

WATERVLIET CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Every Student, Every Day!

Curriculum mapping: a clear path to a brighter academic future

Anyone who has ever taken a long road trip knows that a map is an important tool for keeping you on track and helping you make it to your destination. Likewise, on the long road to a high school diploma, "curriculum maps" are an equally important tool, designed to help teachers navigate the twists and turns of curriculum, covering the appropriate content while making smooth connections from one grade level to the next.

That is why we have embarked on the exciting journey of developing logical and efficient "maps" of our existing curriculum. Our main focus for this year has been ELA and Math curriculum for grades pre-K-8. Over time, we want to establish a clear baseline for what will be taught in all subject areas, at each grade level, at generally consistent times in each school year. Then we must ensure that this baseline agrees with the New York State standards.

The mapping process is a strategic and purposeful analysis of curriculum, which is designed to highlight gaps in instruction as well as unnecessary redundancies. It should also help to improve communication and consistency from one teacher to the next, both within (horizontal alignment) and between (vertical alignment) grade levels.

The administration is working very hard to convey that the mapping process is a positive step in improving academic progress throughout the district. However, there have been concerns expressed by faculty members that need to be clarified. For the record:

1. District administrators, teachers and others will be reviewing the content of the maps. However, their assessment of the maps will not be translated into a value judgment of the teacher's abilities or job performance.
2. The maps will not be a blunt instrument used by the "map police" to seek out weaknesses in faculty members. The maps are designed to be a flexible tool to help improve both teaching and learning by ensuring that all students receive the content they need to be prepared for the NYS assessments and advance to the next grade. As professional educators, we can all agree that our curriculum needs to be aligned to the New York State Standards since that is the knowledge our students will be held accountable for. Subtle changes to what we are teaching may be needed to ensure that we're doing all we can to prepare our students.
3. Administrators will not be using the maps to dictate how teachers teach. Classroom teachers will be expected to progress through the mapped curriculum at their own pace, as dictated by their own teaching style and the needs of their particular group of students. However, teachers will be expected to teach certain aspects of the curriculum at certain times of the year to ensure that students have the content they need to be prepared for the state assessments. The bottom line is

- that curriculum is what you teach, not how you teach it and administrators will never tell good teachers how to teach - that is the artistry of teaching, and the mapping process will not affect that.
4. The process is not one that has a finite conclusion. We have just begun to analyze their content horizontally or vertically and to align with the state standards in the pre-K-8 ELA and math maps. All maps will evolve over time, reflecting continuous efforts to refine and improve the curriculum throughout the district.

Curriculum mapping gives us a way to ferret out areas of our curriculum where we may not be as strong as we need to be so that we can adjust them. However, if we are to achieve our mission of improving academic performance throughout the district, we all need to work together to do so.

Curriculum Mapping FAQ

What is curriculum mapping?

Curriculum mapping is a collaborative communications process focused on collecting data about the curriculum in a school district. Data is gathered in a format that allows each teacher to present an overview of his or her students' actual learning experiences. This data is then analyzed to ensure that the curriculum meets a few simple criteria:

- The curriculum follows a logical progression from grade level to grade level, one that is largely free of repetition and gaps.
- The curriculum is aligned with the New York State Learning Standards to ensure that our students are getting what they need to pass the New York State assessments.
- The curriculum supports our ultimate goal of ensuring that every student at WCSD will become a graduate who is prepared for college, career and citizenship.

Alignment is then made possible by gradually adjusting what is taught to support the above criteria.

Why do curriculum mapping?

Realistic information about the curriculum that learners encounter is essential for informed decision making. Integration of curriculum is about vertical planning as well as horizontal planning. Without a context for looking at students' experiences over time, we can make isolated decisions. Curriculum mapping gives us the "big picture" tool that we need to address this challenge. When teachers share what they teach with one another and work together to eliminate content gaps and repetitions in the students' educational journey, student learning is strengthened.

How can curriculum mapping benefit a school district?

The value of mapping is that educators at a site can edit, review, validate, and develop curriculum and assessment in context and with confidence. With a K-12 overview of what is actually going on in classrooms, individual teachers can build on previous years with authenticity and better prepare students for the future. Teachers in a grade-level can more easily plan and coordinate units of study and activities. Departments can make better decisions because they have more information about what is going on, not only within the building but among buildings. A district can match its current assessments with all levels of standards. It is virtually impossible for any one person or committee to stay on top of the curriculum. Mapping provides a direct, honest, and accessible tool to help all parties in the district carry out that task.

What is shown on the map?

Generally our maps will contain the following for each unit: essential questions; content and concepts taught; skills and activities used; assessment tools used; and the standards addressed. The time during the school year when different concepts are taught is also addressed. The point is not to teach to the months, but to use the months as a common reference to plot the classroom curriculum. This can be especially important when paired with an analysis of what the state tests actually contain. A concept that shows up repeatedly on a state test may need to be covered earlier in the school year to allow more time for students to properly grasp the ideas they need to be successful on the test.

When will the maps and the mapping process be done?

