



# Deconstructing Ohio's New Learning Standards

## *Creating learning targets helps promote success*

*Virginia Ressa, Ohio Department of Education*

Ohio's New Learning Standards represent a significant opportunity for students. The new standards are intended to ensure students are college and career ready and prepared to compete in a global economy. They also represent a challenge for Ohio's educators. The new standards are more rigorous and require educators to plan for instruction and assessment in new and innovative ways.

Educators across the state are already using the

new standards, but how can we be confident we are implementing the standards with the appropriate levels of expectation and rigor?

An essential step in ensuring curriculum, instruction and assessment are all aligned to the standards is to deconstruct the standards. Deconstruction is the process of breaking down a broad or complex standard into smaller, more explicit learning targets. The terms "unpack" or "unwrap" often are used to describe the same process.

Why is this step so crucial? Following are four ways that working through the deconstruction process can bring clarity to standards implementation.

### **Clarifying expectations**

Deconstruction helps teachers better understand the content that is embedded in the standard so it can be accurately taught and assessed. Standards are broad statements about what students should know and be able to do. Often, they are complex and need to be broken down into smaller, more focused learning targets.

For example, Ohio's New Learning Standards for social studies include broad content statements organized around conceptual understandings. These content statements are not meant to be taught in a single lesson or even a single unit of study. Teachers will need to break down these broad statements of content into focused learning targets for daily instruction and assessment.

An example from seventh-grade social studies, on page 29, shows how a complex standard can be deconstructed into smaller, more manageable learning targets. Clear learning targets are the foundation of formative instructional practice (FIP). They serve as incremental steps to bigger,

### **Benefits of clear learning targets**

#### **Clear learning targets help teachers:**

- Know what to teach
- Know what to assess
- Know what instructional activities to plan
- Avoid "coverage" at the expense of learning
- Interpret and use assessment results
- Provide a system for tracking and reporting information
- Create common ground for working collaboratively with other teachers

#### **Clear learning targets help students:**

- Understand what they are responsible for learning
- Understand how to act on feedback
- Self-assess and set goals
- Track, reflect upon and share their learning

#### **Clear learning targets help parents:**

- Understand the expectations of new standards
- Help their children at home
- Understand the grade report
- Have more focused conference discussions about progress

more conceptual understandings built over time, providing clarity to both teachers and students about the intended learning.

**Building understanding and ownership**

Collectively working through the deconstruction process helps teachers understand and take ownership of the expected learning. Ohio’s New Learning Standards require that teachers work together — across grade levels and between subject areas — to create learning progressions that make sense for *their* students. Working together to write learning targets helps create a shared understanding of expectations for student learning. Teachers can come to an understanding of what the standard requires students to know and be able to do, informing decisions about instructional strategies and assessment methods.

Districts across the state are finding the deconstruction process valuable to implementing new standards.

“We do want to deconstruct and look at some of these things for ourselves, because that’s when we really start to internalize and then we take ownership as a building or district,” said **Anthony Elkins**, supervisor of elementary curriculum at **Olentangy Local (Delaware)**. “With the new

Seventh-grade social studies	Strand: Economics	Topic: Scarcity
Content Statement 20: The variability in the distribution of productive resources in the various regions of the world contributed to specialization, trade and interdependence.		
<b>Sample learning targets:</b>		
Explain that productive resources are distributed unevenly throughout the world.		
Discuss why geographic variation in the availability of productive resources fosters specialization, international trade and global interdependence.		
Draw conclusions about how an abundance or lack of productive resources affects opportunity costs.		

standards, you’re not going to be able to implement well without collaboration time built in. Without a common understanding, you’re running in isolation.”

Understanding and ownership of expectations also can be fostered in students by sharing learning targets. When students understand where they are going, they can determine where they are in relation to the learning targets

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and take more ownership for how they will move forward.

### Meeting rigorous expectations

Deconstructing the standard can help teachers understand how to teach and assess at the level of rigor or cognitive demand that is the intent of the standard. One of the goals of Ohio’s New Learning Standards is to increase the rigor of our expectations for student learning. This goal can only be realized if we are providing students with instruction and assessment at the appropriate level of rigor as defined by the standards.

“Clear learning targets are very important as you’re looking at assessment practices and really making sure that your assessments are aligned to standards and to instruction,” Elkins said.

### Creating learning progressions

Finally, the deconstruction process helps teachers understand the learning that comes before and after the standard. Strong formative instructional practice includes creating learning targets at three levels: laying the base, mastery and going beyond. Looking at the learning that comes before and after mastery can help teachers create learning progressions for their students that start where students enter the learning and take them to mastery and beyond.

Sometimes the relevant “before-and-after” learning comes within a school year or course, while for some standards the relevant before-and-after learning comes in the grades or courses before and after the standard being taught. In the English/language arts example (see chart below), the foundational learning, shown in the laying the base sample target, comes from the prior grade, while the going beyond learning is from the subsequent grade.

Vertical alignment and learning progressions are two more

English language arts, fourth grade	Strand: Writing	Topic: Text types and purposes
Standard 1: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.		
<b>Sample learning targets</b>		
Laying the base	Use linking words when writing.	
Mastery	Use linking words and phrases (such as: another, for example, also, because) to connect ideas within categories of information.	
Going beyond	Recognize, determine and use clauses to link ideas within and across categories of information.	

reasons that collaborative time for educators to deconstruct standards is so important.

“With the new standards, you have to have that vertical articulation,” Elkins said. “If you’re only focused on your grade level, it can lead to a checklist mentality. Instead, you need to understand what comes before, what comes after and what the common expectations are. It is possible.

“Like with anything else, if it’s something you value, you’re going to make time for it. Sometimes you have to be creative in how you structure the time.”

*Collectively working through the deconstruction process helps teachers understand and take ownership of the expected learning.*

### Resources to help with the deconstruction process

Through FIP Your School Ohio, the Ohio Department of Education, in collaboration with Battelle for Kids, has created resources to assist educators with formative instructional practices, including the deconstruction of standards. All of Ohio’s educators have access to free online learning modules, blended learning tools, deconstruction templates and content area examples.

Of course, using clear learning targets to drive instruction and assessment isn’t a new idea. But the complexity and rigor of Ohio’s New Learning Standards make the deconstruction process even more important to ensuring that teachers and students truly understand what the new standards entail.

Creating clear learning targets also can be beneficial to parents. If parents are wondering what’s expected of their children in the new standards, sharing these smaller, easier-to-understand statements can be useful in communicating learning expectations.

If your school is working through the deconstruction process, you may want use the FIP Your School Ohio resources and video library. Visit [www.FIPYourSchoolOhio.org](http://www.FIPYourSchoolOhio.org) to access these tools and learn more about formative instructional practices. ■

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