

PRESSURES TO CHEAT. In high-stakes conditions, teachers and principals invest concerted effort in helping their students do well on the tests. In nearly every school and classroom, teachers stop their regular instruction for weeks or more to help students prepare for the test. These preparations can be as practical as practicing how-to-bubble in answers to multiple-choice questions

TABLE 11.10

Criteria for High-Stakes Testing Practices

The American Education Research Association's (AERA) *Public Policy Statement on High-Stakes Testing in PreK–12 Education*, adopted in July 2000, provides twelve criteria, based on solid research, that state education leaders, local school leaders, parents, and others can use to assess the assessments. AERA states that every high-stakes testing program should ensure:

- Protection against high-stakes decisions based on a single test
- Adequate resources and opportunity to learn
- Validation for each separate intended use
- Full disclosure of likely negative consequences of high-stakes testing programs
- Alignment between the test and the curriculum
- Validity of passing scores and achievement levels
- Opportunities for meaningful remediation for examinees who fail high-stakes tests
- Appropriate attention to language differences among examinees
- Appropriate attention to students with disabilities
- Careful adherence to explicit rules for determining which students are to be tested
- Sufficient reliability for each intended use
- Ongoing evaluation of intended and unintended effects of high-stakes testing.

For more information, visit AERA's website at www.aera.net.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

DOES PREPPING FOR HIGH-STAKES TESTS INTERFERE WITH TEACHING?

States require students to pass a test in order to graduate or to receive a diploma. Some states offer different types of diplomas based on how well a student performs on a test. This type of testing is called high-stakes testing and it poses many questions. What does it mean to be “educated” in a high-stakes testing environment? How reasonable is it to be making gate-keeping decisions based on a single test? What student and teacher behaviors do high-stakes testing encourage? The following debate address these types of questions.

YES

Nancy Buell teaches fourth grade at the Lincoln School in Brookline, Massachusetts. She has taught for thirty-two years and serves on the state Board of Education's Advisory Council for Mathematics and Science.

As I watch my students debate how much taller fourth graders are than first graders, I am struck by their intuitive use of significant features of the data. This is an example:

Lee: Fourth graders are 10 inches taller because the tallest fourth grader is 64 inches and the tallest first grader is 54 inches.

Tamara: A first grader is about 5 inches shorter. I found the middle height for each and just subtracted. The middle for the fourth graders is 57 inches and the middle for the first graders is between 51 inches and 52 inches.

Dana: 5 inches or 4 inches, because the most common height for first graders is 53 inches and the most common height for fourth graders is 58 inches or 57 inches.

These students are exploring ideas involving maximum, median, and mode. They are considering what features to use to tell what is typical of the two groups so they can be compared. Students support their ideas with information in the data itself. They are developing

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ways to think about data that will lead to a deep understanding of more formal statistics.

The rich mathematical discussions in my class are an outgrowth of my participation in professional development that focused on inquiry-based teaching and the big ideas we should be teaching.

But since high-stakes testing arrived, professional development meetings often focus on how to improve test scores, not on how to improve learning.

Teaching that concentrates on improving test scores is very limited—by the nature of both testing and teaching. Testing involves sampling student knowledge. It is fragmented and only examines learning outcomes. It seldom looks at how well a student understands complex ideas.

A typical test item might give students a set of data and ask for the median. Students would not be asked to select the appropriate statistic to address a question and justify their choice. Yet knowing how to find the median, without knowing when to use it, is useless, except on tests.

If we teach facts and procedures likely to be on the test, without the deeper understanding behind them, we shortchange our students. We must not limit what we teach to what will be tested.

Many teachers feel pressured to choose teaching techniques that help with testing more than learning. They're urged to spend more time on information that mimics test items.

Students should, of course, know how to answer multiple choice, short answer, and open response questions, but teaching these test-taking skills should not be confused with teaching a subject. Some teachers spend a day a week using test-like items, not to sample what children know, but to try to teach the content.

Teaching should build on what students already know and help them develop a rich web of interconnected ideas. Real learning involves inquiry, hypothesis testing, exploration, and reflection.

Teaching to the test will not help my students think about how to use features of data sets to answer real questions. Teaching to the test is not teaching.

NO

Charlotte Crawford teaches fourth grade at Coteau-Bayou Blue School in Houma, Louisiana. A twenty-seven-year teaching veteran, she helped set the cut scores for her state's high-stakes fourth-grade test and now serves on a state panel for staff development.

Preparing students to take high-stakes tests does not interfere with teaching. It enhances teaching. When used properly, high-stakes tests can focus attention on weaknesses in the curriculum and in the

teaching of it, as well as furnish an assessment of student progress. Once identified, student weak areas can be strengthened.

When the new high-stakes tests and revised curriculum were introduced in Louisiana, along with new accountability standards, many teachers were bewildered at the prospect of being held accountable for teaching a new curriculum without being told how to teach it.

Yet many of these teachers were also open to the new ideas and began working to find ways to implement them. They were aided by funding from the state for additional reading materials and in-service training.

Teachers often feel overwhelmed by the changes involved in our state's rigorous new standards, but many Louisiana educators are beginning to take ownership of their new curriculum. They're growing confident when making scope and sequence decisions. They're consistently reevaluating what they have taught, and how they have taught it, so they can do better next time.

