance instruction for all students.

- ♦ The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning examines how college- and career-readiness standards are implemented, if they improve student learning, and what instructional tools measure and support their implementation.

- ♦ This article by ASCD outlines seven reasons to adopt standards-based grading.

- ♦ Achieve has an extensive collection of resources related to standards.

- ♦ This Achieve report may be particularly helpful for states who are moving away from the Common Core State Standards and implementing state-developed content standards, as it provides considerations for standards that reflect college and career knowledge and skills. The report's content is also helpful for understanding the features of other states' English language arts standards and how these standards compare to one another.

Standards-Based Instruction

- ♦ The four collections featured in this spotlight are designed to support the implementation of standards-based instruction and assessment. Each collection focuses on distinct but complementary considerations that are essential in supporting CCRS instruction and assessment practices.

- ♦ Colorado has created The Standards-Based Teaching/Learning Cycle to guide all educators who deliver and support teaching and learning to understand the context of standards-based education in Colorado and to see themselves as part of an effective, standards-based system.

- ♦ CSAI has developed a series of resources to assist teachers and those who support teachers to plan teaching and learning of CCRS for all students.

- ♦ Massachusetts has created the Characteristics of Standards-based Teaching and Learning: Continuum of Practice framework, which provides an overview of seventeen characteristics of standards-based practice, along with related indicators to suggest the level at which the practice is implemented.

- ♦ Kentucky provides a robust website of resources related to standards-based instruction.

Standards Implementation

♦ The Standards Implementation Framework is a compilation of ideas and lessons learned from a variety of sources, most recently the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards implementation plans. The framework provides a general model for implementing new or revised content standards.

♦ This collection contains resources that are useful for implementing CCRS, focusing on policies, planning, guidance, and evaluation.

♦ In its "Communications 101" collection, CSAI has reviewed a large number of resources to help states, school districts, and schools communicate education reforms and avert potential problems.

♦ This collection contains resources developed for use in the measurement of standards implementation across state and local education agencies. Resources include tools, surveys, and rubrics, and the reports resulting from those resources are used to track and evaluate the implementation of standards.