Common Chapters

For the

Massachusetts Adult Basic Education Curriculum Frameworks

Massachusetts Department of Education
Adult and Community Learning Services

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This draft of the Common Chapters was written by Marie F. Hassett, Ph.D.

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Curriculum Frameworks Common Chapters

Introduction

The Common Chapters of the ABE Curriculum Frameworks are designed to give practitioners an overview. In this Introduction, we will briefly address the history and process of the Frameworks' development, and look at the context for which they are intended—ABE and ESOL programs across the state. Since many adult education staff are part-timers in the field, the Introduction will also include a discussion of who adult educators and their students are, what programs generally look like, and the role of the Department of Education (specifically, the Adult and Community Learning Services unit) in the development, testing, and support of the Curriculum Frameworks.

What are Frameworks?

Curriculum Frameworks are a group of documents created to help adult education practitioners and programs design, implement, assess and evaluate instruction. Within each discipline, Frameworks development teams have done extensive research to determine the critical elements of education within that area. They have looked at the content, concepts, skills, vocabulary, and learning curve of adult education students within these disciplines, both through their reading of the research and through field testing conducted throughout the state. The Frameworks are not ready-made curricula for the subjects that adult education covers, because the enormous variation in students, staff, and programs across the state would make it impossible to dictate a uniform approach and scope of coverage within each discipline. Rather, the Frameworks provide programs with *Strands and Standards* that serve as the basis for curriculum design within each content area. *Strands* are the themes that run through a Framework; for instance, the strands of the English Language Arts Framework are Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Critical Thinking. *Standards* are the indicators of performance within each strand that help instructors to determine a student's level of proficiency, target areas for improvement, and design instruction and assessment that will meet students' needs.

Why Frameworks for ABE/ESOL?

ABE/ESOL programs vary tremendously in size, mission and structure, a variety that contributes to the strength of the field. But this variety can have unintended consequences for students who move from one program to another. Without some agreement about the essential skills and content of a given subject of study, students who switch programs may find that what they were learning in their old class bears little or no resemblance to what they learn in their new class. In order to respect the diversity of programs, while maintaining a sense of continuity for students, Frameworks provide common strands and standards that can be used flexibly within very different programs.

Frameworks are not only a tool for ABE/ESOL programs; Massachusetts has created Frameworks for K-12 public schools in the various disciplines, which are used to plan and assess instruction, and to help teachers and students prepare for the MCAS tests. There are, of necessity, critical differences between the K-12 and the ABE/ESOL Frameworks, reflecting the significant differences between adult and traditional K-12 educational settings. But in both cases, the intent of the Frameworks is to provide continuity and consensus about what skills and content matter most.

In a later chapter (Relationship to Other Standards) we will discuss the ways that the ABE/ESOL Curriculum Frameworks have been designed with reference to other pertinent standards. Those readers who wish to get a better sense of the philosophy guiding the Frameworks at this point may consult the Massachusetts Common Core of Learning (Appendix A), the foundation upon which both the K-12 and the ABE/ESOL Frameworks are constructed.

What are ABE/ESOL Programs?

For purposes of this discussion, ABE/ESOL programs are educational programs designed to help adult learners master the skills and content necessary to improve their English, earn a secondary credential, enhance their employability, increase their ability to participate in the life of their communities, and gain greater control over their lives. ABE/ESOL programs are open to learners aged sixteen and older whose performance on an assessment instrument indicate that they have reading, writing, and/or computation skills of less than a 12th grade level in English. The majority of learners in these programs either lack a high school credential, or have a credential from a school in another country, but there are some learners in ABE/ESOL programs who have high school credentials from U.S. schools.

In order to secure funding from the Department of Education, an ABE/ESOL program must provide a continuum of services, generally at least three levels. In ABE, this usually means a program that can take learners from a GLE (grade level equivalent) of 0 to 12. In ESOL, learners' SPLs (student proficiency levels) are rated on a scale of 0 to 10. Class size varies according to the degree of need among the students; usually, lower level classes are smaller, to allow more individual attention to each student. Classes may be scheduled for as few as six or as many as twenty hours per week. In most cases, evening classes meet for 6-9 hours per week, and daytime classes meet for 9-20 hours.

All ABE/ESOL programs cover the same basic kinds of material. The focus in all programs is on developing students' spoken and written communication skills, increasing their level of general knowledge, and assisting them in meeting such life goals as securing better employment, obtaining citizenship, earning a driver's license, acquiring a secondary credential, transitioning to postsecondary education, or participating more in the activities of their children's schools. To that end, the subjects covered in most programs include reading, writing and math at all levels, with the addition of such subjects as social studies, science, and the arts at more advanced levels. Students who are enrolled in GED

preparation classes or ADP (Adult Diploma Program) classes may also spend time learning test-taking strategies, or completing specific tasks that count toward earning the credential. Currently, the Department of Education funds more than 200 such programs across Massachusetts. Many additional programs are supported by community-based organizations, churches, and other institutions.

Who are Adult Education Teachers?

Adult education teachers are as diverse as the learners they work with. Many of them have backgrounds in education, but many are also first-time teachers with no formal training in the field. The vast majority of adult education teachers work part-time in their programs. In some cases, this means that they have other, separate careers, but often teachers will work in several different programs in order to create a full-time teaching load. The average tenure of a teacher in adult education is three years, though many stay longer, and many find ways to stay in the field of adult education in other capacities (counselors, programs coordinators, etc.). Most teachers have at least a Bachelor's degree; many also have advanced degrees in education or related fields.

In an effort to provide a foundation for teachers, particularly those who have not had any formal training in education, the Department of Education is developing a voluntary certification program. Unlike K-12 public school teachers, adult education teachers are not required to possess a teaching license at this time, unless they are working through a public school. However, a wide variety of professional development opportunities is available to adult educators, especially through Massachusetts' System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), an organization with regional offices in the Southeast, Northeast, Central and Western parts of the state, and Greater Boston. SABES staff provide resources, support, and training for teachers and programs on an enormous variety of topics, and are available to all adult educators, whether or not their programs are funded by the Department of Education.

Who are Adult Education Students?

The students in adult education programs have in common a desire to further their education, but their needs and goals, and the challenges they face, cover a broad spectrum. Learners aged 16 or older are eligible to participate in adult education programs, and in many programs, the age range may stretch from 16 to 66. Many have left school because they were not successful, but the reasons for their lack of success vary widely. Some of the reasons for leaving school prior to earning a high school credential include: pregnancy/parenthood, economic pressures, substance abuse, learning disabilities (diagnosed or undiagnosed), lack of interest, unstable home life, expulsion or legal entanglements. Adult learners whose first language is not English may have had limited access to bilingual programs in the U.S., may not have studied English in their home countries, or may simply not have had access to formal schooling.