These educators are revamping their classroom activities and their teacher-made tests to match them more closely to the format and tone of the state-mandated tests.

Helping students become familiar with the state-mandated test formats, by using them in the classroom, prevents having to spend valuable class time to "practice" for the high-stakes tests.

Learners, meanwhile, are reaping the benefits of having teachers who are determined that their students will be as prepared as possible to relate the skills they learn in school to real-life situations. They're becoming lifelong learners, besides performing well on standardized tests.

Some educators complain that they must "teach to the test."

But others consider this to be a weak objection since the state tests focus on information and skills students are expected to know at certain points in their schooling.

These educators say the curriculum objectives covered by the state tests should be taught before the tests are given, with the remaining objectives covered afterwards. This is a very workable arrangement when high-stakes tests are given early in the spring.

To be sure, some Louisiana educators are still resisting the changes that come with the state tests.

But most realize this is an idea whose time has come.

In 1998, my school helped pilot the fourth-grade language arts test. I was nervous about how my students would fare. When they finished, I asked for reactions.

Much to my surprise, students calmly informed me that the state test was "kind of hard, kind of easy, kind of fun."

That day, my students unwittingly reassured me that learners who are prepared for high-stakes tests need not fear them.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THIS ISSUE?

and reviewing what has been taught during the year. The problem arises when teachers—and in some cases principals—help their students cheat. Cheating ranges from teachers telling students how to answer specific test items to teachers, principals, and school district administrators actually changing students' responses on individual tests as happened several years ago in Atlanta, Georgia. In other instances, schools have encouraged some students, such as those with learning disabilities, to stay at home on the day of testing. The pressure on students to do well can lead to their engaging in cheating. For example, frequently students are discovered seeking outside "help" by using their cell phones to photograph and transmit test items.



Source: Westend61 Premium/Shutterstock

The pressure to do well on high-stakes tests along with the ready access to technology can lead to efforts to cheat.

TEACHING TO THE TEST. Any single test is bound to sample a very limited part of what students learn. Also, state tests might have little overlap with the various sets of content standards and the emphasis in district curriculum materials. Time spent on preparing for high-stakes tests reduces the time available to teach related material and other subjects, such as the performing arts, that are not being tested or for which the stakes are not as high. Teaching to the test also often means that the development of critical thinking and higher order thinking skills is neglected. Still, if the entire district curriculum is aligned with state standards, then those students whose instruction covers more of the standards should perform better on the tests.

A related issue has to do with balancing the time teachers spend on topics that are likely to be on the test versus instructional time spent on the rest of the curriculum. About two-thirds of teachers indicate that their instruction is too focused on content that will be tested to the detriment of covering other material. An immediate impact from implementation of NCLB was pressure on teachers to teach to the test. One early survey of the impact of NCLB (Olson, 2001) found almost 80 percent of teachers reporting that they were teaching test-taking skills to students. Two experienced teachers provided their views about teaching to the test in the "Differing Perspectives" feature.

Other data refute the claim that teachers spend less time teaching content than in the past at least at the elementary school level. Lorin W. Anderson at the University of South Carolina reviewed this claim by teachers by comparing their concerns with conditions in the 1970s and 1980s before testing became so prevalent. He found that elementary school teachers have always spent much more time teaching English language arts than any other subject. The amount of time teaching mathematics has remained constant; attention to science and social studies has always been limited (Anderson, 2009). What was not reported by Anderson was the content covered and whether teaching to the test increased.

ONESIZEFITSALL. Another critical issue related to the heavy focus on testing is the assumption that the same test is appropriate for all students, schools, and states. Historically, heavy emphasis has been placed on the importance of addressing individual differences and emphasizing that all students do not develop at the same rate. Now policy makers are mandating that one test be given to all students at a certain grade level at a specified time—in other words, "onesizefitsall." No matter how unique individuals might be, all are to take the same relatively narrow test, and major decisions about individual students and/or schools are based on the test results. Students who are economically advantaged in suburban schools take the same test that low-income urban students take. This practice undermines the credibility of the test, and its results clearly disadvantage some students and schools.

INCREASED TEACHER BURDEN. As exciting and important as the new approaches to assessment are, one of the downsides is the increased work for teachers. Developing more authentic test tasks takes more time than constructing multiple-choice and true/false test items. Deriving scoring devices for authentic tasks is added work too. Holistic scoring entails first developing a scoring rubric and then examining each student's response in sufficient detail to determine a total score.

The load on teachers becomes even heavier in secondary schools because each teacher has contact with more students. One of the important solutions to the risk of an increased burden is for teachers within a school or school district to collaborate in the development of assessment tasks. There also is national sharing of assessment items through discipline-based professional associations and various chat rooms on the Web. A related key for individual teachers is to keep in mind that many of the traditional activities that teachers have been doing to assess student learning, such as noting their performance in laboratories and in the field, have become more legitimate with the move to authentic assessment.

