

Course Creation Manual

A Guide for Course Developers and Staff
at Bronx Arena High School

Developed by Bronx Arena staff with support from Eskolta School Research and Design

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Glossary of Roles & Terms

Roles

Advocate Counselor: The Advocate Counselor (AC) acts as the student's primary point person at Bronx Arena and helps that student navigate their re-engagement with school. The AC meets with the student regularly to discuss relevant issues, including attendance, progress towards course completion and graduation and any outside issues that are impacting school. The AC also works with parents / guardians, teachers and administrators to negotiate resolutions to any issues that may emerge.

Course Developer: The Course Developer (CD) for any given course is responsible for researching and creating course content for that course – i.e. designing Challenges, identifying Inputs, and developing Tasks. The CD works with the Curriculum Design Team and potentially with subject area teachers at Bronx Arena and / or other schools to research content and get feedback on content developed. The CD will usually have a background in the subject area, but not necessarily. The CD may go on to teach the course to some students, but may not.

Curriculum Design Team: The Curriculum Design Team (CDT) is responsible for planning and steering the course creation process for all courses. The CDT determines priorities for course creation, assigns course developers to projects, and reviews and ultimately signs off on content. Members of the CDT include the Curriculum Coordinator, as well as one teacher, an AC or the internship coordinator, and one student. The teacher, AC or internship coordinator and student serve on the committee in a rotating capacity.

School Leadership: School leadership provides the guiding vision for the course development process at Bronx Arena High School, including the school's priorities and direction vis-a-vis content development, course review and course revision. In addition, the leadership ensures that course content gets online and that any glitches are resolved by liaising with outside contractors and internal staff members.

Web Designer: The web designer is a hired school employee who manages the technology and designs and maintains the school website. The web designer takes the curriculum from the templates created by the Course Designer and CDT and codes them onto the website. After an initial translation is done the web designer, course designer, and instructional designer review the online look of the curriculum and the formatting. This review and revision process is on-going even after students begin to work on courses.

Program Director: The Program Director (PD) shares leadership with the school Principal and supervises the Advocate Counselors. The Program Director is responsible for ensuring that every student has a complete program that meets graduation requirements and his or her social-emotional needs. The PD also works with members of the CDT to integrate youth development principles into curriculum.

Assistant Director: The Program Facilitator (PF) works closely with the Program Director to implement youth development supports and to ensure that every student has a program that meets his or her individual needs.

Teacher: The teacher works with students enrolled in courses to facilitate each student's self-paced learning process. The teacher may be working with students taking various different courses in the same room concurrently. The teacher provides verbal and / or written feedback to students on Tasks and Challenges, as well as guidance on navigating Inputs towards course completion. The teacher is also responsible for providing targeted instructional support to students as needed— either one on one or in small groups. Because teachers have unique insight into students' interactions with courses, they also offer informal and formal feedback to the CD and CDT on how the course is going (e.g., which Tasks or Challenges students struggle with, as well as whether students seem particularly bored or excited by a unit).

Key Terms

Area: All Arena curriculum is organized under five overarching skill categories called Areas. These are: Literacy, Numeracy, Thinking, Expression, and Self & Community.

Arena Competencies: The Arena Competencies are a set of cross-discipline skills which are drawn from the Common Core Standards as well as academic behaviors. Arena courses are aligned to two to four Arena Competencies which students demonstrate in the Challenges and Capstone of the course.

Arena High Five: Students at Bronx Arena are expected to be continually engaged in these five major skills as they move through their coursework: 1. Find relevant information and/or produce original questions 2. Process information and produce knowledge 3. Demonstrate critical thinking 4. Demonstrate self-management 5. Demonstrate reflection and/or knowledge transfer. The capstone of each Bronx Arena course must provide students with opportunities to show each of the Arena High Five.

Capstone: Each course at Bronx Arena culminates with a project-based assessment in which students synthesize the information they have learned and demonstrate the two to four competencies associated with the Challenges of the course. Students move through steps of an action plan in order to complete the capstone project. Each course includes an instructor-designed capstone, but students also have the option to design their own capstone or work with their teacher to choose and adapt a format and action plan from the Universal Project Menu.

Challenge: Courses at Bronx Arena include two challenges which are authentic, summative assessments after a curricular unit aligned to one or two competencies. In general, Challenge One is an opportunity for the student to explore basic course content and be introduced to key skills. In general, Challenge Two provides an opportunity for students to delve into course content more deeply and further develop key skills.

Competency Rubric: For each of the Arena Competencies (see definition above), a rubric has been created to define what student work looks like at *Proficient* and *Exemplary*. These rubrics provide common language – and in turn a common understanding – for what student work should look like for each competency at each tier (see below). As Challenges are created (see definition above), Course Designers use Competency Rubrics to generate Challenge and Capstone-specific rubrics. They may tweak the language if necessary given the context of the specific Challenge or Capstone.

Domain: Each of the five Areas includes several sub-categories called Domains, which represent key expectations for a well-rounded graduate of Bronx Arena. Each domain is made up of a cluster of related Arena Competencies, some domain-specific and others that cut across multiple domains.

Input: An input provides students with information that they need to know and understand to master the course content. It is a presentation of content that will enable students to complete the Tasks at hand. Ideally, the Course Designer will incorporate many different modes of input into the course to ensure that students with different learning styles can absorb and express information. For example, an Input might be a primary or secondary source reading, a documentary video, a streamed informational talk, a PowerPoint presentation, Prezis or lesson, etc.

