

## **The Balanced Curriculum Model: Description and Results**

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# The Balanced Curriculum Model: Description and Results

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David A. Squires<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The Balanced Curriculum is a web-based tool that school districts use to create, align, assess, and manage their curriculum development and implementation. The courses are divided into time-bound units with significant tasks (or assured activities) that local district teachers develop and promise to teach. The significant tasks are aligned to standards and assessment specifications. District curriculum authors also develop assessments for all to use when implementing the curriculum. Results of more than 15 years of implementation show that all districts that have developed curriculum using this model, and ensured implementation, have had significant improvement on their test scores. Implications for teachers, principals, and central office staff are given at the end of the article.

## Keywords

Curriculum, student achievement results

## Introduction to the Balanced Curriculum Model

The Balanced Curriculum has produced improved achievement in every district that has written their curriculum according to this design and done a credible job of implementing the curriculum (Squires, 2005). As the curriculum is web based, it offers online access to all who are registered by the school district. The Balanced Curriculum is designed so that the curriculum structure is specific enough to ensure similar implementation by district teachers while being general enough so that teachers have the freedom to use the curriculum to meet the needs of their classes. There is alignment to standards, state assessment specifications and other specifications, such as Bloom's taxonomy, that the district finds important to use. Assessment encourages use of the data-based results to determine the power of the curriculum. Implementation is addressed by allowing teachers to register their progress and talk back to the curriculum by offering comments on the curriculum through the website. Finally, this curriculum design produces results that are measurable in improvements of student achievement. No other published curriculum system offers this combination of attributes.

This article reviews the structure of the balanced curriculum, how it would be implemented in a school district, the results of more than 15 years of implementation, and implications for teachers, principals, and central office staff.

The components of the online Balanced Curriculum are divided into two sections: (a) writing the curriculum and (b) implementing the curriculum.

### Writing the curriculum

- Courses
- Time-Bound Units
- Significant Tasks (or assured activities)
- Alignment of Significant Tasks to Standards and Assessment Specifications
- Curriculum-Embedded Assessment Aligned to State Standards and Assessment Specifications

### Implementing the curriculum

- A Management System for Tracking Class's Progress
- A Record of Teacher Comments to Guide Staff Development Planning and Curriculum Revision
- Yearly Curriculum Revision Process

## Writing the Curriculum

The curriculum must be written with implementing and revising the curriculum in mind.

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<sup>1</sup>Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, USA

### Corresponding Author:

David A. Squires, Department of Educational Leadership, Southern Connecticut State University, 501 Crescent Street, New Haven, CT 06515, USA

Email: [squiresd1@southernct.edu](mailto:squiresd1@southernct.edu)

Students will set up an in-class debate to examine the controversial issues in *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*. They will have to take a stand on an issue and develop arguments to defend their positions. They will spend time examining the text and providing quotes as evidence to support their claims. They will be able to use their arguments in a structured debate format and setting. Students will give each other feedback on their debates using class generated rubrics.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1.** Sample significant task for high school English

Note: Other examples of significant tasks can be found by going to [www.balancedcurriculum.com](http://www.balancedcurriculum.com) using the user name <SCSU Student> and the password <1234>. There are more than 300 courses there that have significant tasks developed for a vast variety of courses. The work is taken from Southern Connecticut State University students who participate in the Educational Leadership Program that certifies them to become principals.

### *Courses, Units, and Significant Tasks Guide Time, Content, and Process Dimensions of the Curriculum*

The curriculum is written by the district's teachers/authors to guide instruction. To guide instruction, courses are divided into time-bound units so teachers know the pace of instruction. This ensures that everyone will complete the course's curriculum and students do not get left behind. Within the unit, significant tasks or assured activities, described by district teachers/authors in a paragraph, specify what district teachers should teach (an objective) and which instructional processes to use. The significant tasks take longer to complete than a daily lesson plan and generally encompass 2 days to 2 weeks of activities. The unit's significant tasks take approximately 70% of the unit's time. The other 30% is spent however the teacher decides to meet class needs, through remediation, enrichment, or both. This allows teachers to manage the creative aspects of instruction.

