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Author(s): Richard Wells

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DESIGNING CURRICULA BASED ON THE STANDARDS

The standards provide a common set of goals, but incorporating them into a school's curriculum requires some planning.

BY RICHARD WELLS

Our school district, like many others across the United States, has begun revising its music curriculum based on the National Standards for Music Education. While the standards provide a valuable resource to guide curriculum development, there is no clear procedure for turning them into a grade-by-grade curriculum. This process, however, will become increasingly important if the standards are to have a meaningful impact in the classroom. Thus, our school district decided to formulate a plan that would design a curriculum based on the standards.

Producing a written curriculum is frequently an unwelcome task for music departments. It is often initiated because of state or local school district requirements. In a desire to complete the task as quickly as possible, a small group of teachers or an individual leader in the department will write a new curriculum. After it is completed and accepted by the school district, it is given to teachers who may not understand what to do with it and thus may never use it.

What can be done to make this process more meaningful for teachers?

Richard Wells is director of music and performing arts for the Simsbury Public Schools in Simsbury, Connecticut.

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The separation of some achievement standards into assessment dimensions or task constructions is not always clear-cut.

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How can a curriculum be created that will generate significant discussions among teachers and ultimately guide classroom instruction? These are the questions our school district has tried to answer as we revise our curriculum based on the National Standards.

The standards have created a common set of goals, concepts, and vocabulary that has improved communication among music teachers in our district and has provided a focus for our curriculum development. In addition to using the standards to revise our curriculum, we have used resources

including the Arts Education Assessment Framework, which was used in preparing the pending National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Assessment in the Arts. Our state department of education is developing a new state curriculum guide for the arts, the draft of which we have found very helpful. We have also worked with several guest clinicians including Scott Shuler, our state music consultant; John Feierabend, chairman of the music education department at the University of Hartford's Hartt School; and Larry Scripp from Harvard's Project Zero. A number of our music staff members have attended workshops, conferences, and institutes on assessment and the standards. This has provided a significant knowledge base that has been extremely important throughout this project.

Our school district is fortunate in that we are able to meet at least six to eight times a year as an entire music department. This has allowed all of us to contribute to the development of the curriculum. Although we have worked in smaller groups on specific curriculum projects, the bulk of this material has always been reviewed by the entire music staff. This review gives us all a feeling of ownership for the revised curriculum. Although the standards have been a blueprint for our curriculum, we have spent considerable time reviewing, adapting, refining, and developing

Figure 1. The three artistic processes

Creating	Performing	Responding
<p>Imagining Developing idea(s) (concepts, ideas, feelings)</p>	<p>Selecting Choosing an artistic work to perform</p>	<p>Selecting Choosing an artistic work and/or performance to experience</p>
<p>Planning Exploring, rehearsing, and designing ways of presenting the idea(s) through artistic materials</p>	<p>Analyzing Analyzing structure and researching background of work</p>	<p>Analyzing Seeing or hearing visual and aural features of the work and performance, mentally assembling what is seen and/or heard into a coherent whole</p>
	<p>Interpreting Developing a personal interpretation of a work (an idea of its expressive intent or potential)</p>	<p>Interpreting Developing a personal response to the ideas of both the creator and performer</p>
<p>Making, Evaluating, Refining Applying knowledge and skills/techniques to bring ideas to life through artistic work—evaluating quality and refining successive versions (“drafts”) of the work</p>	<p>Rehearsing, Evaluating, Refining Applying knowledge and skills/techniques to bring personal interpretation to life through performance—evaluating quality and refining successive versions of the performance</p>	<p>Evaluating Evaluating the quality of artistic work and its performance</p>
<p>Presenting Presenting in performance or exhibiting completed work for others</p>	<p>Presenting Performing work for others</p>	

Source: Guide to Arts Curriculum Development (draft), Connecticut Department of Education

them to meet the needs of our students and community to represent what we feel students should know and be able to do in music.

We began by reviewing and adapting the achievement standards. As one example, the first achievement standard under Content Standard 5 (reading and notating music) says that fourth-grade students should be able to read whole, half, dotted half, quarter, and eighth notes and rests in 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 meter signatures. A large quantity of the literature our students sing in the primary grades, however, is in compound meter, and we feel that our students should be expected to read in this meter. So we adapted the achievement standard to read as fol-

lows: Students should be able to read whole, half, dotted half, quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes and rests in 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 meter signatures and eighth, quarter, and dotted quarter notes and dotted quarter rests in 3/8 and 6/8 meter signatures.

Next, we organized the standards into three artistic processes (see Figure 1). These processes were drawn from the NAEP Assessment Framework and then further developed as we reviewed the draft of Connecticut’s Guide to Curriculum in the Arts.

