

EDUCATION WEEK

SPOTLIGHT

On Implementing Common Standards

Editor's Note: As the Common Core States Standards take hold in schools, educators are changing approaches to teaching, testing, textbooks, and professional development. This Spotlight reviews some of the new texts aligned to the standards, results from the earliest student assessments, principal training efforts, and ways to reduce costs associated with common-core implementation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- 1 New Texts Aim to Capture Standards
- 5 Common Standards Adoption and Assessments
- 6 Test Group Rethinks Questions
- 7 Ky. Road-Tests Common Core
- 9 Principal Prep for Common Core Gaining Traction

COMMENTARY:

- 11 Teacher Collaboration: The Essential Ingredient
- 12 Common Core vs. Common Sense
- 13 Trimming the Cost of Common-Core Implementation

RESOURCES:

- 15 Resources on Implementing Common Standards



Published November 14, 2012, in Education Week

New Texts Aim to Capture Standards

Retooled basals rely more on documentation and analysis and less on personal experience

By Stephen Sawchuk

Two 5th grade volumes of McGraw-Hill's Treasures reading series at first glance look remarkably similar.

Both include, for instance, a nonfiction selection about a scientific mission to Antarctica, coupled with snippets from a researcher's journal. But there

are subtle differences in what they ask students to think about as they read. The older edition, from 2008, merely asks them to explain the value of keeping a journal. The newer one, from 2011, asks the students to explain how "sensory details and other language" differ between a primary source, such as the journal, and a secondary source, such as the narrative.

In the 2013 version of its Reading Street series, Pearson officials have excised “reader response” questions and replaced them with prompts asking students to “use examples from the text to justify your answer.”

From analyzing text features, to citing evidence, to de-emphasizing personal responses to readings, such changes nod in the direction of the Common Core State Standards’ English/language arts expectations.

All three of the major K-12 educational publishers have unveiled new basal-reading programs that purport to embody the standards, and supplemented older series, in order to claim that their products are “aligned,” “compliant,” or “coherent” with the common standards.

Yet a crucial question remains: Are the changes sufficient?

It is quite literally a multimillion-dollar question, one whose answer could shape the education publishing industry for years. Publishing officials estimate that upwards of 75 percent of the elementary curriculum market in reading remains dependent on basal textbooks.

Alignment Puzzle

The idea of alignment between curricular materials and content standards in reading has always been a bit fuzzy, according to experts who have studied reading programs.

“Publishers are very adept at correlating the standards to the instruction in their programs,” said Peter Dewitz, a professor of education at Mary Baldwin College, in Staunton, Va., and a former basal-reading-program author. “They can issue a page of correlations that illustrate what they’re doing, but if you look really closely, you’ll find that it’s a shallower interpretation of that standard than what the [standards] writers intended.”

Where the common core is concerned, curricular alignment matters because many of its English/language arts expectations—close reading, writing to source texts, using a rich vocabulary to build students’ background knowledge—are as new to educators as to students. Alignment, in that sense, is more than materials. It’s also about making sure they are structured in ways that help instructors make use of the materials.

“It is really, really hard work,” said Kate Gerson, a senior fellow for educator engagement and the common core for the Regents Research Fund, a nonprofit organization that works hand in hand with the New York state education department. “We are really struggling and celebrating as we toil to make sure the materials we are producing will support teachers in their implementation of the standards, while leaving room for

them to adapt and improve, and to inhabit texts in a very different way with students.”

Using federal Race to the Top funds, the state has started a collaboration with two smaller publishers, Expeditionary Learning and the Core Knowledge Foundation, to craft a comprehensive K-2 curriculum and modules for grades 3-5, which it will share with other states.

For this story, *Education Week* obtained and reviewed the 5th grade volumes of the three major publishing houses’ basal programs, comparing them where possible with volumes written before the final draft of the standards was published, in June 2010. They include Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s Journeys, from 2011; Pearson’s Reading Street, from 2008 and 2013; and McGraw-Hill’s Treasures, from 2009 and 2011. (McGraw-Hill also offers a new basal series, Reading Wonders, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt a new edition of Journeys, but full volumes of those products were not available for review.)

Great Expectations

As one of the few highly visible vetting processes for curricula, textbook adoption offers a window into the thorny topic of curricular alignment.

Fewer than half the states have a formal textbook-adoption or -review process, but among them are states with a large K-12 population, such as Florida. And there are already signs that the common standards are beginning to change how reading curricula are vetted, with many states drawing on the “publishers’ criteria,” a document crafted by two of the lead writers of the standards.

For its current English/language arts adoption, Florida built its evaluation framework on more than 100 pages of specifications drawn from the common standards and the publishers’ criteria. Among the state’s demands: Publishers must provide both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the complexity of each text selection in their basal series.

Using Lexiles and other quantitative ways of measuring text complexity is already common, but analyzing them subjectively is another matter. That requirement demands attention to such features as whether a story is told in flashbacks rather than chronologically, or contains several levels of meaning, as in satire or parody.

The criteria “reflect what we wanted to be able to work with teachers on,” said Stuart Greenberg, a former Florida department of education employee who helped design the evaluation tool. “Teachers had a lot of good PD on strategy work—main idea, compare

“My strong belief is that if we make a mistake and allow textbooks to go forward with our endorsement, it will indicate they are rigorous in a way many, if not all of them, probably are not.”

JOHN WHITE

State Superintendent,
Louisiana Department of Education

and contrast—but one of the things they haven't had as much training on is how to use the nuances of text structure to support understanding."

Such demands seem to have been taken seriously by publishers: Of the "big three" bidding on the lucrative Florida contract, all include text-complexity gauges in the series they submitted for review.

A similar desire to help teachers truly embody the standards in their instruction—rather than engage in "the great binder-replacement phenomenon"—caused Tennessee officials to break their English/language arts adoption cycle into two distinct phases, according to Emily Barton, the state's assistant commissioner of curriculum and instruction.

First, every basal series had to meet seven non-negotiable requirements, all related to the common core, including whether 80 percent of questions are "text dependent" and that at least 50 percent of selections are nonfiction. Only after meeting those requirements were the materials advanced to a second review, which digs into other criteria.

The state's two-tiered model has already forced some changes. For example, one publisher submitted a series that reviewers determined didn't provide students with enough writing activities requiring them to delve into source texts, Ms. Barton said. Faced with being disqualified from the rest of the review process, the publisher created an addendum.

"We saw publishers respond, when given information about places where their products were not meeting expectations," she said.

Publishers' Response

The major education publishing houses have, in general, distinguished between their bridge products, such as older series or editions they've supplemented, and brand-new editions that they crafted from scratch to embody the standards.

Districts using Treasures, for example, were offered free supplements, including teacher guides and new reading selections where needed, according to Daniela Perelli, the vice president of editorial for elementary reading at McGraw-Hill School Education, based in New York City. They were also provided with an analysis showing units in their old manuals they could use to provide aligned instruction.

"We did have that variety of text types already incorporated, and we spent a lot of time teaching about the genres in the piece, the organization of the piece, the particular aspects of writers' craft that we're asking

kids to look at," she said. "We felt the base was there, and good instruction was already in Treasures, and that we were now identifying it with the right labels."

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt offers for purchase common-core "enhancement" packages for districts using its backlisted series, such as StoryTown and Reading.

"A lot of the emphasis in the product is on writing and performance tasks," said Melissa J. Counihan, the vice president of product management and strategy for K-12 literacy and social studies for the Boston-based company. "Argumentative writing didn't really exist in the early-elementary grades; that's one of the things we really had to change for the enhancements."

