

Implementation of Common Core State Standards: Roles for Advocates

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have committed to fully implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by the fall of 2013, and members of the two CCSS-aligned assessment consortia have committed to roll out an aligned assessment the following year. With less than a year until the CCSS must be in place in all classrooms, most states have at least some implementation activities already underway. But if these standards are to provide true game-changing leverage, we advocates need to step up our involvement on at least two fronts. We need to make sure that the standards are implemented in effective and equitable ways. And we need to help parents and other stakeholders understand and support the standards.

Implemented well, the new standards will help us accomplish something advocates have been working toward for a long time: getting schools to raise their sights for our children, engaging all of them—rather than just a privileged few—deeply and meaningfully in the rich and rigorous content that will prepare them for college and careers. But we all know from experience with earlier standards that implementing the CCSS well is far from a given. If all teachers don't get the high quality training they need to teach the new standards well; if some teachers get high quality instructional materials truly aligned to the standards, while others have to craft their lessons from scratch; and if there aren't clear plans in place for accelerating students who are far behind, then these new standards will become yet one more missed opportunity, serving neither their overall improvement nor their gap-closing goals.

This brief guide is designed to help advocates who are new to standards work. It provides basic information on matters that are critical to common core implementation, including:

- Transition Planning;
- Communication;
- Educator Training and Instructional Materials;
- High School Curriculum and Graduation Policies
- Catch-Up Strategies;
- English Language Learners;
- Technology; and
- Policy Alignment.

For each area, we've identified key questions that advocates can ask of their states and districts. And we've provided examples of promising practices from states, as well as links to other useful resources.

Transition Planning

In almost every state, the new standards look very different from what came before. In math, for example, there are fewer concepts taught in most grades so teachers can slow down and make sure students learn them deeply. Moreover, those concepts may be taught at different grade levels than teachers are used to. On the language arts side, students will be expected to learn and practice reading and writing across the content areas, and the writing they do will go considerably beyond the personal narrative that is the mainstay in classrooms across the country today. In other words, almost all teachers—in most subjects and grade levels—will have to substantially remake what they do.

Transitions of this magnitude are never easy. But to make the shift as smoothly as possible, states and districts need clear and detailed plans setting forth who will do what...and when.

Questions to Ask

- What is our state's plan for implementing CCSS? Does it address at least the eight critical topics outlined in this guide? Is it detailed and clear about who will do what and when? What is the vehicle for making sure each party performs its role?
- At what point will all teachers at all grade levels will be fully teaching to the new standards? How will we know?

Promising Practices

- To expose teachers gradually to the changes in instruction required by CCSS, **New York** set a goal for every teacher to implement at least one unit of instruction during the 2011-12 school year that embeds the instructional shifts required under CCSS into their practice.
- **Florida** is staggering the implementation of the standards to help with issues of state and district capacity, as well as to ensure that all students have at least one year of instruction using the new standards prior to the implementation of new assessments.

Resources

- Achieve and the USED I teamed up to produce a [Common Core Implementation Planning Workbook](#).
- Education First and Achieve produced a tool to assess implementation: the [Common Core State Standards Implementation Rubric and Self-Assessment Tool](#).

Communications

As schools begin to implement the Common Core, parents will start hearing about the new standards. When educators are excited by what they are experiencing in standards-related professional development, their enthusiasm will come across clearly to parents and will be contagious. But where supports are weak or educators are tired or cynical, the messages to parents will be less positive and parents will be nervous about what the new standards mean for their children. A good communications plan will get out ahead with clear messages to parents and other stakeholders about what's and why's

of the new standards. (It will also anticipate and act on what we know: that teachers are among the most trusted messengers.)

This will be especially important once the new tests are administered, because—for nearly all states—the CCSS assessments will almost certainly result in a significant drop in student proficiency rates, and in wider gaps between groups of students. As teachers begin teaching to the standards of performance expected on the exams, the work that children are assigned should, frankly, be tougher than what came before. Parents who are used to their children getting easy “A’s” –or performing at the proficient or advanced level on state tests without breaking a sweat—are likely to see “lower” grades and test scores, not because their performance got worse, but because the standard for judging it got raised.

