

# CREATING LOCAL K-12 CURRICULUM GUIDES IN THE ARTS 4

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Appendices C – K of this guide provide examples of model curriculum work, in the form of illustrative excerpts from exemplary local arts guides. Some of these local guides were still in editing at press time, but complete versions of these guides eventually will be available, either by contacting districts directly for a "hard copy" (districts may charge for this service to recoup their printing costs) or by downloading the guides as files on the Connecticut State Department of Education website: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dtl/curriculum/currart.htm>

Additional examples of model curriculum units linked to Connecticut standards, complete with scoring scales and scored student work, may be found at: [www.CTcurriculum.org](http://www.CTcurriculum.org)

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The purpose of this chapter is to recommend step-by-step processes and provide examples to assist local school districts in developing quality arts curriculum guides.

## Qualities Of An Effective Curriculum Guide

A *basic* curriculum guide is a written document that presents the philosophy, goals, objectives, assessment strategies and resources upon which the local program is built. A *quality* curriculum guide goes beyond these basic components to provide additional helpful information, such as a scope and sequence chart and recommended instructional strategies.

An effective curriculum guide:

- presents a *philosophy and overarching goals* that guide the entire program, which are linked to the philosophy and goals of the school district, and are consistent with contemporary visions of why and what students should learn;
- establishes clear, developmentally appropriate *learning expectations* for what students should know and be able to do (objectives or outcomes), which are connected to the philosophy and goals, and sequenced from grade to grade and course to course, K-12;
- *allows for flexibility*, and encourages experimentation and innovation;
- identifies and facilitates appropriate *interdisciplinary connections*;
- suggests *means of assessing* student achievement and the success of the overall program; and
- presents all of the above components in a format that is *useful* to teachers and administrators, and which facilitates revision and refinement.■

## Benefits Of Developing Curriculum

School districts are required by Connecticut General Statute 10-16b to provide a “program of instruction [that] is planned, ongoing and systematic” in the “prescribed courses of study,” which include the arts. This statute recognizes the importance of planned, common curriculum, which serves many important purposes. Among the benefits of common curriculum are that it:

- helps ensure that all students have access to a “systematic” program, i.e., one that is of equal rigor and quality across a district;

- ensures sequential instruction as students move from grade to grade, and from teacher to teacher;
- helps new teachers understand and follow the district’s expectations; and
- provides the means for teachers to assess their own success, and for communities to assess a program’s success.

The benefits of developing curriculum extend far beyond the value of having a clear *document* to guide instruction. When properly organized, the *process* of developing curriculum is inherently valuable to participants in that process. The sustained conversations that produce a common vision for the guide, and the continuing conversations that occur as the guide is implemented and the new program is evaluated, are among the most powerful and constructive professional growth experiences in which faculty members can participate.■

## Key Conditions For Successful Curriculum Development

A quality curriculum guide is the result of a carefully planned process that relies on the blending of a variety of resources. To maximize the chances for successful curriculum development in the arts, districts should provide several key conditions.

- Curriculum development is most successful when coordinated by a *designated K-12 program leader* who is an expert in the arts area for which curriculum is being developed (art, music, dance, theatre), working in partnership with the district’s head of curriculum and instruction. As the curriculum guide evolves, these leaders should work with members of the arts faculty and others to plan and oversee its implementation.
- The K-12 faculty for each art form should *work together* as a committee. All faculty members need to “take ownership” in developing and refining the curriculum, because all will need to participate in implementing the curriculum. It can also be beneficial to include school administrators, parents, other community members and students on the curriculum committee.
- Curriculum should be designed as a *K-12 document*, not as separate pieces to be connected later. Committees should develop consensus on a K-12 philosophy, and K-12 goals and objectives for the general (core)

program in Grades 4 and 8, before developing objectives for specialized strands (such as chorus, band, orchestra, keyboard/guitar, music composition; modern dance, ballet, choreography; acting, stagecraft; and painting, ceramics, sculpture, art history).