A total of 40 to 60 significant tasks usually make up a course. The significant tasks are the teacher's promise that most students will be ready for the following course or grade level because all have accomplished the significant tasks. Figure 1 is a sample of significant tasks for a High School English Course.

### *Align Significant Tasks to Standards and High-Stakes Assessment Specifications*

Alignment of curriculum to standards and high-stakes testing provides a powerful predictor of the curriculum's impact, as demonstrated by the many research studies (e.g., Porter & Smithson, 2001; Schmidt et al., 2001; Squires, 2009, 2012; Wishnick, 1989). The significant tasks are aligned by the curriculum authors to state standards, high-stakes assessment specifications, and other important areas for the district, such as Bloom's taxonomy. The vocabulary from the standards is explicitly incorporated in the significant

tasks by the district's teachers/curriculum authors. Then the authors use the website to generate a report showing the author-designated alignments for each significant task. Figure 2 illustrates how a significant task about a "Portfolio Project" is aligned to Connecticut standards and state test blueprints.<sup>1</sup>

In Figure 2, the significant task is listed at the top. The first column lists the state standards and assessment specifications that the authors aligned to the significant tasks. For example, Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) Grade 10 Response to Literature is the state assessment specifications for the part of the reading test for the state. The second column contains the state's "code" for this assessment specification. The third column lists what the state includes in that item. For example, in the area of "CAPT 10—Editing and Revising," commas in a series, tone, misplaced modifiers, and proper notes are all aligned to the significant task. The curriculum authors debate among themselves and come to a consensus about the most important areas for alignment with the significant task, as many alignments are possible.

### *Balancing the Aligned Curriculum*

Next, the alignments are summarized by course, so the teachers/authors can determine whether the "balance" among the standards is appropriate for the course as a whole.

Figure 3 shows that for the CAPT, four significant tasks in four different units were aligned to the "Topic Sentence" content area on the state test. For "Supportive Detail," there were three significant tasks in three different units. For "Tone," there was one significant task in one unit aligned to this area of the test.

From above, the teachers/authors may consider whether one significant task on tone (CAPT 1.5) provides sufficient emphasis for ninth-grade English, as only one significant task is aligned to the "Tone" standard. Curriculum teachers/authors use their professional judgments as well as item analysis of district test scores to support their decisions. For example, if students in the district did not do well on the items testing "Tone" on the state test, then the teachers/curriculum authors may want to add more significant tasks in other units that address "Tone." However, if the test results on tone were satisfactory, they may decide not to change it, as one significant task has shown to be adequate. This helps maintain teacher autonomy while ensuring standards are met.

Another report (Figure 4) shows the number of significant tasks addressed by each standard and substandard. For example, look at the second standard listed below as K4.02.02. In the first column, "3" indicates that there are three significant tasks aligned to this standard. The standard is given in the third column.

The curriculum authors can use this report to ask questions about inadequate alignment and overemphasized alignment.

<p><b>Portfolio Project</b>                  Students will create a portfolio based on the reading of the book, SPEAK. As they read, they will respond to different issues in different types of writing assignments, while discussing in their journals how they handle new vocabulary words. They will have to write creative letters that will explain the thoughts of certain characters, essays that analyze theme, and summaries that explain major happenings in the book. Editing groups will work on commas in a series, fragments, misplaced modifiers, and proper nouns.</p>		
Standard	Code	Description
Bloom's Taxonomy	An S	Analysis Synthesis
CAPT Grade 10—Response to Lit.	CAPT1.2	Does the student describe the thoughts, opinions, and/or questions that arise as he or she reads the story?
	CAPT2.1	Does the student use clues or evidence from the story to make inferences and raw conclusions, predict events, and infer motives and generalizations beyond the text?
	CAPT3.2	Does the student apply his or her understanding of people and life in general to make associations between the story and his or her view of the world?
	CAPT 4.4	Does the student examine the fit between the text of the story and his or her prior knowledge and life experience, and attempt to reconcile differences if appropriate?
CAPT Grade 10—Editing and Revising	CAPT 1.1a	Commas in a series
	CAPT 1.5	Tone
	CAPT 2.1	Fragment
	CAPT 3.4	Misplaced Modifier
	CAPT 4.2	Proper Nouns
CT Language Arts Standards	912.01.02	Students will examine the fit between the text and prior knowledge by recording differences, extracting clues or evidence, making inferences, drawing conclusions, predicting events, inferring motives, and generalizing beyond the text.
	912.01.08	Students will apply their understanding of textual features of each genre to their interpretation of that genre.
	912.01.09	Students use word recognition strategies to perfect reading fluency in ever more sophisticated words.
	912.02.01	Students will select from the complete variety of text structures (essay, short story, poetry, academic essay, report, research paper, response to literature, documentary, etc.) the appropriate organizational pattern for addressing audience, purpose, and point of view.

