



## **Curriculum: A Research Synthesis**

**BaoHui Zhang, David Lustick, and Shih-pei Chang**  
**Michigan State University**

### **Introduction**

Curriculum specifies not only what students are expected to study and learn in schools, but often indicates how that learning takes place. The curriculum adopted by a school, district, or state has a profound impact on the teaching and learning that goes on inside a classroom. From kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, grade level and content specific curriculum materials serve as the roadmap for teachers. This roadmap presents a starting point that represents a relatively low level of student understanding and skill ability around a defined set of learning objectives and the end point represents an improved level of understanding around the same set of knowledge and skills.

### **Principle 1: Arranging Content in a Coherent and Sequential Way**

A coherent curriculum presents its content as a sequence of topics and establishes continuity between the end points and the starting points of individual topics.

### **Principle 2: Allocating Sufficient Time on Focus Topics**

A good curriculum focuses on the most essential topics and spends sufficient instructional time on each focus topic.

### **Principle 3: Including Core Knowledge as well as Specific Knowledge**

Core knowledge based curricula equip all students with a common base of ability for taking future steps towards a fuller and richer understanding.

### **Principle 4: Having Common Rigorous Standards for Evaluation**

Effective curricula are conceived with the targeted learners in mind and expectations are communicated clearly.

### **Principle 5: Multiple Pedagogical Approaches to Instruction**

Effective curricula consider how students learn differently and the variety of approaches teachers may use to deliver instruction to diverse learners.

### **Summary**

The curriculum establishes the 'text' of schooling. It is a vital component of a successful teaching and learning experience. The extent to which a particular curriculum measures up against these five principles can be determined by using the self-assessment rubric at the end of the report.