

## Power in the Process: The *Why* Behind Priority Standards

Accelerated learning is an instructional process designed to accelerate student learning through exposure to current grade- and/or course-level-appropriate standards while providing the scaffolding needed to address possible learning gaps encountered in the prior grade level and/or content areas.

A critical first step in providing accelerated learning is to have a clear understanding of what learning gaps may be present. To do this, teachers must work collaboratively with their colleagues to identify the standards for the grade level and/or content areas that were and were not addressed in the prior school year. Identifying those standards that are of priority, or ones that have endurance, leverage, and student-learning readiness, will help to expedite this process.

The identification of priority standards is best accomplished at the local level as the instructional needs of students may differ across the various types of districts and charter schools across Missouri. In addition, the collaborative identification of priority standards is a process that involves examination of district-/charter school-level data and the expertise of the local district/charter school educators.

As we consider priority or essential standards, some may wonder about the **WHY** of developing these standards. What makes this process a powerful practice?

Let's begin with some fundamental assumptions based on the work presented in *Identifying Essential Standards*.

- All students learn but in different ways.
- All students learn but at varying speeds.
- All students develop learning strategies, but some strategies are more effective.
- Some students have a home life that encourages academic success.
- Students come to school with different skills and knowledge.
- Educators start each day with honorable intentions, work tirelessly on behalf of their students and utilize the best strategies they know.
- Educators strive to meet the needs of all students in their classes but often lack the time, materials and skills necessary to meet all needs..
- **SO:** Ensuring that ALL students learn requires a systematic process that guarantees every child receives the additional time and support needed to learn at high levels (Allthingsplc.info, n.d.).

The *Identifying Essential Standards* presentation cites the work of Marzano, Hattie, DuFour, Lezotte and Ainsworth regarding this critical focus. Experts believe that by developing priority standards, we are able to ask and respond to the four key questions of a Professional Learning Community (PLC):

1. What do we expect students to learn?
2. How do we know they are learning it?

3. How do we respond when they do not learn?  
4. How do we respond when they have already learned?

When addressing the **WHY** of different groups of teachers or districts doing the work of determining priority standards vs. just being given a list, we realize that teachers are closest to the students, curriculum and learning. They are the drivers in communicating the learning targets to students. Teachers' voice, input and expertise add richness to the work, growing in them a deeper knowledge of the standards and a shared commitment for student success. We also realize that students and communities have varying needs and priorities. In looking at John Hattie's *Visible Learning* work, we see that some of the influences that are a part of the priority standard work also have some of the greatest effect sizes.

- Collective teacher efficacy 1.57
- Teacher clarity about success criteria .75
- Professional development .62

In an article written for *Journal of Education and Practice*, Alsubaie (2016) captures the thinking as follows: "Without doubt, the most important person in the curriculum implementation process is the teacher. With their knowledge, experiences and competencies, teachers are central to any curriculum development effort. Better teachers support better learning because they are most knowledgeable about the practice of teaching and are responsible for introducing the curriculum in the classroom" (2016).

In the book *Make It Happen* (2019) by Kim Bailey and Chris Jakicic, the authors devote Chapter 2 to four key actions that help us identify what we want students to know and be able to do. These key actions for teachers are as follows:

1. Identify the most important or essential (priority) standards for their teaching that will ensure students learn.
2. Discuss and clarify what the standards mean and what proficiency looks like.
3. Develop a common pacing guide that ensures adequate and specific instructional periods during which the essential (priority) standards are taught for implementation.
4. Unwrap the standards to identify the learning targets necessary for students to learn in order to master these standards (p.35).

As this chapter begins, Bailey and Jakicic take time to talk about establishing the **WHY** behind essential or priority standards. The authors state, "Many schools we worked with found that by engaging in the processes of identifying essential standards, unwrapping them and developing common pacing, teams were better able to understand both the complexity and content students must learn" (2019, p. 39).

In "Unpacking Standards Leads to Confidence, Not Chaos, for Teachers and Students," Maria Nielsen talks about how learning more about the standards leads to confidence on the part of not only the teachers but also our students. "It is through collaborative conversations that we come to collective clarity on what we want our students to know and be able to do" (2016).

In conclusion, identifying priority standards is best accomplished at the local level by teachers in school districts and charter schools. Many Missouri districts/charter schools have completed the identification of their priority standards. In order to assist districts/charter schools that have not

identified priority standards, several resources are provided through the links below. A few districts have provided detailed descriptions of how they worked to identify priority Missouri Learning Standards ([Ava R-I](#), [Lindbergh](#), [Pattonville](#), [Park Hill](#) and [Republic](#)). In addition, a [repository](#) of examples of priority standards from various-sized districts and organizations across the state is provided with examples of the priority MLS standards that they have identified for their districts.

## References

- Alsubaie, M. A. (2016). Curriculum development: Teacher involvement in curriculum development. *Journal of Education and Practice*. Retrieved August 27, 2020, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1095725.pdf>
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- Nielsen, M. (2016, July 19). Unpacking standards leads to confidence, not chaos, for teachers and students. All Things Assessment. <https://allthingsassessment.info/2016/07/19/unpacking-standards-leads-to-confidence-not-chaos-for-teachers-and-students/>