I'm a builder. There is nothing I love to do more than see a plan, a dream, that I've thought out begin to take shape and then eventually come to fruition. I have scores of hand-drawn sketches of different layouts for our upcoming kitchen remodel. I've got designs for additions to our house, not to mention plans for floating docks, new decks, tree houses. . . . If I only had time and an endless budget. . . .

The truth is that most of my dream projects will stay just that. However, every once in a while I free up some time and a little extra cash. The excitement mounts as I plan and purchase. And then it hits and often stops me dead in my tracks: one little question that I seem to overlook so often. All the buildup, all the hoopla, all the momentum come screeching to a halt as I try to answer the question, “Where do I start?”

I suppose that my love for creating is one of the reasons I like my job here at Pitsco so much. Although it is not quite the same as building a new deck, our development process of writing new Missions, Modules, and Suites uses much the same process as any household project. We research and plan, build from the ground up, test each phase as we go, and then end up with a finished product that we take pride in. However, in our job as curriculum developers, “Where do I start?” is seldom asked. This is because a blueprint has already been made for us. That blueprint is called state and national standards.

A Shift in Focus

In recent years, Pitsco Education has made a shift in the design of its products. Although there are still great products for any CTE or FACS course, the shift has been toward core curriculum. We started with science and then more recently moved into math. Writing core curriculum caused us to focus heavily on meeting state standards. Our goal is that when we put in a science or math lab for a particular school, we will address all of the state standards for that subject area as well as a good percentage of cross-curricular standards.

Standards – Drawing the Blueprint

In order to meet our goals, we’ve adapted our development process for writing and updating products. Rather than starting with a cool piece of equipment or a great activity idea, we start by analyzing what standards we currently meet with our other products that will go into the same lab as the product we are writing.

Let’s say we are going to do a content update on one of our most popular Modules, Applied Physics. Applied Physics will most certainly go into a lab that focuses on physical science. So we ask ourselves, “With the other Modules that will be going into a physical science lab, in what areas can we add more content? What are some common state standards that we don’t address very well?” After this question is answered, then we have our blueprint for development.

Sticking with the example of Applied Physics, let’s say an analysis of physical science standards revealed that our physical science Modules do not adequately address standards related to waves. This would be an area where we could easily write an update on Applied Physics. If we were starting from scratch with a brand new Module, then waves would be one of the major themes around which we center the new content.

Depth vs. breadth

With our content themes determined, the next decision is whether we should go deep into one theme addressing as many standards as possible or take a broader approach and address standards from other content areas. Again, this decision is based on standards coverage by other products, or in our example, physical science Modules.

Our first priority is standards depth. Here, we attempt to address 100% of the common standards for a given strand or content area. Secondly, we focus on breadth, addressing a wider range of standards and meeting them multiple times with different products. Having more breadth gives students more exposure to these standards.

Applied Physics is a Module with a wide breadth of coverage. It covers standards in several strands and areas of physical science – force and motion, light, sound, heat, and optics. A Module such as Forces, on the other hand, doesn’t have a lot of breadth, but it does have a lot of depth. Forces addresses nearly all state standards related to force and motion.

After the questions on standards have been addressed, it is time to start the development process: brainstorming ideas, researching content, designing engaging activities, incorporating technology and equipment, writing media scripts, building graphics, recording audio and video, and finally putting all the pieces together into the final product. Throughout this entire process, standards stay at the forefront. Many of our
writers keep a copy of the standards they are addressing taped above their computer monitor to remind them of the importance of meeting those standards.

**Correlation reports**

Just as we began a project by analyzing standards, we end the same way – by looking at standards. Correlating the new product to state and national standards is a big task. We aim to provide correlations to sets of standards for all 50 states as well as correlations to national standards. Although we haven’t made it to all 50 states yet, we are making great strides toward this task.

Recently, we began a partnership with another company called Academic Benchmarks. Academic Benchmarks provides many helpful tools for completing our correlations as well as access to state standards. Our partnership with Academic Benchmarks will greatly speed up the time it takes us to complete a correlation to a given set of standards. We are excited about this partnership and the potential for highly accurate and instantaneous reports in the future, including alignment reports to the recently released Common Core standards.

Standards are important to Pitsco Education. As you can see, they are weaved throughout our entire development process from beginning to end. However, this fact is not the standard by which we measure success.

At the end of the day, when all tests have been taken, all homework turned in, all courses completed, what really matters is if a student was successful. And that is the number one standard by which we measure success. Standards are the blueprint, but student success is the foundation.

We all know Texas is a large state: 268,601 square miles, 23 million people, 4.5 million students attending 9,500 K-12 public schools. These are numbers most states can’t touch. For a company like Pitsco Education that is committed to building long-term relationships and unparalleled customer service, these numbers present a huge challenge.

Just the time it takes to travel from district to district and school to school is a monumental task. Two of the main reasons Pitsco has been so successful in the state of Texas for more than 20 years are Gail O’Quinn and Dan Petersen. These two sales representatives are the very best Pitsco has to offer the education community in the state.

Gail and Dan are passionate about what Pitsco is passionate about, and that is helping teachers help students become successful, lifelong learners. The two put their needs at the bottom of the list on a daily basis when consulting with administrators and teachers. Building successful, long-lasting relationships is their number one goal.

These two individuals believe in being a part of the complete process of a successful partnership. Great customer service, from an initial phone call or a face-to-face meeting, all the way through the process to implementation and teacher support after the sale, is what makes Gail and Dan so successful. Their career choice means sacrifice.

Working long, hard hours; paying attention to detail; occasionally giving up weekends; traveling early in the morning and late at night; skipping meals; and being away from home every week are only part of what Dan and Gail do to be available when administrators and teachers need them.

They are also the first to explain that it takes a team to be successful. With field service individuals Vance Spillman and Tony Soria located in-state at their disposal and a great sales support team in the corporate offices, they and the schools they serve have tremendous support. It takes everyone pulling their weight to make Dan and Gail as successful as they have been.

Pitsco understands the needs of today’s educators, and having professional sales consultants available to provide the services that make teachers and students successful is key to great long-term success for everyone involved.

Pitsco appreciates the hard work and dedication that Gail and Dan have exhibited and continue to exhibit, ensuring student success in the big state of Texas!

Thank you very much.