

2. In regard to the level and curricular area with which you are most interested, what “structures” could you create to increase the involvement of the following groups in planning the curriculum: students, parents, and community members, and other educators?
3. What guidelines should educators follow in facilitating collaborative curriculum planning?

## Perspectives on Curriculum Criteria: Past and Present

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*ABSTRACT: Three interrelated and continually changing criteria have influenced school curricula during our nation's history: vocation, citizenship, and self-fulfillment. These criteria, in turn, have been influenced by historical forces. Religion and the need to educate for citizenship in a democracy have played important roles in the development of curricula. Recent systematic efforts to establish curriculum reforms have focused on curriculum standards, core curricula, and education for equity and excellence.*

The content of the curricula in America's schools has changed frequently since the colonial period. These modifications came about as the goals of the schools were debated, additional needs of society became evident, and the characteristics of student populations shifted. The following list is a sampling of goals the schools have set for themselves at different times in our history.

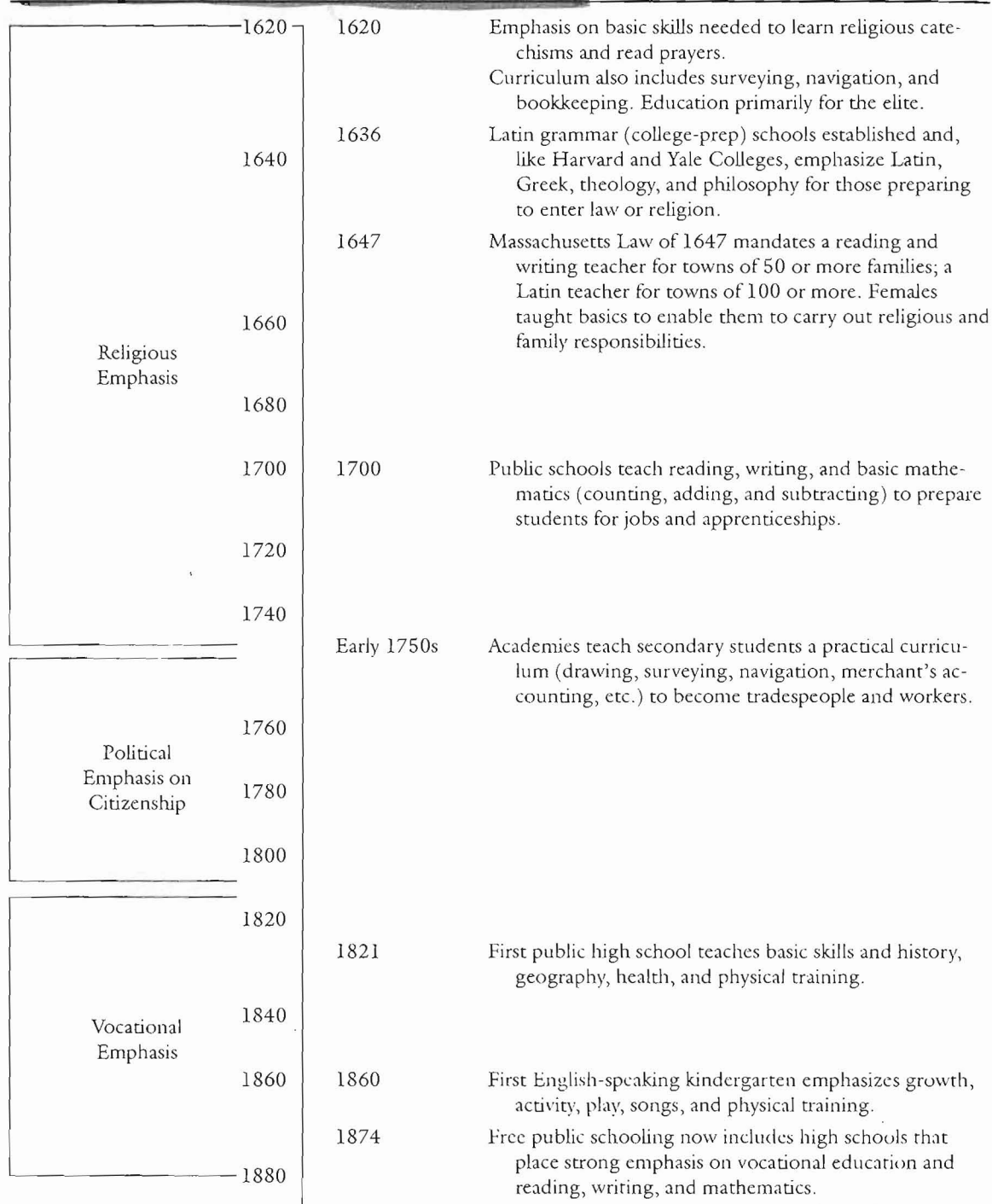
- Prepare students to carry out religious and family responsibilities
- Provide employers with a source of literate workers
- Desegregate society
- Reduce crime, poverty, and injustice
- Help our country maintain its competitive edge in the world economy

