

Curriculum Audit FAQs for Building Administrators

Background

CMSi, a national leader in auditing and evaluating curriculum design and delivery, conducted an independent, comprehensive, district-wide audit which began in the fall of 2021 and concluded in May of 2022. The final report was issued in September of 2022.

Through this process, the SPS curricula was measured against the CMSi “gold standard.” The findings, as you know, showed that 20% of our existing curriculum met this high standard, while the balance needed additional elements. Ensuring 100% of our curriculum meets the “gold standard” is the work underway right now, led by our talented teachers.

This finding has been misunderstood and has led to it being mischaracterized as 80% of our curriculum does not exist. This is simply not true. However, it is understandable that parents and members of the community might be alarmed when they hear or read this misinformation and may approach you with questions.

The following FAQs offer suggestions on how to answer questions you may be asked.

FAQs:

1. What is meant by curriculum?

Curriculum is units of study designed against core standards to guide students in practicing and mastering the necessary skills. In our case, Connecticut standards set by the state education department dictate the skills students need at every grade level in every area of study.

Curriculum exists in all of our classes, across all of our schools and grade levels. Development of our curriculum is a teacher driven process and our teachers use curriculum to deliver instruction to students every day. Student performance is measured against the skills we expect our students to master as set by the state and by the SPS district.

2. What is a curriculum audit and why does a district have one done?

A curriculum audit is a review of all of the district’s instructional curriculum to determine if we have developed and implemented a coordinated, valid and comprehensive system to manage the design, development, implementation, evaluation and support of curriculum.

It is good educational practice for all school districts to conduct an independent, outside curriculum audit every ten years.

In Stamford's case, it had been over 20 years since the last independent audit of SPS curriculum was done.

3. When did the audit begin?

Planning for the audit began in 2019 shortly after SPS Superintendent Dr. Lucero and Amy Beldotti, Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, assumed their current positions. Implementation was delayed by Covid, and work resumed in the spring of 2021. The first step was to identify and hire an audit firm. That spring, CMSi, a national leader in auditing and evaluating curriculum design and delivery, was hired to conduct the SPS audit.

Audit work began in the fall of 2021 and concluded in May of 2022. The process was thoughtful, deliberate, and exhaustive, and the important work it produced required the involvement and support of many of our teachers, building administrators, and central office staff.

A final report was issued in the fall of 2022.

Throughout the audit process, Dr. Lucero and Ms. Beldotti remained in regular contact with the auditors. This enabled the district to address and implement several of the auditor's recommendations in advance of the final report.

4. Did the state request that SPS conduct the audit out of concern for our curriculum?

No. We advised the state of our plans to conduct a curriculum audit and received their full support, not out of concern for our curriculum, but because such periodic audits are good educational practice.

In fact, every year we demonstrate to the state that we have curriculum in place and our program of study is well presented. We are proud that the state considers SPS curriculum to be highly researched when it comes to selecting programs and resources for our schools.

Often, our teachers participate in curriculum writing for the state, as some recently did for the African American and Latin Studies course and for the new Computer Science curriculum required to launch in 2025. Our schools are frequently pilot classrooms for new curriculum too.

5. What did the curriculum audit find?

Through the curriculum audit process, the SPS curricula was held up against CMSi's "gold standard." The findings of the audit showed that 20% of our curriculum met this high standard, while the balance needed additional elements, such as pacing guides, a broader array of teaching strategies, and updated content.

This was not unexpected. It had been over 20 years since the last independent audit of SPS curriculum. We also understood that the timing of the audit might not be ideal, as Covid protocols had just been lifted and students, teachers and administrators were still in the Covid mindset. But the work was important and waiting another year was not an option.

6. What has the District done to address the audit findings?

Throughout the audit process, Dr. Lucero and Ms. Beldotti remained in regular contact with the auditors. This enabled the district to address and implement several of the auditor's recommendations in advance of the final report. In fact, over the summer of 2022, 35 of our high school English Language Arts and Social Studies teachers worked to revise curriculum for these two subjects, which were introduced in the fall of 2022, along with Chemistry and Music.