States – and advocates – need to proactively address both issues through effective communication with the public and, in particular, parents and families. Parents and the public must understand that lower scores are not a step back. Rather, they’re a reversal of a long-standing pattern of inflating performance.

Questions to Ask

- What is the state’s plan for communicating the new standards to the public? What is the core message, and with whom will it resonate? What role will state officials play in the process? What is the role for district and school personnel and how will they be supported? What other trusted messengers can be recruited to this effort?
- How is the state planning to communicate likely changes in student proficiency scores resulting from the implementation of new standards and assessments? Will there be training in score interpretation for local educators? For journalists?
- How directly does the state’s plan address likely widening of the achievement gap? Who will be on deck to talk about that and how will civil rights and community groups be engaged?
- Will there be a way for parents with questions to get their concerns addressed?

Promising Practices

- With the roll-out in 2010 of more rigorous standards, **Tennessee** launched an aggressive – and successful - awareness campaign to prepare the public for the changes in student test scores resulting from raised expectations. The state’s current communication and stakeholder engagement plans related to the transition to CCSS are modeled on this earlier campaign.

Resources

- Achieve’s [guide to communications planning](#) about the Common Core State Standards, including a research-based list of [messaging do's and don'ts](#).
- The Council of Chief State School Officers’ [Communications Toolkit](#) includes do’s and don’ts, talking points, FAQs, tips on engaging stakeholders, sample op-eds, and more.

- The National PTA’s [Parent's Guide to Student Success](#) provides concrete examples of the English Language Arts and math content that students should be learning in each grade, and is available in both English and Spanish.
- The National Council of La Raza’s [Access to Common Core Standards for All: Advocacy Toolkit for Supporting Success](#), highlights best practices and practical strategies for education advocates building community support and enhancing communications efforts for common core standards.
- The Achieve and USED I [Common Core Implementation Planning Workbook](#), section 4 guides state policymakers on communicating implementation plans and timelines to communities.

Educator Training and Instructional Materials

The Common Core State Standards are both different in kind and substantially more rigorous than most states’ standards. To understand the shifts in instruction that are required to teach the new standards and to learn how to adjust their practices, teachers (and their principals) will need consistent, high-quality, ongoing training and support. And we can’t wait until teachers are in their classrooms to train them on the standards; teacher preparation programs must also step up to ensure that future educators enter their schools knowing what it takes to teach CCSS.

Teachers also want and need comprehensive, well-organized, quality resources that don’t just tell them *what* standards to teach and *when*, but actually guide them on to *how* to teach them. Too often, states pass all responsibility for developing curriculum down to districts, schools, and teachers. But this is neither efficient nor fair to teachers and students in districts with less capacity to create strong instructional resources. Inequitable resources translate too often to inequitable instruction, and students – disproportionately poor students and students of color – pay the price.

Questions to Ask

- How are teachers and school leaders getting information about the standards? Who is training them and what is the content of the trainings? Is training primarily focused on explaining the standards or is time dedicated to helping educators practice the pedagogical shifts necessary? What are our quality assurance mechanisms?
- Who is responsible for developing or acquiring the high quality instructional materials—texts, curricular frameworks, guides, lessons, units, assignments—teachers need to teach CCSS? Are the materials organized, comprehensive, and logically sequenced in a way that teachers, especially new ones, can use the material to deliver high-quality lessons? How can we be sure that these are of high quality and that all teachers have full access to them?
- What financial and human capital resources are the state allocating toward educator training and aligned instructional materials? What expectation is the state setting for district allocations?
- How are colleges and universities assuring that all newly prepared teachers and administrators are ready to educate students to CCSS? Have we aligned certification requirements/exams?

Are institutions required to demonstrate curricular alignment as part of the state authorization or accreditation process?

Promising Practices

- Over the last two summers, **Maryland** has conducted regional academies for every school.
- In **Massachusetts**, districts with low-performing schools are offered additional training on the new standards and on how to use data to inform instructional decisions.
- **New York's** Teacher Performance Assessment – which is required for teacher certification - will require videos of a Common Core-aligned lesson. State legislation in **Colorado** requires all educator preparation programs to align their content to the new standards by the end of 2012.
- Five states – **New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina** and **Colorado** – are working through the [Shared Learning Collaborative](#) to develop and pilot a comprehensive set of open platform resources. **Delaware, Kentucky, Georgia** and **Louisiana** will join in the coming year.

