

## K-12 Case Study 1: Red Bank, NJ

Excerpt adapted from Squires, D.A. (2005) *Aligning and balancing the standards-based curriculum*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Originally developed in Red Bank, New Jersey, a school district serving a majority of poor and minority children, the Balanced Curriculum was an evolving model that generated increased student achievement from below to above grade level on standardized tests with concurrent improvement on state tests over 6 years (Burns & Squires, 1987). The trend continued from 1979 through 1993.

In 1979, Red Bank had adopted a Mastery Learning instructional design. Units, usually 2 to 4 weeks in length with 3 to 5 objectives for each unit, provided the curriculum structure. Within that structure, an instructional model of teach, formative test, reteach, mastery test, was followed (Abrams, 1981; Squires & Burns, 1987). Following the principles of Benjamin Bloom (1973, p. 22), which assert that entry characteristics of students need not determine instructional outcomes if the instruction is aligned to the assessments. In a school district dealing mainly with poor and minority students, this assertion had great appeal among school board members.

The curriculum director (David A. Squires) did not want to produce curriculum that were only aligned to the test; good curriculum should take into account the needs of the learner and the structure of the discipline as well. The team's model, lead by Squires, involved units that were aligned to the important tests and to the staff's understanding of what made a good curriculum in a particular subject area, which we termed a "Curriculum Rationale" and is similar to standard statements of today (Squires, 1985, 1986, 1987). Such definitions of a good curriculum predated the current emphasis on national standards and state frameworks.

An independent study conducted in Red Bank on 4th-grade reading and language arts reinforced this perception. Wishnick's (1989) results suggested that an aligned curriculum can overcome the usual predictors of student success (socioeconomic class, gender, teacher assignment, etc.). Wishnick concluded that:

- When students were taught well enough to perform well on the unit tests, **and** the unit tests were aligned with the standardized test item clusters . . . not only did SES and gender no longer factor in to results, but teacher differences had little to no effect on their performance. (p. 168)
- The study provided evidence that an aligned curriculum can overcome students' unearned disadvantages while refining and reinforcing Bloom's (1976) ideas.

It is important to note that student familiarity with a test item's structure and format is different than teaching content specifically on a test. Students who have never seen or experienced an assessment using multiple choice format, for example, are less likely to perform well on tests. Some familiarity with test item structure and format is OK to increase student achievement. With the Balanced Curriculum process, teachers are less likely to fall into the trap of teaching to the test.

The table on the next page shows Red Bank's test scores in grade equivalents from 1978 to 1992.

Red Bank Test Scores in Grade Equivalents 1978-1992

Subject/Year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Read 78-79		1.9	2.6	3.5	4.2	5.0	6.0	7.1	7.3
Read 79-80		1.7	2.5	3.3	4.0	5.8	7.0	7.5	8.9
Read 80-81		1.9	2.8	3.5	4.4	6.5	7.2	8.6	9.4
Read 81-82		2.1	3.2	3.4	4.3	5.5	7.8	8.1	9.6
Read 82-83		2.1	3.4	3.6	4.8	6.3	8.1	8.5	10.0
Read 83-84		2.1	3.5	4.1	5.2	6.0	7.4	8.2	10.3
Read 84-85		2.3	3.3	3.9	5.2	6.1	7.9	8.6	10.2
Read 85-86		2.2	3.5	3.6	5.9	6.1	8.3	8.2	10.2
Read 86-87	1.7	2.1	3.1	3.1	4.9	6.1	6.9	7.8	9.8
Read 87-88	1.7	2.2	2.9	2.9	4.7	5.7	7.3	7.5	8.6
Read 88-89	1.7	2.3	3.7	3.7	4.5	5.6	6.4	7.9	9.4
Read 89-90	1.7	2.3	3.3	3.3	5.0	5.7	7.0	7.2	9.5
Read 90-91	1.7	2.4	3.3	3.3	5.6	5.6	7.7	7.8	8.7
Read 91-92	1.8	2.1	3.7	3.7	5.1	6.0	6.5	7.5	9.2
LA 78-79					4.8	5.3	6.2	7.8	7.6
LA 79-80		1.6	2.9	4.0	5.2	6.1	7.1	7.6	8.9
LA 80-81		2.0	3.3	4.5	5.5	6.5	7.1	8.1	9.3
LA 81-82		2.4	3.6	4.5	5.7	6.2	8.3	7.6	9.5
LA 82-83		2.4	4.1	5.1	6.6	6.2	7.9	7.9	10.1
LA83-84		2.7	4.4	5.7	6.9	6.4	7.9	9.8	11.0
LA 84-85		2.7	4.2	5.5	7.1	6.2	7.4	8.9	12.1
LA 85-86		2.9	4.5	5.3	6.7	7.1	7.9	9.6	10.6
LA 86-87	1.7	2.1	3.3	4.5	5.6	6.6	6.7	7.5	11.8
LA 87-88	1.7	2.2	3.3	4.9	5.7	6.3	8.4	8.0	9.2
LA 88-89	1.7	2.3	3.7	5.1	5.6	6.3	7.5	8.4	10.4
LA 89-90	1.7	2.3	3.6	7.9	6.6	5.5	8.1	8.0	10.6
LA 90-91	1.7	2.4	3.6	6.0	8.3	6.1	8.1	8.8	9.6
LA 91-92	1.8	2.1	3.9	6.7	8.0	6.7	6.5	8.6	10.4
Math 787-9		1.8	2.9	4.0	4.8	5.03	6.4	7.6	8.0
Math 79-80		2.0	3.2	4.5	5.5	6.1	7.4	9.2	9.0
Math 80-81		2.0	3.5	4.5	5.4	6.5	7.5	8.7	10.4
Math 81-82		2.3	3.2	5.1	5.1	6.2	8.1	7.7	9.6
Math 82-83		2.4	4.1	5.7	6.0	6.2	7.5	9.4	11.6
Math 83-84		2.5	4.2	5.5	6.2	6.4	7.5	9.3	12.2
Math 84-85		2.7	4.3	5.3	5.9	6.2	8.2	9.0	*PHS
Math 85-86		2.6	4.3	4.5	6.0	6.8	7.7	8.5	11.5
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Math 90-91	1.2	2.4	4.3	6.4	7.0	6.3	8.3	9.3	9.2
Math 91-92	1.2	2.1	4.7	5.7	6.5	7.5	8.4	9.0	9.8

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