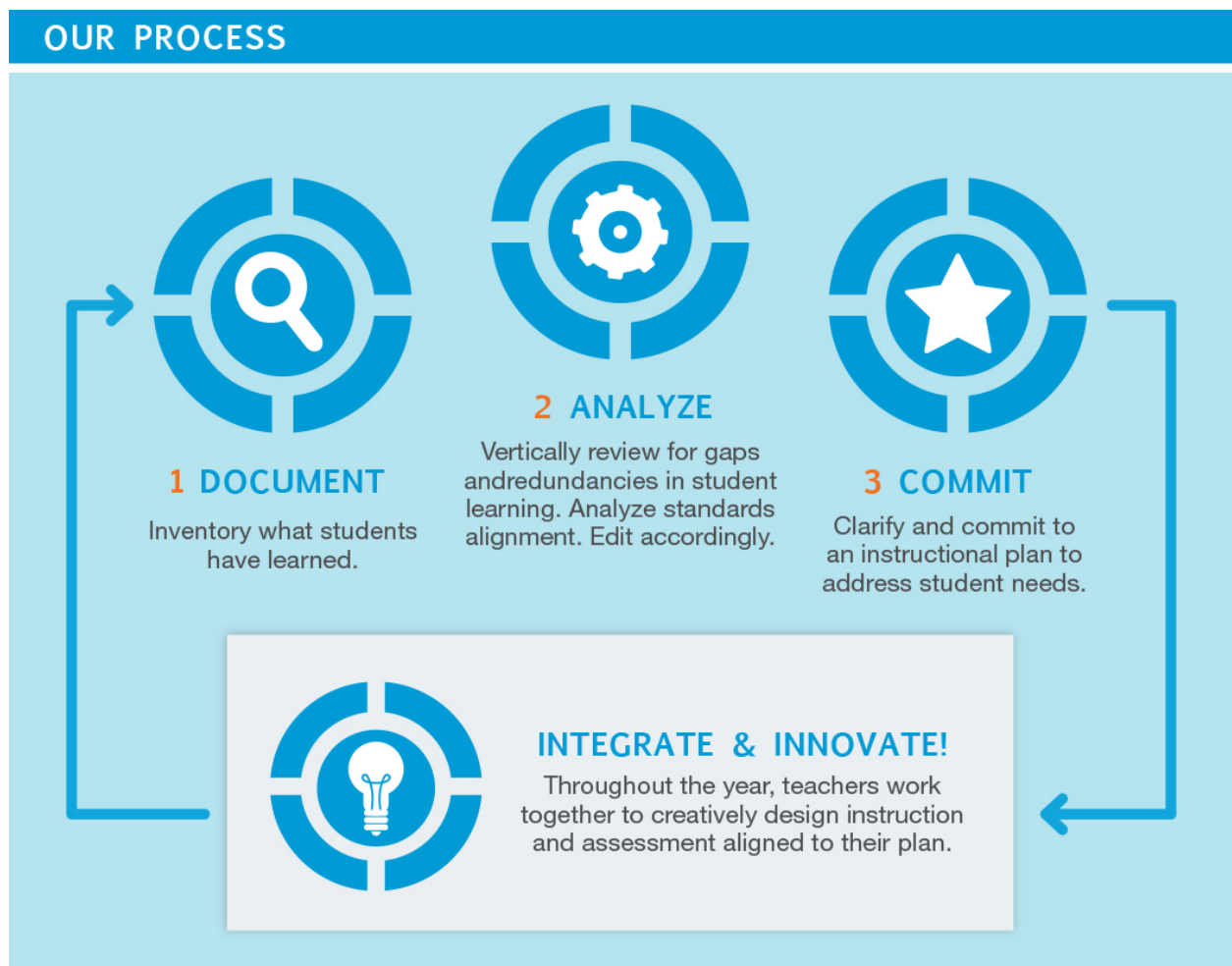


## The Curriculum Turnaround Process

### YEAR 1 – INITIAL ROLL OUT:

During the initial, two- to three-day roll out process, teachers work in grade-level teams to (1) Diary Map their enacted curriculum, (2) Core Map their intended curriculum to fill immediate needs identified by receiving-grade teachers, and (3) clarify and commit to the skill-level required for mastery using Student-Friendly Language. The resulting product of those three activities is a customized, student-centric, instructional contract for each grade-level team, by each grade-level team. That contract represents the first step of Curriculum Turnaround.



## YEAR 1 – IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE INITIAL ROLL OUT:

After the roll out, teachers should know what their students need to learn during that year. The school year will be all about integrating and innovating. Teachers should work with the support of PLCs, or common planning time, to creatively design instruction and some kind of assessment aligned to their plan. (*The curriculum is in flux, so this is not the time to implement a formal assessment system.*)

Teachers who take the roll out process as a series of tasks “to check off the list”, risk missing the “big picture”. Their plan and roll out documentation doesn’t suffer, but if anxiety-levels increase, the implementation process can be negatively impacted. **The most important thing a leader can do is to offer immediate clarification and direction.**

No matter how many times you have said it before, the following concerns will likely be raised:

- ***There is too much to teach!*** – EVERY effort is made to encourage teachers to create a realistic plan and “take things off their plate” during the roll out process. Nonetheless, teachers are focused on the task at hand (vs. “big picture”) and they present each other with valid reasons for keeping each individual item of content. Often, it is not until they see the pages and pages of instructional content that it hits them: They have created an unrealistic Instructional Contract!

After the roll out, it is too late to go in and change the reports, *but they should not despair*. They have simply revealed the truth: all this time they have been trying to teach an unrealistic curriculum.