One of the few common denominators among students in adult education programs is low income and limited economic opportunity. Many of them seek out educational programs with the primary goal of improving their earnings potential, and learning how to navigate the many systems (economic, legal, social service, educational) that control the resources and programs to which they want access. Adult learners value education and the power it has, but they rarely see it as an end in and of itself. Rather, education is seen as a means to other kinds of opportunities and achievements.

What is the Role of Adult and Community Learning Services?

ACLS is the unit of the Department of Education responsible for adult education programs across the state. As such, their role is multi-faceted; they exist to provide resources and support, but also to maintain standards and ensure that the quality of education available through state-funded programs remains high. In the process of developing the Curriculum Frameworks, ACLS hires contractors for each of the subject areas, provides support, resources, and oversight, coordinates the efforts of the individual contractors to ensure that the Frameworks are both excellent stand-alone documents and also pieces of a coherent whole.

To guarantee that the Frameworks are developed in ways that make sense not only theoretically, but practically, ACLS awards grant money to adult education programs to field test the individual Frameworks as they are developed and refined, and seeks the input of practitioners with regard to the content and structure of the Frameworks.

The Common Chapters: An Overview

The following four chapters are designed to acquaint programs and practitioners with the structure of the Frameworks and their common elements, to assist them in beginning to use the Frameworks, and to help them see how the ABE Curriculum Frameworks compare to other standards documents, locally and nationally.

Habits of Mind

Habit grows from a mixture of conviction ("This is good for me; it is persuasive; I can use this to good advantage"), of practice ("I can do this stuff in my sleep"), and of reinforcement from the community ("The place where I live and study is a place that values this").

Theodore Sizer
Horace's School

It is difficult to talk about habits without sounding prescriptive, and to suggest that there are common, universal habits that all students need in order to achieve their fullest potential would seem, on its face, to contradict the claim set out in the Introduction that the Frameworks have been designed to allow for flexible interpretation and implementation. But if we examine closely the habits suggested here as essential for learning across disciplines, we will see that, in fact, the cultivation of these habits will allow for ever greater variety in the ways that we use and implement the individual Frameworks.

Our habits, ultimately, determine our success; they have more impact than talent, and dictate the extent to which we will take advantage of the opportunities presented to us. If you have doubts, consider the example of exercise. We all know, intellectually, that regular exercise is important to maintain good health. More Americans have access to gyms and home fitness equipment now than ever before in history. And yet, a higher and higher percentage of the population is clinically obese and chronically sedentary. These are not unintelligent people, nor are they without options. But their habits do not support their health. Knowledge without action does no one any good.

There are many habits that support learning, but the four most global and essential are *perseverance*, *reflectiveness*, *patience*, and *openness*. Without these habits, adult students may make intermittent progress, or score well on the GED, but they will not have the tools for success in the larger world of work, family and community. As we discuss these four habits in more detail, it will become apparent that these are as critical an element of our curriculum as reading, writing and mathematics.

Perseverance is the foundation for all significant learning, in adult education and elsewhere. Anyone can pick up a skill quickly, and rapidly develop a certain level of proficiency, but no one learns a subject in depth without struggle. Perseverance is the ability to work through that struggle, and recognize that the frustration of the moment will yield rewards worth having.

For adult learners whose earlier educational experiences were less-than-perfect, perseverance is a hard habit to develop. Anyone who has repeatedly struggled and failed, often without understanding why, will feel some reluctance to take up the struggle again. And if the rewards seem very distant, it is hard for any of us to push forward. It is important to recall that a reluctance to persevere in the classroom does not necessarily indicate that a learner is unable to persevere, period. Many adult students work long hours, often at two jobs, raise families, and take part in the activities of their communities. We must acknowledge the skills and habits that learners demonstrate in other areas of their

lives, respecting their choices, if we hope to convince them that the same kind of effort is worthwhile in our classrooms.

While the ability to persevere serves as the foundation for learning and progress, it is important that it be tempered with ***reflectiveness***. We want students to maintain their efforts, but we need to explain why, and to what end. Perseverance is not mere repetition and dogged effort. Balanced with opportunities for reflection, the student who learns to continue through challenges also learns to discern when more effort is needed, when a different kind of effort may be needed, when to get help, and when it is time to move on. Reflectiveness also helps students to connect their efforts in the classroom to their larger life goals and ambitions. Teachers who always have a thoughtful answer to the question, "Why are we doing this?" are modeling the thoughtfulness and reflection that will help students make deliberate, thoughtful judgments about how to direct their efforts in order to achieve their selected ends.

Patience both supports and extends the ability to persevere and to reflect. For many learners, the first hurdle to developing this habit will not be showing patience toward the subject being studied, but being patient with themselves, particularly early in their return to school, when everything is new and to some degree unfamiliar. Many adult students are quick to berate themselves when they don't grasp a concept quickly, or have difficulty remembering rules of grammar, or can't figure out the logic behind long division. It is important that these students learn to treat themselves with patience and consideration. It is sometimes helpful to ask adult students, if they are feeling angry at themselves, how they would treat a friend or family member who had difficulty with the same task. Realizing how much harder they are on themselves than they would be on someone else gives them distance and perspective, and helps them to see the value of patience. It is not only students who are struggling that have trouble being patient. Often, students who are making rapid progress want to move on to one new thing after another, and resist suggestions that some repetition and rehearsal will help to build a skill.

In many ways, the habit of patience is connected with students' levels of self-esteem. If we do not hold ourselves in high regard, it is difficult to treat ourselves and our learning with respect, and allow the time and practice necessary for the full development of our skills and content knowledge. Teachers support the quest for patience when they themselves demonstrate patience in the classroom, refuse to hurry a student along, and continually find new ways to explain and demonstrate material so that everyone will reach a deep understanding.

Openness, finally, is what separates the educated person from the well-schooled person. Without this habit of mind, we are incapable of recognizing that there may be more than one right answer, more than one way to view a topic, more than one way to assign value to skills and knowledge. Like patience, openness both relies on and extends the range of our perseverance and reflectiveness. When we are willing to entertain new and challenging ideas, to stay with them until we understand, and then to absorb them into our view of the world, we have both used and increased our ability to be open. This is in many ways the culmination of the previously described habits, and the foundation for many

others—analysis, imagination, communication, and perspective—which are critical to building a capacity for lifelong learning.