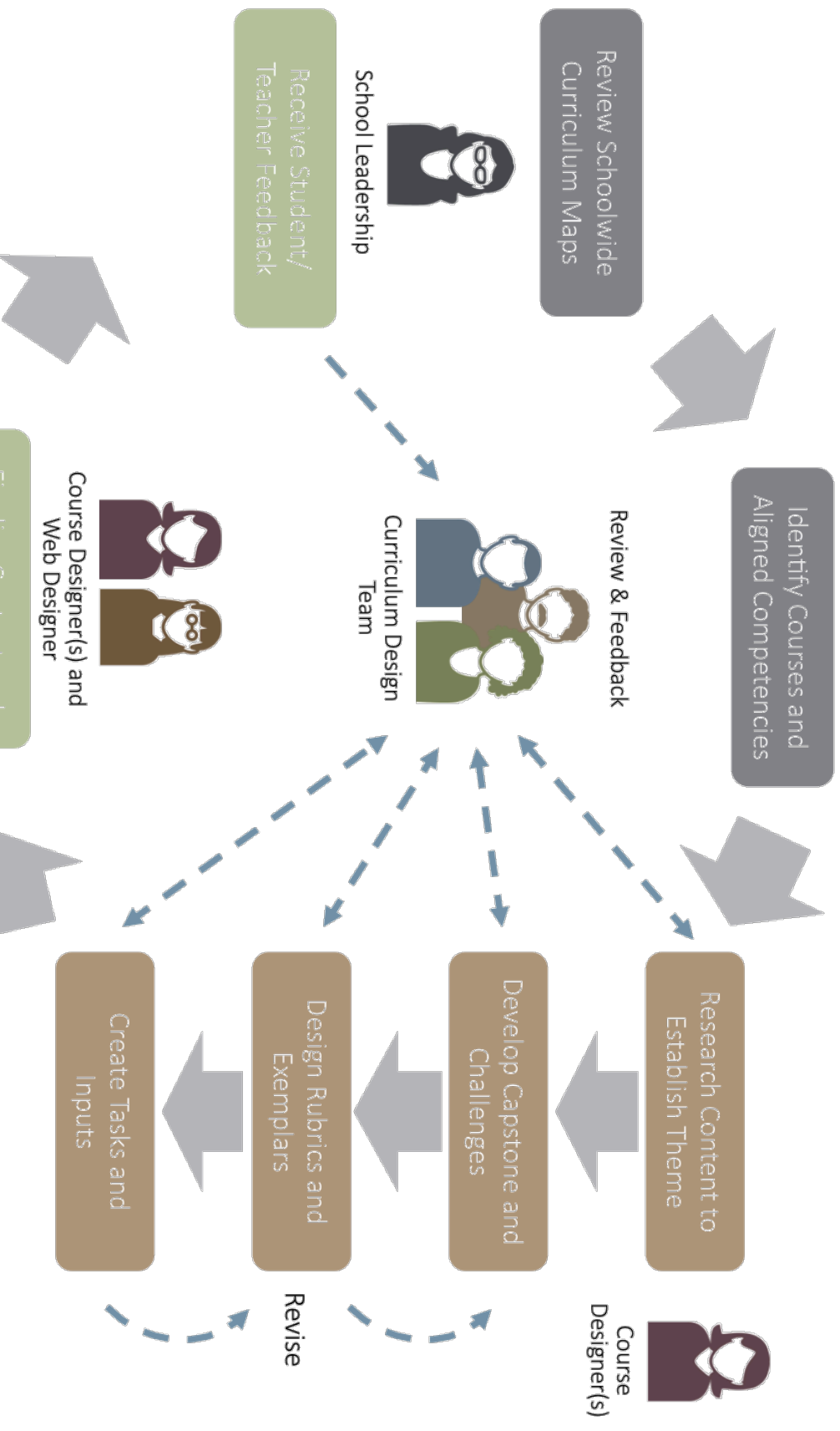
School Wide Curriculum Maps: At Bronx Arena, School Wide Curriculum Maps exist to provide an overview of the scope and sequence for each of the subject areas. The Curriculum Maps identify the key competencies and content covered by each course offered at Arena, and demonstrate how competencies progress both within and between departments. The Curriculum Maps are living documents that are regularly updated, for example when courses are added, when skills are moved or added etc.

Task: A task is a student-driven activity that students complete in the context of instruction and inputs related to a specific sub-skill. For example, a student may read several op-ed articles (inputs) and then write a reaction piece to those articles (task). Teachers review tasks to provide students with feedback, and to determine if students need further support on a particular content area or skill. A series of several tasks leads up to students completing a Challenge for the course.

Tiers: Course offerings at Bronx Arena address domains and competencies at an “Introductory” Tier 1 aligned to the 9-10 grade band of CCLS and “College-Ready” Tier 2 aligned to the 11-12 grade band of CCLS. The complexity of texts, level of scaffolding, and sophistication of tasks as well as the rubric criteria for evaluating the resulting student work differs for curriculum at each tier.

Universal Project Menu: The Universal Project Menu includes a list of potential project formats and associated action plans and rubrics all organized by the competency to be assessed. Within the course creation process, it can be used as a resource for course designers to consider various competency-specific options for building assessments.

