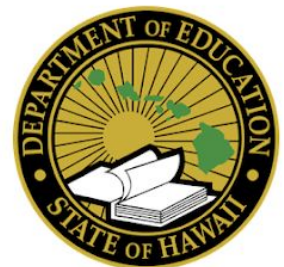


Instructional Content Review of Acellus Accelerator

Final Report

Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design
Hawai'i State Department of Education
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Preface

Due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases near the scheduled start of the 2020-21 school year, the Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) delayed the start of school and opened with full distance learning for nearly all students.

Initially distance learning was to be conducted for the first four weeks of school but the HIDOE extended the *Learn from Home* phase for the remainder of the first quarter for most schools to align with state and county safeguards and restrictions at the time.

To implement distance learning, some schools have adopted the online curriculum program Acellus Learning Accelerator as their full distance learning option for families reluctant to physically send their child to school, and some schools are using its content as a supplemental tool to support distance learning needs.

Acellus has been utilized by Hawaii public schools in different capacities over the past decade. With the sudden closure of school facilities in March 2020 and the unexpected shift to distance learning, the Department expanded the use of Acellus.

The program was selected based on curriculum availability to fulfill course needs, cost effectiveness, implementation timeline, teacher familiarity with the program, and consultation with schools already utilizing the program. A key consideration was to minimize any burden of introducing brand new materials and programs given all of the other adjustments teachers and principals were handling at the time.

After starting to receive parent, school and community questions and complaints about Acellus around issues of questionable and inappropriate content, rigor and alignment to standards and other areas, the Department worked to identify questionable content and directly worked with Acellus to try to address the concerns.

At the Sept. 17, 2020, Hawaii State Board of Education (BOE) General Business Meeting, there was a discussion item regarding the continued use of Acellus. At the direction of Superintendent Dr. Christina Kishimoto, Deputy Superintendent Phyllis Unebasami initiated a multidisciplinary cross-office review of the program and committed to report back to the BOE on findings, solutions and recommendations.

This report summarizes the instructional materials review conducted by a multidisciplinary instructional review team from Sept. 22–Oct. 2, 2020.

Review Process

An internal review team made up of 56 specialists conducted an instructional content review of Acellus from Sept. 22–Oct. 2, 2020. The panel included members representing content area specialists, program specialists, resource teachers, special education, English Learners, homeless concerns, Title I, assessment development specialists, Hawaiian education, and civil rights compliance equity specialists.

The North Carolina Digital Learning Initiative’s Quality Review Tools for Digital Learning Resource was used for the review. Additionally, content area standards were utilized as part of the instruction and content review along with content-specific review tools.

Review Team Findings

1. Evidence confirming concerns submitted by stakeholders.
2. Evidence of conflict with BOE policies addressing academic program, standards, curriculum, discrimination and religion.
3. Evidence of misalignment to Hawaii Core Standards and grade-level expectations.

Quantitative Data

- A combined total of 84 reviews, which covered over 50 courses that spanned grades kindergarten through 12, was submitted for analysis.
- In response to the question, Would you recommend this resource for your assigned grade level/course?, 83.3% of the content review team submitted a “No” rubric score for their assigned grade level course, while 16.7% of the panel entered a “Yes, with reservations” rubric score.
- At least 75% of the K-12 courses consistently received weak rubric scores of 0 or 1 for all four rubrics: Instruction, Content, Technology and Design. (Resources that score a 0 or 1 on any indicator should be carefully considered before recommending their use by educators and students, according to the review tool.)

Qualitative Data

- A review of the qualitative data revealed trends that support the quantitative rubric scores. The most significant trend in the K-12 data noted repetitive tasks with a low cognitive demand.
- Some reviewers emphasized the need for a teacher who monitors student progress and provides feedback as needed.
- Others reported the materials needed to be personalized to adjust for student needs.

Review Team Recommendation

Based on the analysis of Acellus content, assessment and policy concerns, the review panel recommends that the Acellus Accelerator program be discontinued as a curriculum resource.

Next Steps: Immediate Complex Area & School Actions

The HIDOE is working with complex area and school leaders to finalize a transition plan for Acellus users, with the goal of moving forward in a manner that supports students in the least disruptive manner possible, ensures the continuity of learning, and most importantly mitigates any harm to students.

In acknowledging the review team's overall recommendation, the HIDOE also recognizes the curriculum includes content that reviewers found acceptable and aligned to standards, and will be working with schools that use Acellus to identify and leverage such content, as appropriate.

For Quarter 2 and Semester 2 planning by elementary and secondary school leaders and teachers, the HIDOE leadership will support the continued supplementary use of Acellus. Schools will supplement or replace Acellus content with other curriculum materials to increase rigor and minimize disruption of instructional delivery to students via distance learning. These actions will ensure an orderly transition for elementary and secondary schools, students and families, while facilitating academic planning for the 2021-22 school year.

Potential Transitions

The HIDOE Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design (OCID) will design a transition plan for Acellus users. Content specialists are investigating replacement solutions. OCID will continue to work with complex area distance learning teams to assist with implementation.

Full distance learning with current school curriculum

- Transfer full distance learning (opt-in) students into a teacher-led class/course.

Replace Acellus with a menu of choices, which can be assigned via a learning management system such as Google Classroom and Blackboard

- Continue to use the school's selected high-quality materials.

- Use curriculum and instructional materials selected by the teacher for the school's distance learning model (Example: Stepping Stones Online and Wonders Online; College Board resources in My AP Classroom).

Explore the availability and viability of online self-paced programs for specific purposes, including, but not limited to:

- Credit recovery
- Secondary course completion
- Alternative learning experience to meet elementary grade level proficiencies (e.g., home-hospital)

Long-Term Recommendations

The articulated and implemented process served as a prototype for the HIDOE to quickly respond to curricular and instructional issues in crisis situations and, therefore, should not be viewed as a stopgap measure for this specific concern. Lessons learned and insights gained by the multidisciplinary review team will be captured and documented as the Department continues to advance refinements to the curriculum management system.