

ACADEMIC STANDARDS INITIATIVE

Recommendations for
Phase II Implementation:
2001-2006



**Presentation to the
Board of School Directors**

March 5, 2001



Acknowledgements

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Recommendations for Phase II Implementation: 2001-2006

The Bethlehem Area School District is in its fifth year of implementing internationally benchmarked academic standards in the areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics. Through the hard work and dedication of the staff and with strong support from the Board of School Directors and the community, Bethlehem is now recognized as a leader in the academic standards movement in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and nationally. Test results, as measured by the New Standards Reference Examination (NSRE) and Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), demonstrate increased academic achievement by students.

This challenging standards initiative requires many systemic changes. Eighteen months ago, five study groups were formed to determine the structural and policy changes necessary to continue this complex task. These study groups concentrated their efforts on grading, graduation requirements, portfolio assessment, promotion and retention, and special education.

Each of these five study groups was comprised of administrators, classroom teachers, and support staff. Their charge was to research, discuss, and solicit broad-based information regarding these critical topics and make recommendations that will enhance student achievement.

The study groups developed preliminary reports on the above topics. Parental reaction was secured through discussions with the district-level Parent Advisory Council. Administrators and teachers reviewed and reacted to each preliminary report at the October 6, 2000, inservice meeting and at December faculty meetings.

The recommendations of the Academic Standards Study Committee are summarized in the seven distinct areas outlined below. Details for each of these recommendations are contained in the next section of this document entitled, Projected Timelines for Implementation.

1. ALIGNMENT: CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENT

In a standards-based school system, the curriculum, teaching strategies, and assessments need to be aligned to the standards. This curriculum alignment began with reading, language arts, and mathematics, but this process needs to be ongoing and consistent for all students in all programs of the district. A comprehensive assessment system, including on-demand performance tasks, along with a portfolio of selected student work, will be developed and implemented.

2. ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS

In a standards-based system, effort, not ability, is the primary ingredient for success. The results of an ongoing series of assessments indicate that some children need more time than others to achieve standards. This additional time is provided by an array of academic

interventions. Some short-term interventions are offered before, during, and after school. More intensive programs occur on Saturdays during the school year and during extended summer programs.

For students that require even more time, comprehensive program changes are proposed including full-day kindergarten and standards summer schools for selected students. A year-long academic academy will transition elementary students to middle school. A short-term “newcomers” program will be developed for students who transfer into the district and who are below standards. The mandatory year-long academy will have a specially designed intensive and accelerated curricula and support services that are qualitatively different to help students meet standards by the end of that academic year.

Grade level retention will occur for students who do not meet the criteria for promotion to the next grade level. These students will primarily repeat the same grade level program, supplemented with academic interventions.

Intense academic interventions at each high school will make it necessary to increase the academic interventions administrator allocation from one position shared by the two high schools to one position at each high school.

3. COMPREHENSIVE GRADING SYSTEM, K-12

Currently, the Bethlehem Area School District uses a traditional grade reporting system. A student’s progress toward achieving specific academic standards is not reported. Therefore, a new consistent, reliable, and valid reporting system will be adopted that will also provide information about a student’s progress toward achieving those standards.

The letter grade “D,” which traditionally means little evidence of achievement is not included in this new grading system. In a standards-based system, little evidence of achievement is no longer acceptable. Time and opportunity will be provided for these students to raise their performance level to meet standards. After such time and opportunity, beginning in grade four, students who are not achieving a minimal level of standards (“C” or better) will receive an “F.”

Secondly, included in this grading system are indicators of the student’s achievement toward meeting specific standards. In a standards-based system, the curriculum, instruction, and assessment are always focused on standards. Therefore, the parent/guardian and the student need to have an ongoing picture of a student’s developing progress.

Thirdly, included in this grading system are recommendations for academic interventions. In a standards-based system, repeated opportunities are provided for a student to meet standards. Therefore, this grading system will reference information relative to a student’s needs for interventions.

