

CURRICULUM – Not by Chance

Curriculum in the Council Rock School District is a complex and ongoing process, accomplished through the collaboration of many staff professionals. To achieve a curriculum that promotes high standards and high levels of achievement for all students involves the due diligence of the administration and approval from the Board of School Directors.

Through its curricular offerings the Council Rock School District facilitates the state directed goal of improving students' achievement as they mature into adults. The Pennsylvania School Code states that the purpose of public education is to prepare "students for adult life by attending to their intellectual and developmental needs and challenging them to achieve at their highest level possible. In conjunction with families and other community institutions, public education prepares students to become self-directed, life-long learners and responsible, involved citizens."

The state statute gives each local district's elected School Board directors the legal responsibility for the oversight and final approval of curriculum, including the cost of instructional materials. The Council Rock School Board adopts courses of study taught in accordance with Council Rock's School Board Policy 107, *Adoption of Courses of Study*, and Policy 108, *Adoption of Textbooks*. Other types of classroom resources, both required and supplemental, are regulated by Policy 109, *Library Resource Materials*, and administrative regulations 109 R, 109 R1, 109 R2, 109 R3, and 109 R4.

The development and adoption of an effective curriculum is carefully planned. The process is outlined in Council Rock's 2006-07 *A Plan for Curriculum Renewal*. It states that "the Council Rock Board of School Directors recognizes the need for the continuous development, review, and renewal of the school curriculum, assessment practices, and instructional strategies." All required curricular materials go through the renewal process and Board approval as do optional instructional materials. For example, if in an English course, every class reads the same three out of four required novels, and the teacher selects the fourth novel, it is a selection from an approved list of optional novels. Therefore, all novels that are read by a class go through the same curriculum renewal process and are approved by the Board of School Directors.

Supplementary materials are selected or created by the staff and do not go through the curriculum renewal process, nor are they approved by the Board, but are regulated by Board policies. The Board does, however, approve the expenditures for all supplemental resources housed in the school library-media center. Supplementary resource materials could include reference books, audio-visual materials, databases, online resources, maps, library books, periodicals, etc. For the most part, the use of Visual Literacy in curriculum (see article on page___) is part of a curriculum's supplemental materials.

Before the School Board takes a vote on any curriculum renewal or new course, and/or its related instructional cost, there are many hours of groundwork. Representatives at every professional level within the district are involved, including administrative supervision, leadership from curriculum coordinators, and committees of teachers at the secondary and elementary levels.

Although the Directors of Elementary and Secondary Education are charged with the implementation of curriculum development and renewal, there is a bottom-up process that is stewarded by eighteen Curriculum Coordinators who are both experts in their field and teachers in the classroom. A Curriculum Coordinator's academic day is split between interfacing with students and their academic discipline's curricular responsibilities. In this way each Curriculum Coordinator not only experiences how a written curriculum is put into practice, but also has the opportunity to interact every day with teacher colleagues.

Curriculum Coordinators head up curriculum committees that are made up of “secondary and/or elementary teachers representing the respective curriculum under review,”¹ an administrator, and individuals representing the parent community. It is the curriculum committees that put together all the components of a new or renewed curricular offering. The goal of the curriculum committees is “to revise, and integrate the curriculum, assessment, and instruction to meet established standards for achievement and to address the needs of individual students.”²

To assure that there is a continuous cycle of district-wide curriculum renewal, a Council Rock School Board policy states that all “textbooks with copyright dates more than five (5) years old shall be reviewed annually for their continuing suitability”³ and School Board directive that all curriculum is mandated for renewal after it is in place for 10 years.

A new or renewed curriculum might also be initiated as a result of:

- Changes to PA state standards (even though CR standards are much more rigorous than state standards, any change in a state standard would initiate a CR curricular review)
- PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) testing, if there is a gap between when curricular content is introduced and when questions on the content are part of a PSSA test (for example, a realignment of the science curriculum was triggered following an analysis of PSSA subject matter).
- A Curriculum Coordinator’s research in their academic discipline.
- The curriculum review process (i.e. the change from Consumer Science to Consumer Economics. Although not technically a “renewal” but a change in course title, it also resulted in a change in content, in part on-line, due to a different emphasis suggested by the Economic Development Council).
- Teachers who see a need for a course (for example AP Psychology) or materials that would enhance learning, such as a grammar writing book.
- Parent feedback and concern (parents recently lobbied for two levels of difficulty in a secondary foreign language offering).
- Changing expectations for college admissions (some of the newly added AP courses in music and the arts are benefiting CR students in the competitive college admissions process in these fields).

Developing a “curriculum that is meaningful, articulated, aligned, and promotes high standards for students,” having it approved, and implementing it is a long term process that typically takes four to six years.

Since there are hundreds of different courses, the administration has developed a staggered schedule for curriculum renewal. It usually takes a year of research and discussion to narrow down curricular needs and evaluate choices, and then, once the choices are narrowed down, it takes another year of close examination and discussion to pick a program. All secondary curricular proposals are presented in the spring, a year before approval, to the course scheduling administrator to see how the proposal will fit into the overall scheduling picture. A course framework is written when a proposed curriculum’s associated cost (including a time line for expenditures), staffing, and staff development needs are discerned. It is then placed on the agenda of the School Board’s Academic Standards Committee.

The Academic Standards Committee reviews proposed curriculums and sometimes makes recommendations for the Board approval presentation. The Academic Standards Committee consists of the Directors of Elementary and Secondary Education, and representatives of the Board of School Directors. They meet once a month before the regular School Board meeting. Meeting dates can be found on the crsd.org website and, although not televised, are open to the public.

After approval from the School Board, the curricular program, materials, and resources are piloted in a limited number of classes, generally for a period of one year. During the first two years of full implementation, the district provides ongoing professional support, surveys teachers to determine the effectiveness of the program, and communicates with parents and the community. Multiple approaches to new and/or revised assessments are also implemented. Data is collected and analyzed. Curriculum is monitored and adjusted.

“An effective curriculum prepares students with critical knowledge and skills for living in a 21st century world”⁴ and is an evolving process. Because teachers have more sophisticated tools than a pen, textbook, and lecture, Council Rock curriculum integrates current best practices. The curriculum is being taught in classrooms that have progressed from blackboards to whiteboards to smart boards. Schools have progressed from a facility with one movie projector in the auditorium, to TV’s and computers/projectors in the classroom. The textbook has changed from being one of the few requirements of a curriculum to just one of many learning resources. It is believed that educational textbooks using the printed page will soon be replaced by an online distribution. This and other types of innovation including technology advancements affect not only how the curriculum is delivered, but could also have an effect on the substance of curriculum. As education evolves, Council Rock will be ready to adapt, innovate, and renew its curriculum, because it already has a process in place that utilizes collaboration of all levels of its professionals.

-
1. Council Rock School District “A Plan for Curriculum Renewal,” Council Rock, Newtown 2006-07. III Curriculum Committees. A. Membership. Print 9.
 2. Council Rock School District “A Plan for Curriculum Renewal,” Council Rock, Newtown 2006-07. V Curriculum Renewal Policy. Print 8.
 3. Board Policy 108, Council Rock School District, Newtown PA 18940 “Adoption of Textbooks” adopted April 16, 1998.
 4. Council Rock School District “A Plan for Curriculum Renewal,” Council Rock, Newtown 2006-07. II The Effective Curriculum. Print 4.