



Missouri Visioning Project Sub-Committee Report

Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Sub-Committee

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES, KEY ISSUES, AND PROMISING PRACTICES

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER 1—A guaranteed and viable core curriculum reflective of international (NAEPP, TIMMS, PISA) standards is provided to every student.

Key Issues and Promising Practices: It is the Committee's belief that all students should be provided the opportunity for a rigorous curriculum with literacy and numeracy as foundational cornerstones. Rigor is defined in part by the need for every student to develop proficiency in core content, the mastery of key skills, and the ability to think in complex ways such that they can solve problems and engage in critical analysis over time. Rigor is also defined in part by a student's ability to represent their understanding through written expression as measured on state assessments. To implement a rigorous curriculum throughout Missouri, the following must be in place: a statewide curriculum framework, the inclusion of the P-20 education community in the determination of the curriculum framework, and a statewide system of school district support (especially, professional development for instructional leaders and teachers).

Highly effective teachers are essential to effective implementation of a rigorous curriculum. The lack of a high quality teacher will limit the degree to which students will master a rigorous curriculum. Currently and prospectively, the pool of highly qualified teaching candidates in some content areas is limited, which leaves achieving the goal of providing instruction that leads to mastery of a rigorous curriculum for all students in doubt. The challenge of meeting this goal may be mitigated, in part, by making virtual coursework accessible and affordable to all students. This will only be possible to the extent that technology is available at all schools to all students in need of the coursework.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER 2—Learning expectations must be high, measurable, and clear to teachers and students.

Key Issues and Promising Practices: While the Committee has not made a specific determination of the definitions of "clear" or "high," a broadly agreed-upon definition of these terms is necessary to realizing this Guiding Principle. Equally foundational is the determination of *who* will decide what the learning expectations will be—is this decision to be made at the national level, state level, local level . . . or a combination thereof? In the view of the Committee, there is not sufficient reward in the State's educational structure for the taking of risks. Said another way, the various elements that drive policy-making at all levels encourage maintenance of the status quo. Rewarding risk-taking in the planning and execution of instructional programs is necessary to the provision of learning expectations that are "clear" and "high," however these terms are defined.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER 3—Students learn differently.

Key Issues and Promising Practices: People are different, and since public education has a responsibility to teach all, it necessarily follows that teaching methods and instructional time must be differentiated to individual student needs—utilizing methods that work best for each student. This practice has direct implications for resources provided to schools.

“Time” is viewed by the Committee as both a resource and a variable. It is recognized that sufficient time is required for students to complete courses reflecting a rigorous curriculum. It is also recognized that some students require more time than others for their learning. Instructional time must be flexible to adjust to students’ needs and abilities.

This practice clearly suggests there must be flexibility in the current “school year calendar”—some students will need more than “one thousand forty-four hours” and some students less. Further, this practice suggests that the Carnegie Unit is no longer acceptable for measuring students’ academic credit.

In addition to using time as a variable, adjusting teaching methods to students’ needs requires that schools forge relationships with individual students—schools must know each student. A part of this relationship should be a deliberate planning process by the school that results in each student being meaningfully engaged each school day.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER 4—Students are more successful when they take control of their learning.

Key Issues and Promising Practices: The Committee believes that most people actually do prefer to take control of their learning. This means that instructional methodologies must have student input—affording the individual buy-in to the teaching and learning process and mastery of their learning. Second, students must be provided their own performance data and be able to understand it. Further, the curriculum must be engaging and the learner able to perceive the curriculum’s relevance to his or her life. Depth of knowledge becomes more important for the learner than breadth of knowledge; experiential learning and “hands on” instruction are common to the methodologies that are utilized.

This approach to teaching and learning implies that the role of teachers will adjust according to student learning needs. The role may range from methodologies that employ direct instruction to serving more as a facilitator in the learning process. The teacher is not “the sage on the stage.” Technology plays an important role as it integrates into the educational process at home and school as a means by which learning is supported. This approach also assumes that the basic needs of all learners—food, safety, and shelter—are met. In select cases, consideration for proper nutrition beyond the scope of the school day is required. Learning is not maximized without these needs having been met in advance of the onset of instruction.

Taking control of one’s learning in an instructional environment that supports proficiency in a rigorous curriculum has real and serious implications for the design and implementation of accountability structures. The Committee believes that accountability must be clear, achievable, and directly linked to a rigorous curriculum. The assessment system should work backward from end of high school assessment(s) and be supported through a formative assessment system that emphasizes student achieving mastery. This requires learning level assessments. A current example learning level assessments is end of course exams. As final exams, they have value to a learner, particularly when demonstration of proficiency is directly tied to high school graduation and/or a final grade. The right number of exams targeting specific content supports the notion of rigor for all. Too many high-stakes assessments, the wrong high stakes assessments, the use of high stake assessments that lack meaning to the learner, or an accountability system that fails to reward systemic improvement for all learners work against

the goal of rigor for all. The Committee therefore strongly recommends an assessment system based on working backwards from desired outcomes that reflect career pathways chosen by the learner. This includes: ACT (or SAT), career/vocational exams that indicate college/career readiness, and a unified approach to assessment ensuring that students exiting from high school and attending community college pass mathematics and communications arts exams, hence mitigating the need for remedial coursework. While the Committee is wholly supportive of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Structure, we strongly encourage the adoption of the ACT and related battery of assessments (COMPASS, PLAN, EXPLORE) to help achieve this goal and use in place of End of High School Assessments, which hold limited to no personal value to high school students as currently conceived.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER 5—Research-based, job embedded collegial professional development for teachers and leaders is essential to the teaching and learning process.

