Curriculum Overview

When preparing for accreditation, schools often ask us what their curriculum should look like. That is a difficult question to answer because there are many right ways to organize your curriculum. This white paper contains a brief discussion of the basic elements of curriculum and the curriculum review process.

A quality school places a high priority on the continuous development of its instructional program and the documentation that guides that program. At each grade level taught and in each secondary course, *an instructional program includes far more than the contents of any textbook*. The **CURRICULUM GUIDE** is a description of what is taught throughout the school, and as such, it…

1) describes the school's instructional program,
2) helps to ensure continuity between grade levels and subject areas,
3) guides the teacher in planning instructional activities,
4) guides the purchase of textbooks and other resource materials, and
5) provides a basis for evaluation of the school's instructional program.

It is understood that the curriculum development process takes time and that it must be revisited on a regular basis to keep it effective and applicable. While the initial development of a site-specific curriculum document will take several years, the true value is found in the ongoing revisit of those documents, the adjustment and revision that keep them current, and the updating in response to new educational research, instructional trends, and emerging content. As a school matures and adjusts its instructional program, the curriculum guide must change as well, reflecting improvements to instruction, student achievement, changes in supportive materials, and expansion of the school's biblical integrative components.

The curriculum guide/map is a tool to inform the work of the teacher. A school's curriculum guide is a collaborative effort of teachers in the same department or grade level as well as those above and below it. Members of the faculty at other levels review the guide for a given level to ensure that gaps and overlaps do not exist. Course mapping is invaluable as teams plan for the most developmental approach to skills and concept development. It is tremendously valuable to new teachers as they work through their lesson plans.

Finally, the heart of any school's instructional program should be the teacher. Many schools refer to their faculty as the *Living Curriculum*. While they work hard at providing a great course of study, engaging instructional activities, and mission appropriate materials, it is up to the teacher to make it come alive in the spirit with which it was developed. Through diligent support and regular evaluations, the curriculum is followed with fidelity so that students at the school are truly receiving the experience for which they came.

We use the term "map" because we have looked ahead and determined where we are going. The map is the sequence of steps (paced over time and with what resources) that gives us the best plan on how to get there. Remember…just having a map won't help the students. Using the map will!

What should a curriculum guide Include and where should each part be located?

That is answered for us in REACH Accreditation document, Indicators 5.1 and 5.2. The new version of these Indicators lists the elements of the curriculum guide quite clearly.

The descriptions below give some suggestions on how these elements might be arranged. It is not meant to describe all possible "right answers." If your school has a system that works well for your teachers, is easy to keep up-to-date, and meets the accreditation criteria, then review it with the consultant or chair assigned to your school. That system may be perfectly fine.

Indicator 5.1
(1) Well-documented **biblical basis for each course** - typically this is an Introduction to the subject area that Includes a paragraph about the school's philosophy and biblical basis for how this course of study will be approached. Often this is housed in the Course Descriptions online (on the web) so prospective parents can read them. When you develop a biblical philosophy for each subject, it will be specific to that subject.
(2) For example, when you write about Language Arts, you may include concepts such as God having revealed himself through the Word and that he gives us words to communicate to our fellow man. That's why it is important to learn to read, write, and speak.
(3) For science, for example, you may write about God's creation and how God gave us the tools to use science to help heal and solve problems. That is why it is important to study how things work, how to use the scientific process, and understand the human body. The idea is that your philosophy about the subject will actually drive your perspective on how you approach the study of and use of that subject area.

Indicator 5.2
(1) **schoolwide <u>E</u>xpected <u>S</u>tudent <u>O</u>utcomes** - listed on the course map, these reference specific ESOs that this activity is connected to (See article on Expected Student Outcomes under Accreditation on ACSI's website. https://www.acsi.org/schoolaccreditationdocuments) ESOs are schoolwide and should be listed in the handbook, on the website, etc.
(2) **course goals and objectives** - listed on the course map. These are to be listed generally. Some schools ask their teachers to list the instructional strategies that go along with these as well.
(3) **biblical integration concepts** - listed on the course map, sometimes there is only one main essential biblical question or concept per unit but for other schools, these are broken down in greater detail, by lesson. These may include a Bible verse but should not be limited to a Bible verse. A verse alone is not a biblical integration concept nor does it tell the teacher how to develop a Christian worldview in the students. Just listing a verse can be misleading, making teachers think that all they have to do is attach a Bible verse. Sometimes the biblical integration idea is bigger than one or two Bible verses. Sometimes it takes many verses or passages and an analysis of how one is similar or different from another to get to the real meaning.
(4) **school-selected standards** - listed on the course map. These may come from state standards, standards from groups like *National Council of Teachers of Mathematics*, or *Standards for American Overseas Schools* www.projectaero.org. If the school has written its own standards for any subject, they can reference those. Often these are coded with numbers/letters.
(5) **resources**, listed on the course map. In electronic mapping, these links can be live and that is a great advantage. Textbooks, websites, other books, videos, recordings, etc. can be sorted and searched for use across grade levels and department heads and administration can see where

various resources are used. This is just one advantage of the electronic mapping tools such as Curriculum Trak and others.