**Figure 2.** Alignment of the significant task to the standards and the assessment specifications  
 Note: CAPT = Connecticut Academic Performance Test.

**Inadequate Alignment.** After reviewing the last figure, the curriculum authors might ask the following: “Why are there no significant tasks addressing the first standard and last standard in this section?” “Does the curriculum (via significant tasks) actually address these areas and were they not aligned because other alignments took priority?” and “Was the alignment miscoded?” or “Did the curriculum (significant tasks) ignore these areas (usually inadvertently) and code others in its place?” The teachers/curriculum authors may decide to add or modify significant tasks so these areas can be addressed.

**Overemphasized Alignment.** The curriculum authors will need to decide whether the emphasis on K4.02.04 with alignment to five significant tasks is overemphasized given that two other standards (K4.02.01 and K4.02.05) have not been addressed. The curriculum authors will need to decide whether alignment to five standards is too many. They may reason that because of the emphasis in the state test, coverage is necessary for the five significant tasks. Conversely, they could reason that such emphasis is inappropriate given the unaligned standards. Significant tasks may need to be rewritten for appropriate alignment to take place. This

Alignment of CAPT Specifications To Units and Significant Tasks CAPT Grade 10—Response to Literature: Forming an Initial Understanding	
CAPT 1.1 = Topic Sentence	
<i>Unit</i>	<i>Significant Task Title</i>
Search for Self	Balanced Person
Survival	Physical/Mental Survival
Power	Power Structures
CAPT	CAPT Preparation
CAPT 1.2 = Supportive Detail	
<i>Unit</i>	<i>Significant Task Title</i>
Search for Self	Records of Daily Life
Short Story	Unified Effect
Betrayal	Poster Project
CAPT 1.5 = Tone	
<i>Unit</i>	<i>Significant Task Title</i>
Search for Self	Portfolio Project

**Figure 3.** Alignments of Connecticut Test specifications to significant tasks

Note: CAPT = Connecticut Academic Performance Test.

assures that all the significant tasks address the standards and assessment specifications in ways that the district's curriculum authors know is appropriate.

### Assessing the Curriculum

Each significant task provides an opportunity for assessment. As the significant tasks are aligned to the standards, the assessment for each significant task automatically covers similar territory and therefore maintains alignment. Teachers/authors construct a performance assessment for each significant task so students across the district have a standard way of demonstrating performance and teachers have a uniform way of giving and grading the performance. The data from the assessments provide the district with comparable information because the task is assessed in the same way for all students throughout a course, about students' competence on the significant task, and also indicates how well they performed on the aligned standards. The district can use assessment reports aggregated by school, task or aligned standards. Such data can be used in recommending improvements to the curriculum or in grade-level professional development. Completion of the assessments is one indicator that the curriculum is being followed.

Another type of assessment, the Format Assessment, provides all students with the once-per-unit opportunity to practice using the same format as the high-stakes state test. The format assessment is usually in the form of a quiz. As the format assessments usually occur at the end of units, extensive test preparation is no longer necessary before the

Grade 2		2006-2007
Standard: <b>CT Language Arts 2003 K-4</b>		
Aligned Significant Tasks: <b>Subtopics</b>		
<b>Students will produce written, oral, and visual texts to express, develop, and substantiate ideas and experiences.</b>		
	K4.02.01	Students will decide upon purpose, audience, and point of view, then select from a group of text types, such as narrative, nonfiction, and poetry, the most appropriate genre to convey their meaning.
3	K4.02.02	Students will speak, write, or draw in a variety of modes (narratives, "all-about" nonfiction pieces, poetry) to tell stories that their audience understands.
1	K4.02.03	Students will generate questions for gathering data from appropriate first-hand, visual and print sources, and categorize the data to produce a product.
5	K4.02.04	Students will compose a piece of writing based on ideas generated through any of a variety of ways (writing, drawing, talking, webbing, listing, brainstorming), revise and proofread it, and present it to an audience.
	K4.02.05	Students will collect and examine, individually or with classmates, an array of their own stories and drawings, discuss the features they like, and say what they might do differently the next time.

