

This article was written by a long-time educator and Odyssey of the Mind director.  
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## Educational Standards? They Don't Come Higher Than In Odyssey of the Mind

by Joanne Rompel, Illinois Association Director and Educator of Gifted & Talented

In preparing to meet and exceed each student's needs to the best of our abilities, educators look at learning styles, standards, and student performance. Leaving no child behind is a national decree. "If it's not standard based it's not happening during our class time," is the cry. Educators have found that using Odyssey of the Mind is a way to extend creative experiences in a real work-world environment while aligning with national, state, and school standards.

The Odyssey of the Mind program is able to meld the state and national learning standards while extending academic challenges that employ the processing of thinking skills. Students are required to solve real-world problems in a creative venue designed to fulfill the requirements of the long-term problems offered each year.

The problems encompass the academic skills required by state and national curricula; they are cognizant of the academically talented and challenge students in a variety of genres. Without having to "learn through the seat of their pants," students learn by doing, moving, and sharing. They practice social skills through working in teams, negotiation through validating their ideas, and assessment through the use of their own and problem rubrics.

Educators delight in the thought that they can capture students' *aha!* as they discover new ideas, formulate hypotheses, test many solutions, and, as a team, decide on a final product based on an evaluation that keeps the target in focus.

Many school districts are experiencing seri-

ous cutbacks in fine arts and other classes for their special populations — both remedial and challenge groups. Odyssey of the Mind provides standard-based, goal-oriented curriculum experiences that are educationally solid in all subject areas while immersing students at various levels in the learning process.

Students are consumers of education. They are developing not only academically but also socially and skillfully. Specific tasks designed to practice their newly acquired skills are measurable; growth is observable and can be accurately

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reported through the use of rubric (evaluation). Students learn the real work-world skills of defining the problem, developing many possible solutions, and establishing criteria to evaluate the process. They then decide, as a group, how to implement their solution in a creative way. Not only do they learn what is required, they learn to budget time, resources, and materials to complete and "market" their "product" (solution).

While students across many grade levels receive the same long-term problems, the end product is always unique, and age and academically appropriate. The application of standard-based learning at each age and skill level validates the educational value of the Odyssey of the Mind's creative, social, and interactive learning. Bringing standards to this program or bringing this program to the standards isn't the issue. In standards-based education we have goals. In Odyssey of the Mind, we have fun while learning and meeting those goals.

