Assessing Academic Rigor to Ensure Grade-Level Proficiency and College Readiness

What can you expect to get from this module?

Academic press, which is the way rigor is frequently manifested at the organizational level, refers to the extent to which the school community experiences a strong emphasis on academic success and specific standards of achievement. Although school leaders generally recognize the importance of rigor, many are not thoroughly and accurately measuring, monitoring, and encouraging rigor. Too often, it is a vague concept that means that instruction is "hard, tough, and sometimes boring."

The level of cognitive complexity of expected learning (rigor) may be directly examined at the classroom level in lesson plans, unit plans, and course content; teacher assignments and student work; formative and summative assessments and rubrics; and the tight alignment of these elements to challenging standards.

Tools and strategies can determine whether rigor exists in classrooms (by evaluating the alignment among expected student learning, teaching, and assessing) and to determine whether rigor exists systemically in schools.

Who should take this training?

This module is for school leaders and potential school leaders. The audience may include school teams of principals, aspiring leaders, teacher leaders and others who are members or potential members of the school's instructional leadership team. **NOTE:** In order for this training to have significant impact, the principal **MUST** be part of the school team being trained.

Other SREB Leadership Curriculum Modules that support this module:

There are no formal prerequisites for this SREB module. However, participants may find it helpful to have attended the modules *Prioritizing, Mapping and Monitoring the Curriculum* and *Aligning Teacher Assignments and Student Work to Rigorous Standards.*

What will you have to do to get the most from this module?

Participants must commit to attending as a team, completing the prework, attending two initial days, completing homework assignments and attending two separate follow-up days. It is important for teams to have time to reflect and apply what they have learned between the initial training and the follow-up session.

Big Ideas in This Module

- Rigor is the expectation that students will be able to perform at levels of cognitive complexity necessary for proficiency at each grade level and readiness for college and the workplace. Alignment of instruction and assessment with standards/objectives that are at those levels of cognitive complexity is a critical part of increasing rigor in schools.

- Typically, the gap between the levels of cognitive complexity in the standards and the levels in assignments increases as students progress through grade levels.

- A taxonomy is a useful tool for classifying and aligning objectives, instruction, and assessment to determine level of cognitive complexity.

- The revised Bloom's taxonomy helps us to analyze cognitive demand along two dimensions.

- Using the taxonomy can result in rich discussions about intentions, assumptions and outcomes.

- The very act of using the taxonomy can inform our decisions and motivate us toward demanding higher levels of rigor.

- Alignment (standards → objectives → assessment tasks → instructional strategies) is essential to raising the level of rigor.

- We attend to what we measure! If we are serious about raising the level of rigor in our school, we must accurately assess where we are now.

- Measuring rigor at the classroom level is a multi-faceted, ongoing, collaborative process requiring a variety of strategies.

- Through these strategies, you can accomplish the dual goals of building professional expertise and analyzing the level of rigor in the classroom.

Module Design. *Assessing Academic Rigor to Ensure Grade-Level Proficiency and College Readiness* **is a four-day workshop (2+1+1). It also includes prework and homework assignments. Each section is described below.**

Prework (about three hours). Participants read a portion of the required text and also gather standards related to a single subject matter and grade level, for analysis in class.

Instruction and Overview (45 minutes). Participants introduce themselves and complete the following statement: "I would know that teaching and learning in a classroom or school were rigorous if…" Then, the facilitator shows a series of slides that illustrate the urgent need for school improvement.

Building an Understanding of Rigor (five hours, 45 minutes). This section begins with an icebreaker in which participants begin to explore the definition of rigor. This exploration continues in a jigsaw exercise. After the jigsaw, school teams work on the definition of rigor that they will present to their colleagues at their schools.

After a brief lecture on rigor, participants look at some artifacts from a hypothetical school and evaluate the message that school is sending about rigor. Next, the trainer explains how and why the revised Bloom's taxonomy will be used as a vehicle for evaluating rigor in this module. Finally, participants apply that knowledge by categorizing a variety of objectives, instructional activity, and assessment on the taxonomy.

Homework between the Two Days of Workshop One. Participants read an analysis of a unit on Macbeth and a chapter in the required text on alignment and answer some guiding questions about alignment and level of rigor.

Applying Our Understanding of Rigor (all of Day Two). Participants continue the work of Day One by first looking at some objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment tasks in isolation and placing them on the taxonomy table. Then, after a discussion on the importance of alignment, they do the same for all the elements in a single unit of study. Finally, they look at indicators of levels of rigor and plan how to assess rigor in their schools.

Homework between Days Two and Three. Participants extend the work to their school communities by informing them and educating them about the importance of academic press and raising the level of rigor. Second, participants continue using a collaborative process to identify rigor of standards in select grade levels and subject areas. Third, participants gather some unit materials for use in Workshop Two.

Analyzing Rigor in Our Classrooms (all of Day Three). Participants look at the data they have gathered and work in teams to map out the level of rigor in assessments, instruction, and standards and then check the alignment of rigor in these areas. Then, they discuss strategies for increasing rigor in objectives, instruction, and assessment at the classroom level.

Analyzing Rigor at a Schoolwide Level (all of Day Four). By this point, participants should have a good idea of what rigor is, how to measure it, and strategies for increasing it. The focus of the discussion will shift to how to gather a schoolwide picture of rigor. Given a variety of samples and tools, participants figure out how to gather and organize schoolwide data around rigor. The workshop ends with participants planning next steps for the systematic monitoring of academic press.

Homework between Days Three and Four. Teams follow a structured process for planning, implementing and evaluating projects that increase rigor at the classroom level. They prepare a presentation for the final day, describing their projects and reflecting on how they can use the experience to inform others of the importance of academic press and raising the level of rigor.

Analyze Rigor at a Schoolwide Level (all of Day Four). Teams present their homework projects and participants discuss how each presentation sheds light on the work of assessing rigor and what next steps can be taken. The focus of the discussion then shifts to how to gather a schoolwide picture of rigor using a variety of samples and tools. The workshop ends with participants planning next steps for the systematic monitoring of academic press.