The importance of openness can be demonstrated in a myriad of ways. If an adult learner whose own K-12 experiences were negative cannot get past the idea that "teachers don't care," it is unlikely that, as a parent, that learner will communicate successfully with a child's school. Learners who have had legal trouble may see the police and the court system as corrupt and prejudiced. Without the ability to step back and hear another perspective, these learners are limited in their ability to understand the workings of the legal system. In essence, openness allows adult learners to gain some distance on a difficult or charged issue. They may maintain their opinion, but they will be able to base their beliefs on knowledge and facts, instead of relying solely on personal experiences and impressions.

So how does this discussion of Habits of Mind relate to the Frameworks themselves? What is the connection between these habits and the content strands and standards laid out in each of the disciplines? Quite simply, if the Frameworks function as maps for learning, showing us what is important and why, these habits are the tools learners need in order to cover the terrain.

If we look at the strands of all the Frameworks (Appendix C), it quickly becomes apparent that genuine knowledge and appreciation cannot develop without the habits we have discussed here. Strands like, "Power and Participation," "Critical Thinking," and "Deciding What to Do," all presuppose an ability to work through difficult issues, reflect on meaning and impact, listen to others, and weigh the knowledge of other perspectives against one's own viewpoint.

Helping students to develop the Habits of Mind that will support their learning is not a matter of indoctrination or coercion, but of respect and honesty. We all know that the student who does not ever read outside of the classroom will not learn as quickly as classmates who make time for reading every day, and so we encourage all of our students to read as frequently as they can. Eventually, we hope that reading will not be a separate, planned activity, but simply a part of their day-to-day lives. The same is true of these habits. Who among us does not hope that students will push through their challenges, develop keen self-awareness, respect their own efforts, and recognize the value of hearing others' opinions? These are the habits of the educated person, and those that we hope our students will embrace.

Guiding Principles

Staff and Students of Adult Learning Programs:

- have high standards and expectations;
- engage in a variety of activities in the classroom to enhance learning;
- make connections between education, home, work, and community;
- base instruction and assessment on inquiry involving investigation, critical thinking, problem solving, and reflection;
- see assessment as a tool to provide evidence of progress and assist students in becoming self-directed, lifelong learners;
- recognize and respect diversity in students' backgrounds, needs, and goals.

If the Habits of Mind described in the preceding chapter are the tools we wish students to develop, the Guiding Principles help us to create a context in which that will happen. As with the other elements of the Frameworks, these Guiding Principles are not prescriptive, and do not require specific types of activities, classroom management, or curricular organization. Instead, they are benchmarks by which to evaluate the overall climate created in classrooms and programs through the choices made by staff. The illustrations of these principles provided below are meant to serve as suggestions, and there is no doubt that each principle could be enacted in a variety of ways, depending on the needs of students and the structure of individual programs.

Staff and students of Adult Learning Programs have high standards and expectations.

The question of standards is one that teachers wrestle with every day in an effort to strike the right balance. Set the bar too high, and students will become discouraged. Set it too low, and they will not reach their highest potential. The development of standards is at minimum a two-stage process for most teachers. There are some things—acceptable classroom behavior, degree of divulgence about one's personal life, etc.—that will remain fairly uniform across classes and over time. But when it comes to determining what constitutes good work, acceptable effort, or adequate attendance, most teachers work on a case by case basis.

It is critical that teachers involve students in determining standards and expectations for classroom work. Without student commitment to and belief in the aims of classroom work, much effort will be wasted, and it is likely that some students, feeling that their needs are being neglected or overlooked, will stop attending. Many adult learners have logged long hours in classrooms that did not meet their needs, with teachers who could or would not create a classroom environment that fostered learning. Perhaps the most critical part of determining standards and expectations lies in respecting what adult learners bring to the classroom, and demanding that they show the same kind of respect to themselves and each other that they would like to have from you.

Staff and students of Adult Learning Programs engage in a variety of activities in the classroom to enhance learning.

Not everyone learns the same things in the same way. Not all students need to learn the same material, even when they are in the same class. And not all students will understand new material at the same pace. Given these facts, the suggestion to vary one's classroom activities would seem obvious, but too often, even the best teachers can fall into habitual ways of teaching certain topics that don't work for all of their students.

The reliance on just a few primary strategies for instruction is not simply a matter of teacher comfort, however. For many adult learners, "school" has come to mean a specific group of activities that remind them of the kinds of work they did as K-12 students. When teachers challenge those notions and vary the structure of the learning environment, students may feel lost, and struggle. Worksheets, math problem sets, and vocabulary lists are all useful tools, and most of us have taken advantage of them. But it's important for our students that we stretch the idea of what it means to learn.

As stated previously, many students come to adult education programs with low self-esteem concerning their academic skills and abilities. Some of them feel that they are incapable of learning, or that they are severely limited in their ability to learn. For these students, it is especially important that we make connections between classroom learning and the kinds of informal learning that all of us experience on a regular basis. Class discussions, videos, newspaper articles, and other materials will help learners to see that they have learning skills already in place that will help them to meet their new academic goals, and face the challenges of the classroom with confidence.

Staff and students of Adult Learning Programs make connections between education, home, work, and community.

As suggested earlier in our discussion, most adult learners value education not only for itself, but for the impact it can have in the various roles of their lives. The decision to earn a high school credential or learn to speak, read and write English better is usually made with other, more concrete objectives in mind.

Teachers in adult education programs help their students by pointing out the ways in which specific activities and expectations can help them meet their goals. Learning to talk about a movie enhances oral communication skills; coming to class on time gets them into a habit of punctuality that will be valuable to employers; learning about the library may help them to assist a child with a homework assignment. Often, student resistance to an assignment or suggestion is the result of not seeing its relationship to stated goals.

Of course, not every activity will have a clear link to every goal that every student works toward. It is a fact of teaching that much of the effect of classroom learning may not be immediately apparent. Sometimes, we cannot move directly toward our goals; we need to choose a more roundabout route in order to fully understand and appreciate the skill or concept or content we hope to master. When the relationship between teachers and

students is strong, and the classroom climate is a trusting one, teachers can take risks, and students can have confidence that even if the benefit is not immediately apparent, the activity has value for their learning.

Linking education with the larger world also means that teachers are willing to talk about the issues that arise in the course of students' day to day lives. The things that happen to students at home, at work, or out in the community are a rich source of classroom discussion, and can suggest a variety of materials and strategies that help teachers build academic skills while helping students to feel more confident about and comfortable in their daily responsibilities and challenges.

Staff and students of Adult Learning Programs base instruction and assessment on inquiry involving investigation, critical thinking, problem solving, and reflection.

