

Lindsay Unified School District – Building a Learner-centered Curriculum

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May 10, 2017

How does your organization define competency-based education?

In Lindsay, the “Performance Based System” is designed to deliver the “ideal learning experience” through a learner-centered, personalized, competency-based delivery model using technology as an accelerator. Learners progress only when they have demonstrated mastery. There is an emphasis on “lifelong learning standards.”

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The Lindsay Unified School District has developed and formally adopted a guaranteed and viable learner-centered curriculum which is based on the California Common Core State standards as well as other California and national standards. In addition, it is aligned to state assessment blueprints. In the Lindsay taxonomy, “guaranteed” means the curriculum is requisite, learned by all learners, and proven through evidence of mastery. “Viable” means the curriculum focuses on the essential learning outcomes and can be learned and mastered by learners in the available time for learning.

The curriculum is organized into units of study referred to as “measurement topics.” These measurement topics are Lindsay’s defined rubrics for learning and guide all scoring, grading, and district policies for advancement and promotion. Inside of measurement topics are “learning targets.” Depending on the focus and scope of the measurement topic, there can be a single learning target or several learning targets strategically grouped for instruction, assessment, and mastery. All measurement topics are written in progressions of learning that align to the [district scoring scale](#) of zero to four, with the level 3 representing the district standard for mastery. The progressions of learning represent the increase in rigor and cognitive demands for each measurement topic. Measurement topics have been developed for grades TK to 12 in English language development, math, English language arts, Spanish language arts, science and social studies, as well as in all secondary grade elective and supplementary core courses, including those for Advanced Placement, career and technical education, world language, and performing arts.

The development of the measurement topics was completed under the direct guidance of Dr. Robert Marzano and has undergone several revisions since it was first piloted during the 2008/2009 school year. It is work that is a “moving target” as state and federal standards change, new courses are added or revised, and re-evaluations of rigor and mastery take place. In this continuing progression of curriculum development, the role of the measurement topic structure, as well as defined rubrics and district models, has been critical in the continuous improvement and sustainability of the Performance Based System.

The [district's policies for grading](#), course credits, and advancement have also been a work of continuous development. As part of the Performance Based System, it is important that there is an effective system for assessing, scoring, and reporting learning that is both multifaceted and guided by a clear purpose. At the TK-8 level, various mechanisms have been developed to ensure that learners can demonstrate mastery based on their learning needs. Such mechanisms include the Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) and transfer and promotion requirements to high school. At the secondary level, similar processes and protocols have been developed that center on how measurement topics translate into course credits. In all aspects of grading, learning facilitators have helped develop scoring and reporting standard operating procedures (SOPs), which range in scope from district assessments to course credits.

In the nascent stages of [developing the Performance Based System](#), it was critical to ensure there was a transparent system for communicating learning outcomes to all stakeholders. The system of a guaranteed and viable curriculum organized in a measurement topic format provided the vehicle for learning facilitators to deliver focused instruction and track of the progress of individual learners. In addition, it was the first critical step in creating a curriculum that empowered learners and made their learning outcomes explicitly communicated.

The measurement topics and scoring scale, in all their iterations, remain the bedrock of the guaranteed and viable curriculum as well as how our learning facilitators score and report learning, award course credits at the secondary level, and award promotion.

Outcomes from this work have been correlated to increasing learner academic achievement data in the district, particularly in English Language Arts and literacy and graduation rates. With a transformed curricular approach, Lindsay learners are demonstrating improved academic gains in core learning internally as well as on external state and federal assessments.

The truest outcomes are [the narratives of the Lindsay learners, their families, and the learning facilitators who support them](#). The qualitative data about learners and families finding empowerment in their learning and learning facilitators discovering new leases on what it means to teach and activate learning stand as a testament to what a transparent curriculum and grading approach can do.

In the scope of this work, there have been several lessons learned. Among the most important is that the communicating and planning for of the measurement topics is crucial. To ensure both mastery and completion in a competency-based model, it is paramount for learning facilitators to have clear pacing expectations, systems to regroup and reteach curriculum, and the moral imperative to “hold the line” and ensure mastery in learning. We did not, in the early stages of the Performance Based System, anticipate how the removal of time would impact curriculum and pacing. We learned that the role of pacing has to be both established and structured as well as flexible and organic to meet the needs of learners as well as of learning facilitators who plan instruction.

Often, especially from the perspective of the learning facilitator, it feels like we are compromising instruction by not including all the standards in the measurement topics. For example, a group of learning facilitators in math might argue for certain essential standards over others. The reality is if we tried to include more standards in certain contents, the viability of the curriculum would be compromised and sink under too many expectations for mastery. While it often feels like we are “sacrificing” some of the content, in reality, we are choosing essential standards that develop correlated skills, processes, and content to maintain a viable curriculum.

In beginning this work, it is important that other organizations consider:

How will you give all stakeholders a voice in the design of competencies, rubrics, and curriculum expectations?

The buy-in of staff and learners is critical in the development of this work. Both the product and implementation will benefit from educators feeling like they have had a voice in the rubrics and progressions and understanding how they will work in vertical alignment, assessment, and other curricular decisions. In doing this work, you are in fact redesigning instructional culture and this requires a strategic focus on honoring learning facilitators’ content knowledge, teaching experience, and ability to lend honest feedback about defined rubrics, progressions, and scoring criteria and policies.

How will you communicate these rubrics and other related curricular components to all stakeholders? This is particularly important for learners. True empowerment in learning comes from them knowing the defined progressions and rubrics, scoring criteria, and pacing expectations. When learners can describe their own learning and progress monitor it, they can then articulate it to their families and their learning facilitators. This takes strategic thinking and tools from learning facilitators to support communication. This video demonstrates examples of such tools for curricular communication.

How will learning based on these rubrics and scoring criteria be evaluated? In designing this curricular approach, think forward to assessment. With the end in mind, the progressions can be evaluated for any misalignments, flaws in integration, or inconsistencies in rigor.

How will you deal with the complexities of secondary grading and scoring in relation to topics such as course credits for college and athletic eligibility? Secondary curriculum has some unique challenges. In the design of rubrics and progressions and grading policies, you are disrupting other protocols, processes, and established expectations. Carefully consider how changes in defined rubrics and grading policies will affect other established processes and determine if changes to those need to be done concurrently and with the appropriate stakeholders.

How will the curriculum you design be supported by resources at all levels, including both remediation resources and components for learners working in advanced content? Early on, we learned that with clearly defined rubrics and progressions of learning, learners really do move at the pace they need. This is fantastic, but it also requires significant curricular supports for the progressions, particularly in reading and math. With a blended learning focus, programs that are standards-aligned, and district-provided devices in all learners' hands, we have now expanded our supports to offer the full range of personalized instruction learners need in tandem with what our learning facilitators provide in their instruction. This includes programs such as Lexia and Reading Plus for reading, Dreambox for math, and other supports serving English Learners and learners working ahead of their grade level and in advanced content. See recent features on Lindsay Unified by Reading Plus in this blog or this case study

What outside partners and consultants will you engage in the work? Lindsay has benefitted immensely from outside partners and consultants who lent their expertise, objectivity, and feedback to the initial and continued iterations of our rubrics, scoring policies, and other aspects of curriculum. Having some outside voices could benefit your processes and development and ensure the nuances of this work are not overlooked.