

Standards Alignment to Curriculum and Assessment

To understand standards alignment in the context of curriculum and assessment, it is important to understand what *standards* are, what *curriculum* consists of, what *assessments* are, and what *alignment* means in the context of curriculum and assessment.

Standards indicate what students should know and be able to do within a particular content area, while *curriculum* shapes how students will gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities as described in the standards. Assessments can be used to gather evidence related to student learning. *Assessments* may include summative, benchmark, or interim tests, or may involve more informal methods of data collection through a formative assessment process.

It is important to understand that the knowledge, skills, and abilities outlined in standards documents should build upon one another from grade to grade (vertical alignment) as students progress in their educational careers, and that the curriculum associated with the standards should also be logical and coherent within grade levels (horizontal alignment). The goal of a well-designed curriculum should be to ensure that students have a range of opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities required by the standards. While standards describe what students are intended to learn; curriculum describes how they are intended to access the knowledge, skills, and abilities embedded within the standards. *Alignment* is the process of ensuring that the specified curriculum is consistent with enabling students to reach the milestones outlined in the standards. A curriculum that is aligned to standards is a curriculum that ensures that students have the opportunity to access the content and skills outlined in those standards.

Through the administration of assessments that are carefully aligned to standards and curriculum, educators are able to gain an understanding of how student learning is progressing. Like curriculum, assessments must be aligned to content and to grade-specific standards, in order to assess whether or not a student has gained the knowledge, skills, and abilities described in the standards. It is important to note that if curriculum is aligned to standards, and if assessments are aligned to standards, then the assessments—not only large-scale summative assessments, but also classroom formative processes and any other assessments that may be administered—must also be aligned to curriculum. This comprehensive alignment ensures that educators will be able to gather information related to the specific area(s) of the curriculum that students are engaging with.

Curriculum Alignment State Example: Louisiana

The state of Louisiana has implemented well-defined strategies and procedures based on the following tenets of curriculum alignment:

- ◆ Curricular decisions are made at the local level, as those who are closest to students are best informed to decide on appropriate materials and methods;
- ◆ Selection and implementation of high-quality curriculum has a large impact on the quality of student learning;
- ◆ Professional development related to curriculum and alignment is important for educators; and
- ◆ Curriculum must be connected to (i.e., aligned with) standards-aligned assessments.

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) helps districts with curriculum selection and alignment, alignment of assessments, and related professional development opportunities, through the following services:

- ◆ LDOE led an online review of instructional materials listed on [this page](#), to determine the materials' degree of alignment with state content standards, in order to support school systems in their decision-making.
- ◆ [This professional development vendor guide](#), created by LDOE, identifies vendors who specialize in providing assistance with the design and implementation of a cohesive academic system.
- ◆ [This page](#) on the LDOE website provides resources, organized by grade and by content area, that can be utilized to support educators in enacting high-quality curriculum.
- ◆ The [ELA Guidebooks](#) 2.0 curriculum, created by teachers for teacher use, is an English language arts (ELA) curriculum that can be used to supplement instruction where gaps in alignment exist.

Assessment Alignment State Example: Oregon

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) provides information around its statewide assessment system, along with resources that are pertinent to alignment to state standards for multiple types of assessments, to teachers and stakeholders.

- ◆ On its [Assessment Development](#) webpage, ODE provides information related to its development of K–12 assessments aligned to state standards. The webpage includes technical documentation as well as links to science and social studies content and assessment panels that provide assistance around content standards.
- ◆ ODE's [Student Centered Assessment Professional Learning Resources](#) webpage includes resources to support high-quality local assessment practices. Resources are available for the following assessment categories:
 - Formative assessment;
 - Performance assessment;
 - Required state assessment;
 - Interim assessment;
 - Balanced assessment system; and
 - English language proficiency assessment.