Overview of Process



Process Steps

Before Content Development

Step One – Develop and Revise School Wide Curriculum

Overview

The School-Wide Curriculum Maps are used to represent the big picture of how courses cover the various competencies, domains, and areas in the two tiers and how they fit together between and across departments. At least twice a year, school leadership reviews them to determine what updates and additions need to be made to the Maps.

Process

1. **CREATE SCHOOL WIDE CURRICULUM MAPS:** First, the CDT and the Principal meet to create initial School Wide Maps. They align the Maps both horizontally and vertically, surface opportunities for interdisciplinary work, and identify different sequences students can take to meet objectives. Each course – those already created and yet to be created – is associated with a set of the Arena Competencies. These Maps are shared with Course Designers, ACs and teachers.
2. **EDIT SCHOOL WIDE CURRICULUM MAPS:** At least twice a year, school leadership meets to review the school wide curriculum maps. Generally, these meetings happen during the start and mid-year. Together, they determine if any revisions to the Maps are necessary. For example, based on feedback from Course Designers or the Course Review Process, they may move competencies into or out of certain courses. In turn, the school wide curriculum map would need to be edited. Or, they may determine that a new course needs to be added to catalog, and would add that course to the Maps and associate competencies as necessary.
3. **RE-PUBLISH SCHOOL WIDE CURRICULUM MAPS:** After any changes have been made to the Maps, an announcement is made to the full staff so that everybody is aware. New Maps are then re-posted, with edits highlighted to make changes highly visible.

Tips

- **Don't re-invent the wheel.** Use existing curriculum maps as a starting point for map creation.
- **Time meetings strategically.** Plan review meetings for when you have fresh January or June Regents (and possibly SSAT) data, so you can use this data to inform analysis.
- **Think interdisciplinary.** Highlight opportunities for students to make connections to other disciplines. For example, in the Neurobiology and Design class, students make connections between how the brain works and design principles and color theory.

Checklist for Step Completion

- Map review meeting is scheduled twice a year.
- Feedback gathered from Course Designers.
- Feedback gathered from Course Review Process.
- Edits discussed at the meeting are made in master documents.
- Revised documents are posted online.

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ Course Designers report that they understand how the course(s) they are creating fit in with an overall trajectory / scope and sequence.
- ⇒ Students can articulate how different courses are related and make connections between courses in the same discipline and other disciplines.
- ⇒ Students who have been enrolled at Bronx Arena for at least 20 credits graduate having been exposed to all the Arena Competencies multiple times and having demonstrated those skills.

Step Two – Identify Courses to Develop

Overview

School leadership identifies which courses should be prioritized for creation based on the coverage of domains, competencies, and graduation requirements by current course offerings as well as ideas for new course themes expressed by interested staff. In those instances, that theme becomes the starting point and then competencies for the course will be chosen through a triangulation of those that fit well with the theme as well as fulfill school-wide competency needs.

Leadership then identifies a Course Designer(s) to select competencies for the course and develop aligned content. Whenever possible, leadership sets up a pair of course designers to work together on building a course.

Process

1. **COURSE CREATION PLANNING MEETING:** School leadership meets to determine what courses should be slated for creation. This team uses the following data sources to prioritize course creation: 1) a “credit audit” that surfaces which credits current students need; 2) an analysis of course completion rates to determine if there are areas that require more options (e.g., if students are finishing introductory ELA courses particularly slowly); 3) informal student feedback provided via ACs, teachers and other routes; 4) teacher recommendations, particularly for a course they want to create. Ultimately, student programming needs drive these decisions.
2. **COMPETENCY REVIEW:** School leadership reviews data on domains and competencies covered by current course offerings to determine if some competencies are not adequately covered in each tier. If school leadership identifies a “competency gap,” they propose that additional courses that will cover the missing competencies be slated for creation. In some cases, school leadership may propose that skills be moved to courses currently slated for creation, which would result in edits to the School Wide Curriculum Map (see step one).
3. **FINALIZE COURSE LIST:** School leadership finalizes course priorities and reviews any changes to the school wide curriculum maps. Each course will be associated with a specific New York City Graduation Requirement (e.g. Physical Science or US History).
4. **SECURE COURSE DESIGNER:** School leadership identifies and secures a Course Designer. If the CD does not come from Bronx Arena, school leadership provides background materials on Bronx Arena, the course creation process and Project Based Learning. In addition, they inform the CD what credit students will earn for the course, what competencies and domains the course will cover and at which tier, and if the course should prepare students to pass the related Regents exam.

Tips

- Pair up Course Designers.** Two people working on a course often leads to better overall course design. Find potential course designers who make for interesting combinations of content knowledge and instructional background as well as complements to each other's work styles.
- Make it timely.** Do a little research to make sure new courses align to current trends / movements in education (e.g. a push towards "21st Century Skills).
- Align to mandates.** Do the necessary research to ensure alignment to City, State and Federal mandates.
- Cast a wide net.** To identify potential Course Designers, reach out to networks in the transfer school community and beyond.

Checklist for Step Completion

- Credit audit completed.
- Review of domains and competencies covered by current courses completed
- Feedback on all courses reviewed.
- Course List is finalized.
- Any necessary edits to School Wide Curriculum Maps are made and Maps are re-posted.
- Course Designer secured for every course slated for creation.
- Course Designers from outside Bronx Arena have necessary background materials (e.g. on course creation process, Project Based Learning etc.).

