

Mapping Instructional Materials to Your District Curriculum

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Districts invest significant time and money in developing a curriculum and purchasing instructional materials. Ideally, the district curriculum and instructional materials would work in concert. However, because materials are developed for a general audience, they rarely track the scope and sequence of any district curriculum. That lack of consistency impedes the successful implementation of both, and often results in teachers using their materials as the de facto curriculum for the course.

Mapping instructional resources to the district curriculum ensures that lessons and activities from the instructional materials are in sync with the curriculum. Such synchronicity eases teachers’ workloads, facilitates standards-aligned instruction, and supports students’ academic progress.

Anyone who has done this work can attest that aligning resources to a district curriculum often feels like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. This white paper offers strategies to help districts and campuses develop a sound process for mapping their instructional materials to the district's curriculum.

The Three Cs of a Standard

As illustrated and further explained in our white paper, [*Overcoming the Challenges of Aligning to Standards*](#), in order to determine whether a citation¹ is aligned to a standard, one must understand what the standard requires students to know and be able to do, as well as the context in which the learning must take place. Each standard contains three parts: *content*, *context* and *cognitive rigor*. These are *the three Cs of a standard*.

- **Content**

The standard's **content** describes *what* students are required to learn/know by the end of the course. The content of the standard is typically stated in the noun(s) of the standard.

- **Context**

The **context** of the standard typically modifies/clarifies the content or the cognitive rigor of the standard. The context of the standard may describe *where*, *when*, or *how* the learning should take place. The context is usually, but not always, articulated in the language of the standard itself and often relates to the overarching category or topic of the standard as stated in the

- Domain or Cluster (for Common Core standards)

¹ For purposes of this paper, the word *citation* refers to either a stand-alone resource (e.g., worksheet, activity, lesson plan) or part of an instructional material.

- Knowledge and Skills Statement (for Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS))
- CCC DCI, SEP of the Performance Expectation (for Next Generation Science Standards).
- **Cognitive Rigor**
Cognitive Rigor is the performance expectation of the standard, or what the standard requires students *to be able to do*. The cognitive rigor is typically articulated in the verb(s) of the standard.

A citation must address *all three Cs* of the standard in order to be *aligned* to that standard. This may be more difficult than it sounds because standards are often both compound and complex sentences that contain several nouns, several verbs, and several modifiers.

Use the Publisher's Correlation as a Guide

The publisher's correlation can be an invaluable resource for mapping materials to a district curriculum. A correlation may be provided as a print or printable document, or it may be embedded in the material's search-by-standard functionality. Regardless of its format, the correlation identifies *which standards* the material addresses, and like a map, directs educators to specific citations in the material that address those standards.

Here are three pointers about publishers' correlations:

- **If a material does not provide a correlation to *your state's standards*, it probably was not *designed with your state's standards in mind*.** Thus, the material likely will not cover all of the content and skills the state's standards require students to learn. Consider using such a material for skills practice, engagement, or enrichment rather than as the primary/core resource for the course.

- **Publishers do not always intend for their materials to address *all* grade level standards.** This is most often true of supplemental materials, such as materials that are designed to provide skills practice or test prep materials that intend to address the subset of standards that are likely to be assessed. It may also be true of core materials.
- **Publishers' correlations typically include both aligned and partially-aligned citations.** A material may scaffold instruction for certain standards with the goal of achieving mastery of those standards by the end of a unit or by the end of the course. For example, the first citation listed in the publisher's correlation for a standard may introduce one part of the standard. The next two citations may introduce different parts of the standard. Only the culminating activity at the end of the unit or course may address the standard entirely. Consequently, it may be necessary to bundle several citations (i.e., use citations from different chapter/units in the material together) to help students achieve mastery of a standard.

Map Your Materials

The first section of this paper discussed how to dissect a standard to help you understand what it requires students to know and be able to do. The second section discussed tips to help you understand what the publisher's correlation is communicating about the material. In this section, we put that all together and provide pointers to help you establish a consistent and efficient process for mapping materials to the district curriculum.