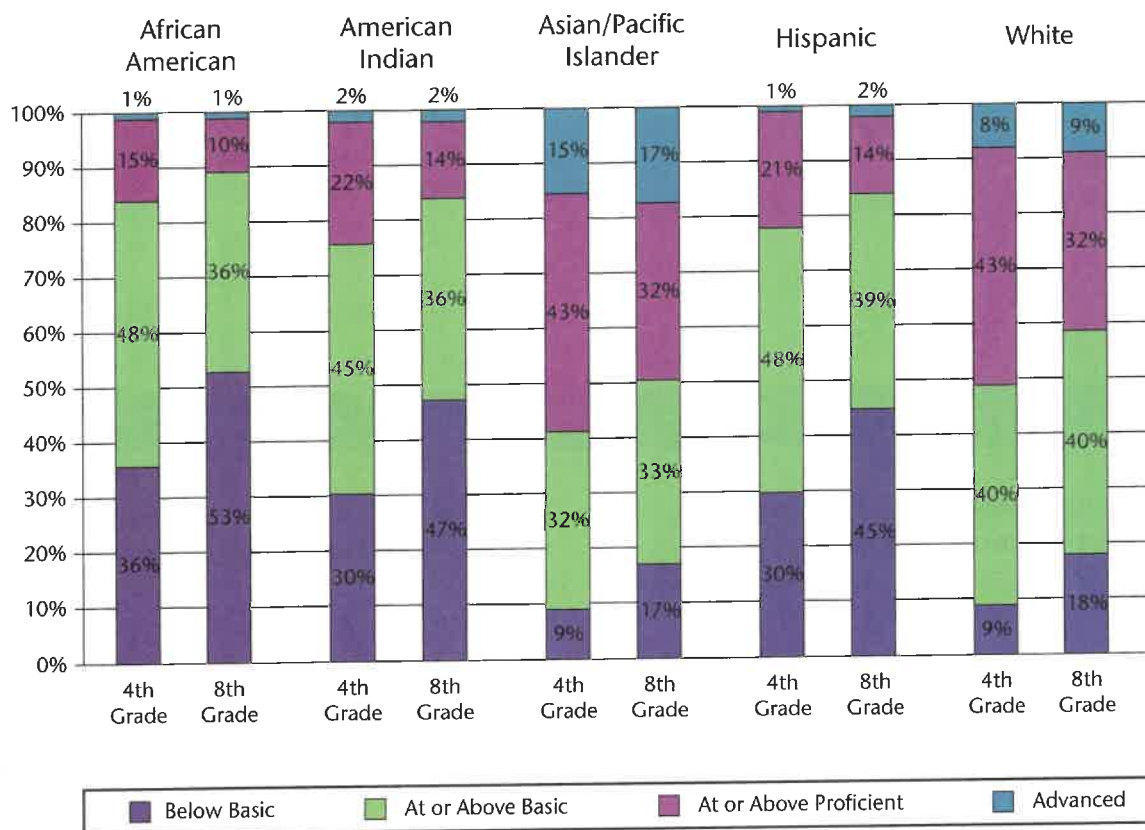
EQUITY WITHIN ACCOUNTABILITY. One positive outcome of NCLB, which has continued with ESSA, is the mandate to disaggregate test data. Schools, districts, and states can no longer ignore the various subgroups in schools. Schools, teachers, districts, and states have to break out the performance of students by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, first language, disability, migrant status, and gender. In fact, performance by students from each of these groups must be reported on school and district annual report cards. Thus, a single assessment—the state content test—is for forcing teachers' and school administrators responsible to be accountable for helping all students learn. Meeting this goal is more difficult in some settings than others, especially when resources are limited or nonexistent for providing students with the facilities and support necessary to promote learning at a high level and providing teachers the necessary professional development. Nevertheless, it is a goal worth achieving.

A continuing point of criticism about the use of standardized tests is that they do not address or accommodate the diversity of students in today's classrooms. Each student brings a unique set of background experiences, prior knowledge, and cultural perspectives to learning. Asking all students to show what they know on a narrow standardized test is a very real problem.

The gap between the test scores of white students and most students of color remains wide as does the gap between students from low-income and high-income families. NAEP data on achievement levels for mathematics show an achievement gap between white and African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students of more than 21 percentage points at the fourth grade and more than 27 percentage points by the eighth grade (see Figure 11.4). The gap grows even wider by the twelfth grade. Ironically, many researchers have found that state tests are much better determiners of the family's socioeconomic level or parents' education than of a student's academic ability. Students who perform at low levels on these tests are disproportionately from low-income families.

Much of the push for the standards movement has come from those advocating that the size of the achievement gap be reduced. One element of this important stance is consideration of the type of assessments being used. For example, researchers are finding that multiple assessments demonstrate that students from different cultural groups perform at higher levels on different assessments. Some students who do poorly on standardized tests effectively demonstrate their knowledge and skills on other assessments based on their interests or real-life settings. The teacher's assessment of prior knowledge and development of instruction with those data in mind are particularly helpful in improving the academic achievement of low-income students and students of color (Shepard et al., 2007).

OPTING OUT. One last point is that in recent years, there has been a groundswell of concern about the pressures and consequences of the heavy focus on testing. For example, in 2015, parents in several states, including New York, Colorado and California, organized boycotts. They refused to have their children participate in the state testing. They advocate for having less standardized testing and increasing the use of multiple assessments. Principals and teachers have been placed in a difficult position. Most of them appreciate the concern about too much testing, but at the same time their school will be reviewed and ranked based on the test results. If too few students take the tests, then the school's classification and status can be negatively affected.