- Developing a quality curriculum takes *time*. Implementing a curriculum takes even more time. Districts, therefore, must provide substantial amounts of time for faculty members and other participants in the process to work together, and expect that the completion of a draft curriculum will take at least a year. They should also provide for in-service training and sustained supervision to ensure implementation and refinement of the document.
- The curriculum development team needs time to think, research, write, weigh suggestions and to revise. After-school, evening or weekend meetings can be helpful, but effective curriculum development requires the kind of *sustained, focused thinking* that best occurs during multihour and multiday blocks of released time and summer work. Half-day or full-day released-time meetings on a biweekly or monthly basis can be productive, particularly if individuals and subcommittees work on clearly defined tasks between those meetings. Summer work often proves most successful because participants can devote their complete attention to the task.
- *Planning* for curriculum development should include clear deadlines and responsibilities. The plan should be realistic, with flexibility built in to accommodate unexpected needs. Many districts have found the Curriculum Development Planning Form (see pages 167 and 168) helpful when planning the process.
- One important way to accelerate the curriculum development process is to research and collect *exemplary materials and procedures*, then adapt them to the local situation. Drawing on Connecticut and national documents, such as student standards, will help. Publications, such as those distributed by professional arts education organizations, typically contain many exemplary practices and suggestions. Reviewing exemplary curriculum guides developed by other school districts also may be helpful.

- The development of curriculum documents requires *funding* for items such as:
  - salaries for school staff members who devote extra hours to curriculum work;
  - pay for substitute teachers who cover classes when staff members are released for curriculum work;
  - secretarial services and duplication of materials;
  - purchase of exemplary resources and other professional literature;
  - clinician and consultant fees;
  - travel expenses to visit other school districts;
  - printing copies of the pilot/review and final versions of the guide; and
  - professional development needed to implement the guide. (This is an essential aspect of curriculum work that too often is neglected.)■

## THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The development of curriculum is a multistep, ongoing, cyclical process that progresses from evaluating the existing program to designing an improved program, to implementing the improved program, to evaluating the success of the improved program and then back to designing a still better program. The following five-year cycle is typical:

- **year one:** convene committee; begin information collection and research to determine the “state of the art;” begin review of current program;
- **year two:** complete review and evaluation of existing program; plan and begin writing process;
- **year three:** complete writing/revision and begin professional development;
- **year four:** implement new or revised curriculum and continue professional development; and
- **year five:** monitor program success and conduct external assessment.

There are many ways to approach the development of local curriculums in the arts. Many school districts have found that the Curriculum Development Process outlined on page 166 is an effective model.■

## Overview Of Curriculum Development Process

1. Convene the curriculum committee.
2. Identify key issues and trends in the arts area(s) for which curriculum is being written to determine the “state of the art,” by reviewing current literature and consulting leading sources.
3. Conduct a systematic review of the current program. Review local priorities and compare the existing program – including both student achievement and the instructional resources provided by the district – to state-of-the-art practices.
4. Develop a K-12 program philosophy, checking for linkage with the district’s general philosophy of education.
5. Develop K-12 program goals, aligning them with the district’s general goals for education.
6. Develop grade and course objectives.
  - a. Reach consensus on Grade 8 student objectives, i.e., student achievement expected by the end of the required core program.
  - b. Reach consensus on Grade 4 student objectives, making sure that students learn what they will need in order to achieve the Grade 8 objectives.
  - c. Build the remainder of the curriculum, including:
    - sequences of objectives, suggested activities/materials, and assessment for the K-4 and 5-8 general core program; and
    - sequences of objectives, suggested

activities/materials, and assessment for specialized strands.

7. Identify the resources necessary to deliver the new curriculum (such as staffing and scheduling, equipment and materials, and in-service training for teachers and administrators).
8. (If resources cannot be provided immediately:) Develop a medium-range (2-3-year) plan to provide resources, and phase in implementation of the curriculum as resources are added. If this approach is adopted, implement the new curriculum in the earlier grades first.
9. Pilot and refine the draft guide.

This curriculum development process calls for the committee to reach an early consensus on what students should have learned by the end of the required core of the arts program, which typically concludes at the end of Grade 8. This approach consciously differs from the traditional approach, in which committees first develop curriculum for kindergarten, then for Grade 1, and so on up through high school. Experience suggests that clarifying at the outset the Grade 8 outcomes, which are the ultimate student behaviors or objectives toward which teachers should be working, K-8, makes it easier to develop K-7 curriculum by focusing and “anchoring” the direction of the objectives developed for each grade.■

## Curriculum Development Planning Form

Developing a curriculum requires managing a number of resources and responsibilities. A number of local district committees have found the Curriculum Development Planning Form (see pages 167 and 168) useful as they plan their curriculum development process.