Such efforts to retrofit older curricula, as it were, appear partly influenced by the overall decrease in revenue caused by cash-strapped districts' delays in purchasing new materials. McGraw-Hill officials, for instance, reported a 20 percent decline in its school division earnings in a second-quarter July conference call with investors. They attributed a "low-water mark" in K-12 publishing partly to the common core, and anticipated improvements in 2013.

Even in the publishers' new "from-the-ground-up" curricula—typically identified by the words "common core" appearing on the cover—as well as in the older curricula, there is a degree of repetition in the series. About half the reading selections are repeated between Reading Street's 2008 and 2013 5th grade anthology, as are about two-thirds of readings in Treasures between 2009 and 2011. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt officials said about half the selections in Journeys' 5th grade anthology are identical between the 2011 and 2014 editions, too.

But as evidenced earlier, there are differences, if sometimes subtle ones, in how exercises for students are framed. In a selection about a 19th century woman, the 2011 edition of Treasures, for instance, asks students to detail how an author's "choice of words" relates to the purpose of her biographical narrative, a question not in the former version's exercises for the same selection.

The 2013 version of Reading Street has some arguably more difficult "writing across texts" prompts. A narrative about ghost towns is now accompanied by a short piece of historical fiction. Rather than making a poster, as in the previous edition, students must now write a journal entry in a character's voice, drawing on details from the nonfiction text.

Some of the most important changes, the publishers said, appear in the new teachers' editions to help them implement the new techniques. For example, the brand new

A Market in Transition

All three of the largest K-12 publishers have put out new core reading series or editions that purport to embody the Common Core State Standards, highlighted in red. They also offer enhancements and supplements for their older curricula.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT

Journeys Common Core (2014)

Journeys (2011)

StoryTown (2008)

MCGRAW-HILL

Reading Wonders 2013)

Treasures (2011, 2009)

Imagine It! (2008)

PEARSON

Reading Street Common Core (2013)

Reading Street (2011, 2008)

SOURCE: *Education Week*

Reading Street teacher editions guide teachers through the reading of each featured text three times, said Nancy L. Winship, the vice president of product development for Pearson PreK-12 literacy. The tool responds to the common core's demands that complex texts should be read multiple times as students master its new vocabulary, meaning, and craft.

McGraw-Hill and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt officials say their newest basals, which weren't available for review, offer similar features.

New Tests

The ultimate test of alignment, though, lies in the hands of state reviewers.

Complicating those decisions is the fact that state adoption tends to be an all-or-nothing decision, leaving less room for

shades of gray. Materials in Florida, for instance, are being evaluated on each criterion on a 1-to-4 scale, but they don't have to clear a particular point threshold in order to win adoption, state officials said.

In New Mexico's adoption earlier this year, reviewers detailed perceived weaknesses in several of the K-3 basal volumes. Documents on the state's website show that reviewers judged that Journeys 2011, even with supplements, "does not sufficiently provide opportunities for in-depth writing instruction" vis-à-vis the common core. And while the 2013 Reading Street's reading comprehension instruction was praised, its research and inquiry prompts were deemed "limited in scope." But both series were ultimately approved by the state.

Tennessee, for the first time, will issue letter grades to English/language arts materials, a move officials hope will give a better sense of reviewers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses in each basal series' alignment to the standards.

Louisiana's 2012-13 adoption process could serve as a test case of how far states are willing to press on the issue of alignment.

Publishers' bids, including one by each of the three major houses, were reviewed by committees against three newly developed evaluation tools drawn from the common core. But based on those reviews—which have not yet been made public—and his own perusal, state Superintendent John White said he is skeptical of the textbooks, and is considering whether to recommend any to the state board of education for adoption, in December.

"I'm very concerned that the questions, the assessments, the text complexity, and other dimensions of the textbooks are not remotely ready to be called 'aligned' with the common core," Mr. White said. "My strong belief is that if we make a mistake and allow textbooks to go forward with our endorsement, it will indicate they are rigorous in a way many, if not all of them, probably are not."

Beyond Adoption

The rush to update the basal readers has some observers asking deeper questions about the architecture of reading curricula. Mr. Dewitz of Mary Baldwin College, for instance, contends that past the earliest grades, basal textbooks may no longer be an ideal way to teach to the depth envisioned in the standards.

"If you read deeply into the common core,

it's the ability to trace and track the development of an idea or a character over time," he said. "Essentially from 3rd grade up, they are talking about books."

Ms. Barton says more Tennessee districts have expressed interest in using complete texts in elementary English/language arts classes, rather than shorter, prepackaged curriculum units.

"I do hear districts say, 'We're going to use these three short texts and these two long ones,' and that they want to get the copyright licenses and go from there," she said. "We don't yet have the 'iTunes' version of curriculum, ... but common standards do change the economies of scale."

In one development, educators across the country are increasingly making use of free or open-source materials to craft lessons. And while the quality of those materials is widely variable, New York officials view their project as a way of signaling what a baseline standard of alignment quality should look like in the state. Unlike the proprietary basal series, the curriculum will be open-source—free for teachers, districts, and even states to use as they see fit, Ms. Gerson said.

Though it's difficult to say how the market will evolve as implementation continues, some see opportunities amid the chaos.

"I have a sense from teachers that they are going to want greater control over decisions that heretofore have been oftentimes left to publishers or central offices," Mr. White said. "That's going to take hundreds of thousands of different forms; but I do think it implies a shift away from teachers who are willing to say, 'OK, I will take this book of content, its order, its skills, its sequence, and its assessments on face value as simply what I need to teach.'"

Coverage of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the common assessments is supported in part by a grant from the GE Foundation, at www.ge.com/foundation



The Synced Solution is the product of a partnership between two companies at the forefront of education, technology, and K-12 school reform:

Action Learning Systems (ALS) was founded in Los Angeles in 1995 to address three core beliefs: ALL students can learn, success breeds success, and schools control the conditions of success. By 2000, ALS became known as California's premier leader in school reform by pioneering a whole-school reform model based on research strategies known to have a measurable impact on student achievement.

actionlearningsystems.com

SchoolCity is a K-12 educational technology company that has been helping to improve teaching and learning since 1999. Currently, hundreds of districts, serving more than 500,000 students, come to SchoolCity for innovative assessment, data analysis, and reporting.

schoolcity.com

Common Core State Standards expertise **&** intuitive, elegant technology
thesyncedsolution.com

Get to know  in person in 2013:

January 30 & 31	Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) 2013 Superintendents' Symposium (Monterey, CA)
February 1 & 2	California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators (CALSA) 7th Annual Focus on Results Symposium (Monterey, CA)
February 12 & 13	Action Learning Systems (ALS) Using the Common Core from Bell-to-Bell: Direct Interactive Instruction Conference (Anaheim, CA)
February 21 & 22	American Association of Schools Administrators (AASA) National Conference on Education (Los Angeles, CA)
February 27 & 28	Action Learning Systems (ALS) Leading in the Common Core Era Conference (Oakland, CA)
March 11 - 14	California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) The 20th Annual California Charter Schools Conference and Anniversary Celebration (San Diego, CA)
March 20	Action Learning Systems (ALS) 6th Annual Partnership Summit (Glendale, CA)
April 10 & 11	Small School Districts' Association 30th Anniversary Annual Conference (Sacramento, CA)
October 12 - 16	Council of the Great City Schools 2013 Annual Conference (Albuquerque, NM)

For more information, call **877.228.8125** or email us at info@thesyncedsolution.com.



