

Unpacking Standards Leads to Confidence, Not Chaos, for Teachers and Students

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With all of the published materials and frameworks available, teachers often ask why they should invest their time in unpacking standards. Consider the following:

- Teachers who do the work to unpack standards are the ones who understand them. It is through collaborative conversations that we come to collective clarity on what we want our students to know and be able to do. When teachers unpack standards in isolation they are likely to interpret the intent and rigor differently resulting in an educational lottery for students rather than a guaranteed and viable curriculum.
- Understanding all of the standards helps teachers wisely choose the essential or power standards. These are the standards guaranteed to all students at grade level.
- Identification of the depth of knowledge required of the standards leads to more thoughtful lesson design.
- Laser-like focus on the standards and team-created common formative assessments go hand-in-hand. When standards and assessments align it is easier to catch students quickly when they don't understand and to provide extension when they do understand.
- The unpacking process keeps the focus on ALL students learning at high levels.

The process to unpack is simple and shouldn't take much time once you are in the swing of things.

These are the steps in unpacking standards into learning targets:

1. Read the standards as a team.
2. Circle the verbs.
3. Underline the nouns and noun phrases.
4. Determine the number of targets found within the standards.
5. Write as separate learning targets.
 - Remember to keep the core language intact at all times.
 - Do not omit any part of the standard.
6. Determine the depth of knowledge required of the standard.
7. Pull the academic vocabulary from the standard.
8. Unpack all of the standards before digging into how the standards will be taught and assessed.
9. Read all of the unpacked standards to determine the standards you will prioritize. These are often called power standards, essential knowledge, or big rocks.

Remember:

The standards we have determined as essential are the ones we are going to spend the bulk of our time teaching, assessing, re-teaching and reassessing. These are the standards we can't imagine our students leaving our course of study or grade level without mastering.

Prioritization does not mean elimination. The other standards will still be taught. They are good to know or nice to know but a student could still progress to the next grade or course without mastering them at a high level.