Much of traditional, K-12 education relies on a model of instruction where students are passive recipients of learning—the teacher teaches, and if the students pay attention, do as they're told, and complete the work assigned to them, they will be rewarded with good grades. This model has been unsuccessful for many of the learners in adult education. There will inevitably be times when direct, teacher-driven instruction is necessary, but it should not be the only, or even the primary, model for classroom learning.

Despite their often low self-esteem about their aptitude for learning, most adult learners have dealt with enormous obstacles and challenges. It is almost impossible for us to understand what it is like to try to negotiate the world without skills and knowledge that many of us take for granted, but that is what our students have done. They are resilient and resourceful, or they would not have survived. A model of instruction which takes advantage of their strengths will not only improve their academic skills more quickly and more effectively, but will also help them to see how the skills they've used to negotiate their home, work and community challenges translate to the classroom.

An inquiry model of curriculum is not one, uniform thing; it looks different in different classrooms, and is adapted to meet a variety of needs. What all inquiry-based instruction has in common is a refusal to take things for granted, whether they are facts, opinions, or ideas. Instead, this kind of instruction asks us to examine, reflect, compare, and evaluate the information that we share in the classroom. In many ways, the inquiry model is a model of thoughtfulness. We are asking students to look closely at the world around them, in order to see new things, or see old things in a new way.

Staff and students of Adult Learning Programs see assessment as a tool to provide evidence of progress and assist students in becoming self-directed, lifelong learners.

There are two basic categories of assessment, formative and summative. Formative assessment allows us to plan next steps, evaluate learning and instruction, and give learners feedback about their progress. Most of the assessment in adult education can and should be of this sort. Unfortunately, in adult education as in traditional K-12 settings, the emphasis tends to fall on summative assessments. Did the students test into the next level, or pass the

GED? These are important tests and important moments in students' lives, but they do little to help adult learners develop a sense of control over their learning, or to interest them in learning as a lifelong process.

If we want students to see learning as an ongoing, lifelong commitment, we need to spend more time assessing and responding to small steps and incremental progress, and less time focusing on the big tests. This does not mean that teachers need to incorporate more testing of a less-critical sort into their curricula; any assignment, thoughtfully evaluated, can be used to help students begin to gauge and evaluate their progress. If we are able to help students get into the habit of evaluating the majority of their work in this way, we are likely to see improvements in the overall quality of that work.

Too often, students and teachers alike see the work that prepares people for big, formal assessments as simply the means to an end, without inherent value. When classroom activities and homework are treated as steps on the way to a test, much of their significance and value for students is lost. And when we fail to value those individual assignments, it becomes more and more difficult to ask students to do things that do not, at first glance, appear to prepare them, directly, for a test.

Consider the work of teachers. The best teachers are those who constantly learn more about the subjects they teach, about topics that interest them, about curriculum planning, instructional design, and all the other elements of classroom instruction. Most of us will not earn more money for doing our jobs well than we would for doing them in a merely adequate fashion, but our commitment to the profession, and to ourselves as professionals, keeps us in pursuit of learning. It is this steady pursuit of improvement, enjoyable and rewarding in itself, that the best teachers inspire in their students.

Staff and students of Adult Learning Programs recognize and respect diversity in students' backgrounds, needs, and goals.

The diversity of learners in adult education programs spans the breadth of our society, with a richness that is both invigorating and sometimes overwhelming. Most instructors routinely face classes where the real difference in skills may vary by three or four grade levels, where the students' understanding of English ranges from the ability to speak a few words to the level of mastery involved in filling out an application form. Additionally, many adult learners bring with them histories of substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, mental illness, or the trauma of having lived in a war zone. Finally, not all students in any given class will share the same goals, which will affect their response to the different activities presented.

It is critical that instructors recognize this diversity, and respect the right of these adults to make their own choices, working toward the goals that seem important to them at their stage of life. We need not agree with students about their choices; often, a discussion of why we disagree can prove to be a valuable teachable moment. But we must be willing to let the learners in our classrooms make their own choices. Although their academic skills

may be limited, they are adults, and thus entitled to the same autonomy and freedom of choice we would expect for ourselves.

Respecting people’s choices also means advising them honestly when their choices seem to lead away from their stated goals. Respect does not mean that we are willing to take an “anything goes” attitude; respecting our students places upon us the responsibility for honesty and straightforwardness. And while we hope to provide a climate that allows for free expression, no one individual should be allowed, through his or her behavior, to undermine the learning of others. Some discomfort and tension may lead to fruitful learning, but too much will create an atmosphere in which learning cannot take place.

Perhaps the best questions for teachers to ask themselves when confronted with a difficult situation are: How would I want to be treated in this situation? and How would I want my friends or family to be treated? If we can answer these questions honestly, and model our behavior after the responses we give, we may not always make the right choices, but we will make choices we can be comfortable with over time.

How to Use the Curriculum Frameworks

The various Curriculum Frameworks have been designed not to provide a blueprint of curriculum, but a map describing the territory that curriculum should cover. As a result, they are flexible documents that can serve as a foundation for a variety of curriculum development, instructional design, and staff training initiatives. In this chapter we will look at some of these ways of using the Frameworks.

Curriculum Development

Obviously, the primary use of the Frameworks for most programs will be in curriculum development. For this purpose, the most important element of the chosen Framework will be the *Strands*. This is the element that suggests the shape of the subject, areas of emphasis, and the scope or breadth of coverage for purposes of adult education. It is possible for teachers to work individually on the development of subject-specific curriculum for their classes, but the process will be richer, and of greater benefit to students, if teachers have some opportunities to work with each other, defining the ways that they hope to work with a subject in their classrooms.

The Strands of each Framework are necessarily broad, and designed to encompass a wide variety of skills, content, and materials. Curriculum planning with the Framework should address the choice of materials, the specific skills teachers wish to address, and the concepts or content that students are expected to learn within this subject area. Curriculum planning is not instructional design; at this point in the process, the what and why of curriculum are far more important than the how and when. If the Frameworks provide a map, then this process helps teachers to fill in the details of how that map should look for their students.

Instructional Planning and Design

After defining the elements of curriculum, instructors will begin to plan for implementation. In this activity, the most useful element of the Framework will be the *Standards*. If the Strands tell us what is important, the Standards tell us how we will know when students have grasped those concepts or mastered those skills. Strands are subject-centered; Standards are student-centered.

