

Compacting Curriculum for High Potential and Gifted Students using Renzulli Learning

This very brief guide enables you to learn how to identify students for compacting who have already mastered some objectives or outcomes of a unit or segment of instruction that is about to be taught. To use the compacting system, teachers should consider which students have the potential to master new material at a faster than normal pace; knowing one's students is, of course, the best way to begin the assessment process. Scores on previous tests, completed assignments, and classroom participation are the best ways of identifying highly likely candidates for compacting. Standardized achievement tests can serve as a good general screen for this step because they allow us to list the names of all students who are scoring one or more years above grade level in particular subject areas.

Being a candidate for compacting does not necessarily mean that a student knows the material under consideration. Therefore, the second step of identifying candidates consists of finding or developing appropriate tests or other assessment techniques that can be used to evaluate specific learning outcomes. Unit pretests, or end-of-unit tests that can be administered as pretests, are appropriate for this task, especially when it comes to the assessment of basic skills. An analysis of pretest results enables the teacher to document proficiency in specific skills, and to select instructional activities or practice material necessary to bring the student up to a high level on any skill that may need some additional reinforcement.

The process is slightly modified for compacting content areas that are not as easily assessed as basic skills, and for students who have not mastered the material, but are judged to be candidates for more rapid coverage. First, students should have an understanding of the goals and procedures of compacting, including the nature of the replacement process. These procedures might consist of answering questions based on the chapters, writing an essay, or

taking the standard end-of-unit test. The amount of time for completion of the unit should be specified, and procedures such as periodic progress reports or log entries for teacher review should be agreed upon. Of course, an examination of potential acceleration and/or enrichment replacement activities should be a part of this discussion.

Another alternative is to assess or pretest all students in a class when a new unit or topic is introduced; although this may seem like more work for the teacher, it provides the opportunity for all students to demonstrate their strengths or previous mastery in a given area. Using a matrix of learning objectives and standards, teachers can fill in test results and establish small, flexible, and temporary groups for skill instruction and replacement activities.

Providing acceleration and enrichment options. The final phase of the compacting process can be one of the most exciting aspects of teaching because it is based on cooperative decision-making and creativity on the parts of both teachers and students. This is where Renzulli Learning can be the most helpful. All of our resources can be used for replacement materials for students whose curriculum can be compacted. These materials may include self-directed learning activities, instructional materials that focus on particular thinking skills, and a variety of individual and group project oriented activities that are designed to promote hands-on research and investigative skills. The time made available through compacting provides opportunities for exciting learning experiences in Renzulli Learning and it can be done in just a few minutes, by searching the Renzulli Learning data base, or just enabling students to use the materials selected for them. Alternative activities should reflect an appropriate level of challenge and rigor that is commensurate with the student's abilities and interests.

The best way to get an overview of the curriculum compacting process is view the 'The Compactor', form included on our teacher site in Renzulli Learning. This form serves as both an organizational and record keeping tool. Teachers can fill out one form per student, or one form for a group of students with similar curricular strengths. Completed Compactors should be

stored on line or printed out and kept in students' academic files, and updated on a regular basis. The form can be sent to parents and principals, as well. The Compactor is divided into three sections:

- The first column should include information on learning objectives and student strengths in those areas. Teachers should list the objectives for a particular unit of study, followed by data on students' proficiency in those objectives, including test scores, behavioral profiles and past academic records.
- In the second column, teachers should detail the assessment tools they select, along with test results. The pretest instruments can be formal measures, such as pencil and paper tests, or informal measures, such as performance assessments based on observations of class participation and written assignments. Specificity is extremely important; recording an overall score of 85% on ten objectives, for example, sheds little light on what portion of the material can be compacted, since students might show limited mastery of some objectives and high levels of mastery on others.
- Column three is used to record information about acceleration or enrichment options; in determining these options, teachers must be fully aware of students' individual interests and learning styles. That is why selecting materials from Renzulli Learning is such a perfect match! We should never replace compacted regular curriculum work with harder, more advanced material that is solely determined by the teacher; instead, students' interests should be taken into account. We should also be careful to help monitor the challenge level of the material that is being substituted. We want students to understand the nature of effort and challenge and we should ensure that students are not simply replacing the compacted material with basic reading or work that is not advanced. Again, this automatically occurs when using Renzulli Learning!