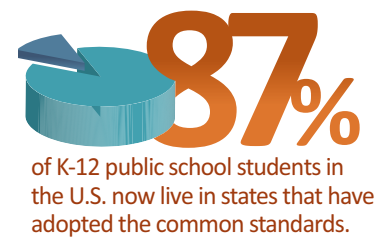
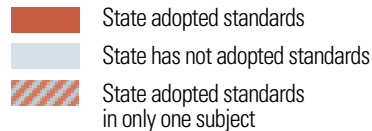
Published April 25, 2012, in Education Week

Common Standards Adoption and Assessments

In less than three years, the Common Core State Standards have vaulted over key hurdles, surprising more than a few naysayers. In June 2009, governors and education chiefs in 46 states pledged their support for the idea. A year later, panels of experts unveiled the completed standards. By November 2011, all but four states had formally adopted them and groups of states began developing tests and supplemental resources for the common standards. This infographic follows the progression of the recent common-standards movement.

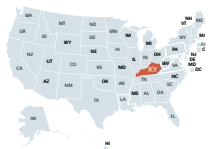
Speedy Process

Once the federal government dangled benefits for signing on to the common core, states quickly adopted the standards in English/language arts and mathematics.

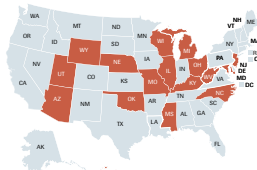


2010 STANDARDS ADOPTERS IN THE YEAR

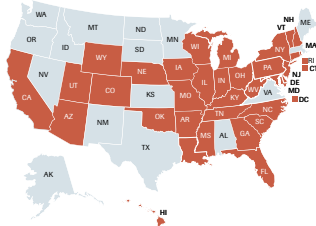
● FEBRUARY
Total states **1**



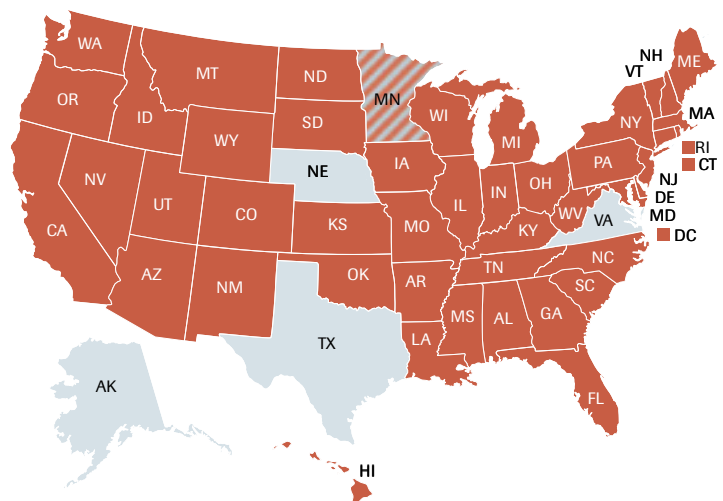
● JUNE
Total states **17**



● JULY/AUGUST
Total states **37**

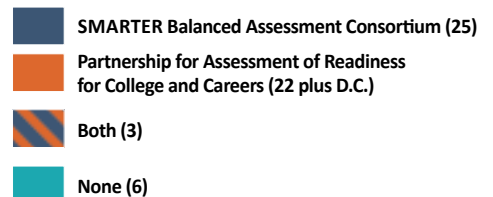
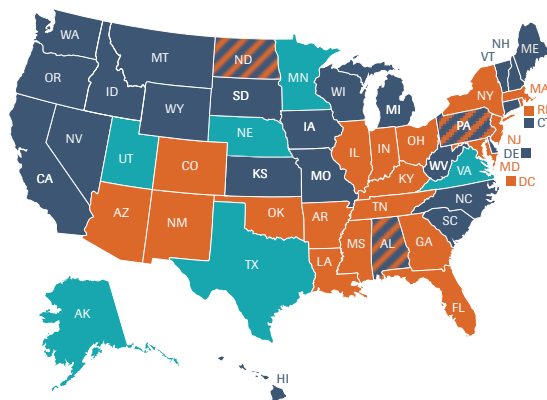


● Today
Total states **46** PLUS THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



ASSESSMENT CONSORTIA MEMBERSHIP

\$360 million in federal grants has gone to groups of states developing common assessments.



SOURCES: SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium; Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

Published December 5, 2012, in *Education Week*

Test Group Rethinks Questions

Fewer Performance Items on Common-Core Exams

By Catherine Gewertz

A group that is developing tests for half the states in the nation has dramatically reduced the length of its assessment in a bid to balance the desire for a more meaningful and useful exam with concerns about the amount of time spent on testing.

The decision by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium reflects months of conversation among its 25 state members and technical experts and carries heavy freight for millions of students, who will be tested in two years. The group is one of two state consortia crafting tests for the Common Core State Standards with \$360 million in federal Race to the Top money.

From an original design that included multiple, lengthy performance tasks, the test has been revised to include only one such task in each subject—mathematics and English/language arts—and has been tightened in other ways, reducing its length by several hours.

The final blueprint of the assessment, approved by the consortium last month now estimates it will take seven hours in grades 3-5, 7½ hours in grades 6-8, and 8½ hours in grade 11.

Earlier this fall, states' worries about too much testing time had prompted the group to offer a choice: a "standard" version of the assessment—6½ to 8 hours—or an "extended" one, which would run 10½ to 13 hours, with more items to facilitate more-detailed feedback on student performance. (See *Education Week*, September 19, 2012.)

Persistent doubts about that plan, however, led to further discussions and a decision to expand the shorter version by about 30 minutes and make it the only one offered, consortium officials said.

The computer-adaptive test will include multiple-choice, constructed-response, and technology-enhanced items. The performance tasks are far lengthier and more complex, requiring students to do things like write several short essays based on their readings from multiple articles and videos, or perform a host of calculations to figure out how to build and plant a community garden.

While many states saw value in having

more performance tasks on the test, the amount of information they could yield didn't justify the additional testing hours, said Carrissa Miller, the deputy superintendent for assessment, content, and school choice in Idaho, and the co-chairwoman of the SBAC executive committee. Including even one such task—which requires students to tackle longer, more complex math problems and write essays based on reading multiple texts—represents a major improvement in most states' assessment systems, she said.

"It's a precarious balance between having a test that we get all the measurement pieces we need, and having it be so long that it becomes impractical," she said. "Having even one very authentic performance task, [with] how much that will change instruction in states that have not had those kinds of things in the past. I think we really came to a sweet spot."

Drilling Down

A key push in the latest redesign was to ensure that the test yields enough detailed information to enable reports on student performance in specific areas of math and English/language arts, Smarter Balanced officials said. The U.S. Department of Education, in particular, pressed for that, said Joe Willhoft, SBAC's executive director. And the consortium's technical-advisory committee had persistent concerns about a pared-down test's ability to report meaningfully on student, as opposed to classroom- or district-level, performance, SBAC leaders said.

The final version will yield overall student scores in math and in English/language arts, by four levels of performance and on a yet-to-be-designed scale, Mr. Willhoft said. It will also produce student-level scores in three areas of math—concepts and procedures, communicating reasoning, and problem-solving/modeling/data analysis—and in four areas of literacy—reading, writing, listening, and research, he said.

