

29 May Identifying Your Power (Ful) Standards

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As education and policy leaders make decisions about which sets of standards schools will align to, classroom teachers continue to **wrestle** with determining why/which/when/how/to what extent each standard is taught in their classrooms.

- *"I feel **overwhelmed** and am not sure what content and skills I should prioritize. I guess I have to make these decisions on my own."*
- *"I know what I would define as essential, but I'm **not sure** whether my colleagues would select the same knowledge and skills."*



- *"I'm running out of **time**... I just need to cover as much content as possible between now and the state test."*

Enter: **Power Standards**. While the notion of power standards is not new in concept, conversations have heightened about **how and why certain standards warrant prioritization**. Teachers are feeling the pressure to cover everything, and while all standards are important, some are more essential and require more time and depth to teach.

BUT WHY POWER STANDARDS?

Educators can get nervous the moment they hear about selecting certain standards and not selecting others. **Larry Ainsworth**, author of **Power Standards (2004)**, reminds folks that it's not about elimination, but prioritization. It's not that teachers decidedly "opt-out" from teaching particular standards, but rather that the school or district works collaboratively to create a **"systematic and balanced approach to distinguish the standards essential for student success from the ones that are 'nice to know."** And when teachers can work together and come to consensus about which are essential, they are empowered by their teaching and learning strategies, and not operating in isolation.

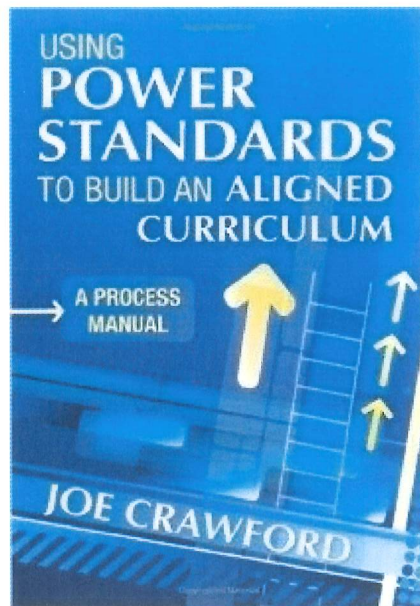
WHAT ABOUT THE ASSESSMENTS?

Not only can the prioritized standards be chosen collaboratively, but any subsequent assessment data can be analyzed collectively as well. Teachers are able to make decisions about which standards will be taught in which quarter, and **build common assessments** that assess a student's knowledge and skills gleaned through the learning from that standard. And if something doesn't work, teachers are able to **regroup and make changes** collaboratively regarding what gets prioritized.



STARTING THE PROCESS

Once a district or school decides that identifying power standards is beneficial for teaching and learning, they must build a **sustainable, on-going process**. Thoughtfully consider the participants that would best contribute to the selection process; smaller schools and districts may be able to include the entire faculty, while larger districts may choose a task force of diverse and representative contributors. Here are some sample steps to ignite the process:



1. Choose a subject area
2. Assemble a grade span group (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12, for example)
3. Select one grade level
4. Working by strands, individually mark essential standards (Do this quickly...maybe 10 minutes...because if you allow too much time, you'll end up selecting everything!)
5. Talk through selections with colleagues
6. Reach initial consensus
7. Compare selections with testing data
8. Discuss across multiple grade levels
9. Identify gaps, overlaps and omissions



These steps can be replicated across multiple content areas until all intended power standards have been identified. **Joe Crawford**, author of *Using Power Standards to Build an Aligned Curriculum (2011)*, encourages schools to integrate the key elements “**Plan, Do, Check, Act**” when developing an action plan for their power standards process.

Plan– Some schools may plan to choose priority standards for one or two content areas in an academic year. This tends to be more successful than attempting to work through all subject areas, because truly integrating the changes and reflecting on the results is critical towards analyzing its effectiveness.

Do– After identifying which standards should be prioritized, developing common assessments is a critical component to embed a successful process that can help measure students’ knowledge and skills gleaned through a growing mastery of the standards. Teams can work together to determine which standards and benchmarks will be assessed during a given quarter, and develop a common rubric to gauge mastery.

Check– At the end of each quarter, it’ll be important to designate time to review the power standards that were part of the teaching and learning. Having collaborative conversations in faculty teams allows for a more thorough assessment of coherence and effectiveness between the curriculum, instruction, and the standards.

Act– In this portion, teams are able to maximize their collective insights and make any necessary revisions to their selected power standards and/or the related assessments, as well as to their classroom instruction and activities.

As schools and districts work through and refine these processes over time, they will hopefully see a more cohesive, coalesced standards alignment process, and feel confident knowing that the standards and benchmarks designated as “priority” are consistent among colleagues.



And perhaps with these changes, teacher comments may sound more like:

"I'm so **relieved** that we're all on the same page about which standards we're prioritizing and when."

"I feel like I'm operating at a **manageable pace** now...I don't feel the same stress about trying to cover everything too quickly."

We won't pretend that aligning to standards is the only source of teacher stress, but hopefully streamlining the process reduces some of it!

Interested in learning more about Power Standards? Click here to download a webinar!

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