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ High quality courses are created on time.
- ⇒ Program Facilitator / AC's report that high priority students (e.g., students nearing graduation) are programmed for courses they need (e.g., Regents prep courses or missing requirements).
- ⇒ Students who have been enrolled at Bronx Arena for at least 20 credits graduate having been exposed to all the Arena Areas multiple times and having demonstrated the associated competencies.

Content Development

Step One – Research Content and Establish Theme

Overview

Once a Course Designer (CD) has been identified, he or she draws on personal experience, reaches out to colleagues, and reviews resources to gather as much information as possible about the course / topic. While there is some opportunity for limited sequencing of courses, many courses at Bronx Arena may be taken out of sequence. Therefore it is important to design thematic courses that do not assume very particular background knowledge. Thus, based on his or her information gathering, the CD proposes a theme to unify and help make meaning of the content. School leadership works with the CD to review, refine and finalize the theme.

Process

1. **COLLECT AND REVIEW ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:** First, the CD reviews the competencies associated with the course he or she is designing. Then, he or she reviews resources that are readily available – e.g. curriculum map(s), unit and lesson plans, texts etc. In addition, the CD reaches out to trusted colleagues (e.g. other teachers, network staff etc.) to see if there are any NY State / Common Core aligned curricular materials that may be shared. For Regents courses in particular, the CD reviews NY State Standards (for content), NYC scope and sequence, and several years of Regents exams.
2. **PROPOSE THEME:** While reviewing resources, the CD brainstorms a list of possible themes that could link the content together in a meaningful way. The CD then assesses which themes are strongest by determining which key content could be covered with each theme. The CD narrows the list down to one or a few possible themes. A good theme is connected to real-world experience, easy to connect to Challenges and a Capstone, and tied to questions that cannot easily be answered.
3. **FINALIZE THEME:** The CD works with school leadership to determine which theme is the most appropriate. Various factors inform this decision, including: themes of already existing courses; accessibility to students; content coverage, etc.

Tips for Course Developers

- Make yourself scarce.** To really focus, you may need to isolate yourself from the distraction of the school building and work elsewhere.
- Start with the end in mind.** Even in this exploratory phase, remember the principles of backwards design. As you research, keep in mind what you want students to know and be able to do by the time they finish the course.
- Give yourself time.** Given the amount of information you need to process, you probably need to allot yourself large chunks of time to dig in to possible themes– at least several hours at a time.

- Stay focused.** Whenever possible, only work on one course at a time.
- Don't be afraid to take a step back.** You might need a few hours away from the content to start making sense of it again.
- Don't re-invent the wheel.** If one of your resources lays something out effectively, you can do the same.
- Solicit student feedback.** If you are grappling with a few different theme possibilities, ask a group of students which one sounds more interesting to them.
- Gather materials as you go.** As you are doing your research, keep track of materials that seem useful. You will end up using them to select inputs and design tasks and challenges.
- Double check your theme.** If you propose a theme, make sure you know how the materials you've collected will work within that theme.

Checklist for Step Completion

- Course Designer feels very familiar with content.
- Selected theme is: accessible to students, broad enough to allow for student choice, narrow enough to be meaningful.
- Theme is approved by school leadership.
- Theme maps to content.

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ Teachers and students report that the theme engaged and made sense to them.
- ⇒ Students know content well enough to perform well on Regents exams.
- ⇒ Theme enables the development of strong Challenges and Capstone.

Step Two – Develop Capstone and Challenges

Overview

Once the course theme has been solidified and the course content thoroughly researched, the Course Designer (CD) reviews the Arena Competencies that must be covered in the course. In general, each course at Bronx Arena has two challenges and a capstone. However, on a case-by-case basis some exceptions may be made. In general, the CD first creates a Capstone that gives students an opportunity to demonstrate the course competencies in a rigorous project-based assessment. Then he or she creates preceding Challenges that serve as assessments of competencies that will ensure students are building the skills they need for completing the Capstone.

Process

1. **CREATE CAPSTONE:** The CD creates a Capstone that is a project related to the course theme and aligned to the course competencies. The capstone may be similar to a pre-existing project from the Universal Project Menu or another course, but tweaked to work within the new course context. Ideally, the **Capstone** should incorporate all of the Arena High Five, and it **must require students to demonstrate knowledge transference**. The CD additionally prepares an action plan for the capstone that lays out the key steps students must follow to complete the project. Students taking the course will complete the project as set by the CD or pursue a different option by designing their own or working from the Universal Project Menu. The CD meets with school leadership to review the capstone and receive feedback before moving forward with the two Challenges.
2. **CREATION OF LEAD UP CHALLENGES:** The CD builds lead-up Challenges – also aligned to the course theme and one or two of the competencies covered - that provide opportunities for students to build the skills and knowledge they will need to complete the Capstone. In general, the first Challenge should introduce students to key knowledge and basic skills, while the second Challenge should provide an opportunity for students to delve deeper into content and to practice higher level skills. The CD must articulate which Arena Competencies (and sub-skills) are associated with each Challenge and the challenge serves as a summative assessment of those competencies after students complete a sequence of aligned tasks. Once the challenge has been prepared, the CD creates an action plan which, like in the capstone, accompanies the assignment and lays out the key steps for students to take in completing the project.
3. **SELECT CHALLENGE IMAGE:** Each challenge at Bronx Arena can be accessed by clicking on a graphic. As such, for each Challenge and capstone, the CD must select an image that can function as its symbol. It is critical that this central image spark immediate recognition for students, and be meaningful given the Challenge’s design. For example, a Challenge that asks students to design a World War II memorial and accompanying essay might have an image of a famous memorial familiar to students.
4. **FINALIZE CHALLENGES:** The CD meets with school leadership to review and edit challenges. The main goal is to ensure that all challenges are related to the course theme, aligned to

