



# **Mokena School District 159**

## **The Curriculum Process**

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## **Preface**

Mokena School District 159's Curriculum Process provides a forum for the district to develop a curriculum that sets high expectations for all students. The process is based upon research, theories, trial and error, discussions with administrators and just plain common sense. The curriculum represents a sequence of learning experiences from the time they begin kindergarten until they graduate from eighth grade. It provides a map for their educational journey. This curriculum provides a basis for budget development, textbook selection, curriculum related decisions, evaluation of student achievement and professional development.

Curriculum development is a collaborative effort between staff, administrators, and the Board of Education. The entire staff is involved in the process, not just those who serve on committees. It is essential that staff members develop a sense of legitimate ownership of and commitment to the successful implementation of the curriculum. The degree to which this happens is dependent in large measure upon the active involvement of staff in all stages of development and implementation.

The district has three basic instructional program responsibilities: (1) to plan, develop and implement new programs (research and development); (2) to maintain and improve the existing program (maintenance); and (3) evaluation. It is crucial that a district adopts an attitude of research, development, and long-range planning, so that significant progress can be made over time in providing an ever current and improved curricular program.

## **Curriculum Development Principles**

### **K-8 Scope**

All curriculum and committee activities need to be viewed from a Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade perspective. Those who are developing programs must consider the ramifications of a program from a district standpoint. Changes cannot be made in isolation. Every change made affects other grade levels. The educational journey begins in Pre-Kindergarten and concludes at grade 8.

### **District Level Curriculum**

The curriculum within a district should be implemented consistently. The basic expectations of a student should be the same regardless of which school or classroom the student happens to be placed. These expectations should be measured by common formative assessments. These common formative assessments will ensure that all students are being provided a consistent curriculum. It is also important that teachers have a full range of resource options available to them to implement the curriculum and enable students to obtain the grade level expectations.

### **Comprehensive Plan**

A school district's curriculum is a complex system. Curriculum developers must start with the most comprehensive view via curriculum mapping process before narrowing to grade levels, subjects within topic areas, and individual courses.

**Ongoing Process**

A curriculum committee's task is never complete; its responsibilities are non-stop and ever-evolving. These individuals not only develop the curriculum, but also continue to oversee the implementation and evaluation of that program.

**Step-by-Step Process**

Each curriculum committee goes through a step-by-step process that ensures that the curriculum will meet state standards and that it will be challenging and comprehensive. Additionally, the process ensures that all staff members, administrators and Board members have the opportunity for input as the curriculum is developed. A specific sequence of activities is defined which requires the committee to first develop a philosophical foundation and analyze the current program before moving on to the development of the program and finally, the implementation of the program.

**Collaborative Process**

The curriculum process is a collaborative effort. It should involve all faculty members, not just those serving on the committee. It requires thought, discussion, debate and interaction of all professionals who teach the addressed curriculum. Those persons that serve on the curriculum committee need to represent the faculty at large and be in constant communication with the entire faculty.

**Professional Growth**

The individuals involved in the development of a program must be given opportunities to benefit from the research and experience of other experts in this subject area. It is essential that committee members attend local and state meetings, have access to the latest in literature, review the relevant current research, and have the ability to call in consultants in the field when necessary. They are responsible for becoming experts in their field of study.

**Communications Assured**

The credibility of any curriculum committee depends upon its ability to communicate to staff members, parents, and to the community. Their communications must be consistent and frequent if they are to produce a program that will be implemented and supported throughout the district.