Key Issues and Promising Practices: Pre-eminent among the considerations to realize this Guiding Principle is professional development for teachers on strategies for teaching reading, writing, and mathematics across the curricula. Concomitantly, attention should be given to professional development for cultivating students' analytical skills. Model lesson plans (available online) for teaching such skills should be available to all teachers (as well as model lesson plans for a wide range of instructional areas).

The ongoing utilization and expansion of "data teams" should be encouraged to inform the determination of professional development that advances student learning. Further, the involvement of higher education in field-based, pre-service experiences for prospective teachers in instructional improvement processes such as data teams should increase.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER 6—Quality teaching and leadership make a significant impact on student learning.

Key Issues and Promising Practices: Research is clear that student achievement is impacted by quality teaching and leadership with student learning influenced by teaching, and teaching influenced by instructional leadership. Therefore, it is essential that high quality teaching and leadership be available to all students in all schools.

To support quality teaching and leadership, there should be a statewide structure in place for identifying "benchmark schools" whose instructional programs can serve as a model and can be replicated elsewhere.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER 7—The integration of problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and the application of technology into the learning process is essential for success.

Key Issues and Promising Practices: Fully realizing this Guiding Principle has a number of requisites. The requirements include: teaching problem solving and critical thinking across the curriculum; ongoing assessments of students—including state assessments that measure problem solving and critical thinking; targeted professional development driven by data; and student information literacy (i.e. the ability to find, select, evaluate, and utilize information).

As stated earlier in this document, the desired role of teachers is more of a facilitator as opposed to the "sage on the stage," and that technology is an essential classroom tool. This "teacher role" with availability of classroom technology is important to integrating problem solving and critical thinking into content skill acquisition.

It should be noted that professional development for teachers is perceived as a significant Key Issue by the Committee. Specifically, guidance is needed pertinent to the instruction and measurement of students' thinking skills in addition to the integration of the instruction of these skills across disciplines and grade levels. Further, realizing this Guiding Principle has salient implications for the training of prospective teachers, including their

field-based, pre-service experiences and the opportunities that all teachers have for face-to-face and virtual collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee offers the following nine (unordered) recommendations that are drawn from the seven **GUIDING PRINCIPLES** and the **PRINCIPLES'** respective **Key Issues**. The Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee recommends:

- Support for a rigorous common core curriculum. The underpinning of this curriculum is literacy and numeracy with reading, writing, information literacy, and complex reasoning (thinking) integrated across all subject areas. This system is supported through a multiple measures assessment approach which includes formative (e.g. within the course) and summative (e.g. end of course exams, end of high school exams, ACT, etc.) measures. Summative assessments should require a written component whereby students demonstrate rigor in their thinking about important concepts and ideas.
- The determination of a curriculum framework by the education community, P-20.
- Teaching methods and instructional time be differentiated to individual student needs. Every student's learning needs vary. The use of quality pre and post formative assessment is needed to identify where each student is his/her learning, with instruction designed to meet those needs. This will likely require increased use of mastery learning to instruct students at their learning level(s) as the progress toward proficiency on state standards.
- A structure for routine and on-going collaboration for teachers and leaders for data-driven decision-making.
- Strategies are implemented to attract the most talented individuals to teaching with attention given to creating a diverse workforce. To achieve this recommendation, it is critical Missouri provide students of all ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds receive a high quality education and encourage students to consider teaching as a career prior to entering college.
- Teacher performance reflects integration of problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and the application of technology into the learning process. Technology's role in extending learning beyond the classroom to home is critical if the needs of all learners are to be met. Writing, thinking, problem-solving and the development of information literacy skills are directly supported through a robust use of technology. Students who lack access to technology due to geography and/or socioeconomic status stand a far greater chance of exiting high school less prepared than peers for post-high school education than those students who have 24/7 access to technological learning tools.
- Multiple methods of assessment are utilized to measure student growth and performance.
- Performance data are used to inform and guide instruction. Performance data must have relevance to the student, to the teacher, and to parents. Data should inform the student about their learning progress and promote goal setting. For teachers, data should inform curriculum articulation and instructional design. For parents, data should give them honest feedback about their child's progress toward mastery of the state standards.

- Grant funds are made available to schools that cannot afford to provide sufficient technology to meet goals.

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