- (1) **Establish a common definition of *alignment*.** When we founded Learning List, we surveyed educators and publishers to find out how they defined *alignment*. Not surprisingly, publishers generally defined the term more liberally than educators did, but there were shades of grey in the definitions provided by educators, too. Before beginning the process of mapping materials to the district curriculum, it is a good idea for everyone involved in the process to discuss what alignment to the *content*, *context* and *cognitive rigor* of a standard means and what it looks like.

(2) **Identify the standards that must be taught in each curriculum unit.** Most district curricula are recursive, meaning that the same standards are repeated across several curriculum units. Before beginning to look for citations in your materials, it is helpful to know which standards must be taught in each curriculum unit. It is equally important to chart out the number of times each standard is repeated across all of the units in the district curriculum. That way you will know how many different citations you will need to address each standard across all of the curriculum units.

(3) **Become familiar with the materials available to you.** As explained further in our white paper, [*Navigating the Road to Successful Student Outcomes with Standards-Aligned Instruction*](#), using materials for their intended purpose is critical to students' success. Before jumping into the mapping process, familiarize yourself with the core and supplemental resources available to you for the course.

As you go through each material, note the topics covered, the progression of units/chapters, the pattern and structure of lessons, as well as the types and location of the material's component parts (e.g., tutorials, assessments, teacher resources, etc.). Given the complexity of digital resources, this may take more time than you anticipate.

Practice Tip

Inventory your instructional materials and determine which ones should and should not be mapped to the district curriculum. Are some outdated? Are some weakly aligned? Which material(s) should be listed as the primary resource in *each unit*?

Determine whether the publisher's correlation is a document or a search-by-standard function in the material. For each standard, does the correlation identify citations at the unit, chapter, or lesson levels? The broader the citation (i.e., unit rather than lesson), the more time it will take for reviewers to identify precisely where the relevant standard is addressed. Look at the number of citations (lessons, activities, quizzes) listed for each standard in the correlation. Understanding the materials' structure and the

publisher's correlation will make it easier to find citations in the material to check for alignment.

(4) **Identify the materials that *address* the standards listed in each unit of the district curriculum.** Using the publisher's correlation or the material's search-by-standard feature, determine which of your core and supplemental materials *address* the standards listed in each district curriculum unit. For each curriculum unit, make a list of those materials.

(5) **Determine which citations in each material are *aligned to each standard within the context of the unit of instruction*.** Begin with the first unit in the district's curriculum and the primary/core material you want to map to that unit. Check the alignment of the citations listed in the publisher's correlation for each standard contained in that curriculum unit. As stated previously, a citation must address all three Cs of the standard to be *aligned* to the standard.

Practice Tip

Publishers and educators often have different definitions of *alignment*. Therefore, it is critical to *verify* the alignment of each citation before mapping it to the district curriculum.

If a standard is repeated across multiple curriculum units, you may also need to check the alignment of supplemental resources (e.g., graphic organizers, leveled readers, etc.) in your core material and/or other supplemental materials you listed for that curriculum unit in the prior step (4) of this process.

For each standard, make a list of the citations *in each material* that is/are aligned to that standard. Also, note citations that are only partially aligned to the standard, identifying which part of the standard each partially aligned citation does or does *not* address. Doing so will help teachers identify materials' gaps.

Map the *aligned* citation(s) for each standard to the district curriculum unit where *mastery* of the standard is required; then, use the partially aligned citations that introduce and scaffold instruction of that standard to backfill the other district curriculum units that include that standard.

Determining whether a citation is aligned to a standard can be challenging. Our white paper, [*Overcoming the Challenges of Aligning to Standards*](#), contains strategies for overcoming common alignment challenges.

Practice Tip

If the publisher's correlation includes citations to the teacher and student edition, citations to the teacher edition are more likely to be aligned to the standards because the teacher's edition often includes prompts and/or additional guidance that is necessary to address all three Cs of the standard.