(6) **time allotted for each unit** - listed on the course map. This can be written in as days or weeks.

(7) **assessments** - listed on the course map. These should be described in more detail than just "Multiple Choice," "Project, "or "Essay." There should be some indication of where those materials could be found. Again, the electronic mapping tools allow the materials to be linked and available. Often the rubrics for projects and essays are included.

8) A document, often called a **Scope and Sequence**, should be available to guide the overall curriculum plan and to assess where the gaps or overlaps are. With the electronic mapping tools this is not a static document. It is generated periodically, as needed. If the curriculum is done in Word Processor or Spreadsheet style files, then a Scope and Sequence should be done occasionally. That is more difficult since the course maps frequently change. Since the goal is to identify those gaps and overlaps, the administrator in charge of curriculum must use the electronic mapping tool or create the physical Scope and Sequence as often as it is needed to do this analysis well.

The guides/maps need to be accessible and used by all faculty to inform instruction. Teachers should have them on their desks as they develop their lesson plans. The curriculum should address all components of a Christ-centered instruction--the development of the whole child--spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally, and socially. (See Appendix H in the Standards Manual.)

"Where do I begin?"

Some schools are just at the beginning stages of this process and need direction on how to develop their curriculum guide. They may have used the table of contents of their textbooks previously and they want to move to a curriculum guide that better reflects who they are, what they believe, and what they are actually teaching. If that is you, you might be saying, "Where do I begin?"

1) We suggest you review your foundational documents and make sure that you have an overall Christian Philosophy of Education that your whole faculty understands and generally agrees with. This is important because the biblical bases for the courses are either going to build on that philosophy of education or they are going to seem very disjointed. The overall Christian Philosophy of Education for your school Is an excellent activity to start the whole process of developing your curriculum documents. This may only be a one-page document. Once you have developed it, you can place it in your handbook, put it on your website, and use it as a guiding document for curriculum development.

2) The biblical basis for each course should be developed by department. This usually does not take a long time and should probably only be a half to one page in length. Seasoned teachers can usually articulate why they teach what they teach and how it is part of God's truth. Make sure this has a chance to be revised several times after the first draft because departments will want to refine it over time.

3) Next, design a basic model for the course maps that everyone Is going to use. Also decide on certain columns that will be filled in on the first pass through, as teachers begin the process of documenting their curriculum. Someone needs to set the ground rules and the due dates. For example, you may decide that for the first deadline, all that needs to be completed is the unit name, the major goals of the unit, and the timeframe. That way the shell or framework will be completed for all courses. Then as the year progresses and the courses are taught, the other

Items can be gradually filled In. The most important decision is the basic framework (template) that will be used whether that is in the electronic mapping system or a more traditional format. (Two samples are provided for your consideration.)

4) Another tip for success is to identify and train 1-2 teachers to be the "Go-To" people at each level. If there is an elementary, middle school, and high school person right close by who can help with the little questions, schools have found that delays are less likely and the work moves forward. If a teacher must contact someone at the central office or a busy administrator to help them, it might not happen. Also, with the helpers close at hand, there is greater accountability.

5) Provide occasional work time and hold staff to manageable deadlines. Checking work on a regular basis is also key to a successful process. It is best if the year the curriculum development project is introduced is NOT the year the school is preparing for accreditation. Ideally this should be started at least two years before the accreditation preparation year.

Curriculum Review Process

Schools usually have a **textbook review cycle**, that shows which year each subject area will undergo a review. That is not the same as a **curriculum review process** but it is one important piece of that. According to that chart (cycle), a school will usually have each subject area up for review every five to six years.

The following is a brief description of what should be in a curriculum review process. The process at your school might not look exactly like this, but it should cover most of these areas.

1) First, establish a curriculum review committee from those teachers who are most involved in teaching the subject. It should have members from elementary, middle school, high school, the administration, and of course, the person in charge of curriculum, if there is someone assigned to that.

2) The committee completes a needs assessment of how the past five or six years have gone with the curriculum written as it was, the resources (textbooks and other resources) that were used, and any other factors that may have Influenced the subject's success. Some of the questions for the needs assessment could be:

    A. *How did the teaching of this subject contribute to the overall goals or student outcomes of the school?*
    B. *What do standardized (or other departmental) assessments tell us about how well content area standards were accomplished?*
    C. *Have there been any changes in state or national standards that would impact our revision of the curriculum?*
    D. *Are there accreditation standards or recommendations that would impact our revision of the curriculum?*
    E. *Are there any teaching techniques that would enhance critical thinking or student engagement that would impact our revision of the curriculum?*
    F. *Are there individual student needs (high or low) that should impact our teaching of this subject?*
    G. *Are there different or additional types of assessments that should be considered as we revise this curriculum?*

H. *Has anything changed in society, technology, or physical environment that would impact our revision of the curriculum?*
I. *Are there new or more challenging ways in which we can encourage Integration (biblical or Interdisciplinary) as we revise this curriculum?*
(It is recommended that each subject area collects information on their curriculum annually and does not wait five to six years to gather this information.)