In the earlier, "standard" version of the test, some of those areas were combined, making it hard to judge those aspects of students' performance. Adding more items and shifting their distribution allows the test to gauge

“For Smarter Balanced to make a real contribution, it has to make certain that its other two pieces, the interim and formative assessments, are instructionally focused, so educators can do something with the results.”

W. JAMES POPHAM

Assessment Expert,
Smarter Balanced Technician-advisory
Committee

students' skills in each area, Mr. Willhoft said, while time was managed by scaling back performance tasks and reducing the length of some reading passages.

Still, some experts see the resulting reports as being of disappointingly little instructional value.

W. James Popham, an assessment expert who serves on the Smarter Balanced technical-advisory committee, said tests can provide meaningful information only if teachers and students get more fine-grained feedback than an overall score in writing or in math "concepts and procedures."

"It's still too broad," he said. "No one can ferret out what students need help with. For Smarter Balanced to make a real contribution, it has to make certain that its other two pieces, the interim and formative assessments, are instructionally focused, so educators can do something with the results."

The Right Balance

The evolution of the Smarter Balanced assessment showcases a persistent tension at the heart of the purpose of student testing, some experts say.

"Is it about getting data for instruction? Or is it about measuring the results of instruction? In a nutshell, that's what this is all about," said Douglas J. McRae, a retired test designer who helped shape California's assessment system. "You cannot adequately serve both purposes with one test."

That's because the more-complex, nuanced items and tasks that make assessment a more valuable educational experience for students, and yield information detailed and meaningful enough to help educators adjust instruction to students' needs, also make tests longer and more expensive, Mr. McRae and other experts said.

What Smarter Balanced did, he said, was to compromise on obtaining data to guide instruction in order to produce a test that measures the results of instruction. As a strong supporter of accountability, that's an approach Mr. McRae supports. It's also crucial to have data that guide day-to-day instruction, he said, but that should come from separate formative and interim tests.

That's what SBAC has in mind, said Mr. Willhoft. Its end-of-year, summative tests will measure results for accountability, and those can shape what schools and districts do long term, he said.

"I'm not convinced that the end-of-year summative assessment used for accountability could be imagined to be extremely instructionally useful," Mr. Willhoft said. It's the interim and formative pieces of its system, he said, that have the potential to affect day-to-day instruction in profound ways.

The plan is to have thousands of test items and tasks in an online "bank" teachers can draw from to custom-design interim tests on specific standards. Also available will be a bank of "formative" tools and strategies to help them judge and monitor students' learning as they go along, Mr. Willhoft said. That three-pronged approach—summative, interim, formative—makes up the "balanced" suite of tests many have sought, he said.

The final test design, with a mix of multiple-choice, constructed-response, technology-enhanced, and performance items, is a big improvement over the exams most states have now, said Deborah V.H. Sigman, California's deputy superintendent of public instruction and a member of SBAC's executive committee.

"We have a summative assessment that signals to the world that there are different ways to measure what students are learning and can do," she said. "That's a huge benefit."

Coverage of implementation of college- and career-ready standards is supported in part by a grant from the GE Foundation, at www.ge.com/foundation.

Published November 7, 2012, in Education Week

Ky. Road-Tests Common Core

By Andrew Ujifusa

Results from new state tests in Kentucky—the first in the nation explicitly tied to the Common Core State Standards—show that the share of students scoring "proficient" or better in reading and math dropped by roughly a third or more in both elementary and middle school the first year the tests were given.

Kentucky in 2010 was the first state to adopt the common core in English/language arts and mathematics, and the assessment results released last week for the 2011-12 school year are being closely watched by school officials and policymakers nationwide for what they may reveal about how the common standards may affect student achievement in coming years. So far, 46 states have adopted the English/language arts common standards; 45 states have done so in math.

Two federally funded consortia are working on assessments based on the common standards, and those tests are not slated to be fully ready for schools until 2014-15. But Kentucky's tests are generally understood to be linked to the common core.

"What you're seeing in Kentucky is a predictor of what you're going to see in the other states, as the assessments roll out next year and the year after," said Gene Wilhoit, the executive director of the Washington-based Council of Chief State School Officers, which spearheaded the common-core initiative along with the National Governors Association. Mr. Wilhoit was also previously Kentucky's education commissioner.

Proficiency Rate Drops

The drop in Kentucky's scores conform to what state education officials had expected: that students in grades 3-8 taking the new, more-rigorous Kentucky Performance Rating of Education Progress, or K-PREP, would not be able to reach their achievement levels of prior years. Kentucky began implementing

the common standards in the 2011-12 school year.

The biggest drop came at the elementary level. On the previous Kentucky Core Content Tests, 76 percent of elementary students scored proficient or higher in reading in the 2010-11 school year. That percentage plunged to 48 percent for the K-PREP results in the 2011-12 school year, a drop-off in proficiency of more than a third.

In 2010-11, 73 percent of elementary students were proficient or better in math, but that fell to 40.4 percent. That drop represents a 45 percent decline in the share of proficient students.

Middle schoolers' decline was a little less steep. In reading, they dropped from a 70 percent proficiency level in 2010-11 to 46.8 percent in 2011-12, a decline of a third. In math, proficiency-or-better levels declined slightly more than that, from 65 percent in 2010-11 to 40.6 percent in 2011-12.

Overall, students in grades 3-8 demonstrated somewhat higher proficiency levels in reading than in math.

When new tests are introduced, states can expect scores to fall in most cases, said Douglas McRae, a retired assessment designer who helped build California's testing system. "When you change the measure, change the tests, then you interrupt the continuity of trend data over time. That's the fundamental thing that happens," he said.

Kentucky developed its tests in conjunction with Pearson, the New York City-based education and testing company, which is also crafting curricula for the common core.

K-PREP does not represent the final, polished version of common-core assessments. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium are designing the tests that most states have signed on to for gauging students' mastery of the common standards nationwide beginning in the 2014-15 school year. (Kentucky belongs to the PARCC consortium.)

But Mr. Wilhoit said K-PREP represents the state's best effort, along with Pearson's, "to develop an assessment that was representative of the common core."

Proficiency drops also occurred in the end-of-course tests in reading and math Kentucky administered to high school students. But those declines were smaller than those in the earlier grades, and a state study shows that while the K-PREP tests are completely aligned with the common standards, the high school end-of-course tests (from the ACT QualityCore program) are only about 80 percent to 85 percent aligned to the standards.

The proficiency level in high school reading dropped from 65 percent to 52.2 percent (a figure 6 percentage points higher than the state's prediction), based on the end-of-course tests, while proficiency in math fell from 46 percent to 40 percent on the Algebra 2 test, beating the state's prediction by 4 percentage points.

Commissioner's Take

Kentucky education Commissioner Terry Holliday said that students beat the state's predictions for both the K-PREP and end-of-course exams. Using a statistical model that predicted ACT performance based on academic results in reading and math in 2011, for example, the state estimated a 36 percentage-point drop in elementary reading scores in 2011-12, instead of the actual 28-point drop.

"We're just a little bit above our prediction, which I think is a pretty good testament to our teaching," Mr. Holliday said.

Earlier exposure to the common standards, he suggested, would help younger students at first.

"It's going to take a little longer to see middle and high school growth on these tests," Mr. Holliday said. "It'll take about five years to see an overall growth of significance at all levels."

But based on national benchmarks, the new K-PREP tests may not have been rigorous enough, said Richard Innes, an education policy analyst at the Bluegrass Institute, a conservative-leaning Lexington, Ky.-based think tank.

