The “Non-Negotiables” of Academic Rigor

Academic rigor is an essential characteristic of effective curriculum, instruction and assessment. Students learn when they are challenged to use the full range of their talents and intellectual abilities to address authentic and complex academic tasks in professional and real-life events. All students should have the opportunity to participate in qualitatively different academic environments that build upon their interests, strengths and personal goals. These environments should engage them actively and consistently in sophisticated investigations of materials, texts, interactive technologies and learning activities, requiring them to understand and apply advanced critical and creative processes.

Rigorous academic environments represent true communities of learning, encouraging both students and teachers to be risk-takers engaged in experimental, investigative and open-ended learning processes. Together, members of inquiry-based learning communities can utilize effectively their existing knowledge while striving to create new knowledge. In these rigorous learning environments, students accept greater responsibility for developing and applying a deep understanding of significant concepts, generalizations, essential questions and skills and procedures to problem finding and problem solving for which there are no predetermined limits. As a result of an education reflecting these “non-negotiables,” students will become life-long learners and thinkers, capable of independent reflection, self-evaluation and reasoning.

**Academic Rigor …**

- Has Qualitatively Different Academic Environments (More In-Depth, Complex and Abstract Concepts and Ideas)
- Builds Upon Interests, Strengths and Personal Goals
- Engages Consistently in Sophisticated Investigations of Materials, Texts, Interactive Technologies and Learning Activities
- Employs Advanced Critical and Creative Processes
- Embraces Teachers and Students as Risk-Takers in Experimental, Investigative and Open-Ended Learning Processes
- Utilizes Effectively Existing Knowledge and Creates New Knowledge
- Develops and Applies Deep Understanding of Significant Concepts, Generalizations and Essential Questions to Problem Finding and Problem Solving
- Sets No Predetermined Limits
- Creates Life-Long Learners and Thinkers Capable of Independent Reflection, Self-Evaluation and Reasoning
## Rigor Rubric for Educational Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Four</th>
<th>Level Three</th>
<th>Level Two</th>
<th>Level One</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CURRICUM</td>
<td>Curriculum occasionally attempts to build upon and to extend beyond a standard course of study through universal concepts, generalizations and essential questions from a few perspectives within the topic. Students occasionally engage in multiple complex, thought-provoking and ambiguous texts/materials that challenge their thinking and feelings.</td>
<td>Curriculum focuses on multiple discrete concepts and ideas with little if any articulated connection or overt relationship, particularly as they relate to the design and structure of a standard course of study rather than unifying concepts, generalizations and essential questions. Students rely primarily on one or two textbooks that may or may not be provided by the instructor.</td>
<td>Curriculum develops around topic(s) and exploration occurs through activities. Student outcomes lack articulation. A superficial attempt exists to provide rigor through quantity rather than quality. An over reliance on the textbook as the predominant curriculum is evident. Readings superficially address the topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A SSMENTS</td>
<td>Assessments are ongoing, focused and evident through the complexity of materials, ideas, issues, and problems encountered within curricular studies throughout the year. The teacher frequently provides for reflections on students’ understanding, and growth within curricular studies.</td>
<td>Assessments are focused and evident through some materials encountered throughout the year. The teacher sporadically provides for reflections on students’ understanding and growth within curricular studies.</td>
<td>Assessments reflect a “one shoe fits all” approach with an emphasis upon end-of-unit tests comprised largely of short answer, multiple choice, true/false and/or fill-in the blank responses at the conclusion of unit(s). Little or no opportunity exists for the learner to refine skill(s) or major ideas/concepts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I NSTRUC TION</td>
<td>Instructional delivery of the teacher uses multiple instructional strategies and methods within lessons and sometimes larger curricular models of study to understand complex and sophisticated materials/texts. Opportunities for understanding the “whys” through discussions are frequently provided and students frequently reflect on concepts, generalizations and essential questions encountered with rigorous texts.</td>
<td>Instructional delivery of the teacher uses one or two instructional management strategies (learning and/or interest centers, learning styles, etc.) within lessons to understand complex and sophisticated materials/texts. Opportunities for understanding the “whys,” the meta-cognition of such strategies may or may not be addressed.</td>
<td>Instructional delivery of the teacher assumes students will independently construct meaning from sophisticated materials/texts through appropriate mental models (processes/graphic organizers). Teacher provides little, if any support and is primarily engaged in delivering content and coverage.</td>
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Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program
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Bibliography


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