**Figure 4.** Report of number of significant tasks for the course aligned to significant tasks

high-stakes test. Spaced practice is a better way to learn to take tests than through massed, often anxiety-provoking practice right before the state assessment.

### Implementing the Curriculum

The design of the curriculum needs to promote curriculum implementation by having a management system to teachers' progress, a way to talk back to the curriculum by recording teachers' comments about improvements or frustrations that might have been encountered, and a way to revise the curriculum.

#### Management System for Curriculum Implementation

The district must plan strategies to ensure that the curriculum is actually implemented by the district's teachers, and that they are actually teaching the significant tasks. This helps address teacher accountability. As all teachers use the same significant tasks for a course, tracking a teacher's progress is a matter of determining whether the significant tasks are taught. On the Balanced Curriculum website where the curriculum is located, teachers can log in and check off their completion of a significant task, view their own completion record, but cannot view other's completion records. Principals can check the progress of all teachers in their buildings. District staff can access completion information across district schools, providing easily accessible information for managing student learning, without micro-managing the teacher's instruction.

#### Modifying the Curriculum

The curriculum plan now generates data so the curriculum can be modified based on the data. In modifying the curriculum, teachers and administrators need to ask questions about the data, as shown in Figure 5.

Data source	Questions data can help to answer
Alignment of Significant Task to Standards	Are all standard areas covered?
The Balance of the Curriculum	Does the existing balance of alignment with the standards promote increased achievement?
Significant Task Assessments	Do significant task assessments align with high-stakes assessment?
Format Assessments	Do format assessments align with high-stakes assessments?
Completion Information	Which significant tasks had low/high completion ratings? Did these correlate with test results?
High-stakes/Standardized Test Results	For areas of low results, should the district increase emphasis on that area through more significant tasks and/or more time devoted to the aligned units/significant tasks?

**Figure 5.** Using data generated by curriculum implementation

## A Sample Plan for a District Implementing the Balanced Curriculum

### *Overview and Planning*

Districts generally schedule a series of half day sessions to encourage the district and school leadership to understand the model and plan for implementation, generally negotiated through the superintendent. Usually, a presentation to the Board of Education is included, so that policy makers know what is coming in terms of curriculum. Emphasis is placed on the fact that student achievement is likely to improve if proper implementation support is provided. Generally, boards of education are also interested in cost factors. A total of 3 to 5.5 days are provided for planning activities, after the superintendent appoints a planning team, consisting of representatives of important groups across the district. This allows concerns to be ironed out in a small but representative group before curriculum writing begins.

### *Writing the Curriculum*

Ten days are needed for representative teachers at each grade level together to write the curriculum and begin drafting the assessments. Generally, we ask that the strongest, experienced, and most caring teachers be appointed to a 4-to-6-person author team. The author team's purpose is to draft the strongest curriculum for the grade level. In larger districts, special education teachers and ESL (English as a second language) teachers are included to make sure that the curriculum devised is appropriate for these areas. The teacher/authors develop the unit titles, amount of time for units, the significant tasks, alignment, and balance, and begin the assessment process within the 100-day time

period. This model has worked well for a number of districts implementing the Balanced Curriculum. The rest of the work to develop the assessments is scheduled during the following year. (We have developed curriculum using the author groups during the year, but this was less than satisfactory, as the author groups needed to be pulled from classes.)

### *Implementing the Curriculum*

Author/teacher groups planned an orientation for their grade level to be presented to teachers at the beginning of the school year. In large districts, grade-level groups met at individual schools, and presented the curriculum to their colleagues after the superintendent provided an overview and purpose of the curriculum development effort to the school district as a whole. Grade-level teachers were taught how to record their progress using the website, how to record their comments on problem areas and suggestions of ways to improve, and how the curriculum would be revised the following summer. Many districts have used the 1st year as a trial, to see if the curriculum met teachers' expectations.

