

Policy Statement 80

This We Believe About Rigor in Business Education

Today's students face a complex, rapidly changing work environment requiring high-level content knowledge and skills in technology, communication, and problem solving. Students must be provided with a rigorous program of study to prepare them for the competitiveness of the global business environment and for further educational study. Business education can and should provide today's students with the academic rigor and relevance needed for the world of work.

Definition of Rigor

Academic rigor challenges all students to meet high standards and high expectations while providing the support necessary for success. A rigorous business curriculum not only meets but also exceeds local, state, and national standards. An exemplary business education curriculum integrates academic content by building a solid knowledge base in business and economics and by requiring students to demonstrate excellence in literacy, numeracy, and technical skills in a business context. Rigor in business education affects all stakeholders including students, parents, teachers, administrators, employers, and other community members.

Business and community leaders stress the critical need for educational rigor to prepare students for success in the global workplace. At the national level the Partnership for 21st Century Skills reform initiative and Perkins legislation emphasize the importance of rigor in the secondary and postsecondary curriculum and its impact on the workforce and ultimately on the economy. **We believe that** the business education curriculum can and should provide this rigor as an integral part of school reform initiatives.

Rigor in the Curriculum

The knowledge economy of the 21st century demands that workers possess information and communication technology skills. An exemplary standards-based business curriculum addresses these essential skills including problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication. Rigorous courses engage students and challenge them to become self-directed, independent learners, as well as collaborative team members. Higher order thinking skills are developed through problem-based learning activities. For example, creating a business plan requires students to define a need, conduct market research, analyze data, and generate a solution for a potential enterprise.

We believe that rigor is needed in all business education courses. At the high school level, some examples of rigor in a business education program of study include honors, advanced placement, dual credit, and international baccalaureate courses. As students have become more technologically literate, courses are being offered earlier in programs of study. For example, some courses previously taught at the postsecondary level are now taught at the high school level. As teachers react to political, societal, philosophical, technological, and economic changes in the world, they must be challenged to set higher benchmarks for students.

Rigor in Instruction

We believe that rigorous curriculum requires rigorous instruction delivered by dedicated, competent, and fully credentialed teachers who continually update their knowledge and skills. Business teachers who implement rigorous instruction articulate expectations and challenge students to maximize their potential. One way for teachers to challenge students is to pose essential questions that elicit creative and thoughtful student responses. Highly proficient, dynamic teachers facilitate the learning process through differentiated instruction to meet the needs of each student.

Instructional delivery methods that provide students with opportunities for more in-depth application of rigorous classroom curriculum include the following:

- work-based learning
- co-curricular career and technical student organizations
- online instruction
- interdisciplinary instruction
- inquiry-based instruction
- project-based experiences
- student-centered activities

We believe that business teachers must continually strive to integrate innovative teaching strategies that actively engage students. Teachers who challenge students through application of the rigorous content facilitate learning and empower students to reach their highest potential. Reflective practice enables teachers to improve instructional delivery.

Rigor in Assessment

Rigorous instruction requires rigorous assessment that carefully delineates between levels of performance criteria. The degree of rigor is reflected in expectations of the performance assessment. Rigorous assessments should be aligned with curriculum standards. Qualitative statements in the scoring guide encourage students to achieve high levels of performance. Therefore, prior to actual performance, students must be given scoring guides that clearly communicate expectations. Completed scoring guides returned to students provide constructive feedback about their performance.

Business courses that prepare students to attain industry-recognized credentials also demonstrate rigorous assessment. The credentials verify that the student has achieved a nationally recognized level of accomplishment for which college credit may be granted.

Conclusion

We believe that rigor should be reflected in all dimensions of business education including curriculum, instruction, and assessment. A rigorous business education program of study should prepare students to be globally competitive in an ever-changing world. The knowledge and skills that are demanded in the global workplace of the 21st century must continue to be integrated throughout business education programs.