3) Next, consensus statements are formulated and submitted by various levels (elementary, middle school, and high school.) Those consensus statements are merged and agreed upon by the committee and then the administration. Once approved, the combined committee develops a revised Scope and Sequence and makes adjustments to the overall curriculum as needed. The basic questions to be answered would be something like:
  A. Any philosophy changes
  B. Overall goals/objectives for the various grade levels (note especially If this Is a change from previous years)
  C. Content to be included, especially new/changed
  D. Skills, especially new/changed
  E. Biblical concepts/essential questions (unit level concepts)
  F. Resources, especially new/changed
  G. Timeframes, especially if the needs assessment would suggest more or less of something
  H. Any new courses needed to meet the objectives of the curriculum changes being recommended

4) Once the basic parameters are decided upon by the larger group, it is time to discuss textbook adoption. A general discussion should cover the parameters the team agrees on: (factors such as)
  A. Christian, secular, or either (and a review for worldview elements)
  B. Pedagogy, or approaches such as "Literature-based Language Arts"
  C. Standards-based, or not
  D. Cost (for materials included, or able to purchase a la carte for what is needed)
  E. Quality (durable, attractive, etc.)
  F. Additional materials, online or other technology support (may be required for other programs)
  G. Teacher support materials (reteaching, assessments, etc.)
  H. Multiple levels, or other special needs support materials
  I. Compatibility with other instructional materials (fits scope and sequence, levels above and below, additional programs being offered at the school)
  J. Staff development/training Included

5) The various levels/grades obtain materials and review the options. Most textbook adoptions Involve:
  A. Grade level team reviews the textbooks with the criteria developed above
  B. Recommendations go to the larger team (made up of department heads and an administrator or two, depending on size)
  C. Top 2-3 choices are often put out for parents with short review form (with criteria for comments)
  D. After comments have been received, curriculum committee or administrators make final decision
  E. Communication is made to teachers and parents

F. Purchase is made

6) The first year of the new curriculum begins. Training is scheduled and completed. Course maps are adjusted at the unit level to reflect changes in curriculum and textbooks from the curriculum review. Assessments are adjusted appropriately.

The following is an example of a course map that have the essential elements included. You may organize the sections differently at your school.

Grade: 8 1st Quarter   **Subject / Unit: English Grammar**

Instructional Goal: To improve communication through the skills of grammar as it applies to writing

Standards & Outcomes	Content/Objectives/Skills: Students will:	Essential Question Biblical Integration	Assessments: • for content / grading	Instructional Activities:	Resources:	Cross-Curricular / Tech Integration:
CCSS – ELA Writing 8.3 8th grade Text type and Purposes #3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. ESO – 1C	Explore and analyze the eight parts of speech.	How does God communicate with us? What is the importance of words in our life? How can the Word become flesh?	Use a pretest to determine knowledge of nouns.	Highlight nouns in paragraph "What's Right About My Life."		Writing- compose original sentences and paragraphs using different parts of speech.
	Identify nouns including collective and compound while distinguishing between common and proper.		Chapter 14 Book Tests from *Writing and Grammar* Chapter 14 exercises and practice pages graded as weekly grammar packets determined by pretest.	Read chapter 14 and discuss noun and pronoun examples. Use story to illustrate usage of pronouns.	Use a photograph to identify nouns or a videotape from the *Sound of Music.*	Technology-on-line exercise bank is used for test review on all chapters. Internet site: www.phschool.com for grammar review for all chapters.
	Compose sentences with a variety of types of nouns.	God communicates His truth in an understandable and orderly manner.	Teacher-created pronoun memory quiz	Read chapter 15 and use exercises on Smartboard as examples.	Use Prentice Hall extra practice pages 7-12.	
	Recognize the relationship between pronouns and their antecedents.			Use "the wave" to assist memory of linking verbs and helping verbs.	Use pronoun list to memorize types of pronouns.	
	Identify personal, demonstrative, relative, interrogative, and indefinite pronouns.	Show the importance of how to follow pronouns in Scripture- I John 1			Use Prentice Hall extra practice pages 13-22.	
	Complete sentences using each of the different types of pronouns.			Use adjective activity to show patterns.	Use Prentice Hall extra practice pages 23-31.	
	Identify action verbs while explaining why it is transitive and intransitive. Identify and locate linking and helping verbs.	Show the importance of our belief by using transitive verbs vs. intransitive verbs.	Chapter 15 Book Tests from *Writing and Grammar* Chapter 15 exercises and practice pages graded as weekly grammar packets	Read chapter 16.2 and use exercises on Smartboard as examples. (group interactive) Act out the activity in class from 16.1.	Read chapter 16.1 and use exercises on Smartboard as examples.	