### *Follow-Up*

Districts scheduled follow-up meetings with principals and those at the school level responsible for curriculum implementation on a monthly, quarterly, or twice-a-year basis. In these meetings, schools reported out on how they were doing with curriculum implementation (getting teachers to record their progress on the website), reinforcing, and planning curriculum at grade-level, department, or course-level meetings, and specific school-level concerns. The planning team continues to provide oversight of curriculum as a whole, assuring that the district is on-track in high-quality curriculum implementation.

To summarize, the Balanced Curriculum model consist of the following:

#### Writing the curriculum

- Courses
- Time-Bound Units
- Significant Tasks (or assured activities)
- Alignment of Significant Tasks to Standards and Assessment Specifications
- Curriculum-Embedded Assessment Aligned to State Standards and Assessment Specifications

#### Implementing the curriculum

- A Management System for Tracking Class's Progress
- A Record of Teacher Comments to Guide Staff Development Planning and Curriculum Revision
- Yearly Curriculum Revision Process

## Results From Schools and Districts Implementing the Balanced Curriculum Model

By using and implementing the Balanced Curriculum approach, curriculum can be the key to improved achievement. Data from the many schools and districts across the country that have used the Balanced Curriculum process to design their own curriculum show that the process significantly improves achievement (Squires, 2005, pp. 295-307). As Figure 6 demonstrates, school districts that both *designed and implemented* the curriculum saw their scores improve significantly (<http://www.balancedcurriculum.com/results.htm>).

As the Balanced Curriculum operates from the web, with access determined by passwords, districts can save money through coordinated web-based review and revision of their own curricula, rather than via a paper-based process. Most districts can pay for the website access by what they save in printing and publication costs.

### Yearly Curriculum Revisions

The curriculum can then be revised on a yearly basis to take into account comments, the teachers completion history, the current test results, and the results from the curriculum-embedded assessments. We suggest that the most caring and knowledgeable teachers (2-3 per course) spend a day or two over the summer, revising the curriculum, based on the completions and comments on the website.

During this 1- or 2-day period, the teachers would print out reports of all the comments that have been logged for the course for both units and significant tasks. They would look for patterns in the comments and make a list of changes to the units or the significant tasks that address the comments.

Next, they would print out a preformatted report that would show the completion history for teachers who taught the course during the year. For example, if a majority of the teachers had a difficult time completing all the units or significant tasks, this may mean that there was too much curriculum for too little time. Adjustments would need to be made by the curriculum authors of revising the scope and sequence of units, and/or deleting or combining some significant tasks.

Once the authors completed the revisions, they would need to align the new parts of the curriculum and, from the reports available on the website, determine whether standards were over or under emphasized. Further changes to units and significant tasks would need to be made, and the new alignments recorded and validated for balance. Since the units and significant tasks changed, the authors would also have to review the content and format assessments to reflect the new units and significant tasks. The assessment alignments should also be rechecked to make sure they maintain the balance in the assessments.

## Implications for Teachers

They can be confident in their district colleagues work in assuring that all standards and assessment specifications have been included during the curriculum design process. As long as they follow the units and the significant tasks, and assess using the format and content assessments, they can be assured that all standards and assessment specifications have been addressed—one huge load off the teacher's plate.

The structure of the curriculum provides teachers with a description of the significant tasks that all teachers will cover and assess in each unit, allowing teachers to focus on the immediate job of teaching, while understanding that the curriculum has been designed to cover all the standards and assessment specifications when looked at from a year's perspective. As all teachers will teach the same significant tasks for 70% of the unit's time, there is enough consistency in the curriculum across teachers at the same grade level and schools to ensure that students are getting approximately the same instruction, yet the teacher has the freedom to cover the significant tasks in whatever ways are consistent with a teacher's style and the composition of the class.

Teachers also know that the district's curriculum authors (teachers themselves) created the curriculum to make sure the prerequisite skills for this year were addressed during the previous year. Teachers will not have to worry about uneven curriculum coverage by students who come to them from the previous grade level or course.