### **The Curriculum Process:**

- Develops a program philosophy consistent with the district's overall mission statement
- Is a gathering of experts (teachers, administrators, staff and consultants) focusing upon improving learning opportunities
- Requires a commitment from staff, administrators and Board members
- Provides a curriculum mapping strategy
- Establishes a communication tool for articulation
- Formalizes goal and objective setting
- Establishes consistent expectations for all students at a grade level
- Provides a solid criteria for selection of instructional materials
- Provides a timeline for the development of the curriculum
- Provides a cycle for the implementation of new curriculum
- Establishes a plan for the evaluation of learning objectives
- Sets a foundation for other district activities
  - Professional development
  - Textbook selection
  - Program evaluation
  - Allocation of dollars

### **Committee Responsibilities**

- Provide ongoing, continuous improvement of the subject area
- Sole authority to develop and implement curriculum in subject area
- Provide continuous communications with the staff
- Document the "real" curriculum of the district
- Conduct research and compile information
- Follow the district curriculum development sequence
- Implement developed curriculum
- May establish subcommittees

### **Curriculum Committees – Subject Areas**

- Fine Arts
- Language Arts – Reading, Writing & Ad Hoc subcommittees
- Math
- Physical Education
- Science
- Social Studies
- Foreign Language

### **Membership**

- Assistant Superintendent of Instruction
- Time commitment one complete cycle (Development, Implementation and Evaluation)
- K-8 representatives (Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies) one from each grade level
- Special education representatives (one from each building)

- Foreign Language – representatives from Spanish semester course, Spanish year course and French course
- Fine Arts Committee – 1 representative from each department and from each building
- Physical Education Committee – 2 representatives from each building

#### **Task Forces**

- Ad hoc committees
- Provide specialized advice and information for use by subject area committees
- Established by the superintendent
- Membership determined to meet the specific charge
- Do not develop curriculum
- Report to superintendent and/or designee

#### **Technology Task Force Charge**

- Identify the various technology hardware and software that is available, or will become available, to classroom teachers and students
- Evaluate current use of technology in the district
- Identify grade level expectations and tools for assessing those expectations
- Identify district professional development needs regarding instructional technology
- Make recommendations regarding the implementation and use of various instructional technology techniques

#### **Task Force Membership**

- 1 teacher from each grade level
- 1 Administrator
- Ex-officio member – Superintendent of schools
- Community Members

#### **Enrichment**

- Evaluate current programmatic design in light of research and trends.
- Recommend district-wide professional development related to meeting the needs of the academically talented

## **Curriculum Process**

### **I. The Development Phase – Years 1 and 2: July 1-June 30**

- A. Membership selection
  - 1. Administrative leadership
  - 2. Grade level representatives
  - 3. Chairman
  - 4. Secretary
- B. Review of current literature and research
  - 1. Identify best practice
  - 2. Analyze current research and literature
  - 3. Identify current trends of successful programs
  - 4. Review state mandates, goals and standards, performance descriptors, performance assessments
- C. Visitations to schools with exemplary programs
- D. Development of mission/philosophy statement – incorporate best practice
- E. Definition of current program
  - 1. Map current curriculum by general concepts
  - 2. Analyze test results
- F. Program development
  - 1. Develop curriculum map
  - 2. Identify or revise current expectations
- G. Resource Selection
  - 1. Review all available resources
  - 2. Choose top 3 by grade level
  - 3. Select top resources district-wide
- H. Board Recommendations
  - 1. Information report
  - 2. Action report
- I. Professional Development Plan
  - 1. Define needs
  - 2. Develop plan (presenters, modeling, mentoring, etc.)

### **II. The Implementation Phase – Years 3 and 4: Sept-June 30**

- A. Publish curriculum on-line via web pages
- B. Implement Professional Development
- C. Development / Identification of Assessments
- D. Design Instructional Activities
- E. Ongoing monitoring
- F. Identification of Additional Resources

### **III. The Evaluation Phase – Years 5, 6 and 7: Sept-June 30**

- A. Analyze ISAT scores, local assessment data
- B. Survey staff

## **I. Development – Years 1 and 2**

### **A. Membership Selection**

The first step in the process is to select staff members to serve on the committee. Once the committee commences, best qualified candidates will be recruited from each grade level and department. Unfilled positions will be addressed via MTA/Administration. The superintendent will assign an administrator to each committee.