In planning instruction with the Standards, teachers may wish to address a target group of standards over the course of a unit, or they may try to find ways to incorporate standards from more than one Framework into a thematic, interdisciplinary unit. There is no one best way to approach this, because students, teachers, and classes differ. The only consistent rule is that the structure and format of lessons should meet the needs of the students in the class in the most effective manner possible. Here again, it is helpful for teachers to spend some time discussing their plans with each other and with their students. While each teacher may work differently, students who move from one class to another need to know that the work of their new class is in some way building on what they have

done before. It may be as simple as constructing a common statement of goals for students that each teacher uses and interprets differently.

Materials Selection

Just as curriculum planning and instructional design are different, the planning of instruction and the selection of materials are two different processes. If the goal of a lesson is the improvement of students' reading comprehension, a wide variety of materials may serve the purpose. The selection of materials should take into consideration the teacher's style, the students' needs and interests, and the available resources of a program.

Although none of the Frameworks require the use of a specific set of materials, most of them do include a bibliography of materials that teachers have found particularly effective and useful for addressing that content and helping students to meet those standards. The selection of materials is dependent on the knowledge, creativity and resourcefulness of individual teachers.

While there are no materials requirements included in any of the Frameworks, it is generally accepted that some materials are better suited than others to the kind of instruction suggested in the Guiding Principles. For instance, it is generally considered helpful for students to use a variety of real-world materials in the classroom. Using newspapers, videos, magazines, forms and documents in general circulation, teachers help students connect their classroom work with the world of home, work and community. Using open-ended questions and materials that require students to draw their own conclusions or develop strategies for problem-solving will enhance the flexibility and transferability of the skills they learn in the classroom to other situations, and will help students develop the habit of reflecting on and evaluating their choices.

Repetition, memorization, and test-taking all have a place in the adult education classroom. Most of us are glad that we know the multiplication tables, or that our knowledge of grammar allows us to write without constantly second-guessing our structural choices. Worksheets that address important, basic rules and operations can help increase student confidence and reinforce learning. And given that many students see the GED as their primary goal, it is important that we help them prepare to take multiple-choice tests with a minimum of anxiety and discomfort.

Ultimately, the materials teachers select should present a balanced approach to learning through a variety of different strategies. No one learning approach will work for all students at all times, and it's important that we recognize and plan for difference. Not all teachers are equally comfortable with all approaches, but most teachers are quite capable of finding ways to provide a variety of materials that will appeal to students.

Evaluation and Assessment

Both Strands and Standards can help teachers and programs design meaningful, effective ways of evaluating and assessing performance for both teachers and students.

These parts of the Frameworks show teachers what's important within a discipline, and what results for students would indicate that important skills, concepts and content have been mastered. Therefore, using these elements to evaluate program design and lesson planning, and to assess student progress, teachers can develop tools that allow for consistent, thoughtful, formative assessment at the same time that they gather information that will allow them to refine and enhance their curriculum and instructional choices.

As a tool for student assessment, the Frameworks provide Learning Standards that give teachers and students clear, specific objectives to work toward. Teachers can evaluate class assignments in light of specific standards, or design evaluation materials that target skills they want to teach. Teachers who share the Standards with students and ask for their input are further enhancing their ability to engage in ongoing assessment by making students active partners in the learning process.

In terms of class, curriculum, or program assessment, the Strands and Standards allow teachers and administrators to look at how well classroom activities match teachers' stated goals for their classes. The broad scope of the Strands means that a wide variety of instructional strategies and materials can be used to meet similar objectives, so teachers can exercise great discretion while still working with each other toward a common goal. As teachers identify the Standards they want their students to meet, programs can find or create evaluation tools that will provide appropriate feedback.

Assessment and evaluation are both complex and challenging processes, and using the Frameworks to refine those processes will take time and effort on the part of teachers and program coordinators. It is unlikely that first attempts will yield perfect results; this is an area of curricular and instructional design that usually requires extensive experimentation. However, no effort at evaluation fails if it yields information that can be used to further improve student performance or classroom instruction.

Professional Development

Although they are not meant to serve as curriculum textbooks per se, the individual Curriculum Frameworks are rich resources for professional development. By providing broad outlines of the disciplines, specific skills, concepts and content needed to help students achieve mastery, suggestions for implementation (through case studies and Guiding Principles), and extensive bibliographies, each Framework has the potential to serve as the basis for an extended course of professional development, for individual teachers or program faculty as a group.

Because teachers come to adult education with enormously diverse backgrounds, they have far less knowledge in common than their K-12 counterparts. This variety contributes to the strength of the field, but it also means that we can take very little for granted. As a result, it is important that the field have some way of creating common knowledge, and developing, if not similar programs, programs that agree on the kinds of things that adult learners need to know. The Frameworks are an attempt to provide this

kind of common ground, but they will only achieve their full effectiveness if they are broadly disseminated and widely used.

As professional development tools, the Frameworks open up a discussion about the core values of adult education—what are we doing, and why? And who benefits? They provide a way of organizing content and suggesting outcomes. Within their bibliographies are materials that can further extend our understanding of specific subjects, of teaching strategies, and of approaches to content. They do not require that we all agree about all facets of education, but they provide us with a frame of reference and a vocabulary that will make our discussions of these issues more meaningful.

How the Common Chapters Relate to Other Standards

Adult educators constantly strive to connect the work they do in the classroom with their students' real-life needs and concerns. Likewise, the developers of the various ABE Curriculum Frameworks have worked hard to insure that these documents connect to other kinds of standards with which adult educators and their learners must contend. Perhaps the best known of these other standards is the GED exam, since a large percentage of adult learners will eventually take that test. However, a number of other standards also affect the policies shaping adult education programs. In this chapter we will examine a number of specific local, state and national standards, and their relationship to the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks.

Massachusetts K-12 Curriculum Frameworks

The K-12 Curriculum Frameworks are one of the many results of the 1993 Education Reform Act, and have been designed to give teachers across the state a blueprint for determining what essential knowledge, skills, and content should be covered in each subject throughout the years of public school education. Currently, Massachusetts has K-12 Frameworks for:

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- History and Social Sciences
- Arts
- Comprehensive Health
- Foreign Language

There are many common elements shared by the K-12 and ABE Frameworks, and a number of critical differences. Obviously, both sets of documents have been written to assist teachers, to bring consistency to instruction across the state, and to let the public see what standards have been agreed upon for the different disciplines. However, the ABE Frameworks are not simply "adult versions" of the K-12 documents, as the following important points will demonstrate.

ABE Frameworks are focused primarily on skills acquired, rather than content covered. Given the significant discrepancies among programs and students in adult education, it would be almost impossible to dictate a list of books or materials to be used in a given subject area, at a specific level. Instead, the ABE Frameworks address their respective disciplines in terms of the skills they require, the habits of mind that support them, and the levels of proficiency adult learners can be expected to possess at different SPLs or GLEs.