Mapping is an ongoing, multi-stage process with no finite conclusion. Once the maps are established, they will be a useful tool to help teachers ensure that the instructional strategies they are using are covering the appropriate grade-level content.

Will administrators be using the maps to tell us what to teach or evaluate the way we are teaching?

Curriculum is WHAT is taught and instruction is HOW a teacher chooses to implement the curriculum. The goal of the curriculum mapping process is to develop an overview of the district's curriculum to ensure that we are teaching what New York State says our students need to know at the right grade level and at the right time during the year. If what is currently being taught to students is not aligned to the standards, and not adequately preparing them for the tests, then adjustments will need to be made to the curriculum NOT to the instruction. We will never tell good teachers how to practice their craft. The maps will not be used to keep track of what a certain teacher is doing on a certain day.

Will mapping keep us off of the SINI list?

Our designation as a SINI school was an impetus to begin the mapping process, and there are other districts, such as Glens Falls, that attribute mapping as playing an important role in improving their academic achievement and assisting them at being removed from list. However, the process benefits both successful and struggling schools – it is meant to be a tool that assists our district in an ongoing process of improvement, now that we are off the list the process will absolutely continue. Many schools in the area use curriculum mapping such as: North Colonie, Guilderland, Scotia-Glenville, Schalmont, Voorheesville, Ravena-Coeymans Selkirk, Lansingburgh, Saratoga, Mohonasen, and the Capital Region BOCES Career and Technical Education program.

I am a special area teacher... why do I care?

Special areas have state standards and benchmarks just as the core subjects do. Although our major focus this year has been on ELA and Math pre-K-8, all teachers have begun the mapping process and will be expected to take part in the mapping process.

Will the maps be made public?

The curriculum alignment sub-committee has set a goal to eventually post our curriculum maps on the district's web site. Curriculum maps can be a useful tool for parents, allowing them to see -- at a glance -- precisely what their child will be taught at each grade level.

Who is making the final decisions on what the curriculum should be?

Curriculum is what you teach, and the minimum standards are dictated by New York State. However, it is our hope that once we have established that we are all meeting these minimum standards that we will begin to aim beyond them. Proficiency is the minimum of what we want for our students - mastery should be our goal. Think about it – wouldn't you rather have the pilot or surgeon who has mastered their craft, as opposed to one who is merely proficient? In today's world it is not enough to have our main focus be just getting the kids to pass. Our students can do better than that and so can we!

If we are required to follow NYS Standards, why aren't the NYS curriculum guides considered a map? Is there a NYS map being developed for each curriculum area?

New York State has developed core competencies- these are not maps. State Ed may have some content areas mapped, but these may not necessarily match what we teach or our resources. The guides do not list specific content, activities, skills, assessments, available resources and technology that are specific to our district and classes. (Ex. There is a map for Global Studies on the New York State Education Department web page but this map does not mesh with our method of teaching this course.) We are not aware of any plans for NYS developing a map for each curriculum area.

Who is evaluating the maps? Is there a plan for teachers to evaluate other teachers' maps? What happens if a map is not up to par?

The evaluation Rubric has been posted on the website. The first wave of ELA/Math pre-k-8 maps were reviewed by the principals and Director of Curriculum. The rubrics have, or will be, given back to the map makers so that improvements can be made in any area that scored low on the rubric. In the future, other teachers will be trained to assist with this process so that it will be an on going process/review.

Is there something that can be done in regards to the situation where certain people having 1 map and others have 3, 4, 5 or more maps?

Every class we teach needs to have a map. Some teachers will be involved with more than one map. An effective teacher has daily lesson plans for all classes they teach regardless of the number of classes. Curriculum maps should be viewed the same way.

Are there deadlines for completing the maps? What do you expect to see in a completed map? If there are deadlines, what are they?

Yesterday! All pre-k-8 ELA and Math maps need to have all required components in place, per the rubric, by July 2010. All other courses should be at least drafted by July 2010. All courses will be rubric reviewed over the summer with results back to teachers by Fall 2010. Our goal is to have all course maps surpassing minimum component requirements based on the rubric.

Will there continue to be more time and opportunities for map development? Will we have more in – service on days like Superintendent's Conference Day in September? Will there be ½ or full day staff development in the 2010 – 2011 school year to continue work on the maps?

The district will continue with quarterly curriculum alignment meetings. However, this will not be enough time to create and adjust our curriculum and maps. Teachers will need to work during planning time and/or other time to continually monitor and adjust their curriculum in order to meet these deadlines. There is also time at department meetings for this activity. During the end of the year Regents and ½ days, there is additional time and resources available to all staff for working on their maps. Additionally, there will be time during the summer and multiple half days are being worked into the calendar for next year as they have been this year. The district has committed substantial resources to this initiative in money, professional development days, summer work, training and software and will continue to do so.

**Does the current software provide the necessary tools and set – up for our needs?
Are we moving to another program now or in the future?**

Rubicon Atlas is one of the premier software companies for curriculum maps. The district has a great deal invested in this product and does not plan to switch any time soon.