FIGURE 11.4 Performance on NAEP Mathematics Test by Race and Ethnicity

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress of the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.



CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 11.3

Complete Check Your Understanding 11.3 to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

SUMMARY

EDUCATION STANDARDS

- The focus of standards today is on what students know and are able to do.
- Most states have adopted and are now engaged in implementing the common core standards (CCS), or a related statement of standards.

ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING

- Once the standards of learning have been set, teachers, as well as curriculum developers and policy makers, want to know how well students are doing.
- Assessing is more than testing. It entails developing and using good measures along with making interpretations

and judgments about what has been accomplished and what needs to be done next.

- Formative evaluation for teachers and students means using data about student learning to plan for and adjust instruction and to focus student efforts.
- Summative evaluation entails making concluding decisions about whether or not students have learned the standard.
- Using multiple measures to make judgments about the amount of student learning is very important when making high-stakes decisions.
- The Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) and Teacher Work Sample (TWS) are examples of authentic performance assessments that allow teacher candidates

to demonstrate their ability to develop and implement instruction that is based on effective assessments.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- The pressures on states, school districts, schools, and teachers have never been higher. Everyone wants to see higher levels of student learning.
- Two tools being used to hold educators accountable are standards and testing.
- The stakes of testing can be high for states, school districts, schools, teachers, and students.
- Every effort must be taken to ensure that the tests are of high quality and that high-stakes decisions are based on multiple sources of evidence.
- The intense focus on testing has led to parents organizing and having their children opt out.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Standards-based education is now the paradigm that teachers are expected to use. Thinking about your own education at school and college, how would you describe the integration of standards in the curriculum and instruction? Were you made aware of the standards that you were supposed to be meeting? Did the standards support higher order thinking, or were they more factual in nature?
2. Assessing has been described as being more than testing. In adopting this perspective, what do you see as the major challenges for you as a teacher? How will you know if your students are engaged in assessing rather than simply testing?
3. Standards-based education calls for the use of performance assessments in determining whether students meet standards. How could student portfolios be used to show what students have learned? What problems might such assessments cause?
4. Regarding accountability students, regardless of their ability or socioeconomic status, are they expected to master a specific set of learning standards, such as the common core standards, before obtaining a diploma? In what cases, if any, do you think students should be exempt from testing requirements for graduation?
5. What are your thoughts about the opting out movement? Do you think there is too much emphasis on testing? What do you think about parents boycotting the federal and state government mandates that all students be tested? Should they be doing this?

SCHOOL-BASED OBSERVATIONS

1. Talk with teachers in the schools that you are observing and review the school district's website to identify the standards that teachers are supposed to use. During your observations, record the evidence that convinces you that standards are (or are not) integrated into classroom instruction. What evidence indicates that the students understand the standards and how they will be assessed?
2. Ask several teachers about what they do to help students prepare for the state testing. Ask specifically about their role during the administration of the tests. Develop a list of strategies you may use to help students in preparing for testing. Develop a second list of the procedures teachers can and cannot do during testing.
3. One of the distinguishing characteristics of standards-based education is that students, regardless of grade level, are supposed to be able to describe the expectations for them for learning (standards and benchmarks). Interview some students and see how they describe what they are doing in a particular lesson. Do they tend to describe the instructional activity ("We are studying the Civil War."), or do they describe what they are supposed to be learning ("We are learning about the economic factors that led to the Civil War.")? Can they describe how much they have learned? Can they describe what they need to learn next?

PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

1. Authentic assessments attempt to provide students with opportunities to show what they know and can do within a real-world setting. Go to the website for the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Go to the standards for English language arts and Science and Technology. Within these standards, find the grade level you plan to teach, select one of the standards, and develop an authentic assessment you could use with your students. Keep in mind that the CCS expect *all* teachers, regardless of grade level or subject, to “integrate” ELA into their instruction and assessments.
2. Rubrics are used to assess performance in many classrooms. To gain practice in developing and using a rubric, design one that could be used to assess the level at which you have learned and are able to demonstrate an important component of the information presented in this chapter. Ask several of your classmates to self-assess their learning extent using your rubric. Note the questions and suggestions they offer that would help you refine your rubric.

WEB SOLUTIONS

Today’s classrooms have a wide range of students. They bring to class different abilities to learn. They represent different ethnicities, socioeconomic families, and current capability to communicate using English language arts (ELA). Some students will have individualized education program (IEP) designation, and others will be identified as having limited English proficiency (LEP) or as English language learners (ELLs). Teachers need to understand the types of accommodations that can, and *cannot*, be provided to this diverse set of students. Conduct a Web search related to making accommodations in your classroom. Instead of doing this activity from the point of view of finding out what is legal, take a standards-based approach: What can I find out about accommodations that will help all my students learn? As a hint, start the search at your state’s education department’s website.

- The website of the Council of Chief State School Officers, which is the professional association for state superintendents of education, provides links to each state where it is

possible to explore that state’s standards and information about test results.