Teachers show that they are following the curriculum by recording completion of significant tasks on the website (this process usually takes less than a minute per significant task.) Teachers can see their record of completions but cannot see other teacher's records.

Teachers can also "talk back" to the curriculum by recording comments for either individual significant tasks or whole units that indicate problems that the teacher had in implementation, or suggestions for improving the unit or significant task. This ensures that a record of ways the curriculum might be improved is kept. Teachers can view all comments that they and others place on the website. All teachers are therefore involved in the curriculum revision process through their completion and comments on the website.

Teachers can then be assured that the assessments that they are giving are aligned to the state assessments, and that if their students take the content and format assessments, they will be adequately prepared for the test. (The format assessments are given once per unit and provide students with a quiz that resembles the state yearly assessment.) They do not have to construct any additional activities to ensure that their students are prepared for the state assessment. The teachers will not need to review for the state assessment, as this has been done once per unit throughout the year. Therefore, teachers will have more instructional time and less review time for the state test. And they can have confidence in the process because the curriculum-embedded tests

Place and Date	Subject	Grades	School Demographics	Results																																																																																										
Red Bank, NJ 1978-1992	R,LA, Math	K-8	800 approx 60% Black 20% Hispanic 20% White 60% Free/Reduced lunch	Student averages at all grade levels went from below grade level to above grade level in R, LA, and Math over a period of 7 years on a variety of standardized tests used by the district.																																																																																										
Richardson Elementary, Washington, DC 1993-1994	Reading	1-6	360 approx. 96% Black 100% Free/Reduced Lunch	Improvements pre implementation to post implementation. (Normal growth for a year's schooling is 1.0)  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Grade</th> <th>Grade Equiv. Improvement</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1-2</td> <td>0.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2-3</td> <td>1.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3-4</td> <td>0.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4-5</td> <td>1.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5-6</td> <td>1.1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Grade	Grade Equiv. Improvement	1-2	0.8	2-3	1.2	3-4	0.6	4-5	1.2	5-6	1.1																																																																														
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Collection of New York City SURR Schools (Schools under Registration and Review i.e declining scores for three years in a row) 1994 (pre)-1997(post)	Reading and Writing	K-6	1,000 (approx) students per school Mostly high poverty high minority schools	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>School Grade</th> <th colspan="2">State Test % passing</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>Pre</th> <th>Post</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>PS 191</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>32.9</td> <td>49.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 5 Wr</td> <td>80.3</td> <td>91.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PS 165</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>35.3</td> <td>54.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 5 Wr</td> <td>54.1</td> <td>47.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 6 Re</td> <td>74.5</td> <td>66.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PS 156</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>26.9</td> <td>72.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 5 Wr</td> <td>47.1</td> <td>77.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PS 115</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>68.0</td> <td>75.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 5 Wr</td> <td>94.8</td> <td>90.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PS 43</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>48.8</td> <td>54.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 5 Wr</td> <td>75.6</td> <td>90.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 6 Re</td> <td>59.6</td> <td>80.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PS 15</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>72.7</td> <td>79.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 5 Wr</td> <td>76.7</td> <td>89.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 6 Re</td> <td>79.4</td> <td>79.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PS 27</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>34.9</td> <td>57.4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 5 Wr</td> <td>89.6</td> <td>78.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 6 Re</td> <td>52.8</td> <td>55.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Yonkers Hostos/Micros</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 3 Re</td> <td>42</td> <td>87</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gr 6 Re</td> <td>36</td> <td>62</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	School Grade	State Test % passing			Pre	Post	PS 191			Gr 3 Re	32.9	49.0	Gr 5 Wr	80.3	91.7	PS 165			Gr 3 Re	35.3	54.8	Gr 5 Wr	54.1	47.1	Gr 6 Re	74.5	66.7	PS 156			Gr 3 Re	26.9	72.2	Gr 5 Wr	47.1	77.6	PS 115			Gr 3 Re	68.0	75.6	Gr 5 Wr	94.8	90.3	PS 43			Gr 3 Re	48.8	54.7	Gr 5 Wr	75.6	90.0	Gr 6 Re	59.6	80.5	PS 15			Gr 3 Re	72.7	79.3	Gr 5 Wr	76.7	89.8	Gr 6 Re	79.4	79.0	PS 27			Gr 3 Re	34.9	57.4	Gr 5 Wr	89.6	78.9	Gr 6 Re	52.8	55.6	Yonkers Hostos/Micros			Gr 3 Re	42	87	Gr 6 Re	36	62
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PS 156																																																																																														
Gr 3 Re	26.9	72.2																																																																																												
Gr 5 Wr	47.1	77.6																																																																																												
PS 115																																																																																														
Gr 3 Re	68.0	75.6																																																																																												
Gr 5 Wr	94.8	90.3																																																																																												
PS 43																																																																																														
Gr 3 Re	48.8	54.7																																																																																												
Gr 5 Wr	75.6	90.0																																																																																												
Gr 6 Re	59.6	80.5																																																																																												
PS 15																																																																																														
Gr 3 Re	72.7	79.3																																																																																												
Gr 5 Wr	76.7	89.8																																																																																												
Gr 6 Re	79.4	79.0																																																																																												
PS 27																																																																																														
Gr 3 Re	34.9	57.4																																																																																												
Gr 5 Wr	89.6	78.9																																																																																												
Gr 6 Re	52.8	55.6																																																																																												
Yonkers Hostos/Micros																																																																																														
Gr 3 Re	42	87																																																																																												
Gr 6 Re	36	62																																																																																												
District 13 (Brooklyn, NY) 1997-2000	Reading	K-8	18 elementary 4 Middle 1,000 Students per school (Total 20,000 students). Mostly Black and poor	<p><b>Implementing Schools</b> Gained 7% more students scoring above grade level on city tests in Reading from previous year</p> <p><b>Non-Implementing Schools</b> Lost 6% of students who scored above grade level on city tests in Reading from previous year</p>																																																																																										