**Curriculum Development Planning Form  
Target Dates, Resources and Responsibilities**

**1. Convene committee**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**2. Review of key issues and trends**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**3. Systematic review of the current program**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**4. K-12 program philosophy**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**5. K-12 program goals**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**6. Grade and course objectives:****a. Consensus on Grade 8 student objectives**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

(continued)

**Curriculum Development Planning Form (continued)****b. Consensus on Grade 4 student objectives**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**c. Objectives for remainder of curriculum:****• Grades K-4 and 5-7 core objectives**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**• Specialized strands (such as choral and instrumental music, or acting and stagecraft)**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**7. Resources necessary to deliver the new curriculum**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**8. (Only if resources cannot be provided immediately:) Medium-range (2 – 3-year) plan**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

**9. Pilot and refine**

Date to complete: \_\_\_\_\_

Resources Needed:

Meeting Dates/Content:

Who is responsible for what:

## Step 1: Convening The Curriculum Committee

The first step in any curriculum development cycle is to assemble the curriculum team. Because the full K-12 faculty must implement the curriculum, the full faculty must have substantive input into the document. In smaller districts an entire faculty may serve on the curriculum committee; in larger districts there is typically a smaller core committee which manages the process, but that committee should involve the entire faculty by actively soliciting ideas and providing opportunities for critique and revision.

Many districts choose to involve other members of the school and broader communities in the curriculum development process. The most common non-arts specialist member of the arts curriculum team is a school administrator, such as a central office administrator or school principal. Other teams, however, choose to include non-arts faculty members, students, parents, local artists, outside expert personnel such as members of university faculties, school board members or other members of the broader community.

The choice of a leader for the curriculum team is of critical importance to the success of the process. Where there is a designated program supervisor or coordinator who is an expert in the arts area, that person typically leads the curriculum team. When such a person is not available districts may either identify an administrator who has curriculum expertise and an interest in the arts, or hire an outside consultant to work with the arts faculty.■

## Step 2: Identifying Key Issues And Trends

The curriculum team first should update the local vision of quality arts education by reviewing state-of-the-art practice in the arts area(s) in which the district will be developing curriculum. Such a review allows a curriculum committee to identify key issues and trends that will become the basis for assessing the quality and needs of the current program (see Step 3) and for the remainder of the curriculum process.

The vision-development process typically begins with a committee gathering, reading and discussing current literature and consulting with expert sources. In-service sessions, professional conferences and leading publications within and outside the arts education field can be useful sources of ideas and information. State and national standards documents provide information that should prove useful in developing the vision. Professional arts education organizations are able to provide access to research and other resources that should help the committee define state-of-the-art practice.

While synthesizing this information, the curriculum committee should begin to develop a local approach

to critical issues, such as:

- defining and meeting the needs of all students;
- offering challenges and opportunities for greater depth to motivated students;
- developmental readiness and appropriateness;
- addressing the cultural heritage of varied segments of the student population;
- the roles, availability and integration of computers and other technology;
- balancing expectations of entertainment with the educational priority of student learning;
- ensuring appropriate instructional time and other resources;
- implementing scheduling approaches that provide students with access to arts study; and
- systematically assessing student learning.

Although it is important at this step to consider the resources necessary to implement a state-of-the-art curriculum, the focus should be on developing a broad common vision of what and how students should learn. This vision will provide the basis for writing a philosophy and goals.■

## Step 3: Assessing Needs

### IDENTIFYING NEEDED CHANGES

Once the committee has established a common vision of quality arts education, members should conduct a systematic needs assessment to ascertain the perceptions, concerns and desires of each of the stakeholders in the arts curriculum. The needs assessment provides an opportunity to gather information about what members of the local education community want in terms of arts outcomes or expectations, program content, student achievement and other components of the program. For example:

- Teachers may be dissatisfied with older content, materials and techniques in light of recent research and innovations.
- Student achievement may be declining or lower than expected at certain grade levels, or in certain areas of the program.
- Teachers may lack time, technology, materials or other resources to implement quality instruction.
- Teachers may be concerned about low elective enrollment and/or existing scheduling practices.
- Curriculum leaders in the district may want