Our goal was to stretch the standards to encompass these three processes, which provide a vehicle for increasing the depth and breadth of our curriculum. Consequently, we

now teach performing or composing as a process that includes many standards rather than teaching separate individual standards. The act of performing, for example, is more than just accurately playing a piece of music in a group with appropriate technique and expression. Performers also engage in reading, listening, analyzing, and describing music; performers must also understand music in relation to history and culture. The three artistic processes provide a framework to organize the nine content standards and the numerous achievement standards, and they also provide a structure that more closely resembles the actual instruction that occurs in music classes.

The curriculum grid in figure 2 represents this manner of looking at the standards. Content Standards 1 and 2 deal specifically with performing, and Content Standards 3 and 4 deal specifically with creating. Content Standards 5 through 9 have elements that deal with responding as well as performing and creating. Components of standards 5 through 9 that apply to each artistic process should be entered into the empty boxes in this grid.

We also spent time breaking the standards into two parts: (1) *assessment dimensions*—what we look at or listen to when determining what students know and are able to do in music and (2) *task constructions*—the type of activities students should engage in when we are determining what they know and are able to do. Some standards contain both these components. For example, the first achievement standard in Content Standard 1 (for fourth-grade students) says that students should be able to sing accurately and with good breath control throughout their singing ranges, alone and in small

and large ensembles. If we break this into two parts, the standard is as follows: students should be able to sing accurately and with good breath control throughout their singing ranges (assessment dimensions) and students should be able to sing alone and in small and large ensembles (task construction).

Some standards, however, are missing one of the parts. The second achievement standard in Content Standard 1 for twelfth-grade proficient students—sing music written in four parts, with and without accompaniment—refers to the type of activity students should engage in and is an activity that is largely the responsibility of the teacher. The language of this achievement standard does not clearly specify what one should look at or listen to when determining whether students have achieved this standard. So that element had to be developed by us, and this is what we devised: *assessment dimensions*—students should be able to sing accurately, with appropriate technique and expression, and

with ensemble skills.

The separation of some achievement standards into assessment dimensions or task constructions is not always clear cut, and it is an area that generates some interesting discussions. For example, is singing from memory an assessment dimension or is it part of a task you ask students to do? If we make it an assessment dimension, it raises its level of importance. Keeping it as only part of task construction means that while students will sing some songs from memory, they will not be specifically evaluated on their ability to memorize.

Figure 3, the artistic process of creating at the eighth-grade level, is an example of some of the results of this process for the achievement standards for Content Standards 6 and 7.

After completing this procedure for each individual achievement standard, we listed all the assessment dimensions and task constructions for each content standard. See figure 4, Content Standard 1 for fourth-grade students, for an example.

Figure 2. Curriculum grid

	Content Standard 5 <i>Reading and notating music</i>	Content Standard 6 <i>Listening to, analyzing, and describing music</i>	Content Standard 7 <i>Evaluating music and performances</i>	Content Standard 8 <i>Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts</i>	Content Standard 9 <i>Understanding music in relation to history and culture</i>
Performing					
Content Standard 1 <i>Singing</i>					
Content Standard 2 <i>Performing on Instruments</i>					
Creating					
Content Standard 3 <i>Improvising</i>					
Content Standard 4 <i>Composing and arranging</i>					
Responding					

Figure 3. The artistic process of creating at the eighth-grade level

<p align="center">Content Standard 6 Listening to, analyzing, and describing music</p>	<p align="center">Content Standard 7 Evaluating music and music performances</p>
<p>Students will describe music events in a given aural or visual example using appropriate terminology (6a)</p> <p>Assessment Dimension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accurate use of terminology ■ Accurate description of musical events <p>Task Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will describe musical events in their own compositions, arrangements, and improvisations and in the compositions, arrangements, and improvisations of others. <p>Students will analyze and demonstrate a basic knowledge of the uses of the elements of music, as well as tonality, intervals, chords, and harmonic progressions in aural and visual examples representing diverse genres and cultures (6b and 6c)</p> <p>Assessment Dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Appropriate analysis of the use of musical elements as well as in various genres and cultures ■ Understanding of the elements of music <p>Task Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will be asked to analyze the music they compose, arrange, or improvise. 	<p>Students will develop criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of music compositions, arrangements, and improvisations and apply the criteria in their personal listening and performing (7a)</p> <p>Assessment Dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Appropriateness of the criteria to the style of music ■ Effectiveness of the evaluative criteria to address both the quality (technical and expressive) and the effectiveness (expressive impact) of the composition, arrangement, or improvisation <p>Task Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will be asked to develop criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of their own compositions, arrangements, and improvisations as well as the compositions, arrangements, and improvisations of others. <p>Students will evaluate the quality (technical and expressive) and effectiveness (expressive impact) of their own and others' compositions, arrangements, and/or improvisations by applying specific criteria appropriate for the style of the music and will offer constructive suggestions for improvement (7b)</p> <p>Assessment Dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accurate use of terminology ■ Appropriate identification of the strengths and weaknesses of a composition, arrangement, or improvisation ■ Appropriateness of the evaluation to the style of the music ■ Effectiveness of the suggestions for improvement <p>Task Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will be asked to evaluate compositions, arrangements, and improvisations and offer suggestions for improvement.