Figure 6. (Continued)





have been aligned with the state tests. The Balanced Curriculum Model does not make teachers work easier, but it makes their hard work more productive.

### Implications for Principals

Principals understand that by partially centralizing expectations for what is taught in the curriculum, they can be assured that coverage of the curriculum means that the standards and assessment specifications will be covered by all teachers. They do not need to supplement the curriculum with other activities that might (by chance) improve test scores. Alignment makes the difference.

Principals also have a management system that takes little of their time. Principals, through reports from the website, can know that their teachers are up to speed and covering appropriate content.

Principals can be instructional leaders as they make sure all staff are following the curriculum through teaching each significant task and reporting this in their lesson plans. Principals can easily check lesson plans to determine whether they contain the significant tasks of the curriculum. Principals will not have to worry about the skills of students transferring in from other schools in the district because the same curriculum is taught in all schools, with consistency insured by a uniform time line across the district for teaching the units.

Principals know the importance of teachers recording their completions and comments. The principal can get a report from the Balanced Curriculum website, which details how many significant tasks each teacher in the school has completed. Principals regularly review their school's progress by getting and reviewing this report once a week (after checking that teachers' lesson plans address the significant tasks in the curriculum) and arrange to speak with those who appear to be behind. A wise principal will know that a week or two variations in the teacher's completion of significant tasks is not important; what is important is a teacher falling behind three or more weeks, as the principal knows that this means that the teacher will have to constrict the curriculum coverage for the year. This will guarantee that children have not completed the curriculum for the year, and will enter the next year with deficiencies. The principal may also want to attend grade-level meetings or department meetings to work with teacher groups on completion information. Instructional specialists or coaches can also take on these duties as well. The goal of the principal is to ensure that by the end of the year, all teachers have taught what is specified by the units and significant tasks of the curriculum. This insures that all students have the necessary prerequisite skills for next year's course.

Principals can also be confident that students who complete the format assessment will know the formats and how to answer them on the yearly state test. Administrators will want to check with their teachers whether they have used

with students the format and content assessments. Perhaps in their yearly introduction of expectations for the school, they should state that use of the format and content assessments are required, as this will give students the needed and necessary practice on the content and format of the state test.

### Implications for the Central Office

The central office now does not have to worry about the differences in what is taught between schools; they know that if the curriculum gets taught, all the standards and assessment specifications will be met by all schools. And they have the additional assurance that because local teachers created the curriculum, and decided how to "balance" the significant tasks, the curriculum was made to address the unique characteristics of the district and the schools within the district. The curriculum is uniquely matched to district needs because the district's teachers developed the curriculum and decided on the alignments.