- Another web site to explore is that of the Education Trust. It site provides data, policies, and recommendations related to academic achievement with an emphasis on students who have not been served well in the educational system.
- The National Assessment of Educational Progress website provides information about the national testing programs and national report card.
- The site for Relearning by Design provides information on standards and authentic assessment and is hosted by the Coalition for Curriculum and Assessment (CCA).
- Information about the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and its standards can be found at its website.
- To learn about the science standards, go the National Science Teachers Association website.



Source: John Lund/Marc Romanelli/Blend Images/Alamy Photo Stock

12

Designing Programs for Learners in Challenging Times: Curriculum and Instruction

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading and studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Analyze the different influences on the selection, design, and evaluation of curricula in your state. (InTASC 4: Content Knowledge; InTASC 6: Assessment; InTASC 10: Leadership and Collaboration)
2. Apply instructional best practices to maximize student learning, including utilizing instructional objectives, appropriate and varied teaching strategies, and strategic use of technological resources. (InTASC 7: Planning for Instruction; InTASC 8: Instructional Strategies)
3. Compare the learning needs of different types of learners and the relative effectiveness of different teaching strategies. (InTASC 1: Learner Development; InTASC 2: Learning Differences)

EDUCATION in the NEWS

OKLAHOMA EDUCATORS QUASH ATTEMPT TO BAN AP U.S. HISTORY

By JASMINE SONG

The attempt by right-wing legislators in Oklahoma to ban the teaching of Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. History courses looked like it might have been successful. That was before educators, parents and students stood up and spoke out against the proposal.

In mid-February, the committee on education in the Oklahoma House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly, 11-4, to pass House Bill 1380, which barred state funds from being used for AP History and actually mandated what should be taught in the classroom. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Dan Fisher, who said the new AP framework developed by the College Board characterizes the U.S. as a "nation of oppressors and exploiters" and shows "what is bad about America."

Last week, however, HB 1380 failed to receive a hearing on the floor of the House. And while the language could show up in a shell bill or as amendment to another measure later down the road, the lack of a debate and vote effectively kills HB 1380 in this legislative session.

The public outcry against HB 1380 erupted soon after the bill passed the committee. Educators and other supporters mobilized to inform the public and organize protests.

"Oklahoma educators have been contacting legislators to voice their concerns. They've also been helping students, parents, and community members to learn about this issue and how to contact members of the legislatures," explains Matthew Holtzen, AP U.S. History teacher at Enid High School in Enid, Oklahoma.

"Our members were very clear that government should not tell teachers what they should be teaching and that the College Board is a reputable organization that stands for academic excellence," adds Linda Hampton, president of the Oklahoma Education Association.

And academic excellence requires a thorough examination of U.S. history, free of political pressure.

"The AP course provides a framework of standards that work to create a critical thinking student who is able to view issues from multiple perspectives," explains Holtzen.

"U.S. History is about people, and different people experience the same event differently," he adds. "It is an exceptional story with many difficult aspects, but it is also a story for great hope and growth. My job is to expose students to different perspectives of history and to allow them to draw conclusions and to evaluate the evidence."

In addition, citizens were outraged that the bill, by removing the AP curriculum, would prevent students from receiving college credit and other educational benefits upon passing the comprehensive exam.

Facing a wave of criticism from across the state and the nation, Rep. Fisher backtracked furiously and has since proposed a revision to his plan. Rather than eliminating funds for the course, he now wants to require a state “review” of the curriculum to promote a more “patriotic” course.

Revising the curriculum to mask certain political viewpoints would still undoubtedly result in students being less informed about U.S. history in general. Furthermore, changing the curriculum and training teachers for a new state-approved course and assessment would be expensive, costing the state nearly \$3.8 million dollars.

“This is a waste of spending at a time when Oklahoma is facing a budget shortfall of over \$600 million,” Holtzen says. “And there is no test that Oklahoma could create that would be accepted at colleges and universities across the United States.”

The AP history framework has also been targeted in Georgia, Texas, South Carolina, North Carolina by lawmakers who, like Fisher, are preoccupied with so-called “liberal bias.”

In Oklahoma, however, the momentum has shifted—thanks to educators and parents, says Hampton

“They were very vocal about how important the AP program is, and specifically how important it is to keep U.S. History free of partisan politics.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In this chapter, you will see how curriculum is influenced by many different groups. Educators, politicians, parents, taxpayers, and advocates bring diverse points of view. In this article, the advanced placement content for U.S. History was challenged by lawmakers in Oklahoma who wanted to promote a more patriotic course and save precious funds due to a budget shortfall. As a future teacher what arguments would you provide to either support this bill or reject it?
2. Another key idea that you will find in this chapter is that it is extremely important to recognize that a public school curriculum must respond to the concerns of many different groups who have opposing ideas. As a future teacher, what would you do to create a climate of collaboration and respond to the needs of parents who have diverse points of view about what should or should not be included in the curriculum?

Source: Oklahoma Educators Quash Attempt to Ban AP U.S. History from NEA Today. Copyright © 2015 by National Education Association.

WHAT IS CURRICULUM AND HOW DOES IT DEVELOP?

Curriculum relates to anything and everything that supports learning. As such, it is a general term that is used in many different ways depending on the circumstances in which it is used. For example, in textbook selection committees, curriculum implies the scope of learning content and the grade-level sequence in which that content will be taught. In a school improvement meeting, curriculum might imply the types of competencies that students should be able to master at a certain grade level. At a daily teacher planning session, curriculum can mean that type of teaching that teachers use to help students learn.