The administrator's role is to provide a liaison between the committee and the administrative team. It is expected that they will provide weekly updates at the administrative meeting informing the team of progress and issues which may arise. Additionally, they meet with the chairperson to provide guidance in the implementation of the curriculum process. The administrator should also review the committee minutes before their submission to the curriculum department.

Each grade level should have a representative on the committee. These grade level representatives will receive a stipend based on the current year contract. They are responsible for attending meetings, reading research, soliciting grade level input and sharing information with their grade levels. It is essential that this be a two-way process. Members of the curriculum committee are responsible for disseminating information from the curriculum meetings with the building grade-level coordinators and/or the department chairs who will then share this information at the grade-level coordinators meetings and the department chair meetings. Curriculum updates should be a standing item on all monthly department and grade-level coordinator meetings.

During the initial committee meeting, a chairperson should be selected. This person is responsible for directing the curriculum process, developing meeting agendas, summarizing decisions reached and informing the committee administrator of their progress. The committee should be lead by the chairperson, not the administrator. It should be a staff led committee.

Also during the first meeting, a secretary should be selected. It is the secretary's responsibility to record the major highlights of each meeting. The minutes should be shared with the administrator on the committee for his or her review. They are then submitted to the curriculum department for distribution to the entire staff. These minutes will be archived to provide documentation of items discussed and approved.

### **B. Review of Literature and Research**

The second step in the process is to review the most current literature and research. The curriculum department will acquire and distribute these articles. Members of the committee should also be encouraged to share literature with which they are already familiar. The committee needs to discuss the method they will implement in reviewing these articles. Everyone can read all of the literature and discuss it or each member can read several articles and present the information to the committee. Other alternative methods are acceptable. In addition, as the information is presented, notes should be taken so there is written documentation of the information reviewed. The secretary of the committee records the title

of the article, its main focus and the pros and cons of the method or idea presented. Another option is that the person presenting completes a review of the article. Below is an example of notes taken from an article.

**Title:** "Creating Tests Worth Taking" by Grant Wiggins

**Main Focus:** Validation of alternative assessments needs to include evidence regarding the intended and unintended consequences, the degree to which performance on specific assessment tasks transfer, and the fairness of the assessments...

**PROS:**

Identify new criteria  
Appropriateness of test  
Interpretations of criteria

**CONS:**

Validity  
Tradition  
Good predictive ability

Also, as the committee gathers information they must review the state mandates, goals and standards and performance indicators. It is essential that the district's curriculum incorporate these mandates and standards.

**C. Visitations**

One of the initial steps of the curriculum process is school visitations. The district office can provide a list of the schools that have scored well on the ISATs. When the committee selects schools it would like to visit, the district office can provide contact information for the particular school. However, the actual visitation needs to be scheduled through the committee members' building principal. Committee members should visit a wide variety of districts and limit the number of members attending the same place. Visitations should be made early in the process.

These visitations should be scheduled with schools that have exemplary academic programs. The selection of districts to be visited should be based upon exemplary programs, high test scores, etc. Distance should not be a factor in the selections of sites to be visited. Through these visitations, committee members should determine the factors that contribute to making the academic program successful. Committee members should view the curriculum implemented and have the opportunity to meet with administration and teachers for their insight on what makes their program successful. Committee members should request a copy of the written curriculum if it is available.

It is beneficial for the committee to develop a form to guide members through the process of collecting information on their visitations.

**D. Development of Mission/Philosophy Statement**

The mission statement should:

- Serve as a framework for curriculum development
- Explain the purpose and value of the subject area
- Be stated clearly so that it is understood by all

A good mission statement should accurately explain why a subject exists and what should be achieved by its implementation.

The statement should be a brief paragraph free of jargon and “terms of art.” In other words, it should avoid the kind of shorthand common to others who work in the field but are unfamiliar to anyone outside the organization or field in which it works. The mission statement should answer these three questions:

1. What needs are being met by including this subject area in our curriculum?
2. What is needed to accomplish those needs?
3. What principles or beliefs guide our work?

