

UNPACKING THE ALTERNATE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Students who attend Maryland public schools have the opportunity to learn to read and write, solve mathematics problems, and utilize their academic skills across all content areas. Federal guidance requires that students with disabilities have the same opportunities and have access to the same curriculum as their general education peers.

For students with significant cognitive disabilities, the academic content is aligned to the chronologically age-appropriate grade-level content standards, but at a less complex performance expectation. This alternate instructional content matches the general education curriculum but varies in the depth, breadth, or complexity of the learning outcomes. In other words, the instructional content is tied to the major topics of the general education curriculum, but the performance expectations are modified.

For example, in a third-grade mathematics class, the students would organize data provided to them to create a line graph while the general education students would collect, organize, and analyze the data to create a graph which illustrates their findings. Despite differing academic rigor, the content is the same because the students are doing the same general activity that addresses the content standard.

This specially designed instruction ensures that the unique needs of a student with a significant cognitive disability has access to the general curriculum and the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS). The intention of this specially designed instruction is to reduce or eliminate the effects of a student's disability by accommodating, modifying and adapting instructional methods, materials, techniques, media, physical setting, and/or the environment so that the student can participate in academic tasks and demonstrate their knowledge.

Skills of daily living can be incorporated into instruction rather than having them exist as a supplement to instruction. In English/language arts, students locate information in a newspaper or conduct an internet search. In mathematics, students gain skills traditionally used in activities of daily living such as problem solving, reading charts, measuring, and working with time. Experiences in science and social studies classes may lead to lifelong hobbies or careers. Practice with social skills can be embedded throughout the student's day in all content areas. With improved skills, students with significant cognitive disabilities have increased opportunities for achieving post-secondary outcomes in college, career, and community.

Curriculum and Instruction Resources for Families



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The **Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS)** cover English/language arts, mathematics and literacy in social studies, science and technical subjects. These standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and align state standards and state assessments. They are designed to ensure students are prepared for entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs. <http://www.mdk12.org/index.html>

The **Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)** complement English/language arts and mathematics standards by enabling students to solve problems using skills and knowledge from multiple content areas. The NGSS promote interactive science instruction that support critical thinking and analysis with a high set of expectations for achievement. <https://www.nextgenscience.org/>

The **Core Content Connectors (CCC)** are aligned to the MCCRS in English/language arts and mathematics. These content standards facilitate access to modified grade-level curriculum and are appropriate for only a small number of students whose significant cognitive disability may prevent them from attaining grade-level achievement standards. https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Core_Content_Connectors

The **Essential Elements for Science (EE)** are aligned with the NGSS and help educators promote student learning by utilizing a learning map model, or “road map” for instruction. The learning map model helps educators, students, and parents see where students are in their learning and how they can get to where they need to go in learning science concepts and skills. <http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/maryland>