In a report released last week for the institute, Mr. Innes compared the K-PREP math scores for 8th graders this year (41.5 percent proficient or better) with the results on the ACT Explore test this year (30.5 percent) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress proficiency levels in 2011 (31 percent).

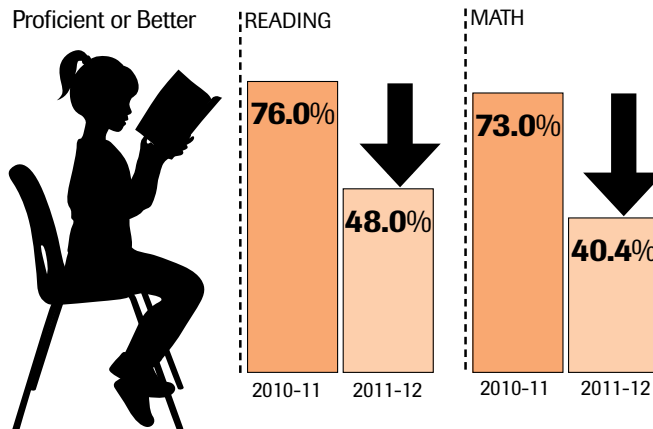
"There are questions in my mind as to whether they are rigorous enough in several areas," he said. Different subject tests appeared to have been more rigorous in different grade levels, Mr. Innes said. The math in middle schools appears to be the subject where K-PREP is less rigorous than NAEP or Explore tests, he noted. He drew the same conclusion about K-PREP reading results at the elementary school level.

One number that went up: the proportion of

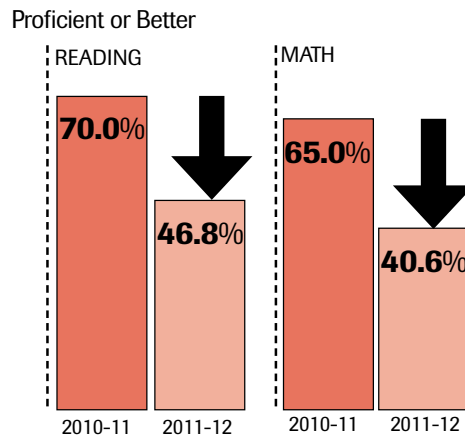
HEADING SOUTH

Kentucky was the first state to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Results on its first round of tests linked to the standards are expected to draw widespread scrutiny.

Elementary School



Middle School

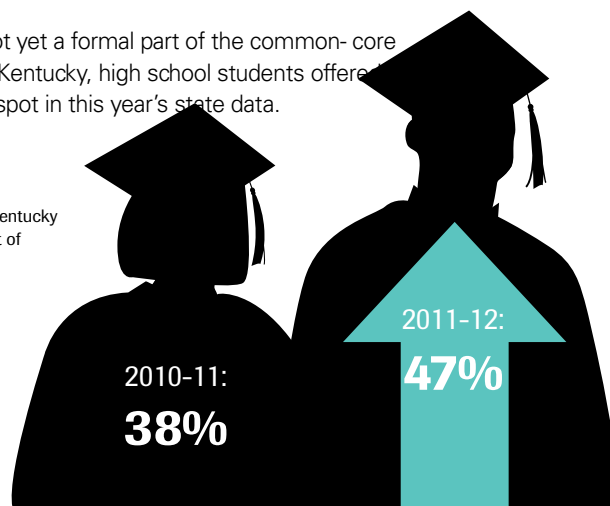


High School: College and Career Readiness

ANOTHER YARDSTICK

While not yet a formal part of the common-core effort in Kentucky, high school students offered a bright spot in this year's state data.

SOURCE: Kentucky Department of Education



students qualifying as college and/or career ready, which rose to 47 percent in 2011-12, from 38 percent the previous year. Mr. Holliday attributed that rise to the state creating more career pathways and bringing more introductory college courses to high school seniors to prevent the need for postsecondary remediation.

"To get that much improvement in the first year is extraordinary, I think," said Bob King, the president of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, based in Frankfort, Ky.

Preparing the Public

To combat a potential public backlash from the lower scores, Mr. Holliday noted that he had enlisted the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce as part of a yearlong public relations campaign.

Florida schools earlier this year endured a significant backlash when proficiency rates on its state writing tests dropped by two-thirds after a tougher grading system was introduced, forcing the state school board to change the test's cutoff score retroactively.

"We knew the scores were going to drop, but this is the right thing for our kids, our schools," he said. "You're going to see quite a different reaction in Kentucky because we watched what happened everywhere else," Mr. Holliday said.

But the transition for schools can be disappointing for some, especially in the short term. Carmen Coleman, the superintendent of the Danville Independent district, said she was proud of how the school system had progressed over the past three years from a ranking of 110th to 24th among the state's 174 districts, only to tumble back to the middle of the pack in the newest rankings of school districts.

"It's a tough blow for teachers and students," she said.

The Kentucky PTA has received grant money from the National PTA to educate parents and others about the new standards, but the state group's president, Teri Gale, said it doesn't mean people won't be caught off guard by the lower-than-usual results.

"They've heard us talk about it. They've seen the newscasts and everything," Ms. Gale said. "But until they actually see the scores, I don't think it's going to hit home that this is what we were talking about."

Coverage of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the common assessments is supported in part by a grant from the GE Foundation, at www.ge.com/foundation.

Published June 6, 2012, in Education Week

Principal Prep for Common Core Gaining Traction

By Catherine Gewertz

A year ago, top officials in the school leadership world were worried. It seemed to them that principals were being overlooked in national conversations about how to get educators ready for the Common Core State Standards.

But that is changing. The past six months have seen a surge of activity to acquaint principals with the new standards and teach them how to lead their staff members through the profound changes that are required to turn the new expectations into classroom instruction.

"There is much greater awareness now about what we need to do to educate principals about what they should be doing for the common core," said JoAnn D. Bartoletti, the executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

A year ago, as she took the helm of the NASSP, Ms. Bartoletti told *Education Week* that far too little was being done to prepare principals to lead common-standards implementation in their buildings. And while there is still much more work to be done to fully support principals in the common core, "I am more hopeful than I was last spring," she said last week. "There is more going on now."

Ryan Imbriale, the principal of Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts in Baltimore County, Md., said the past year has brought a spike in the amount of information being offered for principals on leading common-core implementation. Still, it can be tricky to figure out what's high-quality guidance, he said.

Meeting a Need

"All of a sudden, a floodgate has opened, and there is a real focus on this," Mr. Imbriale said. "Articles in journals, opportunities for seminars, summer trainings. I want to make sure I get the right information from the right people."

“There is a tsunami that’s about to hit our schools, and I’m worried that our principals are not prepared.”

GAIL CONNELLY

Executive Director, NAESP

The 30,000-member NASSP, based in Reston, Va., jumped into the void by partnering with the College Board to offer a series of six webinars that walked principals through some of the issues they will face as they work with their teachers to implement the new standards.

Mel Riddle, the NASSP's associate director of high school services, wrote a series of columns on principals and the common core for the National High School Center, part of the American Institutes for Research, and sought to spread the message as well through an April webinar for the Alliance for Excellent Education, a Washington-based high school improvement group. The NASSP assembled the webinars and columns, along with articles from its blog and its monthly magazine, on a new common-core resources Web page.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals is also beginning to offer common-core information to its members, as it did in a May 3 webinar with the School Improvement Network. The Alexandria, Va.-based group hired a full-time staff member devoted to the standards, compiled a "checklist" aimed at helping principals take stock of

what they must do to move ahead with the new standards, and set up a Web portal to house its new stock of common-core resources.