The process of drafting a mission statement begins with brainstorming words, phrases or ideas that come to mind with respect to the subject area and these categories. Provide everyone an opportunity to be heard. Record all suggestions and do not edit at this time. Once the brainstorming has been completed, the group should now answer the above questions using the words, phrases or ideas that have been documented.

Your mission statement should

- Express the organization’s purpose
- Motivate those who are connected to the organization
- Be articulated in a way that is convincing and easy to grasp
- Use proactive verbs to describe what the organization does
- Be free of jargon
- Be short enough so that anyone connected to the organization can readily repeat it

#### **E. Definition of Current Program**

The next step in the process is to define the curriculum that teachers are currently implementing in the district. Committee members meet with their grade levels and review the curriculum map or scope and sequence. The grade levels should then indicate any discrepancies between the documented curriculum and what is actually taught. The committee must be evaluating reality in order to recommend improvements. This is essential in order to improve student learning.

After the current curriculum is documented, the committee must decide on what additional information to collect, how the information will be collected and how it will be analyzed. The information collected should include,

- Subject-area topics and standards currently being taught at all grade levels (reality, not just what is documented in the curriculum guide)
- Approaches or methodologies being used in presenting the subject matter
- Instructional resources being utilized
- Student achievement data

These curriculum maps define what is actually going on with curriculum through the grades; adjust for overlaps and redundancies in content and topics and skills.

## **F. Program Development**

It is during this phase of the curriculum process that the actual curriculum is defined and developed. The development of this curriculum is based on best practices, alignment to state academic goals and standards, and addresses the identified weaknesses of the current curriculum. As our district moves toward a concept-based curriculum we must first identify the critical content topics. Three criteria are helpful in deciding which topics qualify as critical content to be included on a matrix.

1. What do students need to know to be successful at the next level of learning?
2. What do you feel that students need to know to understand the discipline?
3. What critical content topics are expected and identified in state and national standards?

The first step in the development of this curriculum is the consensus map or essential map. By reviewing the current curriculum maps, teachers should identify the essential understandings for each grade level. The committee must then look at these essential understandings and make adjustments to assure that there are no redundancies and that these understandings build upon each other and become progressively more complex as students progress through the grades. The map should provide the path for a student's learning journey from grade to grade, kindergarten through eight.

After developing and finalizing the consensus map, grade levels must develop unit overviews. (Appendix A) The essential understandings and guiding questions determine the content of the unit. When identifying enduring understandings/ generalizations/essential understandings, you are determining what the outcome of the study is. Generalizations go beyond the facts to the conceptual and transferable level of understanding. What is essential for students to learn and why is it essential for them to learn it.

After identifying the enduring understandings the grade levels need to brainstorm "guiding questions." These questions facilitate the student's study toward the essential, enduring understandings. Guiding questions are both factual and conceptual.

The next step in the process is identifying the specific knowledge and skills that students must internalize. This section should outline both the processes and the skills that students must know. As students learn and practice the skills, they build conceptual understanding. Upon concluding this step the cadre must then evaluate the facts and processes being emphasized to determine gaps, overlaps and redundancies in content topics and skills.

The curriculum should be spiraling. It should start in Kindergarten and build through grade eight. Skills are initially introduced (I) at a particular grade level. Then at that grade level or a sequential grade level the skill will be developed (D) and eventually it will be mastered (M). The grade level where mastery is expected the student will be held accountable for that process or skill through an assessment. In order to assure that facts and processes are being presented in a sequential order and to prevent gaps, overlaps and redundancies content must

be entered into a scope and sequence chart. This allows for a quick overview and a visual representation of the curriculum making it easier to evaluate.

Once these revisions have been made to the existing curriculum to reflect best practice and bridge the gaps identified in the evaluation of the current curriculum, the committee must present the curriculum map to the Board of Education.

### **G. Resource Selection**

Once the curriculum has been well-defined, the committee begins the process of selecting the resources to support the mastery of the curriculum. Materials may include textbooks, software, library materials, etc. The first step in the selection process is to develop a matrix which will be used to evaluate resources. The criteria should incorporate best practice recommendations and be in alignment with the district's mission statement as well as the subject area philosophy.