4. PERFORMANCE-BASED PROJECT

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Chapter 4 Curriculum Regulations require the completion of a performance-based project. As part of the district's graduation requirements, the project will be introduced to students in the freshman year and conclude in the junior or senior year. This requirement will commence with the Class of 2006.

5. PROMOTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The current Bethlehem Area School District's promotion policy mandates that students are expected to progress through grade levels by demonstrating growth in learning according to grade-level criteria.

The focus of the new promotion policy is set forth as follows:

- Designate clear, consistent standards-based performance levels that students must achieve to meet the standards of entry for the next grade level. This will be determined by designating achievement indicators for each grade level.
- Develop multiple criteria in the form of a matrix to identify students at risk of or in need of retention to provide more time to meet entry level standards for the next grade level.
- Provide a K-12 policy that offers a continuum of interventions to assist students to meet the standards.
- Provide early notification for parents/guardians of students at risk of not meeting promotion criteria, including an appeal process for parents/guardians.

6. DIFFERENTIATED DIPLOMAS

The current district policy for graduation awards one diploma to all students regardless of their academic attainment. A differentiated diploma will be awarded to graduates based on the mastery of academic standards. The diplomas will be categorized as follows: Honors, Standards, and Regular. The level of diploma will be based on achieving state and/or national standards and completing the required number of credit hours. This will commence with the Class of 2006. A matrix will be developed to assist in determining the type of diploma to be awarded. The matrix will include standards test scores, student portfolio review, grade point average (GPA) requirements, and other essential criteria to be determined.

Honors Diploma — Students who meet or exceed the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) standards and achieve the proficient or advanced level score on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) standards. Students would also accumulate the necessary credits required for graduation and the needed number of points from the matrix.

Standards Diploma — Students who meet both the NCEE standards and the PSSA standards. Students would also accumulate the required credits needed for graduation.

Regular Diploma — Students who do not meet the NCEE Standards or the PSSA standards, but have accumulated the required credits for graduation. In addition, they may need to demonstrate Work Force Employability Standards as recognized by the vocational-technical school.

7. Evaluation of Implementation

For the past five years, a comprehensive annual evaluation has occurred at each high school. This evaluation is based on over 40 identified variables representing academic and behavioral areas. As we move further along with the Academic Standards implementation, it has been determined that this evaluation process needs to be extended to include the elementary and middle schools. Therefore, it is recommended that an annual evaluation be conducted for grades 4 through 12. The process will be similar to the current high school format with specific variables identified for the additional grade levels.

Projected Timelines for Implementation

I. Alignment: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment	Year of Work/ Implementation
A. Continuation of Curriculum Alignment to Standards	
1. Continue the alignment of curriculum, K-12, to standards using NCEE, national, and/or state standards.	Ongoing
2. Develop a standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment policy for English-proficient students.	2001-2002
3. Implement the standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment instrument for English-proficient students.	2001-2002
4. Develop differentiated performance standards and assessment instruments for the vocational-technical preparation program.	2001-2002
5. Implement the differentiated performance standards and assessment instruments for the vocational-technical preparation program.	2001-2002
B. Alignment of General Education Curriculum for Exceptional Students	
1. Align goals and objectives for exceptional students to local and state standards.	Ongoing
2. Develop Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans which incorporate and/or adapt appropriate grade level standards, as well as establish criteria for the highest level attainment possible, based on each student's present educational level and ability.	2001-2002
3. Implement the IEP plans specified above.	2002-2003
C. Assessments	
1. Develop English language arts, writing, and mathematics on-demand interim end-of-year assessments and accompanying scoring rubrics:	
Grades 6, 7, and 9	2000-2001
Grades 1, 2, and 5	2001-2002
Grades 3 and 11	2002-2003
Grade 12	2003-2004
2. Implement the English language arts, writing, and mathematics on-demand interim end-of-year assessments and accompanying scoring rubrics:	
Grades 5, 6, 7, and 9	2001-2002
Grades 1 and 2	2002-2003
Grades 3 and 11	2003-2004
Grade 12	2004-2005