- (6) **Match the pacing and context of the citations in the materials to the pacing and context of the district curriculum units.** As you determine which unit to map each citation to, try to match the pacing of the material to the pacing of the district's scope and sequence. For example, if a standard occurs in the early units of the district's scope and sequence (e.g., units 2-5), look for citations that align to that standard in the *early* units of each material. Citations that occur in the later units of the materials (e.g., units 6, 7, 8) may assume pre-learning that will not yet have occurred early in the school year when units 2,3, and 4 of the district's curriculum will be used.

Also, be sure to consider the *context of the district curriculum unit*. For example, if a standard stating, "compose literary texts such as personal narratives, fiction, and poetry using genre characteristics and craft," is listed in several units of the district curriculum, a citation requiring students to *write a poem* would be aligned to that standard in the district curriculum unit addressing *poetry*, but not in the unit addressing *personal narrative*.

- (7) **Citations should specifically identify the aligned content.** Pages (physical or digital) of a material often have several subsections. To be most useful for

busy teachers, the citations listed in the district curriculum should include the title of the material and pinpoint the *portion of the page* where the standard is aligned. While teachers likely will use other parts of the page or surrounding pages in their lessons, as well, it is important for them to know precisely where alignment exists so that they do not inadvertently skip the aligned portion of the lesson, activity, quiz, etc.

(8) Consult external resources when struggling with an alignment

decision. When reviewers disagree about a citation’s alignment or alignment *within the* context of the particular curriculum unit, consult external resources, such as district or state vertical alignment documents, released assessment items, and other explanatory resources. Seeing a different explanation of the standard often helps reviewers reach a consensus.

(9) Avoid *reusing* text-dependent citations. This tip is particularly relevant when mapping English Language Arts and Reading materials but may also have cross-curricular applicability. Identify whether the citation you are reviewing requires students to read or refer to a particular text. If so, the citation is text-dependent and should only be cited in a *single* curriculum unit. Otherwise, students will have to re-read the same text multiple times throughout the year. While text-dependent citations should only be mapped to one curriculum unit, non-text-dependent citations or skill-based citations (e.g., “paraphrase the text” citations or writing *process* exercises) can be cited in multiple curriculum units, because teachers can use these types of citations with a different text each time.