competencies identified on school-wide curriculum maps and the Arena High Five, that the Capstone provides a rigorous opportunity for students to show transfer of those skills in a project-based format, and that lead-up challenges sufficiently prepare students for the competencies of the Capstone. In addition, the Challenges must be aligned to the New York State Standards relevant to the specific credits being awarded.

ALTERNATIVE – In particular subject areas, there may be a pre-developed bank of challenges, each aligned to competencies and subject-specific content. Custom courses can be created by selecting two challenges that meet areas of need for an individual student and then developing a capstone, which provides a culminating demonstration of the competencies associated with those challenges. Additionally, pre-developed challenges from different subject areas can be combined to create an interdisciplinary course targeted at specific student interests.

Tips for Course Designers and Teachers

- **Begin with the end in mind.** Utilize principles of Backwards Design to plan Challenges. Think about what students will need to know and be able to do for the Capstone, and design the lead up Challenges accordingly.
- **Make yourself scarce.** *Course Designers* – to really focus, you may need to isolate yourself from the distraction of the school building and work elsewhere.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** *Course Designers* - If there is a great project that you did at another school, or if you know about a great project – tailor it to work in this context!
- **Use existing resources.** *Course Designers* – take advantage of some of the great Project Based Learning resources (e.g., The Buck Institute) and established, effective techniques (e.g., R.A.F.T.s).
- **Leverage the CDT's knowledge.** *Course Designers* – work with members of the CDT to think about different modalities that are outside your comfort zone, for example multi-media opportunities.
- **Be authentic.** *Course Designers* - Design challenges that are real world and meaningful. For example, have students design a business plan or a school-wide campaign.
- **Less is More.** *Course Designers* – Projects do not have to be overly complicated to be rigorous. Streamlining projects with less content, less skills and competencies, and less moving parts often leads to deeper understanding and retention by students.
- **Use Checklists:** Putting action plans for the challenges and capstone in a checklist format really helps students understand the steps ahead and stay on track for completing them successfully.
- **Think long-term.** *Course Designers* - Try to design challenges that may provide opportunities for follow-up or further development (e.g., one student creates a PSA announcement, another student disseminates the PSA, a third student surveys the student body to get responses).
- **Push students to try different modalities.** *Teachers* - Encourage students to move out of their comfort zone. If you have a student who always opts to do a PowerPoint, ask him to do a class presentation that goes with it, or perhaps to write an essay instead.

Checklist for Completion

For each course:

- Skills in Capstone are aligned to skills in lead-up Challenges, but are expressed in a more complex manner requiring knowledge transference.
- The Arena High Five are “hit” in the lead-up and Capstone.
- The Arena Competencies associated with this course are “hit” in the lead-up and Capstone.
- Challenges connect student work to the real world.
- Challenges are approved by CC.

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ Students are able to complete the Capstone project successfully, because lead-up Challenges have adequately prepared them.
- ⇒ Student work on challenges is high quality and demonstrates the appropriate skills.
- ⇒ Students find challenges engaging and relevant.
- ⇒ When appropriate, students perform well on related Regents examinations.

Step Three – Create Rubrics and Exemplars

Overview

After Challenges and Capstone have been finalized, the Course Designer (CD) develops rubric and exemplars to accompany each. Each Arena Competency has established language defining the criteria for proficient and exemplary work on the competency. The CD builds from the established language to share criteria and assessment-specific examples that define expectations for students' work. In addition, when possible, the CD either creates exemplars for each Challenge, or works with others to create exemplars.

Process

1. **REVIEW, MODIFY AND CREATE RUBRICS:** The CD reviews the established language for each competency assessed by the Challenge or Capstone. This provides an additional opportunity for the CD to check the alignment of the assessment to the competencies and to make any tweaks to its steps and/or content to ensure it will provide opportunities for students to demonstrate all aspects of the criteria for exemplary work. Next, the CD takes the established language for the relevant competencies and additionally develops specific bullet points below it which provide concrete details of what demonstration of the competency will look like in the context of this assessment. Finally, CDs develop an example of work at each level to be presented in a column next to the relevant criteria (see sample image below).

