"Lost at Sea": New Teachers' Experiences with Curriculum and Assessment

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To better understand how new teachers experience curriculum and assessments in the face of standards-based reform, we interviewed a diverse sample of 50 1st- and 2nd-year Massachusetts teachers working in a wide range of public schools. We found that, despite the states development of standards and statewide assessments, these new teachers received little or no guidance about what to teach or how to teach it. Left to their own devices, they struggled day to day to prepare content and materials. The standards and accountability environment created a sense of urgency for these teachers but did not provide them with the support they needed. The absence of a coherent curriculum has implications for student achievement and teacher retention in that students may learn less than they otherwise might, and many new teachers who could have succeeded with more support may leave teaching prematurely because of the overwhelming nature of the work and the pain of failing in the classroom. This suggests an urgent need to reconsider the curricula and support provided to new teachers.

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