The two national principals' groups have conducted recent joint trainings in Georgia and Michigan, supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the James B. Hunt Institute, a North Carolina nonprofit that supports the common standards. Lucille Davy, a former New Jersey commissioner of education who is now serving as a senior adviser to the Hunt Institute, said that the groups hope to offer more such trainings in states that want them.

Gail Connelly, the executive director of the NAESP, said she hopes those sessions can help fill what has until recently been a void.

"There is a tsunami that's about to hit our schools, and I'm worried that our principals are not prepared," she said.

Leading Change

Principals must understand many moving parts of school life to lead their staffs toward the common standards, the NASSP's Mr. Riddile said. Not only must they grasp the content and pedagogical changes in the standards, but they also must recognize a host of other potentially necessary changes: grading practices, daily schedules, student grouping, monitoring, and implications for special education, English-language learners, Advanced Placement, technology, and counseling.

"If I were designing an implementation plan, the first thing I would want to do is get the school leader on board," said Mr. Riddile, who led two Virginia high schools and was the 2006 national secondary school principal of the year. "They have to have the big picture of where this is going, how to work with the teachers."

The ASCD has expanded its focus on principals, giving a common-core webinar earlier this month that walked participants through the standards' key ideas and how they should look in the classroom. The Alexandria, Va.-based professional-development group will also run two-day institutes for principals in five cities scheduled for August.

New York state created a number of resources for school leaders, including a principal's guide to overseeing the key instructional shifts in the standards, and posted them on its common-core website, engageny.org. It describes what is expected of students, teachers, and principals in each such shift.

The 405,000-student Chicago school district is reaching its principals through its regional superintendents. In four meetings this year, those 18 regional superintendents explored the common core, said Steve Gering, the district's chief leadership-development officer. They then worked with the district's 625 prin-

cipals and their school leadership teams. The idea, Mr. Gering said, is to create a structure that not only builds capacity among principals, but also enables them to customize the work to their school sites and offers ongoing support as they put the work into practice.

"We have to empower the instructional-leadership team, led by the principal, to adapt the information around the common core to the needs of their school," he said. "The principal is the one leading the adaptation and design of the common core to their school site and is the one ultimately responsible for implementing it."

Mr. Imbriale, the Baltimore County principal, said he has gotten help both from his state and his district in wading into the common-core work. Last summer, every principal took a school team to a Maryland education department summer training academy, where they learned about the new standards and designed a school transition plan, he said. The team from Patapsco High—Mr. Imbriale and his core-subject department chairs—has been at the heart of the work ever since, he said.

They brainstorm with other department chairs in the district at monthly meetings, returning to share what they learned with their colleagues, he said. He, too, uses monthly principals' meetings at the district level to build his knowledge and bring it back to his staff.

"An administrator that doesn't get that kind of support from the central office can feel very isolated," Mr. Imbriale said. Also crucial, he said, is building a good team with his department chairs, since he depends on them to be key conductors of the work throughout the building.

The biggest watchword in overseeing common-core implementation for Tracey Lamb is monitoring. As the principal of Fulton County High school in Hickman, Ky., she uses twice-monthly faculty meetings to hone teachers' instructional focus and make sure they are gauging students' progress regularly and adjusting instruction accordingly.

"It's all about instruction and facilitating to make sure that what is supposed to be happening is happening," said Ms. Lamb, Kentucky's 2008 high school principal of the year. "Monitoring, monitoring, monitoring, and teaching, teaching, teaching."

Principals must also be sure to carve time out of the schedule to let teachers work together on ways to teach the standards and analyze data from assessments of student work, Ms. Lamb said. Additionally, principals must take care to coordinate with feeder schools to align expectations, she said.

As principals begin exploring their role as common-core leaders, some caution them against seeing themselves as solo players.

Rob Weil, the director of field programs for the American Federation of Teachers, urges

them to approach common-core leadership as a joint project with their teachers, working as a team to define and observe classroom practice.

"Leadership isn't one person," said Mr. Weil. "It's most effective when everyone is playing a role, working together."

If common-core implementation is to be sustained over time, it's not only current principals who must be prepared, but aspiring principals as well. And those engaged in that work say far too little is happening.

Preservice Preparation

Margaret Terry Orr oversees one of the leadership-training programs at the Bank Street College of Education in New York. She also chairs a regional association of such programs and serves on a state task force that's examining principal evaluation. She reports that little attention is being given to ensuring that new principals are prepared to lead their staffs in teaching the common standards.

"Principal-preparation programs just haven't been doing very much with this," she said. "The dialogue is just beginning."

New York state officials have begun working with the public university systems to think about how to incorporate common-core ideas into teacher preparation, Ms. Orr said, but are not yet doing likewise with programs that prepare principals. "We fear that attention to leadership preparation will not be well addressed," she said.

Top education officials in New York recognize and place a high value on ensuring strong common-core leadership in school buildings, but because of limited capacity, haven't yet been able to focus a lot of investment in aspiring principals, said Ken Slentz, the deputy commissioner for the office of P-12 education, which, with the state's office of higher education, oversees professional development for teacher and principal evaluation.

The state is focusing first on training those who evaluate principals, on the theory that the process can strengthen in-service school leaders by designing targeted professional development based on multiple observations and surveys of parents, students, and teachers, he said.

The education department recognizes that it must turn its attention to principal preparation, he said, so that both preservice and in-service programs build the instructional leadership of principals.

Coverage of leadership, expanded learning time, and arts learning is supported in part by a grant from The Wallace Foundation, at www.wallacefoundation.org.



Action Learning Systems, Inc.

Implementing the Common Core State Standards

As the American education system inches closer to full actualization of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a unique opportunity presents itself. Teachers and administrators have the chance to revitalize classroom instruction in a significant and enduring way. However, they also have the chance to affect nothing. Approaching the CCSS with a consistent and coherent district-wide implementation strategy greatly increases the chances of a smooth transition to higher achievement for ALL students. Without such a strategy, districts diminish their chances for meaningful success, and the CCSS could become another in a string of failed reform initiatives.

Using the Principles of **Focus**, **Alignment**, **Expectations**, and **Opportunity** is an effective framework for CCSS implementation. It begins with narrowing the classroom's, school site's, and district's focus to the knowledge and skills students must master to be successful in college and careers. All programs, practices, procedures, and policies must then be aligned so that every educational activity supports mastery of the CCSS. Afterward, high expectations and meaningful opportunities are established for all stakeholders – from students to teachers to administrators.

An implementation strategy utilizing **Focus**, **Alignment**, **Expectations**, and **Opportunity** should occur in five stages.

Stage 1 – Defining: The Context for Implementation

Defining a context for CCSS implementation includes two important factors. The first is a clear vision of what the district will look and feel like as a result of the implementation. The second is an explicit purpose for what the implementation strategy will achieve. When defining the context for implementation:

- Clarify the vision and purpose for implementation of the CCSS.
- Identify the **Focus** of growth goals that ensure mastery of the standards for ALL students.
- Establish the specific roles for the leadership and support teams.
- Educate the leadership teams about the background, organization, and content of the standards, as well as develop an awareness of the new assessments available.
- Create a time line for implementation that includes all five stages.