ABE Frameworks recognize the kinds of skill variations presented by adult learners. Although we use terms like "4th-grade level" to describe the skills of adult learners, practitioners in the field are well aware of the differences between an eight year-old elementary school student

and a thirty-six year-old single mother with such skills. The GLEs and SPLs yielded by some kinds of assessments tell only part of the story of an adult learner's skill array. A learner may speak fluently, with a large vocabulary, but falter with written language. Conversely, some learners may demonstrate excellent command of written English, but struggle to master the skills of speaking and listening. Additionally, the knowledge base and life experience of adult learners have enormous impact on both their capacity for and interest in learning, and must be considered when planning instruction.

In practical terms, this means that the ABE Frameworks are, for the most part, less sequentially-oriented than the K-12, and assume a broad range of educational backgrounds among students. The developers of the ABE Frameworks recognize that a learner's grasp of skills does not necessarily indicate a comparable breadth of knowledge in a given subject area, and have provided strategies for teachers to address this challenge.

Equipped for the Future (EFF)

Equipped for the Future is an initiative of the National Institute for Literacy, begun in 1994 in response to National Educational Goal 6 (of Goals 2000):

> By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. (Stein, 1995)

EFF conceptualizes the literacy needs of adults in terms of their life roles, as family members, community members/citizens, and workers, and in terms of the need to develop lifelong learning skills. The EFF framework is organized into four categories of skills—Communication, Decision-Making, Interpersonal, and Lifelong Learning—and within those four domains, lists 16 Generative Skills adults should possess.

While the ABE Curriculum Frameworks have not been written as a direct response to the EFF Framework, there are clear areas of commonality among them. Both EFF and the Massachusetts Frameworks have clearly identified both the skills adults need and the ways in which they will use those skills. Both frameworks, too, address the issue of skill-building in greater depth than they address content coverage.

In many ways, the EFF can be seen as a larger, umbrella framework within which the individual ABE Curriculum Frameworks share a variety of common references, goals, and methods. The most recent EFF publication, *Equipped for the Future Content Standards* (January 2000), provides details lists of indicators to help teachers assess learner performance. Many of these indicators are also appropriate tools for evaluating performance in one or more of the ABE Frameworks.

GED and Adult Diploma Programs

A large majority of adult learners list the acquisition of a high school credential as their primary reason for seeking an education program. Program staff would be remiss if

they adopted a curriculum that did not help their adult learners to reach that goal. However, we also know that preparing for an exam or evaluation is not the same thing as acquiring useful skills. Many teachers struggle to find a balance between test-preparation activities and the kinds of lessons that will give learners an opportunity to develop their skills in broader, more holistic ways.

One of the challenges in implementing the ABE Frameworks has been this conflict between skill-building and test-preparation. Although the Frameworks address the same kinds of content that students are expected to know for the GED exam, the presentation of that material does not always match what students have seen in workbooks and on practice tests. However, upcoming changes in the GED exam are likely to make the Frameworks an essential tool for teachers.

The new GED exam will rely less on multiple-choice questions, and more on open-ended, short essay or short answer formats. Students will be expected to have a broader repertoire of problem-solving skills, and a higher level of reading comprehension. These are all skills and proficiencies addressed by the various ABE Curriculum Frameworks. Because the emphasis of the Frameworks rests in the acquisition of broad, transferable skills, working with the strands and standards of each subject area will help teachers to identify the kinds of learning most essential for students.

Adult diploma programs are, paradoxically, in the best and worst of positions for integrating the Frameworks into their curricula. As most programs are affiliated with their local school districts, they can expect at least an awareness of what Frameworks are and how they might be implemented on the part of administrators. However, there is some question at this time as to whether school districts that offer adult diploma programs will institute a requirement that learners pass the MCAS in order to graduate. If this is the case, instructors may need to find ways to incorporate elements of the ABE Frameworks, with their emphasis on adult learning needs and models, and the K-12 Frameworks, in order to address specific kinds of required content.

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

The MCAS, Massachusetts' statewide standardized testing system, is administered to public school students in grades 2, 4, 8, and 10. Beginning in the spring of 2001, 10th-graders will be required to achieve passing scores on the MCAS in order to graduate. The test covers English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and History and Social Sciences—the same subjects, in fact, as the GED.

The K-12 Frameworks have been designed to help teachers cover all of the necessary materials to not only give students solid grounding in the various subject areas, but also to give them the skills and knowledge to pass the MCAS exams. The alignment between the two is not perfect, but practitioners and school districts across the state are working to implement Frameworks in ways that enhance students' MCAS scores without spending inordinate amounts of time "teaching to the test."

The ABE Frameworks have not been so closely aligned with the MCAS requirements, primarily because the exam is not currently a requirement for adults pursuing a GED or diploma. It is possible that school districts that provide adult diploma programs may require MCAS testing as a condition of awarding diplomas in the future; however, no school district has implemented such a policy at this time.

Appendix A: Suggested Readings

Banner, James Jr., and Harold Cannon. (1997). *The Elements of Teaching.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Belenky, Mary, et al. (1986). *Women's Ways of Knowing.* New York, NY: BasicBooks.

Bempechat, Janine. (1998). *Against the Odds: How "At-Risk" Students Exceed Expectations.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Brown, Rexford G. (1993). *Schools of Thought*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Casarjian, Robin. (1995). *Houses of Healing.* Boston, MA: The Lionheart Foundation.

Coles, Robert. (1989). *The Call of Stories.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Connelly, F. Michael and Jean Clandinin. (1988). *Teachers as Curriculum Planners.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. (1997). *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Davidson, Howard S. (1995). *Schooling in a "Total Institution": Critical Perspectives on Prison Education.* Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Delpit, Lisa. (1995). *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom.* New York, NY: The New Press.

Denby, David. (1996). *Great Books.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Dodson, Lisa. (1998). *Don't Call Us Out of Name.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Freire, Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York, NY: Continuum.

Fried, Robert L. (1995). *The Passionate Teacher.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Fullan, Michael. (1994). *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Education Reform.* London: The Falmer Press.

Gardner, Howard. (1983). *Frames of Mind.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

_____. (1991). *The Unschooled Mind.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

_____. (1999). *The Disciplined Mind.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Goldberger, Nancy Rule, et al. (1996). *Knowledge, Difference, and Power.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Goleman, Daniel. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence.* New York, NY: Bantam Books.

_____. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence.* New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Groome, Thomas. (1998). *Educating for Life.* Thomas More.

