



Thoughts on Standards

Standards and assessment are at the forefront of the current educational landscape. Challenge Based Learning is a flexible approach to teaching and learning that allows for all standards to be integrated into the experience. The question is not whether standards are considered but how, when, by whom, and for what purpose. The following quotes explore the role of standards within the Challenge Based Learning experience and are provided to stimulate discussion.

As a teacher, CBL allows me to cover more standards in less time. In addition, my students get to experience the standards in a real-world setting. The familiar context of the naturally interconnected world lets students make meaning that is relevant to their lives. I have found that this is much more difficult to accomplish with isolated lessons. From a standards perspective, the CBL model lets me cover more standards in a more meaningful way.

Paul Devoto
Apple Distinguished Educator

When implementing our first CBL lessons, we took a different approach in regards to how to address our state and local standards and benchmarks in the different subject areas. We just conducted our unit and then analyzed the unit to see which state and local standards were covered. We were amazed at the variety of standards that were covered by our CBL units, not only in the subject area that conducted the units, but other curricular areas also. The district administrators were pleasantly surprised by this discovery.

Bob Lee
Apple Distinguished Educator

Traditionally, the teacher identifies and creates lessons to address the standards. This is a top-down experience. The burden is on the teacher—regardless if the students know it or learn it. There's no buy-in from the students to connect with the standards. Another approach is to present a big idea to the students like: healthcare. Create an essential question like, how does the healthcare crisis affect me and my community? The challenge is to improve healthcare in our community. With this context, students are asked to identify standards not only in their immediate course of study, but what standards from their other classes can be addressed and met.

Start out by helping the students understand what the standards are and help them to see them as critical ingredients to the journey of learning and NOT make them out to be the journey. Have them read them, reword them, and make connections to what they are studying. Post them on a blog, wiki, or shared document for future use and reference. Collect this data via text, audio, or video along the way. Don't wait until the end to collect this valuable and empirical evidence that YOU ARE COVERING THE STANDARDS.

This process of locating the appropriate standards can be part of the guided questions and activities. Giving the students the opportunity to be involved in the planning is key to CONNECTING them to the learning goals and process. In the end, this makes so much more sense to everyone involved.

Marco Torres
Apple Distinguished Educator

Through the CBL process we cannot only meet standards for various math topics, but make real-world connections so students are actually extending their understanding and exceeding the standard to a performance level. CBL in the math classroom can be challenging but once teachers see students internalize and apply the mathematics rather than listen and repeat, they will see that standards are not only addressed but mastered.

Julie Garcia
Apple Distinguished Educator

Often educators express concern regarding utilizing the CBL model and meeting the standards expected by their institutions. My response and advice is that if the teacher guides the project and facilitates the learning around topics that are embedded in their curriculum (and in the standards), the standards can and will be met. In fact, because students are so engaged in this authentic learning strategy, they often learn so much more. And, because the learning is meaningful and applicable in the “real world,” they gain a deeper understanding of the content. By developing the big idea and essential questions in ways that match the curriculum standards, CBL absolutely is an effective and extremely successful instructional strategy.

Julene Reed
Apple Distinguished Educator

Since working with Challenge Based Learning with teachers and students, I have witnessed students go above and beyond the set of expectations teachers have set for them, time and time again. This framework in action demonstrates students far exceed the status quo due to them having an ownership in the learning process. When teachers take the time to reflect on the amount of erudition occurring during CBL, they will notice that they set the new standard of learning—24/7/365.

Holly Ludgate
Full Sail University

Challenge Based Learning is the easiest and best way for students to meet and exceed the standards. Challenge Based Learning allows me to align the standards with real-world projects that my students are naturally interested in and love to create.

John Gulick
Apple Distinguished Educator

I used a “democracy” challenge with my Advanced Placement course in U.S. Government and Politics. In order for certification by the College Board as an official AP course, a teacher must submit a detailed syllabus, demonstrating that specific course content will be covered. Our CBL process allowed us to meet two important benchmarks—“Foundations of American Government” and “Voting Behavior.” The depth of learning achieved in these areas was outstanding. This level of understanding translates extremely well to the short response section of the AP exam. Over half of the class ultimately received the top score of “5” from the College Board, and I am confident that CBL contributed to their success rate.

Larry Baker
Apple Distinguished Educator