Stage 2 – Designing: The Plan for Implementation

The designing stage of the implementation strategy should employ the four Principles at every level of the school system, from teacher to superintendent, including clarity on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. When designing the plan for implementation:

- Create a coordinated, systematic implementation strategy to ensure mastery of the CCSS for ALL students.
- Identify assessments that track the **Focus** growth of mastery of the CCSS.
- **Align** all instructional programs, instructional practices, operational procedures, and school board policies to ensure students meet and exceed the **Focus** growth goals.
- Set **Expectations** and **Opportunities** for all stakeholders, including students, teachers, principals, district office administrators, superintendents, board members, and parents.
- Develop a scaffolded time line, specifying explicit activities and the budget for enacting the CCSS implementation strategy.

Stage 3 – Delivering: The Support for Implementation

Delivering the implementation strategy must include support for both instruction and school personnel. All teaching materials should be **Aligned** to the CCSS per the established **Focus**. Professional development **Opportunities** should support teachers in making the transition from previous grade-level standards to the delivery of the CCSS. When delivering the support for implementation:

- Analyze the standards, complete a gap analysis of materials **Aligned** to the CCSS, and identify a comprehensive solution for **Aligning** existing textbooks and instructional materials to the CCSS.
- Audit the district's technological infrastructure in order to develop a comprehensive student achievement system that monitors the progress of meeting the **Focus** goals.
- Ensure comprehensive professional development **Opportunities** for teachers of English Language Arts, Math, Science, History/Social Studies, and Technical Subjects in enacting the CCSS implementation strategy.
- Deliver professional development **Opportunities** to the leadership teams in the context for change, including the components of the implementation strategy, content of the standards, delivery using Direct Interactive Instruction, and lesson planning.

Stage 4 – Documenting: The Monitoring of Implementation

Once set into motion, recording the progress of implementation includes identifying the features of the monitoring, gathering data on student performance and achievement growth, and analyzing the data in order to make plans for continuous improvement. When documenting the monitoring of implementation:

- Develop an accountability system that sets **Expectations** for the effective implementation of the CCSS.
- Determine the high-level characteristics of effective implementation.
- Gather evidence of both student achievement and the implementation of **Aligned** programs, practices, procedures, and policies.
- Analyze data to determine strengths and weaknesses and to establish the **Focus** for the next steps.
- Provide feedback to all stakeholders, including **Opportunities** for support.

Stage 5 – Determining: The Next Steps for Implementation

Determining the successes and roadblocks of the implementation strategy encompasses both reflection and preparation. Drawing on past lessons learned provides the framework upon which future implementation efforts are based. When determining the next steps for implementation:

- Evaluate each major component of the implementation strategy.
- Revise plans for continuous improvement, using the four Principles of **Focus**, **Alignment**, **Expectations**, and **Opportunity**.



Action Learning Systems, Inc.

Action Learning Systems (ALS) was founded in 1995 to address three core beliefs: ALL students can learn, success breeds success, and schools control the conditions of success.

Kit Marshall, PhD, the company's founder, has worked throughout the country in the earliest efforts to develop high standards and multiple measures of mastery. These experiences grounded the development of her four core Principles of School Reform: clear **Focus**, tight **Alignment**, high **Expectations**, and expanded **Opportunity** for success. ALS has a long and successful history in the development of standards-aligned materials, assessment, interventions, and research-based instructional strategies for kindergarten through grade twelve. They help school communities find strategic solutions by offering standards-based instruction and materials, research-based strategies, training and coaching, and intervention programs.

Action Learning Systems in partnership with SchoolCity developed The Synced Solution, a web-based software that allows users to align existing textbooks and instructional materials to the Common Core State Standards.

For more information, call (626) 744-5344, or visit www.actionlearningsystems.com.

Published December 5, 2012, in *Education Week*

COMMENTARY

Teacher Collaboration: The Essential Common-Core Ingredient

By Vicki Phillips & Robert L. Hughes

We ask a lot of our teachers and, as a nation, we're about to ask a lot more. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and math in almost every state, we are raising the bar on what students must master to be prepared in an increasingly competitive world. Gone are the days when states and districts could lower expectations, hide poor results, or create confusion about what students are capable of achieving.

But the real challenge is for teachers, not policymakers: The new standards emphasize teaching fewer topics, but in greater depth, and focusing more on hands-on learning and dynamic student projects than traditional lectures. If students are to be successful, teachers must also encourage innovative assignments that require students to show their understanding, use their knowledge and skills to solve problems, create written and multimedia presentations, and complete real-world tasks.

The common core means that teachers must shift their practice and teach more advanced materials to their students in more successful ways. How can we accomplish such a substantial change in classroom instruction in thousands of schools and tens of thousands of classrooms, and with millions of students with differing abilities, interests, and life goals? We believe the answer lies in two key strategies: greater teacher collaboration and better instructional materials in the classroom.

In a 2012 Scholastic Inc. survey of teachers, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, teachers indicated they need more professional support and development to implement these standards. In our experience, the best professional development comes from those already in our schools. When engaging in inquiry or lesson study, teachers draw on their shared trust, expertise, and experiences to improve instruction. And when this collaboration focuses on student work, it builds educators' capacity to

address students' academic needs immediately.

Yet one of the tragic hallmarks of American education is teacher isolation. Too often, teachers do not have sufficient opportunities to work together to examine work and structure interventions within their classrooms. As the new standards are implemented, we must ensure that teachers are not left alone to figure out how best to teach to them. The standards are an opportunity for greater collaboration, fresher thinking, and a rearticulation of shared goals for teachers and students. By collaborating with each other and with instructional specialists through cycles of examining student work, creating hypotheses about how to implement common-core-aligned lessons, implementing them, and making adjustments in their practice in real time, teachers can find the best ways to help their students reach these higher expectations while still maintaining individual styles and flexibility.

But this commitment to deep collaboration also requires new types of materials aligned to the standards, with a focus on real-time assessment and its translation into classroom practice. Two examples of this kind of collaboration are the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and the Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC), through which groups of traditional public school and public charter school teachers, curriculum experts, and other educators are working together to create high-quality, useful lessons and research-based instructional tools incorporating the common-core standards. In addition to developing a free, online library of new lessons and units, these efforts, funded by the Gates Foundation, are pioneering new pathways for how educators can work together to shift teacher practice.

LDC and MDC teams work together to integrate common-core skills into classroom materials and to create performance tasks—structured assignments that provide teachers with rich information on how students understand key concepts.

For example, the common-core standards recognize that, to succeed in college, stu-

dents need to understand and write about nonfiction texts. But most high school science and social studies teachers, and even some English teachers, have little training in teaching reading and writing. In New York City, the LDC team, guided by instructional experts from New Visions for Public Schools, a New York City-based nonprofit organization, is helping teachers embed standards-based literacy skills into their classrooms.

These skills include locating textual evidence, evaluating arguments, interpreting meaning, and synthesizing information from different sources. Teams use preliminary templates aligned with the standards to develop their own curriculum units that scaffold the writing process and enable teachers to assess student progress. They are producing classroom-tested, common-core-aligned modules that other teachers can adopt or adapt.

For example, one module—developed by two teachers at the High School for Service and Learning at Erasmus in Brooklyn—provides a template for teaching argumentative writing.

For a 10th grade global history class, the teachers designed a writing module that prompts students to argue whether the achievements of the British industrial revolution were worth the costs. The teachers compiled a list of relevant sources at different reading levels and created strategies for students' reading, note-taking, summarizing, and analyzing. They broke the writing process down into a series of coordinated tasks and created worksheets that help students develop a claim, produce an outline and first draft, peer-edit a piece, and incorporate revisions into a final draft. Other teachers can draw on this example as they implement the common core.