Encourage teachers to “**teach deeply**” on fewer topics on their Contract and resist the past practice of “covering” everything. During the year, the team can make collective decisions about what line(s) should “come off” their Contract. For example, while studying place value: “The students can demonstrate place value to the thousands. Is going up to the trillions really necessary this year?”

If/when the team identifies content that will not be taken to mastery, teachers should use a single line to strike it out on their Skills Summary Report.

This “strike-through” approach provides more clarity to those teachers regarding how much instructional content can realistically be taken to mastery in a given year.

- ***The curriculum is too low!*** A good reminder for folks holding this concern is:  
*Teachers can't teach less, but they can always teach more!*

The Instructional Contract is intended to be a **common minimum**. Think of it as a way for each grade-level to “cover its bases”. That could be a huge departure from the high-reaching curriculum documentation most teachers are accustomed to.

If 85% of the teacher's class of students shows they can already demonstrate a skill, the teacher simply needs to check it off. The teacher can then choose to go deeper with the instruction, or go on to another topic on their Contract.

- ***Why don't we just all do the Common Core?*** Short answer: Teachers must be certain their students can demonstrate the minimal common expectations they created for themselves in their Instructional Contract. If that is the case, they should feel free to explore the Common Core as much as they want.

Long answer: More often, the question is posed in an effort to do the Common Core *in place of* the Instructional Contract. In that case, the most well-meaning teachers will set the district off-course and generate even more gaps and inconsistencies in the curriculum.

This is where “big picture” thinking comes into play. Consider referencing the admin training slides that depict how the enacted curriculum came to be. The bottom line is that no one will benefit from a haphazard approach to implementation.

The State has given every school district a number of *years* to work up to full implementation. Teachers don't currently have the resources, time, or a student body with adequate foundational knowledge to fully implement the Common Core K-12. They should also know that the resources and the targeted areas for the Common Core assessment are still very much in flux.

During the first year of Curriculum Turnaround, the primary concerns need to be (1) to get all of the teachers at each grade-level on the same page, and (2) to fill the numerous gaps in the curriculum, as evidenced by the feedback from receiving teachers.

Assure teachers this is not an oversight. **It will not be long before the leadership team implements their coordinated approach for everyone to focus more explicitly on the Common Core standards.** Those efforts will continue to be **in the context of building a comprehensive, student-centric curriculum.** They will begin towards the end of the year, as part of the first Annual Update in the Curriculum Turnaround process.

- ***What about everything else we need to teach?*** This question is similar to the Common Core question. Short answer: Teachers must be certain their students can demonstrate the minimal common expectations they created for themselves in their Instructional Contract. If that is the case, they should feel free to go deeper or explore other topics as much as they want.

Long answer: They are calling the leader's bluff. Presumably the implementation team has told teachers that "less is more", and that they should prioritize student learning by going deeper with fewer topics. Teachers were encouraged to take items "off their plate".

Some teachers viewed that coaching with skepticism, and for good reason. They have seen many initiatives come and go. That is why some teams have such huge Instructional Contracts. Now that the school year is underway, teachers want to know if the district and school leaders are going to stand behind their words.

Teachers need to see that the district has made a conscious shift away from following textbook pages and skimming content... to following student learning. Many resources may be used during the year; the minimal learning targets for each grade need to stay the same.

At the end of the year, teachers will increase their curriculum for next year: some of the topics that were taken off, will return. However, next year's class will be ready to learn those topics because this year the foundational underpinnings will be secured.

It won't take long for teachers to see, as a result of the heightened coordination, their incoming students will be significantly better prepared than the class before.

- ***There are too many reports!*** – There are a lot of reports because each report was designed to satisfy a different purpose. Sometimes, the initial post-roll out excitement can give way to anxiety about over-committing... that is only amplified by the many reports:

*Instructional Contract Report* - The Instructional Contract represents the common commitment to student learning shared by sending- and receiving-grade teachers. It documents the content and skills teachers will teach to mastery.

*Skills Summary Report* - This report allows teachers to write in their students' names so they can easily keep track of student progress towards demonstrating the specific content and skills on their Instructional Contract.

*Grade Level Core Report* - This is the teacher's sliver of the Intended Curriculum. It shows the content that will be taught this year at the target grade, at the grade below, and at the grade above.

*Student/Parent Communication Report* - Created as a structure for student portfolios and to complement Open House presentations, this report presents the curriculum in “I Can” Statements.

**This is where the need for clear direction comes in. Tell teachers to:**

1. Print out the Skills Summary Report – and ONLY the Skills Summary Report. (The report formatted as a checklist with the columns for student names. It has all of the information they need, in a user-friendly format.)
2. After they print it, teachers should take a few minutes to handwrite their students’ names across the column headings on the Skills Summary Report. They can then attach it to a clipboard and place it in clear view on their chalk tray.
3. When students master an item of content at the desired skill-level, the teacher can grab their clipboard and check it off. That “check as you go” approach will keep them on track, while providing the perfect, low-stress documentation for the Annual Update meeting.

Typically, district and school leaders offer their vision and “all of the answers” *before* their teachers have questions. As with any wide-scale change, individual readiness will come at different times. Teacher questioning should not be interpreted as a personal challenge...or as a sign that they weren’t listening the first time. After the roll out, teachers will have questions. If leaders invest the time to patiently answer teacher questions (again), the teachers will come away with a much deeper level of understanding and commitment.

**YEAR 1 – ANNUAL UPDATE:**

District leaders should establish and communicate the date for the first Annual Update as soon as possible. That is the day teachers report what their students learned this year and then create their plan for next year. Curriculum Turnaround is not a one shot deal. It is a journey of systemic, student-centric change over time. The cycle begins anew each fall with students that much better prepared, and school districts that much better positioned to address the Common Core.