

Why Should We Ensure Students Have Access to a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum?

One of the most significant factors that impacts student achievement is that teachers commit to implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum to ensure no matter who teaches a given class, the curriculum will address certain essential content (Marzano, 2003).

To improve student achievement, educators must determine the power standards—learning standards that are most essential because they possess the qualities of endurance, leverage, and readiness for success at the next level; “the first and most important practical implication of power standards is that leaders must make time for teachers to collaborate within and among grade levels to identify the power standards” (Reeves, 2002, p. 54).

One of the keys to improving schools is to ensure teachers “know the learning intentions and success criteria of their lessons, know how well they are attaining these criteria for all their students, and know where to go next in light of the gap between students’ current knowledge and understanding and the success criteria”; this can be maximized in a safe and collaborative environment where teachers talk to each other about teaching (Hattie, 2009, p. 239).

“The staff in the effective school accepts responsibility for the students’ learning of the essential curricular goals.” (Lezotte, 2002, p. 4, emphasis added)

Professional learning communities are characterized by an academic focus that begins with a set of practices that bring clarity, coherence, and precision to every teacher’s classroom work. Teachers work collaboratively to provide a rigorous curriculum that is crystal clear and includes a compact list of learning expectations for each grade or course and tangible exemplars of student proficiency for each learning expectation (Saphier, 2005).

“[Effective teachers] clarify . . . goals and assessment criteria in ways that will help students understand what they need to learn and what strategies are likely to be most useful in enabling them to do so.” (Brophy, 2004, p. 79, emphasis added)

“Implementing a strategy of common, rigorous standards with differentiated resources and instruction can create excellence and equity for all students.” (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009, p. 133, emphasis added)