Understanding by Design at a Glance

Understanding by Design (UbD) is a framework for improving student achievement. Working within a standards-driven curriculum, UbD emphasizes the critical role of teachers in designing student learning. The framework is built upon clarifying student learning goals, devising performance assessments to collect evidence of student understanding, and crafting engaging and relevant learning activities supported by research and best practice.

The framework, developed by nationally recognized educators Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, and published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), is based on the following ideas:

- Educators should be focused on developing and deepening student understanding.
- Authentic, challenging tasks that mirror real world issues allow students to explain, explore, and apply new learning.
- A three-stage backward planning design to curriculum ensures that learning focuses on essential knowledge and skills as opposed to simply covering material. The backwards design model centers on the idea that curriculum design should begin with identifying the desired results and then "work backwards" to develop instruction rather than the traditional approach which is to define what topics need to be covered.

Stage 1: Desired Results: Identify desired results and outcomes.

- What learning and/or content goals will be met?
- What should students come away understanding?
- What essential questions will students explore?
- What knowledge, skills, and strategies will students leave with?

State 2: Assessment Plan: Determine what constitutes acceptable assessment evidence.

- What performance tasks or products will provide evidence of student understanding?
- What tasks will students engage in to show the transfer and application of skills, content knowledge, and strategies?
- What other types of evidence will be collected to reflect other desired results?

Stage 3: Learning Plan: Plan instructional strategies and learning experiences that bring students to these competency levels.

- What activities, experiences, and lessons will lead to the achievement of desired results and successful completion of performance assessments?
- What opportunities will require students to draw inferences and make generalizations as they construct understanding?