I. Alignment: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment (continued)	Year of Work/ Implementation
C. Assessments (continued)	
3. Select anchor papers and develop a scoring process in English language arts and mathematics (Grades 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12).	2001-2002
4. Identify assessment battery for newcomers to the district.	2002-2003
5. Develop a district-wide student assessment database tracking system that allows teachers to track and monitor individual student standards achievement from grade to grade.	2001-2002
6. Implement the district-wide student assessment database tracking system.	2001-2002
7. Develop a consistent process for testing protocol and identify appropriate assessments for the evaluation of exceptional students.	2001-2002
8. Implement the consistent process for testing protocol as stated above.	2001-2002
9. Create a series of subtests based on both the NSRE and the PSSA assessments to administer to students who fail to meet the minimum requirements for the standards-based diplomas. These subtests could be administered to students in their junior and/or senior years.	2003-2004
10. Implement the standards-based assessments to determine eligibility for the standards diploma.	2004-2005
D. Portfolio Assessment System, K-12	
<p>1. Develop a portfolio system in English language arts and mathematics in grades K-12 which identifies student work and on-demand assessments to be included at each grade level.</p> <p>The English language arts and mathematics portfolios will contain the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tracking sheets - Scored student work - On-demand tests/tasks - 25-book reading requirement (ELA only) 	2001-2002
2. Implement the district portfolio system in English language arts and mathematics in grades K-12.	2001-2002
3. Develop a system to score the revised student work, K-12.	2000-2001 Ongoing
4. Implement the system to score the revised student work, K-12.	2001-2002

I. Alignment: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment (continued)	Year of Work/ Implementation
D. Portfolio Assessment System, K-12 (continued)	
5. Develop a system to manage and organize the portfolios.	2001-2002
6. Implement the system to manage and organize the portfolios.	2001-2002
7. Develop a process for reviewing portfolios to determine which type of diploma students would receive upon graduation.	2002-2003
8. Implement the process for reviewing portfolios to determine which type of diploma students would receive upon graduation.	2004-2005
II. Academic Interventions	
A. School-Based Interventions	
1. Develop intervention programs K-12, such as before and after-school programs, Saturday programs, summer school programs, and scheduling strategies to extend learning time for students who are not meeting academic standards. Examples of new proposals are:	Ongoing
- Reading Recovery, full implementation (grade 1)	2002-2003
- Expand SPARK Preschool Program, full implementation	2002-2003
- Standards summer school (post-kindergarten to grade 12)	2002-2003
- Grade 11 upper house mandated course work	2004-2005
- Grade 12 upper house mandated course work (first semester program)	2005-2006
2. Enhance the district's continued efforts to improve student attendance at all levels.	Ongoing
3. Establish an administrative position which replicates the Academic Standards administrative position currently shared by the two high schools.	2002-2003
B. Newcomers Program	
1. Develop an assessment system for selected transfer students, new to the district.	2001-2002
2. Develop a "newcomers" program to address academics, as well as orientation to the BASD school community.	2001-2002
3. Implement the newcomers program.	2002-2003

II. Academic Interventions (continued)	Year of Work/ Implementation
C. Academic Academy	
1. Develop a year-long academic academy between fifth and sixth grades for students who have not met standards and meet district criteria for placement.	2001-2002
2. Implement a year-long academic academy.	2002-2003
D. Mandated Full-Day Kindergarten for Selected Students	
1. Develop a full-day program for selected at-risk students.	2001-2002
2. Develop a process to identify students who would qualify for all-day kindergarten.	2001-2002
3. Implement full-day program for selected students.	2002-2003
III. Comprehensive Grading System, K-12	
<p>1. Design new report cards, configured for grades K, 1-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The report cards will include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A composite grade for the core academic subjects - Indicators of standards achievement - Recommendations of a need for interventions - Portfolio status - General comments 	2001-2002
2. Develop or acquire appropriate computer software for grading system.	2001-2002
3. Implement the computer software for grading system.	2002-2003
4. Implement proposed grading system for grades 4 through 12 reflecting the elimination of the letter grade "D."	Grs. K-9 2002-03 Gr. 10 2003-04 Gr. 11 2004-05 Gr. 12 2005-06
5. Implement the comprehensive grading system.	
6. Develop staff and parent manuals that explain grading policies, grading devices, portfolios, and standards information.	2001-2002
7. Implement the staff and parent manuals.	2002-2003