Additional Resources

- Student Achievement Partners has developed ready-to-use [professional development modules](#).
- The [Literacy Design Collaborative](#) and the [Math Design Collaborative](#) offer resources to help teachers align their assignments to the CCSS.
- The [Teaching Channel](#) has compiled a series of videos of Common Core-aligned lessons.
- [Learn Zillion](#) is a free online platform that combines video lessons, assessments, and progress reporting centered on the Common Core standards.
- [Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products \(EQulP\)](#) is a cross-state collaborative focused on identifying and increasing the supply of high-quality, Common Core-aligned instructional materials available for instruction in elementary, middle and high school classrooms.
- Section 5 of the Achieve and USED [Common Core Implementation Planning Workbook](#), outlines strategies for state leaders on the curriculum and materials alignment necessary to launch in to quality professional development (covered in section 6).

High School Curriculum and Graduation Requirements

There is nothing simple about implementation of the CCSS in high schools. Most high schools are still organized according to the (much-maligned, but still predominant) Carnegie Unit—that is, instruction is divided into courses. And, in the vast majority schools, those courses are still grouped into tracks, which often serve students by perceived “ability” or by assumed destination (e.g. college or work).

At a macro level, the CCSS challenges this different destinations approach, with a clear goal of “college AND career readiness for all.” But without careful attention from advocates, the “all” part is likely founder on the shoals of opposition from secondary educators or simply get lost in the micro-implementation details of bundling, assigning (“Here, World History, you take Standard 18-A about interpreting source documents”) or otherwise arranging the CCSS into courses.

Then, of course, there is state policy. Which of these courses should we require our students to complete in order to get a diploma?

Questions to Ask?

- Who is guiding implementation of CCSS at the high school level? Are most standards simply being integrated with existing courses, or are courses and course sequences being redesigned?
- Are critical decisions being made at the state level or are districts and/or schools free to decide how to integrate the new standards with their course offerings? If the latter, does anybody have to approve? What, in particular, is happening with CTE courses and students? Will they be college ready?
- Is the goal of college AND career readiness being preserved, or has the state reverted to an “or”?
- How is the state handling any conflicts between the minimum expectations of the CCSS (essentially “a partial Algebra II” plus any math required by the colleges) and the admissions requirements of most four year institutions (at least Algebra II)?
- How should the course requirements for high school graduation be modified to align with common core?

Promising Practices

- As a part of their participation in Achieve’s American Diploma Project, 21 states have adopted course requirements for high school graduation that align with the requirements of college readiness. For states that haven’t yet taken this step, these are a solid start in the right direction.

Resources

- Achieve has a [state comparison document](#) that specifies the graduation requirements in place in the 21 states that have aligned their requirements with college and career readiness.

Catch-Up Strategies

Far too many students, especially low-income students and students of color, are far below even the too-low standards in place in many states now. Without explicit practices for identifying and supporting those students who are furthest behind, such students will continue to fall behind their peers, and will be effectively shut out of Common Core content.

Questions to Ask

- How is the state supporting districts and schools in identifying students who are the furthest behind? Has the state developed an early warning system that helps districts and schools identify such students early?

- Does the state provide guidance to districts and schools on what to do—for example, additional learning time or intensive tutoring—to accelerate learning for these struggling students? Do districts and schools get dedicated financial support to put these practices into place—or at least more generous funding if they serve concentrations of such students?
- Who monitors whether struggling students receive extra services and/or catch up? Does the state’s accountability system report such information?

As critically important as this issue is, there are not yet valuable resources to direct advocates to, at least that we are aware of. This is an area for advocates to watch closely and, where there are promising practices or valuable resources, share widely.

English Language Learners

English Language Learners are the fastest-growing segment of the school-age population. While ELLs constitute more than 10% of the nation’s total public school population, ELL student enrollment has increased at nearly seven times the rate of total student enrollment. As states consider “catch up” strategies for students who are currently low performing, they should also heed the unique needs of English Language Learners. ELLs require specialized instructional services, especially at the secondary level, so they can acquire the English language skills they need to master complex academic content at the same levels as their higher-performing English-speaking peers. States and school districts will need to evaluate current services and consider if more than minor adjustments are required for CCSS implementation.

