

BACKGROUND: STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM

The Challenge

In comparison to other countries, low U.S. student test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in comparison to other countries, contributed to the test-based focus codified in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002. More specifically, NCLB focused on reading and mathematics. The legally binding emphasis on reading and mathematics forced schools to spotlight those subjects while instruction time in other “core” subjects decreased.

The Center for Education Policy reports that a majority of school districts increased instructional time for English language arts and math by 43 percent and reduced instructional time for other subjects by 32 percent, on average.¹ Additionally, more than half of districts surveyed cut instructional time by 76 minutes per week in social studies, 76 minutes per week in science, 57 minutes per week in arts and music, and 40 minutes per week in physical education.

NCLB has effectively narrowed school curricula, deprived children of a rich and full academic experience, and stunted students' social and creative growth. Loss of class time in subjects such as social studies has a direct impact on students' grasp of civic heritage, history, and the various processes of government. Without an understanding of government processes, how can we expect our students to be thoughtful and active citizens in a democratic society? Moreover, subjects such as physical education, can positively impact academic achievement, academic behaviors, concentration, memory, self-esteem, and verbal skills.²

The Opportunity

The National Education Association (NEA) believes

that the narrow federal focus on standardized testing in reading and mathematics deviates from the idea of a complete education. Learning in the domains of the fine arts, sciences, social studies, and physical education is essential to preparing students for a future of opportunity and self-actualization. It is important to set a high bar with rigorous standards that demand creativity, and social skills, in addition to literacy and numeracy. The link between high standards and career- and college-ready students is only possible via a complete, holistic curriculum. A rich curriculum provides students with access to advanced courses in mathematics and science, classes in the fine arts, additional supports to those farther behind, and time to sharpen critical skills in self-monitoring and self-control during physical education.

Indicators of Standards and Curriculum

A great public school (GPS) ensures that all students have the opportunity to develop every facet of their talents and skills, harnessing their full potential and engage in higher-order multisensory tasks. High standards and rigorous curricula are integral to this development. Quality standards and curricula consist of integrated and continuous curriculum development, comprehensive curriculum content, appropriate instructional services, and accommodation and differentiation. Indicators of successful standards and curriculum include:

Integrated and Continuous Curriculum Development

- ▶ State policy requires educator involvement in developing content standards and curriculum guidelines.
- ▶ 100 percent of educators surveyed indicated alignment among standards, curriculum, resources, and assessments

Comprehensive Curriculum Content

- ▶ State developed a policy that requires alignment between curricular content and rigorous standards that address the needs of students of all abilities, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds in all academic subjects.
- ▶ 100 percent of high school seniors complete the entire range of college-preparatory courses in math and science 3.

Appropriate Instructional Services

- ▶ State policy provides funding for job-embedded professional learning opportunities to improve teachers' instructional repertoire.
- ▶ 100 percent of educators participated in job-embedded professional learning opportunities in the previous year.

Accommodation and Differentiation

- ▶ State developed a policy that requires accommodations and differentiations in curriculum, instruction, and assessment to meet the range of students' needs.
- ▶ 100 percent of teachers have at least eight hours of professional learning on analyzing student data to differentiate instruction for students with limited English proficiency.

Conclusion

NEA believes that every student can succeed, no matter their zip code, if they have access to the seven Great Public Schools criteria, including high-quality standards and curricula.

NEA further believes that every state can implement these standards and curriculum policies and work in collaboration with school districts, school leaders, educators, and the community to meet the requirements of a successful program.

Notes

1. Center on Education Policy, *Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects* (February 2008). www.cep-dc.org
2. US Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). Retrieved from website: www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf
3. College Preparatory courses are algebra 1, algebra 2, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics.

For more information please visit
nea.org/gpsindicators