The central office knows that having the curriculum organized by units and significant tasks gives teachers what needs to be covered and presents principals with ways to monitor if the units and significant tasks are being followed. The central office knows that the written curriculum (the units and significant tasks) has been aligned to the content and format assessment, the content and format assessments have been aligned to the state test specifications, and all students will have practice in these domains.

The central office's role is to make sure the schools and teachers have taught the units and the significant tasks. Administrators at the central office can log on to the website, and receive a completion report organized to show each school and how many units the teachers at each grade level or course in the school have completed. The central office needs to follow up with the principal about what they are doing with teachers who are significantly behind or are not logging their completions on the website.

Likewise, the central office needs to monitor comments similar to the way they have monitored completions. Are schools recording their comments on the website? The central office can follow up with school principals if this is not taking place. The central office will recognize that having comments are a necessary component of revising the curriculum on a yearly basis, and the central office will need to organize and fund such revision activities.

Revision involves inspecting the current curriculum and comparing it with the yearly state test results, the format and content assessment results, the completions, the comments, and the alignment reports to determine whether changes need to be made. For example, if the test results indicate low scores in an area, and the content and format assessments also have low scores in that area, then the curriculum revisers need to revise the curriculum in that area. To do this, they call for an alignment report from the website that shows the significant tasks that have been aligned with the test specification of the

area that scored low. Obviously, because of the low scores, the significant tasks aligned to this test specification were not strong enough to produce higher test scores. Of course, there needs to be a plan in place to make sure that this takes place.

The central office also knows that if all students in the district have practice with the aligned format and content assessments that they don't need to schedule or require that teachers spend extra time during the school year or require that teachers spend extra time before the state tests in test preparation. They should ensure that their principals do not schedule valuable instructional time in reviewing for the test, as this has been taken care of through practice on the aligned format and content assessments. The alignment process embedded in the curriculum development process ensures that students and teachers are prepared for the state standardized test.

Likewise, the curriculum authors can examine results from the assessments and compare them with the results from the state assessments. To continue our example, if the state assessments indicate a problem in measurement, then the curriculum authors will want to examine how measurement was assessed and whether that assessment is consistent with the results from the state test. The curriculum authors may need to examine the following:

- whether the level of difficulty of the state's assessment is at the same level as the way the curriculum-embedded assessment is structured,
- whether the content of the state assessment is mirrored in the curriculum-embedded assessment, and
- whether the format of the state's assessment is replicated in the curriculum-embedded assessment.

For example, let us suppose that the state's assessment item is a unique way of assessing student knowledge and was currently not included in the curriculum-embedded assessment. The authors would then change the way that item was assessed.

The same process could be used for curriculum-embedded assessments. For example, let us say that the state assessments on measurement did not have positive results. We would expect that the results of the curriculum-embedded assessments would not be stellar as well. If the curriculum-embedded assessments indicated good results for measurement, then the curriculum authors would need to examine the curriculum-embedded assessments to determine whether they were difficult enough (and make sure they were similar to the state test). Conversely, if the state test results were good in measurement, but the curriculum-embedded test results were not, then the curriculum-embedded items on measurement may need to be revised so that they became easier.

The Balanced Curriculum can address many of the concerns that teachers, principals, and central office staff have about following a curriculum document. To reiterate, the structure of the Balanced Curriculum model is as follows:

#### Writing the curriculum

- Courses
- Time-Bound Units
- Significant Tasks (or assured activities)
- Alignment of Significant Tasks to Standards and Assessment Specifications
- Curriculum-Embedded Assessment Aligned to State Standards and Assessment Specifications

#### Implementing the curriculum

- A Management System for Tracking Class's Progress
- A Record of Teacher Comments to Guide Staff Development Planning and Curriculum Revision
- Yearly Curriculum Revision Process

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#### Note

1. The website contains all state and national standards, as well as local standards or a district's power standards for all enrollees.

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#### Bio

**David A. Squires** teaches in the Educational Leadership Department of Southern Connecticut State University. He has written several books and articles on curriculum development and alignment.