

# **A Practical Guide to Developing Quality Curriculum Units of Study**

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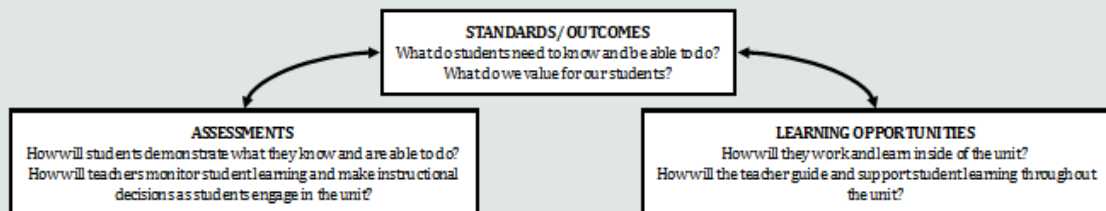
See next page for a full-page sample from our 6 page trifold.



## A Practical Guide to Developing Quality Curriculum Units of Study

Through the curriculum development process, teachers have rich and deep opportunities to consider how national, state and district standards can shape what and how they teach and assess. Teachers who focus on assessment for learning, align their curriculum, instruction and assessment, and collaboratively use student work to discuss and address student needs, are more effective than those driven by policies dominated by the use of packaged curriculum and external assessments (*Graue and Johnson (2011), Martin-Kniep and Picone-Zocchia (2009)*). Increasing teachers' capacity to develop curriculum provides schools and districts with the internal capacity to influence change as well as review and evaluate outside curriculum and assessment resources.

Entry points for curriculum design include Standards/Outcomes, Assessments and Learning Opportunities. Teachers can start the process by looking at data from any of the three areas:



The following guide outlines the theory and practice behind key components of quality curriculum:  
*Framing the Unit, Unit Assessments, and Unit Learning Opportunities.*

### FRAMING THE UNIT: FOCUS



The **organizing center** is the **heart or hub** of the unit. Because topics are narrowing, we encourage using concepts, issues, problems, processes, or phenomena as organizing centers. Compelling organizing centers can promote deep thinking, support authenticity and allow for natural integration of subject areas. They are more relevant and meaningful for students as well as adults when they cross content areas and transcend culture, geography and time.

#### TYPES AND EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZING CENTERS

Concept	Strategy or Process	Issue or Concerns	Phenomena	Persistent Global Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abstract and less tangible ideas</li> <li>Provide learners with mental structures they can use to describe the world they see</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific strategies or processes</li> <li>Provide learners with opportunities to practice skills, apply strategies to investigate or solve problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific issues or concerns of learners</li> <li>Provide learners with opportunities to investigate and explore issues that are immediately relevant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time-bound or trendy experiences, incidents, events that can be interesting and unusual</li> <li>Provide learners with opportunities to investigate and explore</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant world issues or problems that transcend national boundaries</li> <li>Provide learners with opportunities to understand and grapple with possible approaches to addressing or solving them</li> </ul>
Culture Change Family Energy Uncertainty	Observation Persuasion Synthesis Teamwork Composition	Teenage identity Peer pressure Bullying Teen pregnancy Childhood obesity	Dystopian culture Steampunk Super storms Tattoo culture Nanotechnology	Global warming Child labor Exploitation of women Racism Poverty

#### How do you identify an organizing center for your unit?

1. Read through the process, content and/or dispositional standards that will be used to design the unit of study and highlight key ideas, concepts, structure, genres or events.
2. Look for connections, or threads, between the information you highlighted in the standards.
3. Consider this information as well as your available resources, the needs of the community you serve and your passions.
4. Select a center that captures the most important connections that will be meaningful and relevant for students.

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