- Provide the scientists needed to keep our country strong
- Educate students for intelligent participation in a democracy

Three interrelated and continually changing criteria have influenced school curricula during our nation's history: vocation, citizenship, and self-fulfillment. These criteria, in turn, have been influenced by historical forces. The timeline presented in Figure 6.1 indicates the approximate periods during which these three criteria exerted their strongest influence on the curriculum. (Each criterion, of course, continues to be used as a guideline for curriculum planning). In addition, the timeline shows several of the major shifts in what was actually taught.

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**FIGURE 6.1**  
**A Chronology of Major Emphases in the School Curriculum**



**FIGURE 6.1**  
(continued)

Education for Masses	1900	1893	Committee of Ten asserts that high schools are for college-bound and curriculum should emphasize mental disciplines in humanities, language, and science.
		1918	Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education focuses on individual differences. Curriculum to stress Seven Cardinal Principles.
The Excellence Movement	1940	1920	
		1930s	Progressive education movement stresses curriculum based on student's needs and interests. Home economics, health, family living, citizenship, and wood shop added to the curriculum.
		1940s	
		1957	Russia's Sputnik sparks emphasis on science, mathematics, and languages.
		1960	
		1960s	Calls for relevancy result in expanded course offerings and electives.
		Mid-1970s	Back-to-basics movement emphasizes reading, writing, mathematics, and oral communication.
		1980	
		1983	<i>Nation at Risk</i> report calls for "five new basics"—English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science.
		1985	Rigorous core curricula advocated at all levels in an effort to increase standards and to ensure quality.
	1990	1989	The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development report, <i>Turning Points</i> , recommends the creation of learning communities and a core academic program for middle-level students.
		1990	President Bush unveils national educational goals in six areas: readiness for school; high school completion; student achievement and citizenship; science and mathematics; adult literacy and lifelong learning; and safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools.
		1992	President Clinton proposes a program of national service for America's youth.
		Mid-1990s	National standards committees meet in the subject areas.
	2000		Renewed emphasis on developing curricula for schooling in an increasingly diverse society.

## CHURCH, NATION, AND SCHOOL

From 1620 to 1760, the primary aim of the curriculum was to train students in religious beliefs and practices. It was only later that a distinction was made between civil and religious life. Basic skills were taught for the purpose of learning religious catechisms and reading prayers. In addition to taking courses with religious content, students also studied such practical subjects as surveying, navigation, bookkeeping, architecture, and agriculture.

From 1770 to 1860 the development of citizenship provided the curriculum's major focus. The U.S. had just won its independence from England, and many policymakers believed that literacy was essential to the preservation of freedom. Accordingly, students were taught history, geography, health, and physical training, as well as the basic skills of reading, writing, and computation. In 1821, the nation's first public high school was opened in Boston, and two years later the first private normal school for teachers opened in Concord, Vermont. The first English-speaking kindergarten, taught by Elizabeth Peabody, opened in Boston in 1860.

By the beginning of the Civil War, the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics were well established in the curriculum. Various types of schools had been incorporated into state systems, and in 1852 the first compulsory school attendance law was passed in Massachusetts. Parents in every section of the country wanted more and better opportunities for their children. Through a curriculum that stressed individual virtue, literacy, hard work, and moral development, reformers wished to improve social conditions and to provide more opportunities for the poor.