Curriculum also includes the informal and less obvious parts of the school day, such as mottos or slogans on school walls, the types of student work displayed in classrooms, and even the way desks are arranged in classrooms. Ultimately, **curriculum** is the total environment that is created by the interaction of all of the elements that support learning: the learning standards, the content taught, the materials selected, the teaching strategies used, the learning activities in which children engage, and the way a school is organized.

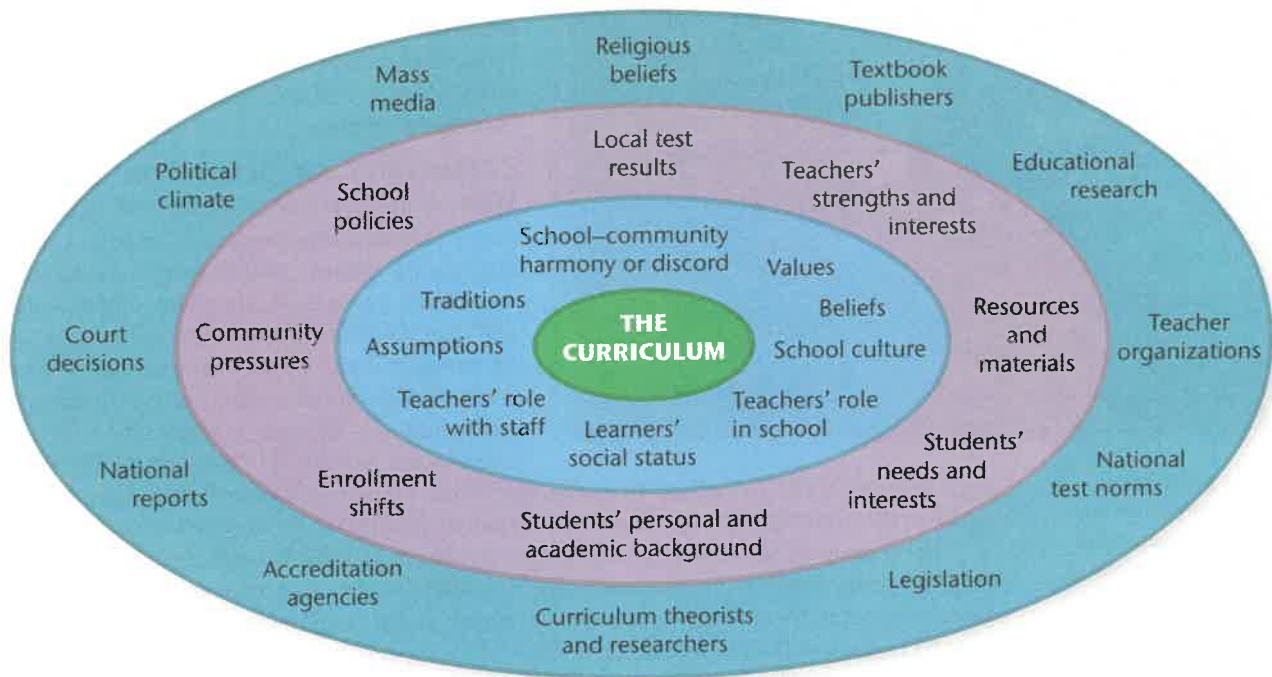
You might be wondering how a curriculum environment develops. Clearly, the curriculum of a school comes together over time and results from many different influences and decisions made by state officials, school administrators, teachers, and the community.

The Many Influences on Curriculum

As befits our democracy, many people and groups have a say in selecting the curriculum for public schools. Figure 12.1 illustrates the many different actors and forces involved in determining the curriculum. Around the outer circle is the array of forces and interest groups that represent the macro view. The middle ring summarizes many of the local factors and conditions that influence curriculum decisions. The inner ring shows the school context and influences. The product of this array of forces and interests is the curriculum that is selected and implemented in each classroom.

Curriculum An environment created by the interaction of all of the elements that support learning: the content taught, the materials selected, the teaching strategies used, the learning activities in which children engage, and the way a school is organized.

FIGURE 12.1 The Many Influences on Curriculum



Source: Parkay, Forrest W.; Stanford, Beverly Hardcastle, *Becoming a teacher*, 8th Ed., © 2010. Reprinted and Electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

LARGE-SCALE INFLUENCES ON CURRICULUM. The primary effect of the various elements that form the outer ring in Figure 12.1 is to influence what will be common for curriculum in all states and school districts. Court cases, state and federal legislation, teaching and content standards developed by national professional organizations, common core standards and national assessments, and educational research as well as textbook publishers determine much of what will be taught and learned in all schools and classrooms. In fact, this set of influences works against local control of schools. Instead of local control, there is a growing movement toward the establishment of a statewide and even national curriculum.

Another macrolevel influence on curriculum is the various interest groups, such as teacher and administrator organizations, political parties, and religious advocacy groups. **Interest groups** are informal and formal organizations of individuals who hold a common interest and shared agenda in regard to a particular topic or policy. These groups pay close attention to the work of committees charged with developing standards, curriculum guides, and test items. Each group is likely to have its own unique perspective and agenda. For example, teacher associations tend to resist any accountability moves that would link student performance on tests with the identity of the teachers who taught them. Many religious groups advocate that their positions, such as intelligent design, be included and that contrary positions, such as evolution, receive less emphasis.

