# What makes curriculum STRONG

Rich curriculum balances big conceptual ideas with concrete content and skills. It not only scaffolds core content and skills over grade levels, but captures other essential elements for a school or district, reflecting a schools culture and including core values, key learning focuses like service learning, differentiation, and intervention strategies.

*While what a school or district defines as essential will vary, a common element of curriculum is that it's based on concrete concepts or skills. This is important because it forms the backbone of the documented curriculum.*

## Features of a Strong Curriculum

**Vision**
Your unique curriculum reflects your mission and vision about student learning

**Alignment**
When and where content and skills are taught is clear across students' academic career

**Standards**
Standards-aligned instructional coherence is built within and across grade levels

**Articulation**
Expectations are clearly and explicitly laid out across all different points of the school year

**Scaffolding**
Supports that address gaps in knowledge and any unique needs are integrated

**Resources**
Written links to adopted resources are included and where gaps exist, how to fill them

**Assessment**
Suggestions for the best ways to measure student achievement of learning are included

(Council of the Great City Schools, 2019)

*Using Atlas as a tool to document and review your curriculum supports and provides a designated space for each of these features of a strong curriculum.*

## What curriculum IS

- Teacher Instruction
- Textbooks & Online Resources
- Standards
- Local Community Needs
- School Mission or Initiatives
- Character or Faith-Based Education

Curriculum is the sum of all of all of its key components. A textbook, set of standards, or even teacher instruction alone is not a viable curriculum in itself.

*Atlas provides the opportunity to **synthesize** all of these components in one comprehensive, transparent platform.*

# Why having a strong curriculum is key to teaching and learning

> An excellent education is not just what gets taught today. It's the cumulative effect of a coherent, cumulative, thoughtfully sequenced, and knowledge-rich curriculum that broadens and deepens over time, within and across grades...This vision is fundamentally incompatible with an approach that treats curriculum as fungible or disconnected, a series of audibles called at the line of scrimmage.

(Pondiscio, 2020)

A **clearly articulated curriculum** allows teachers to pursue topics **in-depth** and reduces the risk of teachers having to plan on the fly.

**A well developed curriculum is also the foundation of a dynamic community of teaching and learning.** Once established, the curriculum anchors common vocabulary, and becomes a critical blueprint to facilitate strong collaborative teams. Ongoing professional learning that is **dynamic** and **responsive, based on student growth** will ultimately be rooted in the curriculum as it serves the building blocks for a culture of continual improvement.

If we want to spark student **curiosity** and **interest** and create room for them to **wonder** and **explore** and practice authentic reading, writing and authentically apply mathematical and scientific concepts, **it is essential to outline this in a written curriculum.**

# Why engaging the school community is valuable

## Transparency

Publishing curriculum on a public site allows community members to see what is being taught in classrooms, as well as showcases integration of community values in curriculum.

## Acccountability

Creating a documented curriculum provides a foundation for a school learning community of educators, students, parents, and community partners to continue to refine curriculum and instruction

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# How schools
## successfully plan curriculum

**Articulate the reason**

**1**

Be clear with users about the impacts that curriculum mapping will have on student growth and the strategic goals of the district.

**Create a plan**

**2**

Provide clear goals and expectations to the core team and empower them to do themselves among everyone involved in curriculum mapping.

**Dedicate a team and a time**

**3**

Create a team to guide, support, and make decisions about curriculum work across the district and school.

**Prepare for change**

**4**

Consider how to de-implement previous curriculum practices and create space for new initiatives.

**Provide ongoing support**

**5**

Collaborate with educators in the school to create and deliver professional learning and development that is targeted and addresses the unique strengths and needs of the district.

# How schools
## manage change

**Change management** refers to supporting individuals (teachers, community members, administrators) in adopting a new initiative or adapting to the change of an existing process. Without intentional consideration of how to manage these changes, increased challenges and pushback are likely to appear stall progress toward full engagement.

## Awareness  Why does this matter?

**Why is the change taking place??**
Be sure that all stakeholders (teachers, coordinators, administrators, community members, etc) understand the need for the change.

## Motivation  What's in it for me?

**Why should individual teachers be invested in this? How will this change benefit the district, school, and students?**
Consider all of the parties affected by the change and what will motivate them to engage authentically in the shift.

## Knowledge  I know what to do, but how?

**Do all of the teachers have the skill set to use the tool and to write curriculum?**
Assess the needs of your staff and provide any training and development needed to give them the skills needed to be successful, including timelines and clear expectations.

## Time  When am I expected to do this work?

**How are teachers to integrate the change into their schedules and routines?**
Teachers may have dedicated time for training and professional development, but the work requires dedicated time. Advocate for and provide a time and space for this additional workload from teachers.

## Recognition  Does this make a difference?

How are the work and success of teachers celebrated? Although the work of curriculum writing and review is never completely over, acknowledging progress and milestones is an important component of ensuring that the process continues moving forward.

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# How schools create buy-in

To launch any initiative, schools need a dedicated team to create a plan, support the work, and adapt the process along the way in order to find success. In order for these teams to lead their colleagues to substantive change with buy-in, they need to consider and account for every component of facilitating the transition.

| Vision | + | Skills | + | Incentive | + | Resources | + | Action Plan | → | Success |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| Vision | Skills | Incentive | Resources | Action Plan | Success |
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| 💡 | 🧩 | 🪙 | 🔨 | 📋 | 🎉 |
| 💡 | 🧩 | 🪙 | 🔨 | ⚠️ | **False Starts** 😠 |
| 💡 | 🧩 | 🪙 | ⚠️ | 📋 | **Frustration** 😣 |
| 💡 | 🧩 | ⚠️ | 🔨 | 📋 | **Resistance** 😑 |
| 💡 | ⚠️ | 🪙 | 🔨 | 📋 | **Anxiety** 😬 |
| ⚠️ | 🧩 | 🪙 | 🔨 | 📋 | **Confusion** 😖 |

(Knoster, 1991)

*As you prepare for the launch of a curriculum mapping initiative with Atlas, take the time to work with your team to account for all five of these components for success.*

**Maintain an open line of communication with staff** in order to assess and detect any feelings of confusion, anxiety, resistance, frustration, or false starts. Routinely **reflect** on the implementation of the initiative and don't be afraid to modify your approach as needed.