The development of citizenship continues to influence school life and school curricula. All students, for example, are required to study United States history and the United States Constitution at some time during their school career. Presidents' birthdays and national holidays are built

into the school year calendar. Issues concerning civil liberties and the expression of patriotism often become educational issues, as in controversies during the last decades over treatment of the American flag and the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools.

## CHILDREN AND SCHOOL

Vocational goals for the curriculum were most prominent from 1860 to 1920. The turn of the century brought with it many changes that profoundly influenced the curriculum. The dawning of the machine age altered the nature of industry, transportation, and communication. The growth of cities and the influx of millions of immigrants resulted in new functions for all social institutions, and home life was forever changed. As a result, curricula came to be based on vocationally oriented social and individual need rather than on subject matter divisions. Subjects were judged by the criterion of social utility rather than by their ability to develop the intellect.

During this period, several national committees met for the purpose of deciding what should be taught in elementary and secondary schools. Initially, these committees espoused goals formed by educators at the college and private secondary school levels—that is, uniform curricula with standardized methods of instruction. Gradually, though, these appointed groups began to recommend curricula that were more flexible and based on the needs of children. This shift is seen clearly in the recommendations made by three of the more influential committees during this period: the Committee of Ten, the Committee of Fifteen, and the Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education.

### The Committee of Ten

During 1892–93, the directors of the National Education Association appropriated \$2,500 for a

Committee of Ten to hold nine conferences that focused on the following subjects in the high school curriculum: (1) Latin; (2) Greek; (3) English; (4) other modern languages; (5) mathematics; (6) physics, astronomy, and chemistry; (7) natural history (biology, botany, and zoology), (8) history, civil government, and political science; and (9) geography (physical geography, geology, and meteorology). The group's members decided that the primary function of high schools was to take intellectually elite students and prepare them for life. Their recommendations stressed mental discipline in the humanities, languages, and science.

### The Committee of Fifteen

The report of the Committee of Ten sparked such discussion that in 1893 the National Education Association appointed the Committee of Fifteen to examine the elementary curriculum. In keeping with the view that high schools were college preparatory institutions, the committee's report, published in 1895, called for the introduction of Latin, the modern languages, and algebra into the elementary curriculum. In addition, the curriculum was to be organized around five basic subjects: grammar, literature, arithmetic, geography, and history.

### The Reorganization of Secondary Education

In 1913 the National Education Association appointed the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. The commission's report, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, was released in 1918 and called for a high school curriculum designed to accommodate individual differences in scholastic ability. Seven educational goals were to provide the focus for schooling at all levels: health, command of fun-

damental processes (reading, writing, and computation), worthy home membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time, and ethical character.

## STANDARDS AND THE SCHOOLS

From 1920 to the present, schools have become increasingly accountable for providing all students with curricular experiences based on high standards. The following comments made by U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley at a Washington, D.C., junior high school in 1993, for example, reflect the nation's concern about current standards in schools (1993/1994, 3):

We are not doing any children any favors by praising them for their skill on the basketball court but continuing the conspiracy of low expectations. Excellence and equality are not incompatible. We've just never tried hard enough to achieve them for all of our children.

Ultimately, if we want our children to get smart and come into their own as full citizens of this great democracy, we need to raise the bar and help our children jump a little higher academically.

To meet these demands for higher standards, schools have undertaken numerous curricular reforms over the years and used more sophisticated methods for measuring the educational outcomes of these reforms.

### The Push for Mass Education

Since 1920, schools have been expected to provide educational opportunities for all Americans. During this period, curricula have been developed to meet the needs and differences of many diverse student groups: disabled, bilingual, gifted, delinquent, and learning-disabled students, for example. Moreover, these curricula have been used not

only in public and private schools but also in alternative schools: night schools, schools without walls, summer schools, vocational schools, continuation schools, schools-within-schools, magnet schools, and so on. In 1973 there were more than 600 alternative public schools. A survey done in 1981 found that the number of public alternative schools had mushroomed to over 10,000, with an estimated three million children enrolled (Raywid 1981, 551-554)!

### The Progressive Curriculum

The concern in this country for educating all our youth has drawn much of its initial energy from the progressive education movement. During the 1920s, the Progressive Education Association reacted against the earlier emphasis on the mental disciplines and called for elementary schools to develop curricula based on the needs and interests of all students. Throughout the 1930s, progressive ideas were promoted on the secondary level as well.