Competency	Proficient	Example	Exemplary	Example
Use evidence to develop a valid argument.	<p>The response creates an effective argument that is reasonably supported with evidence and sound reasoning. The evidence could be more fully explained and developed.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interpret the quote. 2. Explanation of character qualities. 3. Connect quote and character. 4. Use two specific scenes to support your interpretation. 5. Clearly link scenes to character/quote connection. 	<p>"Episode #2 opens with a quote by Carcetti stating "I still wake up white in a city that ain't.". This means that even if he wins the election, the city is still made up of people who are very different than he is. This quote can be applied to Dukie because in many ways, Dukie wakes up every day to spend his time with people who are very different than he is."</p>	<p>The response creates an effective argument that is convincingly substantiated with well developed supporting details and sound reasoning from multiple sources.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide detailed and convincing interpretation of the quote. 2. Uses multiple literary elements (beyond characterization) to support interpretation. 3. Use three or more specific scenes to support your interpretation. 	<p>"Episode #2 opens with a quote by Carcetti stating "I still wake up white in a city that ain't.". This means that he is striving to be the elected leader of a city where the majority of the voting citizens do not see him as a peer. Duquan experiences this every day. Not from a racial standpoint, but rather a socioeconomic one. While Duquan struggles to find clean clothes to wear, his foil, Namond gets an entirely new, stylish wardrobe for school. Even if Duquan gets nicer clothes he will be facing people everyday who may not see him as a peer.</p>

2. **APPROVE RUBRICS:** Together, the CD and school leadership review the rubrics to ensure that they are at once clear, student friendly *and* demonstrate high expectations. In addition, school leadership confirms that the assessment and bullets are well-aligned to the competency and its criteria. The CD edits the rubrics as necessary.
3. **CREATE EXEMPLARS:** The CD liaises with school leadership or the CDT to ensure that each Challenge and Capstone has an exemplar that provides a clear model of expectations to students. There are a variety of ways exemplars can be generated. In some cases, the CD may draft the exemplar. In some cases, the CD may ask an AC or another teacher to generate exemplars. Notably, if the AC or a teacher outside of the subject area creates the exemplar, he or she may wait until the CD has created supporting tasks before the exemplar is developed. Finally, in some cases, the CD may have to wait until the course is implemented and real student work is generated to identify exemplars. Eventually, several exemplars for each Challenge and Capstone will be culled from real student work products.
4. **APPROVE EXEMPLAR:** School leadership reviews the exemplars with the CD to determine if they demonstrate high but realistic expectations for students in an accessible format. If necessary, the CD tweaks the exemplars to make them better models for students.

Tips

- **Think about how competencies embed content:** Rubrics, especially in the bullets following the established competency criteria, should tell students what content they *need to know* to complete a Challenge. Many of the Bronx Arena competencies can be used to capture content - for example Cause and Effect.
- **Check yourself:** Use rubric creation as another opportunity to go back and review the challenges you created. Are the directions explicit enough? Does the Challenge offer sufficient opportunity to demonstrate exemplary work?
- **Make Exemplars to Inform Planning:** Taking the time to actually do the project yourself before finalizing the challenge or capstone can highlight areas of potential confusion and elucidate other important considerations for ensuring the assignment is coherent and clear to students.
- **Less is More:** When offering language and examples for the criteria around competencies, too much can overly complicate evaluation and cloud student understanding. Succinctness is a key ingredient for useful rubrics.
- **Connect to Prior Tasks:** Clarity around expectations for the assessment can be enhanced by making explicit connections between parts of the assessment and specific tasks/lessons which preceded the Challenge.
- **Use Checklists:** Where possible, put criteria and examples in a checklist format which can guide students through completing all steps of the assessment.
- **Create or provide diverse exemplars:** When you gather exemplars, try to present many different output options so students know what's possible. For example, they have probably seen a PowerPoint, but not a Prezi. You can even provide a sample that covers a different topic, just to give them the idea.

- Use exemplars to assess rubrics:** Once you have gathered or created exemplars, try evaluating them as a test run of the rubric to make sure that the rubrics capture everything you want to assess. Have you left any key criteria or bullets off your rubric?
- Start with real student work:** If the Challenge is similar to other projects you have created, see if you have any samples of student work to build from.
- Know your audience:** You are creating exemplars intended to get students excited, try to make the materials as engaging as possible.

Checklist for Completion

- Rubrics created for every Challenge and Capstone.
- Rubrics are clear and student-friendly.
- Rubrics demonstrate high expectations.
- Exemplars are gathered for every Challenge and Capstone.
- Assessment, rubrics and exemplars are aligned (e.g. exemplars are indeed “exemplary” according to rubric).
- Exemplars present multiple output options.

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ Students indicate that they have a clear idea of what is expected of them for each Challenge and Capstone in a course.
- ⇒ Students can identify common skills in rubrics across disciplines, and can identify common strategies for addressing those skills.
- ⇒ Students are able to integrate feedback into their final work products.
- ⇒ Teachers report that providing feedback is relatively straightforward and productive.
- ⇒ Teachers report that exemplars opened student eyes to possibilities and potential, rather than narrowed their conception of how to complete a challenge.
- ⇒ Students produce high quality work products.

Step Four – Develop Tasks / Inputs that Support Challenges

Overview

After Challenges, Rubrics and Exemplars have been developed, the Course Designer (CD) needs to map out the progression of sub-skill development which will prepare students for demonstrating the full competency or competencies of each Challenge of the course. Then, tasks and inputs are created to support that progression of sub-skills. Tasks and inputs are highly related. For example, a student may read several op-ed articles (inputs) and then write a reaction piece to those articles (task). Teachers provide instructional lessons aligned to the sub-skills associated with the task as well as feedback on students' work on the tasks. Generally, about 5-10 tasks lead up to a Challenge.

