

Bringing it all Together—Focusing Instruction with a School-wide Curriculum Alignment Map

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Promising practices...

Agua Fría Elementary School is located in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and it falls into the unfortunate but typical category these days of a low-performing school—with teachers who really want to see their students succeed. During the 2009-2010 school year, Agua Fría was participating in a collaborative schools project with Dual Language Education of New Mexico (DLeNM), when the staff democratically decided to enlist DLeNM in assisting with the creation of a school-wide curriculum alignment map (CAM) in order to address a broader need for instructional focus in the core subject areas of science and social studies.

How did it begin?

During that school year, grade level teams met twice with DLeNM's Lorenzo Sánchez in order to study reading goals and trends—ie., strengths and challenges—as identified by our DRA/EDL student continuums. Agua Fría teachers use this reading assessment three times a year to inform instruction and to alert families of their child's reading progress from grade to grade. Each grade level team then identifies common instructional strategies to use during literacy instruction.

After implementation of these strategies, all grade level teams recognized that there were broader needs which were imperative to address in order to enhance student success. We realized that the same school-wide collaboration that produced our literacy interventions could be applied to all content areas as well, in order to develop a clearer curricular and instructional focus. Our administrator welcomed the request for further cross-grade level collaboration in order to align our curriculum in science and social studies. Dates were set to ensure completion of this work before the end of the 2009-2010 school year.

Why did it evolve?

The possibility of designing comprehensive instruction for every single content standard is daunting—and virtually impossible. Our purpose in aligning our school's curriculum was to develop focused instruction and purposeful teaching with more breadth and depth. We wanted to create a curriculum spiral where everything was taught at least three times *in depth*

while students journeyed through kindergarten to the sixth grade.

Many teachers felt that certain concepts in the core subject areas were skimmed or too repetitive in each grade level, instead of being extensively explored and mastered. At the same time, the school was attempting to have all teachers trained in Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), which

gave us an instructional framework that would allow teachers to focus instruction with far greater depth. We began to see that a curriculum alignment map would give us a clearer focus for the use of GLAD strategies to increase student learning and overall achievement. Things seemed to be falling into place.

What did it involve?

Albeit a daunting group process, a cadre of teachers from each grade level, our literacy coach, and Mr. Sánchez from DLeNM met for two additional professional development days last year. The group carefully dissected our content state standards in social studies and science to identify major strands and common themes across grade levels. The first time we met, each grade-level team member studied their own grade level standards and identified those which seemed to be the overarching “big ideas.” The second time we met, we saw the connections in areas of content focus at certain grade levels, and we began to literally put the pieces of the CAM puzzle together.



Holly Call leads first grade students in a GLAD chant, “Donde Vivo,” as part of a first grade social studies unit.

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We strategized age-appropriate areas of emphasis— e.g., introducing economics in kindergarten with “want and needs,” but teaching it in much greater depth in the upper grades. One example in science is the concept of energy, which is mentioned in the standards at every grade level. However, instead of skimming this topic each year, with students possibly never really grasping the magnitude of energy, why not teach a focused area of study on energy in first, fourth, and sixth grades?

In kindergarten through sixth grade, each grade level identified four or more focus areas for the year in both science and social studies. An example of focused study that surfaced in social studies was how each grade level centered their area of study. To expand, the focus of kindergarten standards is *family*, first is *neighborhood*, second is *school community*, third is *Santa Fe*, fourth is *New Mexico* and *United States geography*, fifth is *US History* (colonization through the 20th century), and the sixth-grade focus is *ancient civilization*. The level of abstraction increases through the grade levels.

	School-wide Themes	Required Assessments	Language Arts	Science	Social Studies	Math	Celebrations/Holidays
August 23 - October 25, 2010	TBD	DRA / EDL 6 Traits Writing Investigations (Math) Treasures/Tesoros	Beginning Literacy All About Us What makes you special? Our Families, Our Neighbors	Parts of the Human body & Simple Functions Scientific Inquiry	All about Me Unit Good Citizenship	Investigations	Labor Day Constitution Day Piñatas Mexican Independence
October 26, 2010 - January 12, 2011	TBD	Investigations Treasures/Tesoros	How do families and neighbors help one another? Have Fun!	Energy - Forms & functions Scientific Inquiry	Leaders of Family/State/Tribe Good Citizenship	Investigations	Halloween Veteran's Day Thanksgiving
January 13 - March 25, 2011	TBD	DRA / EDL 6 Traits Writing WIDA Investigations Treasures/Tesoros	How can we have fun? Let's Team Up How do teams work together? Nature Watch What can we learn about the world of nature?	Structure of Solar System Scientific Inquiry	US symbols & Celebrations (GLAD) Good Citizenship	Investigations	MLK Day President's Day Valentine's Day St. Pat's Day
March 26 - May 27, 2011	TBD	DRA / EDL (for 2-way DL classes only) 6 Traits Writing Investigations Treasures/Tesoros	Adventures What kinds of adventures can we have on any day?	Changes and Patterns (GLAD) Scientific Inquiry	Understanding Resources Good Citizenship	Investigations	Earth Day Memorial Day Easter Mother's Day

After distributing a copy of each grade-level's focus areas for social studies and science to each teacher, we created a blank curriculum map with grids for grade-level teams to complete with their areas of focus for each quarter (see example above). Teams used the master list of four to seven areas created by the CAM team. This blank map also included connected areas such as math, literacy, school-wide celebrations, and required assessments. With a completed CAM, all teachers will be able to collaborate at weekly grade-level meetings, refine their grade-level CAM over time, and share effective teaching strategies.

How much time did it take?

Initially, we worked in grade-level teams for two 90 minutes blocks. However, when the idea of creating a school-wide curriculum alignment map arose, a representative from each grade level spent two additional professional development days, as previously described. This collaboration became a very unifying project for the Agua Fría community.

How did it conclude?

To begin the 2010-2011 school year, we now have a school-wide curriculum map for all grade levels. This includes scope and sequence and grade level appropriate areas of instruction using state content standards. Our administrator's support and direction in having all teachers trained in GLAD strategies only intensifies our potential to succeed in implementing our curriculum alignment map to better support teaching and learning at Agua Fría.