Though there was no single set of beliefs that united all Progressives, there was general agreement that students should be involved in activities that parallel those found in society. Furthermore, those activities should engage students' natural interests and contribute to their self-fulfillment. With these guidelines in mind, the progressive education movement expanded the curriculum to include such topics as home economics, health, family living, citizenship, and wood shop. The spirit of the progressive education movement is expressed well in a statement made in 1926 by the Director of the School of Organic Education in Fairhope, Alabama (Johnson 1926, 350-351):

We believe that education is life, growth; that the ends are immediate; that the end and the process are one. We believe that all children should have the fullest opportunity for self-expression, for joy, for delight, for intellectual stimulus through sub-

ject matter, but we do not believe that children should be made self-conscious or externalized by making subject matter an end. Our constant thought is not what do the children learn or do, but what are the "learning" and the "doing" doing to them. . . .

We believe that society owes all children guidance, control, instruction, association, and inspiration—right conditions of growth—throughout the growing years until physical growth is completed. No child may know failure—all must succeed. Not "what do you know" but "what do you need," should be asked, and the nature of childhood indicates the answer.

*The Eight-Year Study.* One of the most ambitious projects of the progressive education movement was the Eight-Year Study, which ran from 1932 to 1940. During this period, thirty public and private high schools were given the opportunity to restructure their educational programs according to progressive tenets and without regard for college and university entrance requirements. Over 300 colleges and universities then agreed to accept the graduates of these schools. The aim of the study, according to its director, was "to develop students who regard education as an enduring quest for meanings rather than credit accumulation" (Aiken 1942, 23). The curricula developed by these schools emphasized problem solving, creativity, self-directed study, and more extensive counseling and guidance for students.

Ralph Tyler evaluated the Eight-Year Study by matching nearly 1,500 graduates of the experimental schools who went on to college with an equal number of college freshmen who graduated from other high schools. He found that students in the experimental group received higher grades in every subject area except foreign languages and had slightly higher overall grade point averages. Even more significant, perhaps, was the finding that the experimental group had higher performance in such areas as problem solving, inventiveness, curiosity, and motivation



to achieve. Unfortunately, the Eight-Year Study failed to have any lasting impact on American education—possibly because World War II overshadowed the study's results.

### The Push for Excellence

Concern with excellence in our schools ran high during the decade that spanned the late 1950s to the late 1960s. The Soviet Union's launching of the satellite Sputnik in 1957 marked the beginning of a great concern in this country over the content of the schools' curricula. Admiral Hyman G. Rickover was a leading proponent of an academically rigorous curriculum and urged the public to see that our strength as a nation was virtually linked to the quality of our educational system. He wrote in his 1959 book *Education and Freedom* (188):

The past months have been a period of rude awakening for us. Our eyes and ears have been assaulted by the most distressing sort of news about Russia's giant strides in technology, based on the extraordinary success she has had in transforming her educational system. All but in ruins twenty-five years ago, it is today an efficient machine for producing highly competent scientists and engineers—many more than we can hope to train through our own educational system which we have so long regarded with pride and affection.

We are slowly thinking our way through a thicket of bitter disappointment and humiliating truth to the realization that America's predominant educational philosophy is as hopelessly outdated today as the horse and buggy. Nothing short of a complete reorganization of American education, preceded by a revolutionary reversal of educational aims, can equip us for winning the educational race with the Russians.

Fueled by arguments like Rickover's, many curriculum reform movements were begun in the 1950s and 1960s. The federal government became involved and poured great sums of

money into developing curricula in mathematics, the sciences, modern languages, and, to a lesser extent, English and history. Once again, the focus of the curriculum was on the mental disciplines and the social and psychological needs of children were secondary. Testing and ability grouping procedures were expanded in an effort to identify and to motivate academically able students.

### The Inquiry-Based Curriculum

The prevailing view of what should be taught in the schools during this period was influenced significantly by Jerome Bruner's short book, *The Process of Education*. A report on a conference of scientists, scholars, and educators at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, in 1959, Bruner's book synthesized current ideas about intelligence and about how to motivate students to learn. Bruner believed that students should learn the "methods of inquiry" common to the academic disciplines. For example, in an inquiry-based curriculum, instead of learning isolated facts about chemistry, students would learn the principles of inquiry common to the discipline of chemistry. In short, students would learn to think like chemists; they would be able to use principles from chemistry to solve problems independently.

