



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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Why does it seem like everything in education is changing? And, is there a way to think about the work that could make the work more manageable?

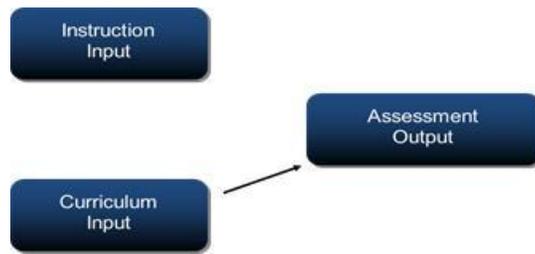
Anyone working in education today knows this is a busy year. On top of local initiatives that were already underway in many districts, externally-imposed initiatives – such as the new teacher and principal evaluation systems, adoption and implementation of evaluation frameworks, student growth measures, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the new state assessment, Smarter Balanced (SB) – are also in full swing. So why does it seem like everything is changing? Because it is! In a nutshell, we are re-tooling almost everything in public education related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Why so much change? Our work is changing because the purpose of American public education has changed. In 1993, we switched from a norm-referenced system of education to a criterion-referenced, or standards-based, system with the passage of HB 1209. The goal of the education system over the last 20 years has been to graduate students who were high school competent. Although the system is still standards-based, those standards have changed. Since August, 2013, the new goal is to get all students, not merely *high school competent*, but *college and career ready*.

Because our previous standards aimed only at high school competency and not college and career readiness, the CCSS are being implemented to provide a better path to college and career readiness. When the goal of education changed, the standards needed to change. Likewise, once the standards changed, the assessment used to measure the standards needed to change.

Although it is a lot of work to learn the new standards (CCSS) and to align to the new assessments (SB), it may be comforting to remember we have been doing this kind of work for two decades. These changes in curriculum and assessment, although numerous, are mostly just a “search and replace” of the work we have been doing and know how to do. On the other hand, instruction is likely to be the most overwhelming area of change because it has been the most neglected in previous reform efforts.

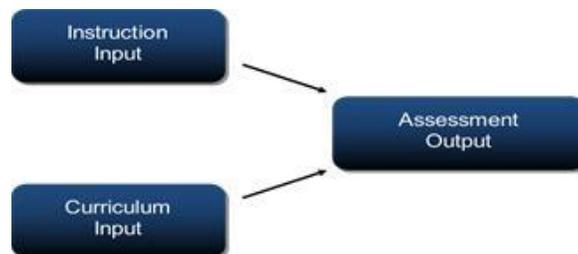
For 20 years, we have set curriculum standards (EALRs) and aligned to them (GLEs). We also established assessments (WASL/MSP/HSPE) and aligned to those (test specifications). During this time period, however, there was not much talk about *instruction*. Some of the state teacher evaluation criteria related to instruction, but no state or national initiative gave much attention to improving instruction. The theory of change for the last 20 years was essentially: Set standards and assess students; re-set standards and re-assess students; re-re-set standards and re-re-assess students. When students did not perform to the level of expectations, the standards were revised. The solution to improved student learning appeared to be solely in an aligned curriculum.



The next two decades, however, promise to look a bit different. Because college and career readiness has raised the standard on what students must achieve before exiting high school, students must learn more information, faster, and earlier than they have in the past. This being the case, if 70% of the students in a district were meeting the criterion standard when the goal was high school competency, then one might expect that percentage to go down now that there are more rigorous standards aimed at college and career readiness.

Just because we set new (higher) standards does not mean students will meet those standards unless we consider the role instruction has to play in learning. Research around cognitive science and learning theory indicates students can learn if they are taught in a way that helps them learn. The challenge over the next two decades will be moving our mindset from *teaching content* to *facilitating learning*.

The new emphasis on evaluation systems and frameworks reflects an intentional, purposeful effort to define effective instruction and to hold educators accountable for delivering it. Effective instruction will play a (perhaps *the*) key role in helping students succeed at more rigorous work, earlier in school. This is why there is so much emphasis on instruction now: Because we have never supported it systemically before, and we have some catching up to do. The theory of change for the next two decades is more likely to be characterized by the following:



Can we think about this work in a more manageable way? People are more likely to do something if it is *doable*. Therefore, how do we make sense of this work and keep it simple? First, try to think about all the changes as being under one initiative related to **College and Career Readiness**. Second, although CCSS and SB present new information, they are essentially the same kinds of work we have been doing for years. Third, beyond CCSS and SB, most of the other initiatives have to do with our new focus on instruction. Although the professional development that an educator attends might be titled TPEP, GLAD, AVID, GRR, STEM, STAR, Learning Walks, Lesson Study, Danielson, Marzano, 5 D+, Calibration, etc., they all have one thing in common – *instruction*. I believe helping educators understand why all the changes are happening and how they can make sense under one or two initiative umbrellas is the key to avoiding reform fatigue.



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