Resources

- ◆ The [CSAI-Developed Curriculum and Instruction Resources](#) webpage provides a collection of resources that address key shifts in learning represented in College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) and that are drawn from leading theory and research about learning and formative assessment.
- ◆ The [Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products \(EQuIP\)](#) initiative has developed a set of rubrics that educators can use to evaluate lessons and units in mathematics and ELA/literacy.
- ◆ The [Instructional Materials Evaluation Toolkit \(IMET\)](#), developed by Student Achievement Partners, is designed to be used to evaluate comprehensive mathematics and ELA curricula (including supplemental materials) for grades K–12 to determine alignment with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
- ◆ The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)'s [Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments](#) provide guidance on the evidence that states should review in order to make informed judgments about the quality of assessments. This document includes both an overview of the criteria and a chart containing detailed criteria and sample evidence.
- ◆ The [ELA/Literacy Grade-Level Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool \(GIMET-QR\)](#) and the [Mathematics GIMET-QR](#) are tools designed by the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) to support educators in evaluating the quality of available instructional materials and in making evidence-based selection decisions about the suitability of instructional materials under consideration. The tool is organized into grade-level or grade-band documents and is structured to mirror the IMET.
- ◆ The [Web Alignment Tool](#) is a web-based application that automates the process of aligning state education standards with standardized tests, using Norman Webb's depth-of-knowledge levels.
- ◆ Within CSAI's [Assessment Design Toolkit](#), the first element of assessment design is alignment. The [Five Elements of Assessment Design Module 4: Alignment](#) explores this element. By the end of the module, participants will be able to define alignment and explain why it is important, explain how to “unpack” a standard to understand its content, and use an assessment blueprint to document the skills embedded within it.
- ◆ The Rhode Island Department of Education–developed [Deepening Assessment Literacy module](#) aims to help educators build their knowledge bases by deepening their understanding of the purposes and types of educational assessment and practices for local assessment development. The module covers topics such as student learning objective (SLO)–guided assessment; identifying the purpose of an assessment; the cycle of assessment and the types of assessment that are used in the cycle; constructing and selecting the right assessment through examining validity and reliability; alignment, format, item type, administration, scoring, and calibration of assessment; and accommodations and modifications.
- ◆ CSAI's [Alignment & Evaluation of College and Career Ready Standards and Assessments](#) resource collection houses CSAI-reviewed tools, products, and guidance resources related to alignment of materials to CCRS and to assessments, as well as resources related to evaluation of the quality of those materials.
- ◆ Developed through a partnership of Achieve, CCSSO, and CGCS, the [Assessment Evaluation Tool](#) supports educators in evaluating the alignment of existing grade- or course-level assessments to the CCSS. It also helps educators build understanding of the qualities of aligned assessments. This tool can be used to help make decisions about the purchase of assessments, the evaluation and analysis of assessments currently in use, and the development of future assessments.
- ◆ CCSSO, Achieve, and Student Achievement Partners have jointly developed a [Toolkit for Evaluating the Alignment of Instructional and Assessment Materials to the Common Core State Standards](#). This toolkit is a set

of interrelated, freely available instruments for evaluating alignment to the CCSS; each instrument supports the expectations in the CCSS and is derived from the [Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards](#).

- ◆ The [Colorado Assessment Review Tool](#) may be used to analyze summative K–12 classroom assessments to determine their quality and efficacy, their suitability for use as student growth measures, and their alignment with the Colorado Academic Standards. With very minor modifications, it could be used to evaluate alignment with the CCSS or with other sets of readiness standards.
- ◆ [Curriculum, Instruction, Alignment and Assessment](#), Chapter 1 in David Squires's book *Aligning and Balancing the Standards-Based Curriculum*¹, first defines *curriculum*, then examines alignment approaches that schools can use to address the interrelated nature of standards, assessment, curriculum, and instruction.
- ◆ [From Common Core Standards to Curriculum: Five Big Ideas](#), by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, explores five big ideas about the CCSS and highlights potential misconceptions in working with these standards. The article also provides recommendations for designing a coherent and aligned curriculum and assessment system within a school or district.

¹ Squires, D. A. (2005). *Aligning and balancing the standards-based curriculum*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.



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