Figure 4. Content standard 1 for fourth-grade students

<p align="center">Assessment Dimensions</p>	<p align="center">Task Constructions</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accuracy (pitch, rhythm, steady tempo) ■ Appropriate technique (timbre, diction, posture) ■ Expression (dynamics, phrasing, interpretation) ■ In groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blending vocal timbres Matching dynamics Responding to the cues of a conductor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will sing familiar songs independently. ■ Students will sing a varied repertoire representing genres and styles from a variety of cultures. ■ Students will sing some songs from memory. ■ Students will sing ostinati, partner songs, and rounds. ■ Students will sing in groups while being directed by a conductor.

Figure 5. Sample curriculum for content standard 3 for students in grades K–2

Kindergarten	
Assessment Dimensions	Task Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The student’s sung answers to simple questions are: Sung on pitch In same tempo ■ The student’s effective choice of sound effects for stories and musical selections ■ The student’s ability to maintain a steady beat while improvising ■ The student’s use of a variety of sound sources when improvising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will be asked to sing simple answers to musical questions. ■ Students will be asked to improvise sound effects to stories and musical selections. ■ Students will be asked to explore various sound sources (body percussion, wood block, hand drum, maracas, triangle).

1st Grade	
Assessment Dimensions	Task Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The student’s improvised answers to given musical questions are in the same: Meter Tempo Tonality ■ The student’s effective choice of sound effects for stories and musical selections ■ The student’s use of a variety of sound sources when improvising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will be asked to improvise answers given musical questions within specified guidelines (rhythmic, melodic, textual) using grade-level rhythms and pitches. ■ Students will be asked to improvise sound effects for stories and musical selections. ■ Students will use a variety of sound sources (grade-level instruments) when improvising sound effects.

2nd Grade	
Assessment Dimensions	Task Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The student’s improvised answers to given musical questions within the specified guidelines are in the same meter, tempo, and tonality. ■ The student’s effective choice of sound effects for stories and musical selections ■ The student’s use of a variety of sound sources when improvising ■ The student’s accompaniments are performed in an appropriate style, and in consistent meter and tempo within the specified guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students will be asked to improvise answers to given musical questions within specified guidelines (rhythmic, melodic, textual) using grade-level rhythms, pitches, dynamics, and articulation. ■ Students will be asked to improvise sound effects for stories and musical selections. ■ Students will use a variety of sound sources (grade-level instruments) when improvising accompaniments and instrumental pieces. ■ Students will be asked to improvise simple rhythmic accompaniments to songs and rhythmic rhymes.

These assessment dimensions and task constructions are directly related to the standards, and they are very helpful when determining the types of activities students should engage in and how students will be assessed. They were also of great assistance to us as we developed our grade-by-grade scope and sequence in the same format (see figure 5, sample curriculum for Content Standard 3 for students in Grades K–2).

Designing our curriculum in this manner provides a vehicle for teachers to plan lessons more efficiently with greater depth and breadth. It also establishes criteria for assessment, which helps students focus on curricular priorities. As Grant Wiggins, a recognized authority on curriculum design, has recommended:

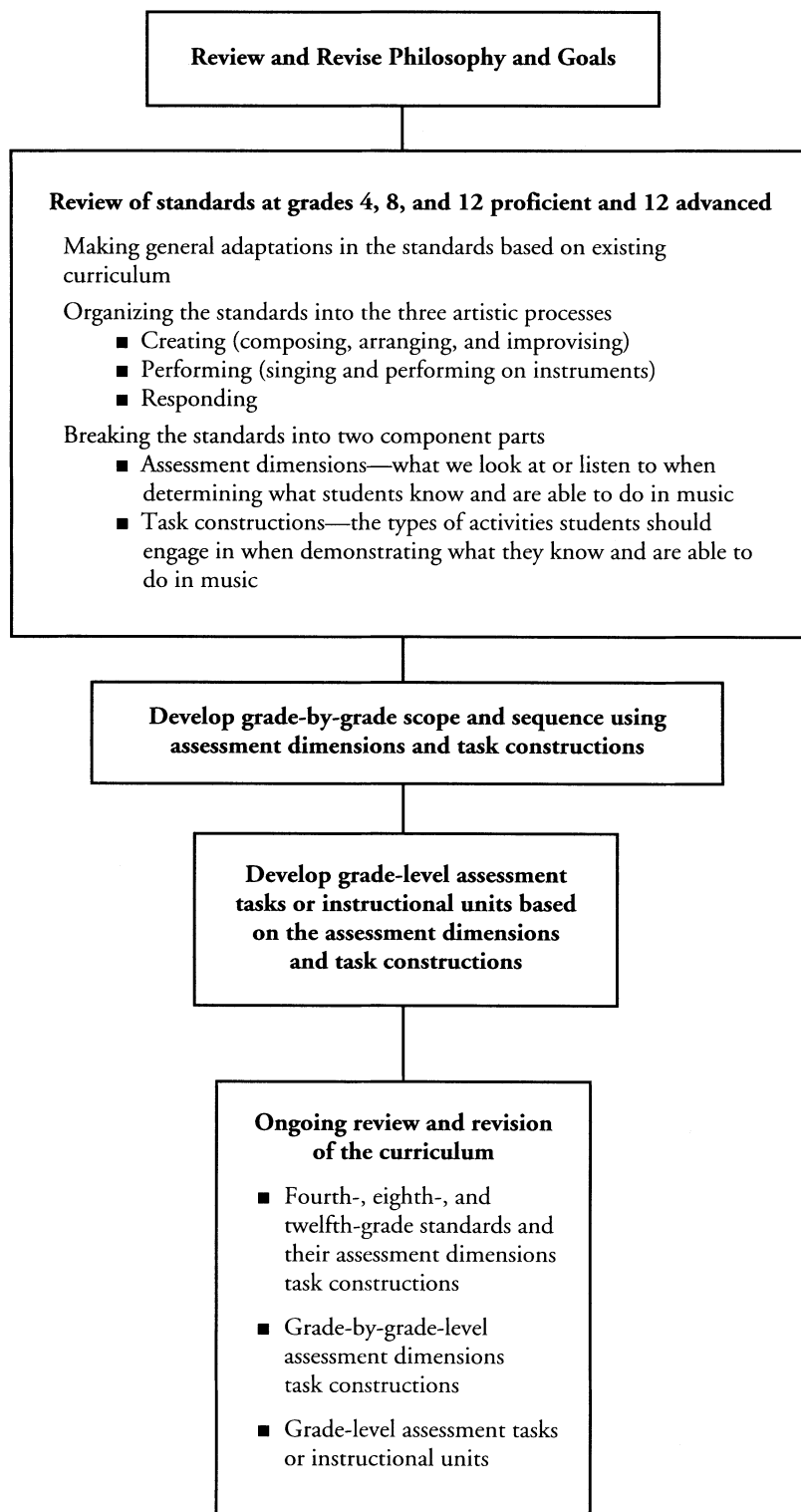
Begin ... designing curriculum “backward from the assessment task”—deciding what students should be able to demonstrate they know and can do before deciding what to teach them....By doing so, teachers will have set criteria for ordering content, reducing aimless “coverage” and adjusting instruction in route; and students will be able to grasp their priorities from day one.¹

Curriculum development will continue in Simsbury as we develop districtwide assessments for each grade level. These will be part of instructional units intimately linked with the task constructions and assessment dimensions outlined in our scope and sequence. These assessments, in most cases, will cover multiple content standards and represent what we feel is the most significant content at each grade level.

We have begun this process and have shared the results of some of these assessments as a department. We have found that reviewing and analyzing examples of student work leads to:

- valuable discussions among staff members clarifying what students should know and be able to do
- a shared understanding among teachers about what an advanced student’s work looks like, or what a proficient student’s work looks like

Figure 6. Curriculum development model based on the standards



- examples of student work clarifying our priorities and expectations that can be shared with students
- the identification of important areas for future staff development
- modifications in our curriculum
- improved instruction through higher expectations for students
- more meaningful assessments.

Developing a standards-based curriculum has been positive for us. Our staff meetings are focused on meaningful discussions about student learning. Our new curriculum is focusing instruction on what students ought to know and be able to do in music rather than on hit-or-miss coverage through random classroom activities.

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Although the standards have been a blueprint for our curriculum, we have spent considerable time reviewing, adapting, refining, and developing them to meet the needs of our students and community to represent what we feel students should know and be able to do in music.

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Although our model (see figure 6, curriculum development model based on the standards) is certainly not the only way to write a standards-based curriculum, it has provided us with an effective tool to bring the standards to life in the classroom.

Note

1. Grant Wiggins, "Designing Performance Assessment Tasks," *Education Update* 37, no. 6 (1995): 1. ■