

Integrating Curriculum for Tomorrow's Students

The Anchorage, Alaska, School District assessed the impact of social change on the lives of students, transformed curriculum review from a fragmented to a holistic process, and found new ways to link disciplines with skills for critical thinking and humane living.



The Anchorage School District declared a moratorium on new curriculum review and development during the 1985-86 school year so that we could reevaluate our curriculum renewal and adoption process. It wasn't working. In the past, curriculum and program review committees—composed of curriculum coordinators, principals, teachers, students, parents, and interested community members—had operated on a six-year cycle. The purpose was to evaluate every elementary subject area and secondary course within this time frame, and to budget major textbook purchases accordingly.

Unfortunately, this plan had several disadvantages. Primarily, it fragmented the way the district looked at curriculum by treating disciplines as unrelated, discrete units. The cyclical review process limited communication among subject-area review committees and weakened the linkages among curriculums.

Curriculum Consortium 2000 was created to allow the district to review curriculum in an entirely different way. Its goal was to implement a comprehensive plan "with appropriate instructional strategies reflecting the present and future needs of Anchorage School District students." Thus, the staff members assigned to this task—representing each curriculum area, multicultural education, gifted education, library/media, assessment and evaluation, and elementary and secondary teachers—were able to examine the total K-12 program, placing in perspective overarching student needs that could not be limited to any single curriculum area. The result was a coherent look at the whole curriculum.

Identifying Future Trends and Skills to Address Them

Curriculum Consortium 2000 grew out of a district study entitled "Forward to the Basics: Teaching for Today and Tomorrow," which identified five major societal trends and, as a result, the skills students would need to prepare them for the future. The study was based on the assumption that "the success of any educational institution depends largely upon the degree to which it meets the needs of a changing global society." We believe that these

five trends will directly affect the lives of our students.

1. *The nation's population is increasing and getting older.* Alaska's population will continue to be younger than the national norm, however, and for that reason may come in conflict with the rest of the nation.

2. *The structure of the family is changing.* Schools will need to adapt to a changing student population.

3. *The economic base is changing.* Because many jobs will become obsolete, workers will have to be retrained in order to remain productive members of the labor force. Education faces the challenge of teaching people how to learn more quickly and efficiently.

4. *The environment is changing.* What we do with our natural resources affects other nations. Thus, we must approach ecological problems on a global level.

5. *Society is changing.* Human rela-

tions skills will become increasingly important as people seek the human side of a technological world.

Skills for a Productive Future

Education must address the skills students will need to lead productive lives in a future shaped by these trends. We identified these four groups of skills.

1. *Critical thinking skills.* Students need to be able to think through a problem logically and to be creative in discovering alternate solutions.

2. *Human relations skills.* As our world becomes increasingly technical, the need for high-quality human communication among citizens of all nations will make it desirable for students to know a second language, to develop new skills in conflict resolution, and to develop sensitivity to the general welfare of humankind on a global level.

3. *Personal skills.* Societal changes will affect people's personal lives.



One result of the curriculum review process was the integration of parts of the curriculum, such as the use of technology, that had been treated separately.

They will need to cope with stress and to adapt to personal and occupational changes in ways that will put them in control of their lives.

4. **Societal skills.** Students need to learn that their actions influence other individuals in an increasingly interdependent world. They must learn to accept responsibility for their actions and to maintain their community by caring for one another.

Developing Goals Based on Desired Outcomes

"Forward to the Basics" led to the development of Curriculum Consortium 2000 and the mission, goals, and outcomes it defined for Anchorage's curriculum, instruction, and students. Consortium members spent their year together outlining issues that they felt have the most effect on students. They then listed them in order of importance:

1. application and transfer of learning;

2. relevant curriculums that consider processes and content in required and elective programs;

3. multicultural education integrated into elementary and secondary curriculum and secondary ethnic studies;

4. educational transition of students from one grade level to another;

5. human relations education; and

6. enriched school structures: alternative programs, magnet schools, international schools, and fine arts schools.

Curriculum Consortium 2000 developed goals for the curriculum and instruction department based on what it perceived to be the common threads among these diverse issues.

Student, Curriculum, and Instructional Outcomes

The consortium's outcomes for students reflect a commitment to educating the "whole person." Students will:

• become increasingly responsible for their own learning;

• develop skills for careers, employment, further education, and learning throughout their lives;

• become involved and responsible citizens who can function in and contribute to a diverse national and global society;

• use decision-making processes in a changing society;

• accept and value others, recognizing individual and cultural similarities, differences, and contributions;

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• develop positive self-esteem through a realistic perception of personal capabilities and potentials;

• be able to retrieve, evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources;

• identify personal, professional, leisure, and recreational needs and determine positive alternatives to fulfill them;

• acquire strategies for developing interpersonal and family relationships;

• develop and use aesthetic sensitivity; and

• develop and use problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, and reasoning skills.

The consortium's desired outcomes for the curriculum specify that, among other things, it will:

• reflect district goals;

• be directed at the skills students need for employment, further education, and lifetime learning; and

• be delivered through a variety of models.

Outcomes for instruction state that it will include:

• a variety of strategies to meet the individual needs of students;

• cross-curricular teaching strategies that integrate skills, ideas, content, and multicultural goals in all subject areas; and

• the modeling of attitudes and behaviors.

Preparing Students for the Next Century

The consortium has also developed objectives for staff training and behav-

ior, school organization, and program evaluation. Each objective is focused toward educating young people for tomorrow's world. The consortium's program is both specific and far-reaching, requiring a complete change in the curriculum adoption process. We are no longer concerned solely with what concepts are presented at what level, but with emphasizing skills that encourage a lifelong pursuit of knowledge and creative talent. This necessitates breaking free of the constraints of an 8 A.M. to 3 P.M. school day.

Because we believe that much learning and discovery occurs outside the classroom, we encourage students to capitalize on this kind of learning and to incorporate it into their lives: we need to educate for all of life's activities, including recreation and leisure. As changes will continue to add stress to students' personal lives, they will need to learn how to rejuvenate themselves so that they can remain productive citizens of an interdependent society. Perhaps the most essential element of Curriculum Consortium 2000's plan is the increased emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking, for without these skills students will be inept at dealing with the change and variety they are likely to encounter.

Essentially, Curriculum Consortium 2000 reworked the entire curriculum process to reflect what the district perceives as societal trends influencing our students. Our intention is to prepare students for a world that will demand flexibility, creativity, and the ability to adapt positively to change. By emphasizing the interrelationships between subject areas and the effects of a changing society on them, Curriculum Consortium 2000 intends to structure a process that will prepare our students for the twenty-first century. □

Note: The following members of the 1985-86 Curriculum and Instruction Department were members of Curriculum Consortium 2000: Dorothy Oetter, Health/Physical Education Coordinator; Louise Petermann, Mathematics/Computer Coordinator; Douglas Phillips, Social Studies Coordinator; Rebecca Sipe, Language Arts Coordinator; Emma Walton, Science Coordinator; Katherine Wilson, Reading Coordinator; and Ruth Keitz, Executive Director.

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