Hirsch, E.D. (1989). *A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Irvine, Cindy. (1999). *Health and Literacy Compendium.* Boston, MA: World Education.

Kohl, Herbert. (1998). *The Discipline of Hope.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Kozol, Jonathan. (1985). *Illiterate America.* New York, NY: Plume.

_____. (1995). *Amazing Grace.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

_____. *Ordinary Resurrections.* (2000). New York, NY: Crown Publishers.

Langer, Ellen. (1997). *The Power of Mindful Learning.* Reading: Addison-Wesley.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sarah. (1999). *Respect.* Reading: Perseus Books.

Levoy, Gregg. (1997). *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life.* New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

Loeb, Paul Rogat. (1999). *Soul of a Citizen.* New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.

Maeroff, Gene I. (1998). *Altered Destinies.* New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.

Maher, Frances and Mary Kay T. Tetreault. (1994). *The Feminist Classroom.* New York, NY: BasicBooks.

Manguel, Roberto. (1996). *A History of Reading.* New York, NY: Penguin Books.

McKnight, John. (1995). *The Careless Society.* New York, NY: BasicBooks.

Meier, Deborah. (1995). *The Power of Their Ideas.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Nagel, Greta. (1994). *The Tao of Teaching.* New York, NY: Primus.

Palmer, Parker. (1998). *The Courage to Teach.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Prochaska, James, et al. (1994). *Changing for Good.* New York, NY: Avon Books.

Quindlen, Anna. (1998). *How Reading Changed My Life.* New York, NY: Library of Contemporary Thought.

Ravitch, Diane, ed. (1990). *The American Reader: Words That Moved A Nation.* New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Remen, Rachel Naomi. (1996). *Kitchen Table Wisdom.* New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Rodriguez, Richard. (1982). *Hunger of Memory.* New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Rose, Mike. (1989). *Lives on the Boundary.* New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Schwartz, Lynne Sharon (1997). *Ruined by Reading: A Life in Books.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Sergiovanni, Thomas. (1994). *Building Community in Schools.* Sand Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Schorr, Lisbeth B. (1997). *Common Purpose.* New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Sher, Barbara. (1994). *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was.* New York, NY: Dell Publishers.

Sizer, Theodore. (1992). *Horace's School.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Sizer, Theodore, and Nancy Faust Sizer. (1999). *The Students are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Smith, Deborahann. (1999). *Work with What You Have.* Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Stein, Sondra Gayle. (1995). *Equipped for the Future: A Customer-Driven Vision for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

_____. (2000). *Equipped for the Future Content Standards: What Adults Need to Know and Be Able to Do in the 21st Century.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

Toth, Susan. (1997). *Orphans of the Living.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Vella, Jane. (1994). *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Voss, Margaret. (1996). *Hidden Literacies.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Williams, Wendy M. (1996). *The Reluctant Reader: How to Get and Keep Kids Reading.* New York, NY: Warner Books.

Wilson, William Julius (1996). *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor.* New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Whitehead, Alfred North. (1929). *The Aims of Education.* New York, NY: The Free Press.

Woodward, Katherine, ed. (1999). *Alignment of State and National Standards.* Washington, DC: GED Testing Service.

Zinsser, William. (1988). *Writing to Learn.* New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Appendix B: Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks Strands

English Language Arts	History and Social Studies	Science and Technology/ Engineering	Mathematics and Numeracy	ESOL	Health
Reading	Cultures and Identities	Doing Science and Technology	Number Sense	Oral Communication	Perception and Attitude
Writing	Power, Authority, and Participation	Unifying Concepts in Science and Technology: Similarity and Diversity	Patterns, Functions and Algebra	Written Communication	Behavior and Change
Oral Communication	Production, Distribution, and Consumption	Unifying Concepts in Science and Technology: Order and Organization	Statistics and Probability	Language Structure and Mechanics	Prevention, Early Detection, and Maintenance
Critical Thinking	Systems	Unifying Concepts in Science and Technology: Systems	Geometry and Measurement	Intercultural Knowledge and Skills	Promotion and Advocacy
	Environments and Interdependence	Unifying Concepts in Science and Technology: Measurement, Magnitude and Models		Navigating Systems	Systems and Interdependence
	Continuity and Change	Unifying Concepts in Science and Technology: Patterns of Change		Developing Strategies and Resources for Learning	
	Conflict and Resolution	Unifying Concepts in Science and Technology: Predictability			
	Perspective and Interpretation	Using Science and Technology			

Appendix C: Content Framework for EFF Standards

In order to fulfill responsibilities as parents/family members, citizens/community members, and workers, adults must be able to:

MEET THESE 4 PURPOSES	ACCOMPLISH THESE COMMON ACTIVITIES	DEMONSTRATE THESE GENERATIVE SKILLS	UNDERSTAND AND BE ABLE TO USE THESE KNOWLEDGE DOMAINS
Access	Gather, Analyze, and Use Information	**Communication Skills**	How we Grow and Develop
To information so adults can orient themselves in the world	Manage Resources	Read with Understanding	How Groups and Teams Work
	Work Within the Big Picture	Convey Ideas in Writing	How Systems Work
	Work Together	Speak So Others Can Understand	Rights and Responsibilities
			Culture, Values, and Ethics
Voice	Provide Leadership	Listen Actively	
To be able to express ideas and opinions with the confidence they will be heard and taken into account	Guide and Support Others	Observe Critically	How the Past Shapes the World We Live In
	Seek Guidance and Support from Others	**Decision-Making Skills**	
	Develop and Express Sense of Self	Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate	
	Respect Others and Value Diversity	Solve Problems and Make Decisions	
Independent Action	Exercise Rights and Responsibilities	Plan	
To be able to solve problems and make decisions on one's own, acting independently, without having to rely on others	Create and Pursue Vision and Goals	**Interpersonal Skills**	
	Use Technology and Other Tools to Accomplish Goals	Cooperate with Others	
	Keep Pace with Change	Advocate and Influence	
		Resolve Conflict and Negotiate	
Bridge to the Future		Guide Others	
Learn how to learn so adults can keep up with the world as it changes		**Lifelong Learning Skills**	
		Take Responsibility for Learning	
		Reflect and Evaluate	
		Learn Through Research	
		Use Information and Communications Technology	

Appendix D: Internet Resources

The sheer volume of good and useful websites has become almost overwhelming. The list that follows is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather, to provide teachers and other program staff with a starting point for exploring topics relevant to their particular programs and students.

www.doe.mass.edu/acls : This is the homepage for the Adult and Community Learning Services Unit of the Massachusetts Department of Education.

www.nifl.gov : The homepage of the National Institute for Literacy, including LINCS and *Equipped for the Future.* Look here for information about a variety of policy-related listservs.