Questions to ask:

- What additional supports will be put in place for ELLs to meet the expectations of the common core standards?
- If common English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards are developed, will your state adopt them?
- Because the new common core standards will likely be implemented—at least initially—in the absence of common ELP state standards, how will your state assure that ELLs educated to be held to the same standards as everyone else?

Resources

- NCLR’s [Implementation Guide](#) helps ensure benefits for Latino students and English Language Learners.
- Colorin’ Colorado [Common Core State Standards for ELLs](#), is a comprehensive online resource guide for advocates interested in implementation and alignment of common core standards for English Language Learner students.
- WIDA (the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) Consortia, has conducted a review of the alignment of WIDA English Language Proficiency standards to the common core ELA and Math standards. [View their findings and determine whether your state participates in the WIDA consortia.](#)

Technology

The CCSS-assessments being developed by the Partnership for the Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced (SBAC) will place far greater demands on technology infrastructure than anything most states have dealt with to date. Both PARCC and SBAC will utilize computer-based administration, scoring, and reporting. Now is the time for states to be identifying their technology needs and deploying resources to meet them

Questions to Ask

- What is the state's currently technology infrastructure? Does it vary from region to region or district to district?
- What holes will the state need to fill in its infrastructure in order to meet the demands of the new assessment it will be implementing? What resources will it take to fill those holes? Who is responsible for ensuring that these resources are available and for ensuring that the holes are, in fact, filled on time?

Resources

- The Center for K-12 Assessment & Performance Management has a [guide to the assessments](#) being developed by the two common core assessment consortia, with specific information on how technology will be used.
- The Digital Learning Now! Smart Series is a collection of interactive papers that will provide specific guidance for policy makers and educational leaders regarding adoption of Common Core Standards and the shift to digital learning. [The first in the series covers funding the shift to digital learning.](#)
- Achieve and USED, in their [Common Core Implementation Planning Workbook](#) section 7, cover key issues in technology and digital learning transitions and enhancements necessary to successfully carry out common core standards implementation.

Aligning State Policies on Educator Evaluation, Accountability and Finance

States are not implementing CCSS in a vacuum; many are doing so at the same time that they are putting in place new educator evaluation and accountability systems under their NCLB waivers. How well all of these efforts line up is critical to the success of standards implementation, as well as to the success of the other policies.

Questions to Ask

Aligning Teacher Evaluation Policy

- How do any classroom observation materials developed for use in teacher evaluation systems align with the Common Core? Do either the evaluation law or administrative policy need to be

changed to ensure that evaluation procedures capture CCSS implementation at the classroom level?

- As the state shifts to the new CCSS assessment, what changes will need to be made in the way student growth is measured? How will the transition year/s be handled?

Aligning Accountability Policy

- Has the state made any changes to current assessments in order to prepare for the transition to the Common Core-aligned assessments? If so, have those changes been adequately factored into accountability ratings?
- How will the state's accountability system change following the implementation of Common Core standards and aligned assessments? Is there a plan for revising school and district accountability goals to reflect the anticipated drop in proficiency rates?

Aligning Finance Policy

- Is the state budgeting for the costs of implementing CCSS, including necessary professional and curriculum development, technology, and catch up supports for students who need extra help?
- Do schools and districts with concentrations of low-income students, ELL's, or other students who enter behind get the extra resources they need to catch these students up?
- Has the state set expectations for school districts around allocation of resources to any or all aspects of CCSS implementation?

Promising Practices

- **Louisiana** is working to integrate the transition to the CCSS with the transition to new educator evaluations. This effort includes training more teachers in the use of Shell Centre Math Tasks and Literacy by Design tasks and getting input from the state's CCSS State Implementation Team as educator evaluation policies and rubrics are designed.
- **New York** is revising current state assessments to measure implementation of Common Core. The state will provide information to educators about the difference between performance on 2012 assessments based on current state standards versus performance under Common Core

Resources

- Achieve's [On the Road to Implementation](#) identifies and provides information on state policies that need to be aligned with the Common Core.