This summer, teachers will work on revising curriculum for high school Math and World Languages. A new K-5 literacy curriculum, Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) will be introduced in our kindergarten classes, with grades 1-5 receiving selective units throughout the year to expose them to the new program. At our middle schools, curriculum for the four core subjects will receive an update.

When our schools open in the fall, 65% of our curriculum will meet the "gold standard." We have made considerable progress and understand that more work remains. Our work, led by our district's talented team of teachers, will continue until 100% of the curriculum is "gold standard."

7. How have these findings been shared with parents?

The final report is posted on the Teaching and Learning webpage. Ms. Beldotti has hosted Parent Pop-ups, and updates are routinely included in Dr. Lucero's weekly email to the school community.

Every quarter, Ms. Beldotti updates the Curriculum and Learning Committee of the Board of Education on progress in addressing the audit findings. The District also hosts parent pop-ups and the updates are included in the Superintendent's weekly email to school caregivers.

8. Is it really true that 80% of the classes in the district lack curriculum?

No. Curriculum exists in all of our classes, across all of our schools and grade levels. Our teachers use curriculum every day to deliver instruction to students and student performance is measured against the skills we expect our students to master as set by the state and by our district.

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9. When will all the curricula be “gold standard” curricula?

Typically, school districts take seven to ten years to fully address audit findings. We set a goal of full implementation gold standard curriculum by fall of 2025 and are proud to report that we are significantly ahead of schedule.

By this fall, 65% of our curriculum, district-wide, will be “gold standard, and we fully expect that well before the 2025 deadline we set, 100% of the curriculum will be “gold standard.”

3-year plan:

- All High School core curriculum in place by Fall 2023
- All Middle School core curriculum in place by Fall 2023
- K-5 ELA adopted CKLA as our literacy program
- Integrated Math to replace Algebra 1/Geometry / Algebra 2 sequence in Fall 2023

“Gold Standard” curriculum in use as of September 2022:

- English Language Arts (grades 9-12)
- Social Studies (grades 9-12)
- Chemistry
- Art - level one (grades 9-12)
- Health (9-10)
- Music (K-12)
- Physical Education (K-12)
- K-5 Math curriculum – Everyday Mathematics, already in place

10. Are assessments included in the curriculum and if yes, what kind of assessments should we expect to see?

Yes, assessments remain an important element of our curriculum across all grades and subjects. As our teams of teachers work on curriculum revisions and updates they will also determine the format and timing of assessments that are most appropriate for that subject. For instance, the Math department may determine that quarterly, cumulative assessments with a summative assessment at the end of each grading period as best indication of a student’s proficiency with the topics being taught and the skills expected. The English Department may use a combination of in-class essays, written reports and periodic tests or quizzes.

While the format and timing of assessments may vary by department, the assessments and timing within each department will be identical. As an example, all high school students taking Integrated Math I will take the same tests/quizzes at the same time throughout the year.

11. Where can I find the curriculum audit report?

On the Teaching and Learning page of the District website.

12. How can I stay informed about the process?

There are a number of ways to stay current on the curriculum audit work:

- a. Dr. Lucero's The Weekly email to the school community will continue to provide periodic updates on curriculum work and implantation.
- b. Parent Pop-ups will continue to be hosted by Ms. Beldotti and publicized through The Weekly and on the district's Facebook page. Be sure you are subscribed to the Superintendent's newsletter and "like" the FB page.
- c. Quarterly, Ms. Beldotti updates the Board of Education's Teaching and Learning Committee, the dates and times of which can be found on the Board of Education page of the district website, under Regular and Special meetings.
- d. For a complete list of all of the district's communications tools for staff and families refer the parent to the SPS website.

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