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Getting Started

As an introduction to the ideas presented in this discussion, please read the ten statements in Figure 1 and decide if the statements are, in your opinion, myth or reality. Trust your instincts and your first reactions. After choosing your answer for each statement, continue on and read the perspective presented in the essay...or go directly to the Appendix to read specific responses to the statements.

Myth or Reality?

1. Standards are the curriculum.
2. There are too many standards.
3. Standards are assessed through performance tasks.
4. Standards are a blessing in disguise.
5. Standards never change.
6. All students can achieve the standards set.
7. Teacher evaluation is inextricably linked to student standards.
8. Content standards inhibit efforts to integrate curriculum.
9. Content standards have priority over process standards.
10. Standards tell teachers how to teach.

Figure 1

Learning: For The Test Or For A Lifetime?

Premise 1: Standards Are Not the Curriculum

The first premise is that standards are not the curriculum. Standards are the goals of the curriculum! They delineate what students need to know and be able to do. Standards are, if you will, the vision of an end product in terms of student learning. The core curriculum is the means to that

Standards are not the curriculum. Standards are the goals of the curriculum.

end. By developing robust and rigorous curricular units, these units of study become the vehicles that carry the standards. For example, when students examine the Civil War, they may read text, view films of various events, or even dramatize roles of the key people involved in the war. At the same time that they are studying these historic events, students are actually achieving some of the standards or goals of the curriculum. Students may be meeting a language arts communication standard, some content standards about the historical significance of an era, and life skills standards about working as part of a team. Thus, the standards or goals of learning are met through the curricular unit.

Premise 2: The Test Is Not the Text of the 21st Century

Second, the test is not the text of the 21st century. The “sacred” test does not replace the textbook as the mythical cornerstone of the teaching/learning process. And, just as the textbook was not the curriculum in previous eras, the test, certainly, is not the curriculum of this era. If the intent of the standards is to proclaim well-defined learning goals, those goals must not be reduced to what is on the test and the resulting test score. The intent of the standards—high achievement for all students—must be kept intact. If the blessing of the standards, meant as a gift of clarity, comes heavily disguised as a point-in-time test, the goal becomes a number on that test and the original intent of student learning standards is lost. In essence, the test is treated as the text for learning and the goal becomes “passing the test”, rather than learning for life. If this short-sighted perception prevails, the standards are, literally, short-circuited because they are linked solely to the outcomes of that test, rather than to the outcomes of a lifetime.

The “sacred” test does not replace the textbook as the mythical cornerstone of the teaching/learning process.
