

# Success Breeds Success

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## SAN BERNARDINO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

It's the question that keeps school leaders, especially those in large, urban school districts, up at night:

*How can we be sure that all students in our care—regardless of age, background, or incoming proficiency levels—receive a rigorous, engaging, and standards-driven education?*

For San Bernardino City Unified School District, teachers and administrators have embarked on a mission to respond to this question. At the heart of their effort: Rigorous Curriculum Design, a teacher-led process for building units

of study that will reach and teach every learner. And as the 2015–2016 school year launches, the core instruction in every

math and literacy classroom will be aligned with that work.

Like many of those in districts across the county, San Bernardino educators knew that with the release of the California State Standards curriculum changes would follow. Seeing this moment of change as an opportunity to both create a stronger core curriculum and to deepen teacher understanding and application of the new, more rigorous standards, the district chose to partner with HMH Professional Services consultants from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt™ to implement the **Rigorous Curriculum Design** process.

Since 2013, pre-Kindergarten–Grade 12 educators have been meeting regularly to analyze and prioritize standards, create a scope and sequence, and build out the components of an effective, standards-aligned learning plan.



## What impact has RCD had on teachers?

*"RCD has developed teacher expertise in the CCSS (Common Core State Standards) and allowed teachers to use their professional knowledge and judgment to create instructional resources and lessons that facilitate student learning at a deeper level."*

Stephanie Dirks

*"RCD (Rigorous Curriculum Design) has impacted teachers by allowing us to collaborate with other teachers."*

Debbie Davari

*"RCD has impacted teachers by providing procedures, support, ideas, and resources to implement common core."*

Erica Zepeda

*"RCD has encouraged teachers to facilitate conversations, debates, and collaboration."*

Cynthia Camper

*"RCD has impacted teachers by providing a focus, and providing ideas and resources that teachers may not have had otherwise."*

Eboni Freeman



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## What have you learned along the way?

*"Along the way I have learned the value of collaboration, struggle time, unwrapping standards, how to read the units from the writer's perspective."*

Debbie Davari

*"Along the way I have learned to become more familiar with the standards."*

Catherine Sadlier

*"Along the way I have learned to become more self-confident."*

Naomi Wylie

## Planning the Work/Choosing Teams

It was clear to all involved that a full-scale overhaul of math, ELA, science, and social studies curriculum would be a multi-year project. Before embarking on the RCD journey, district leadership planned the approach.

- ▶ In Year One, secondary math and ELA teachers would begin their work.
- ▶ Year Two would bring elementary math and ELA into the effort, while secondary continued to develop units. This year would also see a core group of people established to serve as district trainers.
- ▶ During Year Three, secondary science and social studies teachers

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would follow the RCD process to develop their curriculum, while elementary completed their work and a sustainability plan was established.

With the timeline established, it was time to choose teams. The process for creating the unit writing teams required the involvement of many stakeholders, including our teacher's union, district level administrators, site administrators and program specialist. As a means of creating equitable opportunity, the position of unit writer involved an application and recommendation process. The composition of the unit writing teams was very intentional. Teams were designed to reflect a broad cross section of our district teachers, varying in grade level, program (ABE, Dual Language, GATE, etc.), as well as a range in years of teacher experience. Once selected, all unit writers went through the on-boarding process, which included establishing expectations and outcomes for the units, as well as training in the Rigorous Curriculum Design process.

In working to create systems for sustainability, the collaboration between district program specialist and the HMH Professional Services associates was crucial.

## A Complex Path, Taken One Step at a Time

Key to the success in San Bernardino was consistency across all design teams and through all stages of the plan's implementation. Once receiving the big-picture overview of RCD, all teams began by laying the standards' foundation. Teachers analyzed standards using the criteria of endurance, leverage, readiness, and external exams to select priority standards. Next, teams began mapping standards to units of study and created a pacing calendar for the year, driven by skills and concepts contained in the priority standards.

With the foundation in place, teachers began building the units themselves. Grade level teams analyzed standards within each unit to create pre- and post-assessments that would measure student progress and provide the critical formative feedback teachers would need to adjust instruction and plan collaboratively. Teams also developed performance assessments that would become the backbone of the unit and allow students to engage with real-world projects and problem solving as they honed skills contained within the standards. Before sharing units with colleagues, teams also identified some resources and strategies that could be used to develop weekly and daily lesson plans.

## Why should RCD continue?

*"RCD should continue "so we can continue to improve the units."*  
Valerie Mitchell

*"RCD should continue because it encourages students to question sources, written articles, and people."*  
Cynthia Camper

*"RCD should continue because it will help to keep consistency among our district's schools, and to encourage teachers to grow."*  
Naomi Wylie



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## Sustainable Change

Even as the initial work of writing units continued, district and school leaders met with the consultants to plan for sustainability. A core group of educators from within the district who had been involved in the design work were selected to deepen the work through participation in a rigorous, eight day certification course designed to enable them to support implementation, district-wide training, and the ongoing revision process.

The RCD process at San Bernardino is place for over 60 schools, involving 350 teachers, of which 240 have developed the new rigorous curriculum. In their elementary schools, it has led to successful completion of 96 units in 2013–2014, 96 in 2014–2015 and 80 units of study in 2015–2016.

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