

# Frequently Asked Questions about Curriculum Mapping

## What is mapping?

Curriculum mapping is a procedure for collecting and documenting the operational curriculum anchored in the actual school calendar. Each teacher in the building enters critical information about the basic elements of the operational curriculum—that is: what has actually been addressed via content, skills, and assessment.

These basic elements are akin to a blueprint of the critical features of the operational curriculum that need to be communicated to other teachers in order to help the learner over time. We recommend that essential questions be included to frame, focus, and provoke the inquiry of students.

## What about mapping how the students are performing?

Given the nature of technology, computers allow us both to zoom in and to go wide angle with data. For example, when obtaining driving directions it is possible to get a national map, a regional map, a state map, a town map, or a detailed street map. The same is possible with some of the better internet and software curriculum mapping programs. A teacher can click onto his or her classroom map and “go deeper,” housing information about how each student performs.

## What about daily lesson plans?

In the spirit of the previous response, teachers can write and archive their lesson plans in the mapping database as well. If the mapping database is on the internet, then it is also possible to hyperlink directly to additional websites with lesson plan resources. Some of the programs allow people to concurrently enter information for lesson plans even as they enter the basic mapping data into the elements of content, skills, and assessment. If the basic curriculum map is the blueprint, then the daily lesson plans are like the daily building plan that the builders use to erect a building.

Linking teacher growth  
to student growth



## What is the research on curriculum mapping and student performance?

Improvement in performance can never be attributed to any one single factor or any one program. There are a cluster of factors that contribute to sustained improvement. Consider the success of programs like Reading Recovery or Success for All, which share these attributes as well. It is clear that this cluster reflects the very heart and reality of what the Curriculum Mapping process is about. In short, it is not having maps that improve performance, it is using them with these attributes in practice. The attributes include:

- A specific observable and measurable proficiency
- Ongoing collection of performance data; item analysis of those data
- Review both horizontally and vertically among the actual people responsible for instruction
- Adjustments to the instruction based on the item analysis
- Planning time on a regular basis for review of student performance among the people who share the care and instruction for the target population
- Sufficient time to allow for sustained growth among the students

I would suggest that the result of mapping is deliberate accountability; precision articulation of common student performance goals both horizontally and vertically; and ongoing review of those goals IN REAL TIME. The alternative is the norm, which usually does not provide for this degree of communication.

Calendar-based curriculum mapping employing a technology base and involving all staff has only been around for about five years. The majority of districts engaged in this work have only begun to mount the work onto intranet or internet type of communication vehicles. If you would like to reach districts that have begun to track their data please go to our website and contact them under [Consultants](#).

As with any educational research, if there are observable, sustainable gains in student performance, there is always a combination of factors. One of the finest books on the question of long term effects of alignment is from Professor Richard Elmore at Harvard ([Restructuring in the Classroom](#), Jossey-Bass). Certainly the work of Fenwick English on [alignment and auditing](#) is well

recognized, as is the work of Professor Carl Glickman at the University of Georgia in Athens, GA ([Supervision of Instruction: A Developmental Approach](#), Allyn & Bacon). You might note that the early work of Fenwick English ([Deep Curriculum Alignment](#), Scarecrow Press), who discussed "paper and pencil" interviews through a third party about general content and calendar accountability in his curriculum mapping work.

In all of these cases, you will note that it is not sufficient simply to align but is critical that teachers actually work together. Mapping takes teachers beyond just drafting guidelines that pretend to align, providing instead a real possibility of ongoing revision based on quality assessment data. The reading research for example, suggests that it is not enough to simply purchase Reading Recovery as a program, but that there need to be the additional factors: small classes, carefully trained staff, and a schedule that allows for both instruction and planning. As an example, Mary Ann Holt from Chattanooga deployed all of these factors with mapping as a hub for communication over a period of years and can demonstrate a statistically significant gain in reading scores.

My question to school boards, funding agencies, or faculties considering mapping is a little different: how can we improve student performance if we do not have reliable and realistic curriculum data? How can we have an assessment-data-driven curriculum if we cannot adjust our plans in real time? All institutions thrive with better communication vehicles and higher quality data sources.

**Please take a look at these sites for additional research info:**

- <http://currmap.ncrel.org/about.htm>
- <http://www.co-nect.net/>