The various accrediting bodies, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), influence the curriculum through the standards they apply to all schools they accredit. These standards in some ways set a common curriculum for all schools. For example, school accrediting bodies require each school to have a **school improvement process (SIP)**. A SIP usually is written by a school committee and the principal during the spring of the year. The plans include analyses of data about student learning, reports about the year's efforts to improve the school, and specific plans for the next year. Key expectations for these plans include analyses of student success on state tests such as those in mathematics, literacy, and, in some states, writing. The accrediting body expects improved student performance on state tests; a direct consequence of

Interest groups Informal and formal organizations of individuals who hold a common interest and shared agenda in regard to a particular topic or policy.

School improvement process (SIP) A plan for future action that results from a school leadership team review of current successes and needs.



Source: Blend Images/Hill Street Studios/Alamy Stock Photo

Student participation in the cocurriculum and extracurriculum such as involvement with school plays, as shown here, can provide important opportunities for learning as well as encouragement for staying in school.

language learners (ELLs) whose first language is not English and who therefore are learning English at the same time they are learning the content specified in the curriculum standards.

The curriculum influences of this ELL population are many. This population creates demand for teachers who speak their native languages. ELL students also need more assistance in learning academic subjects because they are learning English at the same time. One likely consequence is that ELL students do less well on high-stakes tests, especially if they are expected to read and respond in English. The overall result is that the curriculum in the classroom needs to be adjusted in response to these influences.

SCHOOL INFLUENCES ON CURRICULUM. The inner circle of Figure 12.1 summarizes influences that an individual school can have on the curriculum. Assumptions about learning, for example, make a significant difference in which subjects are emphasized, what is taught, and how. For example, if teachers in a particular school truly believe that all students can learn, then the curriculum is organized and delivered in ways that support all students learning: Students are grouped according to their needs, regular classrooms include students with special needs, and most group activities are organized to take advantage of the diverse talents and interests of students rather than having like students grouped together. In comparison, if teachers in a particular school believe that some of the children cannot learn, then “those” children are given less opportunity and more limited access to the curriculum. The result confirms the teacher’s beliefs: Those students do less well.

In addition to teachers’ beliefs about students’ learning, available resources can also influence curriculum. If a school has a great deal of instructional technology resources, teachers will tend to integrate technology in their teaching. Students benefit from the sophistication that is available when having easy access to national and international resources. If a school has limited technology, students will tend to rely on textbooks as their primary source of knowledge.

In spite of the many influences on curriculum selection, its development, and its implementation, it is clear that in the end the curriculum is delivered in classrooms. This has two important implications. The first is that the role of the teacher in implementing today’s curriculum is enormous. Although teachers have relatively little say in curriculum selection, they have the primary responsibility for helping students learn and achieve the desired outcomes. The second implication is that teachers have a plethora of curriculum resources to work with: curriculum guides, teacher-training sessions, and textbooks as well as standards and benchmarks. All of these curriculum resources assist teachers in understanding what they should be teaching and help them see what came before and what will happen next year with the students they teach this year.

Developing Curriculum

Those who are engaged in developing curriculum bring their own views and beliefs to the effort. For example, people who believe that students can be trusted will press for activities that allow for student initiative and open-ended explorations, whereas curriculum developers who believe

this expectation is that each school and teacher is expected to provide curriculum and instruction designed to enhance student achievement on the prescribed test. In ways such as this, a common curriculum is defined and implemented for all accredited schools.

COMMUNITY INFLUENCES ON CURRICULUM. At the local school district level, many additional factors influence the curriculum. Clearly, community interests and priorities are an influence. If the community values high school football and marching band, these two program areas will be an integral part of the cocurriculum. The personal background of students also influences the curriculum. For example, in many school districts, a significant proportion of the students are English

that students will make a mess and break manipulative materials will develop activities that rely more on the teacher and are more structured for the students.

Beliefs about student learning and effective teaching come into play as well. Some theorists believe that what is to be learned should be broken down into subparts and each of these taught separately and sequentially whereas others advocate for presenting the whole and letting the students “figure it out.” Consider how these different perspectives can influence the teaching of addition. Should students be taught a single way to do addition and be expected to always do it that way, or should they be encouraged to do addition in different ways as long as they can explain how they obtained the correct answer? There is not a single correct answer to any of these questions; the best answer is a matter of perspective. Depending on the perspectives of the developers, the curricula they produce can be quite different. Three key questions must be addressed for each curriculum development initiative:

1. What should be taught?
2. Who should decide?
3. How will it be taught?

Think about each of these questions. Determining what will be taught has serious implications for the learner, the teacher, and society. Should the content prepare students for the world of work? Should it contribute to the development of “good” citizens? To what extent should the selected content prepare the student to learn advanced content?

Who should make these decisions—teachers, experts, politicians, or citizens? Should we ask community members for their input? Should we bring in experts from different disciplines to help decide the content? Should we include principals and teachers? The more people involved in the decision, the more differences that will arise, and this leads to another difficulty—reaching agreement.