Process

1. Utilize Principles of Backward Design: For each Challenge, the CD first reviews the competencies and knowledge to which the Challenge is aligned. The CD then breaks those down to determine what discrete sub-skills are required. For example, if the student needs to write an essay, the student also needs to know how to write an outline, a thesis, a paragraph etc. Finally, the CD creates a basic outline of instructional objectives and associated tasks that will build up students' ability to demonstrate the relevant competencies in each Challenge (e.g., causes of WWI web, WWI poetry response, Treaty of Versailles summary). In some cases, students may be building up work products through the tasks which will be directly used in completing the associated Challenge, but in other cases the tasks are providing opportunities for practice and feedback on the relevant sub-skills which will be assessed with separate work in the Challenge.
2. Find or Develop Inputs and Tasks: The CD draws on his or her own experience when possible, and conducts additional research to develop inputs and tasks for each objective in the outline. For example, the CD may pull readings (input) and a set of focused questions (task) from a class he or she has taught previously. But the CD also takes advantage of the blended environment by finding digital resources to enhance student understanding. Indeed, at this point it is also crucial that the CD considers user interface and designs tasks in a way that makes sense in a digital environment. The CD can take advantage of templates that provide a menu of options for how the task might look online, and uses the Bronx Arena Course Outline to organize all of the material.
3. Review to Ensure Alignment with Challenges: As he or she is working, the CD keeps a running list of all the sub-skills and content addressed by each task. Then, he or she reviews the sub-skills and content necessary for each Challenge. If a gap is identified, the CD goes back and expands on existing tasks, or creates a new task to fill the gap.
4. Finalize Tasks / Inputs with CC: The CD meets with school leadership to review the tasks. They work together to ensure that all the tasks are: 1) aligned to sub-skills and content required by Challenge; 2) appropriately rigorous for the tier of the course and level of competency detailed in the course rubrics; 3) engaging; 4) designed in a way that works in a digital environment. Moreover, ideally each task / input has multiple access points for students by drawing on

different modes of communication— for example multiple texts on the same topic, or a video, text and PowerPoint on the same topic. Additionally, some tasks may be set up as work done in the context of an in-person mini lesson with the teacher. The CD makes edits as required and once the task is finalized, assigns a weight to the task which represent how much it will count toward a student’s task bank. This is determined based on estimated time to complete the task, with a general benchmark of 45 minutes being equal to 1 task for the bank. The CD reviews any changes and the task bank weight with school leadership, who may make final tweaks to tasks before they are put online.

Tips

- **Push students to read & listen closely.** Provide supports for close reading and / or listening: annotations, text-specific questions, vocabulary definitions etc. If you prepare questions, start with lower order questions that help students access the material and then move to higher order questions that push critical thinking.
- **Don’t reinvent the wheel.** Take advantage of the myriad resources that exist for both inputs and tasks, for example: NBC and Discovery clips, regentsprep.org, YouTube, NYC Library database, the Teach for America site, the pre-generated questions from digital texts or videos, DBQs or multiple choice questions from old Regents exams.
- **Don’t be afraid to repeat yourself (within reason).** If you know of a great student activity that worked in a different context, use it with new content - for example, creating flashcards. You can also repeat similar tasks with new content for each Challenge.
- **Don’t shortchange tasks.** Even though a task is not a Challenge, it can still require higher order thinking. Don’t be scared to create tasks that require students to push themselves.
- **Facilitate student discussion.** Find opportunities to build in student discussion. For example, have students interview each other or staff about a topic, or use a discussion board to create student interaction. If you create a discussion board, write expectations for how the teacher would be involved in the discussion.
- **Use tasks for content coverage when needed.** In some cases, Regents classes may require content knowledge not addressed in Challenges but required for the state exam. In that case, create a task that builds *skills* required for the Challenge, but also covers content outside the Challenge’s scope.
- **Remember the teacher:** When creating Tasks, think about and take note of how a teacher could use them to target student intervention. You can also create mini-lessons for the teacher to go with specific tasks.

Checklist for Step Completion

- Each Task is associated with a clear instructional objective.
- Each Task has a work product that demonstrates the student has met the objective.
- Tasks hit all of the sub-skills and knowledge required to complete the Challenge.
- Ideally, students can complete tasks using different modalities.
- Inputs support student completion of tasks.

- Ideally, students can access information via different modes of Input (e.g. Prezi, reading, PowerPoint).
- All Tasks are approved by school leadership.

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ Students understand how tasks and Challenges are related, that tasks prepare them for Challenges and can articulate this alignment.
- ⇒ Students have the sub-skills and content to complete the Challenges effectively.

Step Five – Content is Finalized and Goes Online

Overview

The Course Designer (CD) has worked with the Curriculum Design Team (CDT) and checked in with school leadership throughout the process, however, once the course is complete, it is reviewed holistically one final time before it becomes “live.” At this point, any final edits to content or tweaks to layout / design are made.

Process

1. HOLISTIC REVIEW OF COURSE: Once the course has been completed, the CDT reviews the course as a whole. Ideally, someone who has not been as intimately involved with the course creation process – e.g. a student or AC member of the CDT – reviews the course closely in its entirety. This fresh set of eyes lends a new perspective to ensure that the course is appropriately aligned to the target Arena Competencies, that Challenges and tasks are aligned, that expectations for students are high and that the material is understandable and engaging. School leadership also takes this opportunity to ensure that the inputs, tasks and challenges are appropriate for a digital format.
2. FINAL EDITS TO CONTENT MADE: The CDT provides any feedback on content to the CD, who then edits accordingly. Ultimately, school leadership gives the final sign off on the course and makes any final changes / edits to the material.
3. FINAL EDITS TO DESIGN MADE: Depending on the expertise level of the CD, either the CD or school leadership makes final tweaks to the content’s layout and / or design.
4. CONTENT HANDED OFF: School leadership ensures that the content is in the proper format to be handed off to the parties responsible for putting the content online.
5. COURSE WEBSITE DESIGN: The CD sets a time to sit with the web designer to walk through the course content and map out how it should be visually presented on the course website.