www.sabes.org : The homepage of Massachusetts' System for Adult Basic Education Support. This site has links to all of the regional SABES centers.

www.literacyvolunteers.org : The homepage of Literacy Volunteers of America.

www.bpl.org : Homepage of the Boston Public Library, including an online catalogue of materials available through interlibrary loan.

www.ed.gov : The website of the US Department of Education.

www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/rbeard/diction.html : Access to foreign language dictionaries.

www.eslcafe.com : Includes an ESOL help center, and links to other ESOL sites.

litserver.literacy.upenn.edu : Homepage of the National Center for Adult Literacy.

www.newspapers.com : Listing of national and international newspapers.

www.ins.usdoj.gov : Homepage of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service.

www.wgbh.org/wgbh/learn/index.html : The WGBH website for adult educators and learners, including a wide array of links to other pertinent sites.

www.pbs.org/adultlearning/literacy : The PBS LiteracyLink website, including learning activities and resources for adult learners.

www.cdc.gov : Homepage of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

www.thinkshop.edu/al : Website for adult educators, including material on ABE, ESOL, workplace education, and other, more general information and links.

hugse1.harvard.edu/~ncsall/ : Homepage of the National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning, based at Harvard University.

www.edc.org/ALMA : Homepage of the Adult Literacy Media Alliance.

www.otan.dni.us/cdlp/cc/home.html : Homepage of the Crossroads Café, designed for ESOL learners.

www.weather.com : Homepage of The Weather Channel, with good maps and climate information.

www.pde.psu.edu/able/success.html : Success stories of adult learners from Partners for Progress, Pennsylvania.

easternlincs.worlded.org/health/special.htm : A Health and Literacy compendium.

Appendix E: The Massachusetts Common Core of Learning

The Massachusetts Common Core of Learning supports all Department of Education curriculum development efforts, including both K-12 and Adult Basic Education. To quote from the Massachusetts Department of Education website, "The Education Reform Act of 1993 called for statewide curriculum frameworks and learning standards for all students in all core academic subjects. During the first year of Education Reform [1994], the Common Core of Learning was developed to identify the broad educational goals for all students."

By identifying "what students should know and be able to do," the purpose of the Common Core of Learning is the first step in the process of education reform. It was followed by the development of state curriculum frameworks that contain academic content standards that establish a basis for objective measurement. The next step is the development of an assessment system to evaluate student performance and measure the success of schools and ABE programs.

The Common Core of Learning focuses on three main areas: Thinking and Communicating, Gaining and Applying Knowledge, and Working and Contributing.

Thinking and Communicating

All students should:
Read, Write and Communicate Effectively

- Read and listen critically for information, understanding, and enjoyment.
- Write and speak clearly, factually, persuasively and creatively in standard English.
- Distinguish fact from opinion, identify stereotyping and recognize bias.
- Read, write, and converse in at least one language in addition to English.

Use Mathematics, the Arts, Computers and Other Technologies Effectively

- Apply mathematical skills to interpret information and solve problems.
- Use the arts to explore and express ideas, feelings and beliefs.
- Use computers and other technologies to obtain, organize and communicate information and to solve problems.

Define, Analyze, and Solve Complex Problems

- Make careful observations and ask pertinent questions.
- Seek, select, organize and present information from a variety of sources.
- Analyze, interpret and evaluate information.
- Make reasoned inferences and construct logical arguments.
- Develop, test and evaluate possible solutions.
- Develop and present conclusions through speaking, writing, artistic and other means of expression.

Gaining and Applying Knowledge

All students should:
Acquire, Integrate and Apply Essential Knowledge

Literature and Language

- Read a rich variety of literary works including fiction, poetry, drama and nonfiction from different time periods and cultures, relating them to human aspirations and life experiences.
- Analyze implications of literary works, and communicate them through speaking, writing, artistic and other means of expression.
- Know and understand the development and structure of English and other languages and how learning another language fosters appreciation of peoples and cultures.

Mathematics, Science, and Technology

- Know and understand major mathematical concepts such as measurement, estimation, quantity, probability and statistics; and explore the relationship of mathematics to other areas of knowledge.
- Recognize and use patterns, construct mathematical models, represent and reason about quantities and shapes, draw accurate conclusions from data, and solve, justify and communicate solutions to problems.

- Apply the fundamental principles of the life sciences, physical sciences, earth/space sciences and the science of technology to analyze problems and relate them to human concerns and life experiences.

- Investigate and demonstrate methods of scientific inquiry and experimentation.

Social Studies, History and Geography

- Know and make connections among important historical events, themes, and issues; recognize the role the past has played in shaping the present; and understand the process by which individuals and groups develop and work within political, social, economic, cultural and geographic contexts.

- Synthesize and communicate information about important events and fundamental concepts in Massachusetts, United States and world history, including historical documents such as the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, Federalist Papers, and the Gettysburg Address.

- Know important information regarding the physical environment and understand concepts such as location and place, critical features of a region, demographic trends and patterns, and the relationship between people and the environment.

Visual and Performing Arts

- Know and understand the nature of the creative process, the characteristics of visual art, music, dance and theatre, and their importance in shaping and reflecting historical and cultural heritage.

- Analyze and make informed judgments regarding the arts.

- Develop skills and participate in the arts for personal growth and enjoyment.

Health

- Know basic concepts of human development, mental health, sexuality, parenting, physical education and fitness, nutrition and disease prevention, and understand the implications of health habits for self and society.

- Make informed and responsible judgments regarding personal health, including avoidance of violence, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

- Develop skills and participate in physical activities for personal growth, fitness, and enjoyment.

Working and Contributing

All students should:
Study and Work Effectively

- Set goals and achieve them by organizing time, work space, and resources effectively.
- Monitor progress and learn from both successes and mistakes.
- Manage money, balance competing priorities and interests, and allocate time among study, work, and recreation.
- Work both independently and in groups.
- Work hard, persevere and act with integrity.

Demonstrate Personal, Social and Civic Responsibility

- Accept responsibility for one's own behavior and actions.
- Know career options and the academic and occupational requirements needed for employment and economic independence.
- Treat others with respect and understand similarities and differences among people.
- Learn to resolve disagreements, reduce conflict and prevent violence.
- Participate in meaningful community and/or school activities.
- Understand the individual's rights, responsibilities, and role in the community, state and nation.
- Understand how the principles of democracy, equality, freedom, law and justice evolve and work in society.
- Analyze, develop, and act on informed opinions about current economic, environmental, political and social issues affecting Massachusetts, the United States and the world.