

Shared Curriculum 2023 Welcome Exercise

Welcome to the Shared Curriculum (SC) 2023 Exercise. In this program, we invite teachers to discuss and share their perspectives and experience to help fellow teachers and district leaders to sustain meaningful curriculum together as a group. We will ask you about your values and goals as a teacher and how they can be reached with this year's curriculum.

We will uplift your feedback and facilitate sharing it with your district leadership. Often, people assume to know what it is like to teach a classroom or how best to connect with students. In this exercise, we instead foreground your own experiences and practices as experts with firsthand experience with students in your schools. For example, research suggests that teachers find more satisfaction in their job and are better able to engage their students when they work as a team. However, we want to know what actual K-12 teachers think in real time, 2023 so far. What are the challenges and triumphs you face? We will share this information with your district leaders and possibly fellow teachers. We will keep your identity as confidential as possible and will remove your identity from anything you share in the SC Exercises.

Thanks for sharing your expertise and experience! We look forward to learning from you.

Your Values

First, we would like to hear about why you became a teacher and what you hope to get out of the job. This will allow us to better understand the variety of values and goals of teachers in your school and district. We will share this information with your district's leadership but it can give them insights into how teachers feel and how they can be supported.

It is normal to not always remember why you joined a profession or keep in mind what you hope to get out of it, especially in the heat of the moment (e.g., the middle of the academic year). So please take a moment to reflect and then provide as much detail as possible.

Please continue to the next page when you are ready to begin.

In preliminary interviews, we were able to gather what may be the most common reasons why people become teachers. Please review the list below and think about each of the reasons. Then click the two or three reasons that are MOST important to you about being a teacher. Even if you feel that many of the reasons are important, please pick only at most THREE of them.

- ☐ Helping students learn and grow
- ☐ Working with families to get students ready to be independent
- ☐ Improving the community through schooling
- ☐ Preventing students from going down bad life paths
- ☐ Making a meaningful difference in a student's life
- ☐ Interacting with people I can support
- ☐ Being an advocate for people in need
- ☐ Contributing to future society in a tangible way

Look at the things you picked as MOST important to you. Think about why these things were very important to you in deciding to become a teacher. Write a few sentences describing why these things were and are still **important to you**. Focus on your thoughts and feelings, and don't worry about spelling or how well written it is.

Next, we will share with you some of this research. Then, we will ask for your input as a professional educator. We are especially interested in how these topics play out in real-world classrooms like yours.

Please continue to the next page to begin.

Teachers and Students Have Connections in 2022

Almost everyone has a personal story about a great teacher who influenced his or her life. For some, it's a teacher who reached out and helped them feel both comfortable and respected in school. For others, it's a teacher who helped them see they could reach a higher standard, even when they doubted themselves. However, not enough is known about how teachers make this happen on a day to day basis. Active teachers are best suited to shed light on the perspective but are rarely asked about their experiences or thoughts. Research reflects that the middle of the school year is a pivotal time to share and receive notes from colleagues. So before we continue, we ask: What have you been experiencing in your class or classes so far in 2023?

The scientific community has begun to report research on the impacts of COVID-19 and specifically how it has affected classrooms in America. This past fall has been reported as one of the most difficult semesters for both teachers and students in many decades. Survey data of nearly 3 million adults – including more than 100,000 teachers – suggests that teachers have experienced more burnout than many other professions – including healthcare providers and military personnel – since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic Kush et al., 2022. Research shows that many students are years behind academically and psychologically. They are only now returning to a semblance of normalcy, but things still are not quite the same.

That is what the scientific community is reporting, but how has this looked to you? How have these factors played out in your classrooms?

1 Kush, J. M., Badillo-Goicoechea, E., Musci, R. J., & Stuart, E. A. (2022). Teachers' Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Educational Researcher*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X221134281>

Your Feedback

How was your mental and emotional health during the fall semester this year? As you reflect, check in with your body and take note of how it makes you feel to think about this question.

How was your students' mental and emotional health during the fall semester this year? How might it have felt for them after so much turmoil in school and at home during these times? How have your students' health manifested in their academic motivations and classroom behavior?

How have you managed to take on curriculum – new or old – with your students this academic year? Despite the circumstances or in the face of them, what triumphs, large or small, have you seen while engaging your students? If you share a story about a specific student, please do not include their name or make up a fake name for the student.

Thanks for sharing your reflections on the past semester. Next, we would like to get your feedback on what researchers and policy-makers have put forward about taking on curriculum in general. We will ask you how these topics have played out for you and your students so far this year and what you expect to see during the rest of this year. In SC exercises over the next few weeks, we will discuss teachers' perspectives, students' perspectives, and what these perspectives holistically mean. In this exercise, we will start with teachers' perspectives.

Please continue to the next page to get started.

Teachers' Perspectives

Effectively taking on a new curriculum. Research with teachers shows that they can effectively learn and teach new curriculum with effort and time and when they persevere through challenges. Like all other people, teachers can master new material and comfortably share it after careful reflection and practice. While learning and sticking with new curriculum can be difficult, teachers report a deep appreciation for the structure and rigor of the curriculum.

In focus groups, one teacher shared:

The curriculum helps because we know exactly what to teach and we don't have to run around to find resources.

Another teacher said:

I love the books that we read as part of the new curriculum. These texts are more challenging and they lend themselves to learning more. We have great discussions about the books.

Your Feedback

How have you been able to effectively launch a new curriculum? Share with us a time(s) when you were encouraged to try a new curriculum that was difficult to understand or seemed too difficult for your students. How were you able to overcome those challenges?

Sticking with the Curriculum. Students respond to their teachers' confidence and assurances with new lessons (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Yeager et al., 2014). When a teacher models perseverance by leaning into new curriculum use and sticking with it, students sense that their teacher cares, has high expectations for them, and believes in their ability to reach those standards. They respond to their teachers' confidence with more effort and ultimately with higher achievement.

In a previous focus group, one student shared:

Most of the work that we do is really easy. It's like the teachers give us easy stuff because they think we can't do it or maybe we won't do it. If they gave us harder stuff to do, then they might be surprised to see that we can do it.

In my old school, [I] had to work really hard. I'm reading and learning interesting stuff here, but I don't actually have to work hard.

Meanwhile another student said:

My math teacher really cares about me and my peers. He holds us to high expectations. He also encourages us in the classroom and in the halls. He cares about [us as] people.

Students try harder and exceed expectations when teachers encourage and support them through the difficulty, not when they avoid the difficulty.

Your Feedback

How were you able to connect your curriculum with a student's experiences during fall 2022?

Now we'd like to hear your thoughts about the best way to handle specific kinds of student/teacher interactions during winter 2023. One way we do this is with a scenario. Consider the following scenario happening :

During the first months of the fall 2022 semester, you noticed that one of your students participated very little in class activities. You told your class that participation counts toward their grades. This student has dodged answering questions. This winter, you remind the student that participation is important and she responds that she figures she won't get a fair shot in school anyway.

What might this student be experiencing at this point in the year?

How would you encourage this student?

Another approach that can help is feedback to fellow teachers.

What might you want to know as a teacher at this point in the academic year?

That concludes the Shared Curriculum (SC) 2023 Exercise.