Tips

Do a test run!: Before the course goes “live” have a student intern (or another willing person) run through the course online to make sure all the links work.

Post Content Development

Step One – Receive Feedback from Students and Teachers

Overview

Courses at Bronx Arena are never really “finalized.” There is a commitment to collecting and then incorporating student and teacher feedback into courses. Every student who completes a course is encouraged to provide feedback via a survey or less formal discussion, teachers meet regularly with the CDT to provide feedback on what is working and not working with each course, and at the end of a course’s first “cycle” there is a formal review process. Additionally, staff occasionally completes surveys about all courses to identify courses that should be prioritized for revision.

Process

1. **STUDENTS COMPLETE CAPSTONE REFLECTION:** After a student completes a Capstone at Bronx Arena, he or she is encouraged to complete a reflection. As part of the reflection process, the student assesses the extent to which he or she found the tasks engaging and appropriately challenging, and felt prepared to complete the Capstone. These reflections are collected and used to provide student input on course design.
2. **TEACHERS PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO CDT:** During a course’s first iteration, the teacher has at least two scheduled meetings with the CDT to provide feedback on course implementation. The teacher provides feedback on the extent to which the curriculum is scaffolded to support high-quality student work, on how engaged students are with tasks and Challenges, and on the extent to which they can provide support and help students make connections across the curriculum. The teacher also brings the supplements they have needed to produce to make the curriculum work effectively – for example, mini-lessons. At these meetings, the CDT and teacher review samples of student work to provide touchstones for the conversation. In addition, the teacher may provide ongoing informal feedback as needed.
3. **TEACHERS REVIEW STUDENT WORK IN PLC’S:** One of the major focuses of professional development at Bronx Arena is looking at student work, and PLC’s look at student work once a week. Before a course’s Formal Review Process, student work from that course must be reviewed twice. The PLC reviews Challenges to assess if student work reflects what was originally outlined in the Challenge.
4. **FORMAL REVIEW PROCESS:** At the end of a course’s first “cycle” – e.g., after the majority of students enrolled in the course initially have completed it – the CDT has a formal review process. Prior to this meeting, the following data is compiled: student Capstone Reflections, course completion rates, notes from relevant PLC meetings and at least three samples of student work products. The CDT then makes a formal list of edits and changes that need to happen to improve the course and hands those off to the CD or an appointee.

Tips

- ❑ **Get informal feedback too.** On a regular basis, touch base with students and facilitators to see how things are going and gather any feedback.
- ❑ **Keep an idea notebook.** *Teachers* – Keep a notebook that tracks ideas, common student struggles, additional supports, and insights throughout your facilitation of the course.

Checklist for Step Completion

- ❑ At least two check-ins between teacher and CDT are scheduled.
- ❑ Student work from the course has been reviewed in at least two PLCs.
- ❑ Formal Review is scheduled.
- ❑ Data for formal review process is compiled (e.g., course completion rates, survey data etc.).
- ❑ Sample student work is collected for formal review.
- ❑ Recommendations compiled for Course Designer or appointee.

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ Student survey results improve during the second “cycle” of course administration.
- ⇒ The quality of student work improves over the course of time.
- ⇒ Course completion rates improve.
- ⇒ Student results on state exams or other standard-aligned assessments show greater improvement.
- ⇒ The breadth and level of skills exhibited in student work improves.

Step Two – Revise Content

Overview

Whenever possible, the Curriculum Design Team (CDT) asks the original Course Designer (CD) to make edits and revision to the course. When that is impossible, school leadership identifies another person to make the changes. Revised content is then put online in a timely fashion, so that as many students as possible can benefit from the feedback of their peers and teachers.

Process

1. **REVIEW AND PRIORITIZE LIST OF EDITS:** After the CDT has met, school leadership reviews the list of edits and determines if for any reason the course needs to be completely overhauled. If not, they prioritize the edits to ensure that the most critical changes happen first. In some cases of a longer course that would be difficult to scale down with losing the larger theme, school leadership may work with the CD and others to identify interdisciplinary content and tasks to transform the course into a two-credit offering.
2. **CHANGES MADE:** Whenever possible, school leadership reaches out to the CD to discuss edits. Because not all CDs work at Bronx Arena – and even those that do have many other responsibilities – the CD may not always be able to be responsible for making edits to the course. Either the CD or school leadership makes all high priority edits to the course (and when possible, all edits), after consulting with the Bronx Arena teachers who has been working on the course. These revisions are then shared with the CDT in a “course review meeting.” Any questions or concerns about revisions are raised at this time. School leadership provides the final sign off on course changes.
3. **PUT REVISED COURSE ONLINE:** School leadership hands off the revised course to whoever is responsible for getting the course online.

Tips

- Be transparent:** Be sure the original Course Designer is always notified of any recommendations that come out of the review process.

Benchmarks for Success

- ⇒ Teachers indicate that improvements have intended consequences.
- ⇒ Improvements do not cause any disruptions in student learning.