Question 3 brings up another of challenges: How will the curriculum be taught? Each teacher will have her or his own views about which way is best. What is to be done when the curriculum developers and teachers have different views? Answering each of these three overriding questions begins with philosophical assumptions and beliefs about what is important for society and individuals as well as understanding the discipline. What should happen during instruction also requires careful deliberation.

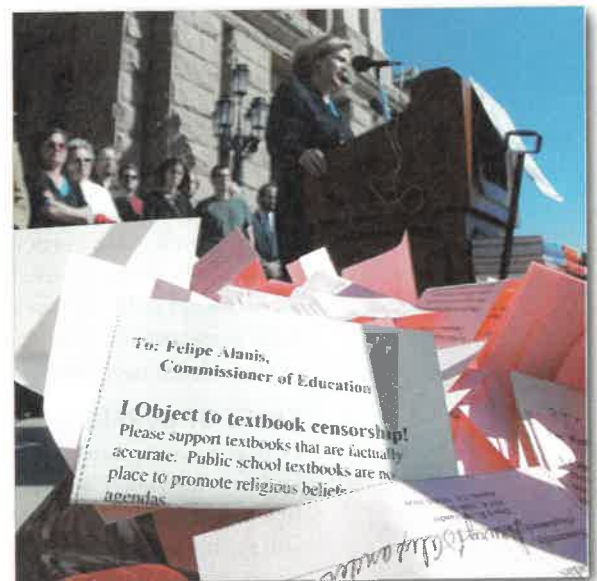
STEPS IN THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS. A good place to start understanding how the curriculum of a school develops is to consider some general steps in which the design of a curriculum is made explicit in the form of outcomes, learning objectives, teaching strategies, and assessment. Over the next several pages, we describe these steps in the curriculum development process along with implications for classrooms, teachers, and their students.

Curriculum theorists of the past identified a logical sequence of steps when developing new curriculum as shown in Table 12.1 (Taba, 1962; Tyler, 1949). The steps may seem overly simple, logical, and sequential; however, they continue to be as essential as they were in the past. The development of any curriculum should incorporate each of these steps. When one or more of these steps is neglected, teachers and their students struggle to fill in the missing pieces.

The seven steps to curriculum development outlined in Table 12.1 make the work look easy. However, the reality is that developing curriculum is hard work and involves answering a number of very important value-laden questions that will be addressed either explicitly or implicitly. As each step is completed, these value-laden questions must be reasked and reanswered:

1. To what extent should the learning outcomes support preserving a democratic society?
2. Which outcomes are important for the individual learner’s self-worth?

Special interest groups are a powerful influence on the selection of curriculum.



Source: Harry Cabluck/AP Images

TABLE 12.1

Basic Steps of the Curriculum Development Process

STEP	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE ACTIVITY
1	Determine what needs to be learned and why.	Survey parents or business leaders about what future citizens/workers will need to know or identify the big ideas in a discipline.
2	Describe the desired learning outcome(s).	Use standards and benchmarks to write learning objectives for each grade level.
3	Select the specific content.	Relate what is expected in the standards with the important topics in the discipline.
4	Organize the content.	Design a topic and objectives sequence so that what is learned first builds toward what will be learned later.
5	Select the learning activities.	Identify specific lesson activities, tasks, and materials that will engage the learner and be congruent with the core ideas of the discipline.
6	Sequence the learning activities into a whole.	Sequence the learning from the early grades through high school and organize the topics within each year so that they are coherent and rigorous with objectives that can be learned.
7	Evaluate the effectiveness of the materials, instruction, and student learning.	Collect evidence from teachers about instruction and from students about learning outcomes.

Source: Based on Taba, 1962; Tyler, 1950.

3. Is the curriculum biased in some way against certain individuals or groups?
4. Will the curriculum be available to all? Or is it too expensive, too hard to teach, or does it have components that are inaccessible to some?
5. Is it built around the essential center of the discipline, or is it composed of peripheral and isolated elements?

You will likely be asked to participate in one or more steps in the curriculum process. When you do, keep in mind these challenging, value-laden questions and carefully determine your personal point of view. This will help you, as a curriculum committee member, to recognize how the ideas of other committee members resemble or contradict your own. This clarity will assist you and others in the process of coming to a consensus. For, as challenging as these questions are, coming to a consensus about the answers is both critical and at the core of the curriculum development process.

Curriculum Designs

Over time, a number of curriculum designs have been identified by comparing the way curricula are structured. Each curriculum design has particular strengths and weaknesses, and each has different implications for teachers. Some designs are typically found in U.S. schools whereas others are more apt to be seen in schools in other countries. Each design is based on assumptions about what is important for students to learn as well as particular philosophies about teaching and how students learn best. Summaries of common designs are presented in Table 12.2.

TYPES OF CURRICULUM. The earliest curriculum design in American schools was the *subject-centered curriculum*, which focused on content disciplines. There were only three subjects or disciplines: religion, Latin, and Greek. The only teaching style was lecture. Students were expected to learn—in other words, memorize—the content. Surprisingly, the subject-centered curriculum is still the most common curriculum design in the United States albeit the subject areas have changed as has the number of subject areas taught. Schools now include mathematics, reading, literature, social studies, science, physical education, and so forth.