IV. Performance-Based Project	Year of Work/ Implementation
1. Develop the protocol for the state-mandated, performance-based project and implement it as a requirement for graduation to be introduced in the freshman year and to be completed by the end of the junior or senior year.	2001-2002
2. Implement the performance-based project.	2002-2003
V. Promotion Policy and Procedures	
1. Develop/select grade level achievement indicators for elementary, middle, and high school levels.	2001-2002
2. Develop promotion criteria and/or matrix for the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading between grades 1-2 and 2-3. - English language arts and mathematics between grades 3-4, 4-5, and 5-6. - Core academic subjects in middle and high school grades. - English learners and special education students. 	2001-2002
3. Develop a process for early and ongoing parent/guardian notification for students at risk of not meeting promotion criteria, including an appeals process for parents/guardians. This process will include a waiver to be signed by parents/guardians when a student is recommended for a specific remedial activity but chooses not to attend. Waivers will not be used when students are recommended for mandatory remediation programs.	2001-2002
4. Implement the new promotion policy and procedures.	2002-2003
VI. Differentiated Diplomas	
1. Develop a system of awarding one of three diplomas to students based on the acquisition of the state and/or national standards and the completion of required credit hours. Successfully completing a performance-based project will become part of the graduation requirements.	2002-2003
2. Implement the differentiated diplomas.	2005-2006

VII. Evaluation Process	Year of Work/ Implementation
<p>1. Design a process to evaluate the success of the academic standards implementation K-12 which includes the following variables for grades 4 through 12:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic Performance (GPA, SAT, Honor Roll) - Ethnic Distribution - Absences and Tardiness - Program of Study Trends - Disciplinary Trends - Class Percentages - Transfer (Mobile) Students - Drop-Outs 	2001-2002
<p>2. Implement the evaluation process.</p>	2002-2003

Summary and Cost Implications

The following represents a summary of the major changes that must occur to the district's current practices and policies and related cost implications to implement Phase II of the Academic Standards Initiative:

IMPLEMENTATION CHART REFERENCE	ACTIONS REQUIRED BY THE SCHOOL BOARD	ADDITIONAL BUDGET IMPACT
	2001-2002	
II.	Development of an academic academy for selected students between grades five and six.	*
	2002-2003	
II.	Implementation of an academic academy for selected students between grades five and six.	T.B.D.**
II.	Full implementation of Reading Recovery	125,000
II.	Full implementation of SPARK Preschool Program	110,000
II.	Establishment of standards summer schools for each grade level, K-12.	100,000
II.	Establishment of an additional 1.0 administrative position for Academic Standards Initiative	70,000
II.	Implementation of newcomers program for transient students	T.B.D.**
II.	Implementation of mandated full-day kindergarten program for selected students	400,000
III. and V.	Implementation of new comprehensive grading system and promotion policy, K-12, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion criteria/matrix - Elimination of letter grade "D" - Portfolios - Indicators of standards achievement 	\$ 50,000
IV.	Inclusion of performance-based project as a high school graduation requirement	None
VI.	Implementation of differentiated diplomas for high school graduation	None
VII.	Implementation of a process to annually evaluate the success of the Academic Standards Initiative	50,000
Total for 2001-2002 — \$ *		Total for 2002-2003 — \$905,000**

* Research and development necessary to design the academic academy is estimated at \$440,000 which will be raised through state grants, foundation support, and corporate donations.

** T.B.D.— To be determined.