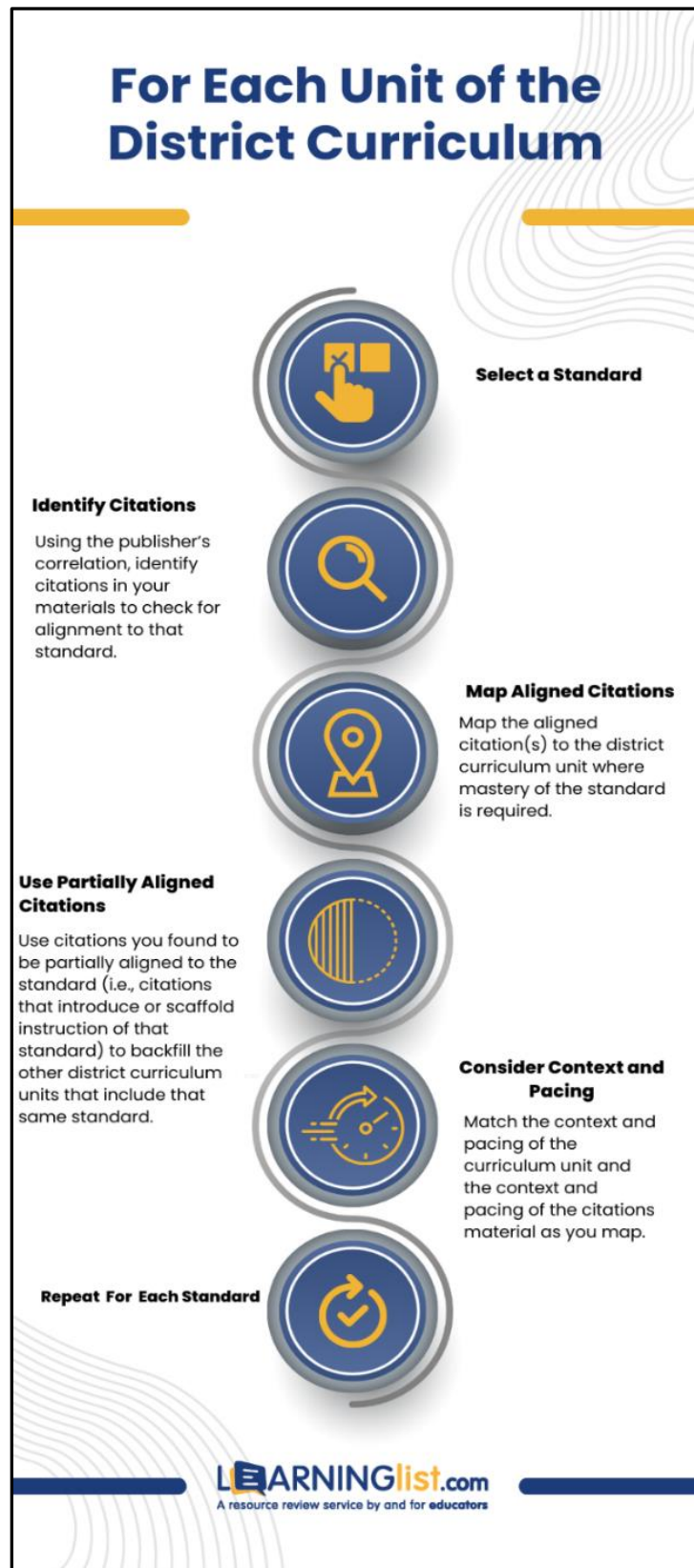
(10) Expect Gaps. Once you have mapped your materials to each of the district curriculum units, determine whether you have an adequate number of citations (in number and quality) to support each unit of instruction. Expect gaps. Your materials may have been written to align to the state’s standards, but they were not written to align to your district curriculum. The district curriculum may repeat certain standards more often than the

materials do, or the curriculum may emphasize standards for which there is insufficient content in your materials.

The goal of the curriculum alignment exercise should not be to try to *force* each material to cover all of the standards in the curriculum. Rather, the goal should be to identify where gaps exist in your materials when examined through the lens of the district curriculum. Those gaps do not mean that your materials are weak; they simply identify where additional resources or instructional guidance must be used to supplement your existing materials in order to fulfill the mandates of the district curriculum. If purchasing new materials is necessary, verify that the new material(s) is/are aligned to the gaps in your district's curriculum *before* you buy them.

Monitor Implementation

As teachers use the district curriculum documents with the instructional materials mapped



to them to plan their lessons, gather feedback regarding the instructional materials' support of the sequence of instruction. Adjustments to the number of citations and types of materials mapped to the district curriculum may be needed to improve the viability of the curriculum and promote the effective use of the instructional materials the district has purchased.

Conclusion

This work is difficult and time-consuming. It is also necessary to help overworked teachers use the district's resources to support of the district's curriculum and prepare students to master state standards. The process outlined in this white paper will help ensure that teachers use a consistent definition of alignment and a methodical approach for selecting and mapping materials to the district curriculum.

About Learning List

[Learning List](#) offers a suite of curriculum support services, including a subscription-based instructional materials review service. Subscribers get access to all published reviews and the ability to submit additional materials for review at no additional cost. Over the last decade, Learning List has reviewed thousands of widely used PreK-12 instructional materials by almost 200 publishers. Each material is reviewed for alignment to state or national standards, instructional quality, and technology compatibility. [Other services](#) include a selection facilitation service, customized curriculum alignment services, and online professional development courses.