Bruner's ideas were used as a rationale for making the curriculum more rigorous at all levels. As he pointed out in an often-quoted statement in *The Process of Education*, "Any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (1960, 33). Bruner advocated a spiral curriculum wherein children would encounter the disciplines at ever-increasing levels of complexity as they progressed through school. Thus, elementary students could be taught physics in a manner that would pave the way for their learning more complex principles of physics in high school.

## The Relevancy-Based Curriculum

The push for a rigorous academic core curriculum was offset in the mid-1960s by a call for a relevancy-based curriculum. Many educators, student groups, and political activists charged that school curricula were unresponsive to social issues and significant changes in our culture. At some schools, largely high schools, students actually demonstrated against educational programs they felt were not relevant to their needs and concerns. In response to this pressure, educators began to add more courses to the curriculum, increase the number of elective and remedial courses offered, and experiment with new ways of teaching. This concern with relevancy continued until the back-to-basics movement began in the mid-1970s.

## The Core Curriculum

In the early 1980s, the public was reminded anew that our country's well-being depended on its system of education, and once again our schools were found lacking in excellence. Several national reports claimed that curriculum standards had eroded. The 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education asserted, for example, that secondary school curricula had become "homogenized, diluted, and diffused." And even Admiral Rickover, in his characteristically terse, hard-hitting manner, pointed out in 1983 that school curricula had become less rigorous (Rickover 1983):

Student performance is lower than in 1957 at the time of Sputnik, when many so-called reforms were initiated. Some curricula involve expensive gimmicks, trivial courses and quick fixes of dubious value. Teachers are often poorly trained and misused on nonacademic tasks. Many students have settled for easy, so-called relevant and entertaining courses. They and their parents are deceived by grade inflation. And the lack of national standards of performance blinds everyone to how poor our education system is.

The push for excellence in the high school curriculum received a boost at the end of 1987 when U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett proposed an academically rigorous core curriculum for all high school students. In a U.S. Department of Education booklet entitled *James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Students*, Bennett described what such a curriculum might look like for an imaginary high school. His course of study called for four years of English consisting of four year-long literature courses; three years each of science, mathematics, and social studies; two years of foreign language; two years of physical education; and one semester each of art and music history. Twenty-five percent of his program would be available for students to use for electives.

## Outcome-Based Education

A recent approach to reforming the curriculum to ensure that all students learn and perform at higher levels is known as performance-based or outcome-based education. The performance-based approach focuses on assessing students' mastery of a set of rigorous learning goals or outcomes. By the early 1990s, Kentucky, Oregon, Connecticut, and Washington were among the states that had begun to develop statewide performance-based curriculum goals. Washington, for example, passed the Performance-Based Education Act of 1993 calling for the implementation of a performance-based education system by 2000-2001. The system, which will include mandatory assessments of students' performance at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, is based on the following four goals, each of which includes several outcomes and essential learning requirements:

**Goal 1:** Communicate effectively and responsibly in a variety of ways and settings

**Goal 2:** Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical,



and life sciences; arts; humanities; and healthful living

**Goal 3:** Think critically and creatively, and integrate experience and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems

**Goal 4:** Function as caring and responsible individuals and contributing members of families, work groups, and communities

As the preceding historical review of curriculum criteria has shown, the content of the curriculum does not remain static. It is continuously refined, added to or subtracted from, based upon the prevailing needs of society, our views of children and how they learn, and our conceptions of the larger purposes of education. Nevertheless, the curriculum must, somehow, reflect the beliefs, values, and needs of widely different groups: liberals and conservatives, rich and poor, gifted and remedial, college-bound and work-bound, and immigrants and native-born.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. At the level and in the curricular area with which you are most familiar, how are these criteria reflected in the curriculum: vocation, citizenship, and self-fulfillment?
2. Examine the timeline presented in Figure 6.1. What do you think will be the major emphases on the curriculum during the next 10 years? The next 20 years?
3. What are some examples of the current impact of religion and nationalism on the curriculum?