The committee should be cognizant of the needs of each all students. Resources should be identified for special groups, i.e., enrichment, learning disabilities, remedial reading, etc.

All staff should be involved in this process. It is recommended that once the committee and staff have narrowed their selections to the top 2 or 3 titles, they visit districts that are using these resources. Districts using resources usually can provide valuable insight into the resources providing positive and negative aspects of a specific series. The committee must come to a consensus on the series being recommended.

Once the committee reaches a consensus the resources that best support the local curriculum, they are then presented to the Board of Education for their approval. All curriculum materials used by the students must be approved by the Board of Education. If after the adoption it is determined that there are gaps in the support material and additional resources are needed, the committee must present rationale for the purchase of additional materials and present the recommendation to the Board for their approval.

### **H. Board Recommendations**

The above resource recommendations are presented to the Board of Education and if accepted,

- Textbook purchases are tied to the state textbook loan program.
- Budget amounts are determined in the district's budget for purchase.

Any series recommendation must be completed before March 1 for budget purposes.

### **I. Professional Development**

A plan for professional development must be developed prior to the implementation of a new curriculum. The following questions should be addressed through professional development:

- ✓ How does the new curriculum differ from the current curriculum?
- ✓ How will new learning experiences and teaching strategies be presented to teachers?

- ✓ How will the necessary background information for teaching the content be provided to teachers?
- ✓ How will teachers be prepared to use new and different materials?
- ✓ How will teachers learn to use new methods of evaluation?
- ✓ How will teachers' ownership of the curriculum be nurtured?

Recommendations for professional development should be presented to the administrative team. These recommendations will then be incorporated into the following year's professional development plan.

## **II. Implementation – Years 3 and 4**

### **A. Publish Curriculum**

The Board approved curriculum will be published in on the Intranet. It will provide Unit plans for each grade level, Kindergarten through grade eight. A major purpose of the guide is to assist classroom teachers in developing lessons and viewing the instructional sequences for each grade level taught. The curriculum will continue to be developed during the Implementation phase. The assessments will be defined in Year 3 and 4.

### **A. Professional Development**

Professional development needs are monitored throughout this phase to assure that teachers are being provided needed assistance. Committee members must communicate with their grade level/department to determine professional development needs. These needs must then be shared with the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction.

### **B. Development of Assessments**

The assessments are developed during the implementation phase. The assessments are developed to hold students accountable for learning the local curriculum. These assessments align to the Units of Study. They measure the depth of understanding. These assessments can be in the form of performance assessments, portfolio assessments, criterion referenced, etc. These assessments should be consistent throughout the grade levels.

### **C. Design Instructional Activities**

Once the assessments have been written and or identified the grade level committee members will write instructional activities to ensure student success on the performance task.

### **D. Ongoing Monitoring**

As the curriculum is implemented throughout the district, the curriculum committee should set up some means of gathering observations from teachers, students and administrators. Formal monitoring during implementation will provide evidence that the curriculum is actually being implemented as designed. The building principal will have the responsibility to serve as the instructional leader in the monitoring process. This ensures continuing review and revision of the instructional program and should be reinforced by appropriate professional development effort.

#### **E. Identification of Additional Resources**

The grade levels and/or departments will meet to identify resources as the new series is implemented. Time needs to be dedicated to this process. The grade levels need to collaborate and share resources used to meet local objectives. These then need to be added to TIEnet through the curriculum office.

### **III. Evaluation – Years 5, 6 and 7**

Years five, six and seven in the process are dedicated to the evaluation of the curriculum. Annually, ISAT and local assessment data is analyzed by the grade level/department. Grade levels or departments determine weaknesses in their curriculum and this information is then shared with the curriculum committee. With input from the grade levels and departments, the committee makes recommendations for improvement. This may be in the form of curriculum revisions, professional development, additional resources, etc. It is during the evaluation phase that the curriculum committee works closely with the School Improvement Teams.