Adopting the common core extends the teacher's role as coach, carefully designing activities to build specific skills, providing constructive feedback, and continually modifying lessons based on student understanding. Through professional development, teachers learn how to assess and give

meaningful, consistent feedback; to share what works with their peers; and adjust lessons appropriately. Our best schools have always done this work, but the LDC and MDC members capture and scale it.

There is a buzz of enthusiasm in these pilot projects, as teachers embrace the work. Some say working with the collaboratives has been the best professional-development experience of their careers. Teachers tell us that they are covering fewer topics more deeply, and that their students gain a greater understanding of the content. Teachers also say they have found that some of the extra time spent on this approach in the first few modules is recouped later in the year because students can apply the skills learned to future lessons.

It's too early to measure the program's effects, but we're encouraged by the anecdotal evidence to date. One principal noted improved pass rates on a state global-studies regents' exam after using the literacy modules for a year. In an informal survey of 30 New Visions teachers in June, all but five or six respondents (including science and social studies teachers) found the literacy modules very helpful. The remainder said the materials were somewhat helpful. The interesting lessons and student-centered instruction also turned many disengaged students into active learners, and teachers reported seeing students across the board develop college-ready skills. Some already are adapting these methods and performance tasks to the rest of their curriculum.

Providing teachers with real training and templates, not scripts and worksheets, and meaningful opportunities to work together to implement strategies that will improve student learning, are critical components of any strategy to implement the common core. We will fail if we do not do both. These strategies implicitly allow teachers to take ownership of how to best implement the common core in their classrooms and to explore the teaching and learning possibilities opened up by the new standards. But more importantly, they ensure that these standards are constantly re-engineered against the real needs of students. That is as it should be.

Vicki Phillips is the director of education in the College Ready program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Robert L. Hughes is the president of New Visions for Public Schools, a nonprofit organization focused on educating high-need children in New York City.

The Gates Foundation provides grant support for Education Week's coverage of the education industry and K-12 innovation.

Published December 5, 2012, in Education Week

COMMENTARY

Common Core vs. Common Sense

By Ronald A. Wolk

The headline in a recent edition of *Education Week* read, "Hopes Pinned on Standards to Boost College Readiness: SAT results show no improvement in any tested subject."

We've been pinning our hopes on standards for more than two decades with little to show for it. About half of our high school graduates are no better prepared for college or work than they were 20 years ago, when standards and testing became the nation's school improvement strategy.

Now, all but a few states are on the verge of implementing the ultimate phase of that strategy: the new common-core standards in mathematics and English/language arts for grades K-12, soon to be followed by new assessments supported by \$500 million in federal grant money.

The Common Core State Standards are much better than the state standards they replace because they focus on analysis, understanding, concepts, and skills more than specific content. A great deal of thought has gone into formulating them. They are championed by business leaders, politicians, foundations, and educators.

If a majority of American youngsters were to graduate from school with the knowledge and skills embodied in these standards, they and the larger society would benefit enormously.

But that would require a miracle.

Here's why:

■ We still do not have the opportunity-to-learn standards called for by the founders of the standards movement in the late 1980s. We still have not eradicated the glaring and persistent discrimination that condemns millions of low-income, minority, and immigrant students to a poor or mediocre education that does not prepare them to meet the new common standards. Last year, nearly half of the nation's schools failed to make "adequately yearly progress" under the No Child Left Behind Act. The evidence shows that efforts to "turn around" failing schools seldom work and often are counterproductive.

■ Our present teacher workforce has not been trained to teach the way the new standards require, and prospective teachers are not being adequately prepared for the challenge. Moreover, we need at least 200,000 additional math and science teachers to replace those retiring or leaving for other jobs or who did not major in math or science. According to a 2007 report from the National Academies Press, more than two-thirds (69 percent) of 5th to 8th graders are being taught math by teachers without a mathematics degree or certificate, and 93 percent of those same students are being taught physical sciences by teachers with no physical science degree or certificate.

■ The organization and scheduling of the traditional school are incompatible with the kind of teaching and learning required by the new standards. Time is still the constant, and learning is the variable. Traditional schools largely ignore the diversity of today's students—their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, the way they learn, their strengths and weaknesses, their interests and aspirations—and deliver the same education to all students in the same way at the same time.

■ Society would have to commit substantially more financial resources—not just to provide more teachers, up-to-date science labs, renovated school buildings, and adequate learning materials, but to address more effectively the rampant poverty in society that undermines our educational efforts.

To have even a hope of overcoming those problems, we would need a couple of decades, a herculean effort, and incredible luck.

So, at this critical point, the nation's governors and legislators should pause to consider the unintended consequences of fully implementing these new standards in the near future.

By compelling schools, teachers, and students to meet standards they are not equipped to meet, we are likely to do seri-

ous harm to millions of young people and the larger society.

Some 27 percent of our high school students now drop out of school—many because they fall behind early, never catch up, and come to accept failure as inevitable. Half of those who earn a diploma are not adequately prepared for college or the modern workplace. And half of those who enter college drop out by the end of senior year without a degree.

Even though student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in math have steadily improved since 1992 and are at their highest point in 20 years, about 60 percent of our students are still not proficient. Reading scores have remained virtually flat during that period, and the percentage of students not proficient in reading is also about 60 percent.

Is it reasonable to expect that just because the new common-core standards are better and more demanding, these lagging students will suddenly rise to meet them?

We know from experience that standards do not educate people. Without the organization, resources, and trained workforce necessary to meet them, standards are worth little, and people cannot be compelled to meet them. Keep in mind that the U.S. Congress mandated that every student would be proficient in reading and math by 2014. How's that working out?

The common standards would be more likely to succeed ultimately if they were initially limited to grades K-6, where the necessary foundation must be laid for meeting the middle and high school standards. Many students now in grades 7-12 cannot read for comprehension and have not learned basic math. They have not been prepared to meet the demands of the common core, and it is unfair to raise the bar for them at this point. If we do, we will either lose more of them or, as has been the case in the past, we will lower test cutoff scores and pass them through the system without the skills and knowledge that standards-makers deem to be indispensable.

During the next seven years that it takes a whole generation of elementary students to meet the K-6 standards, educators and policymakers should concentrate on redesigning the last six years of school to align with reality and the needs of students and society and to be compatible with the kind of teaching and learning embodied in the new standards.

A dedicated minority of educators and policymakers have been working over the past few decades to do just that. They have worked to create schools where the student is at the center; where education is personalized for each student and is anchored in the real world; where teachers are "advisers" and students are busy educating themselves under their guidance; where new technology is integral to education.

The best hope for the success of the common-core standards is to first redesign schools so they provide the kind of learning environment where the spirit of the new standards can flourish, and their objectives are most likely to be met.

Ronald A. Wolk is the founder and former editor of Education Week and the chair emeritus of the board of its nonprofit publisher, Editorial Projects in Education. He is also the chairman of Big Picture Learning, a nonprofit organization in Providence, R.I., that creates innovative schools, and the author of Wasting Minds: Why Our Education System Is Failing and What We Can Do About It (ASCD, 2011). The views expressed in this Commentary are his own.

Published August 29, 2012, in Education Week

COMMENTARY

Trimming the Cost of Common-Core Implementation

By Patrick J. Murphy
and Elliot M. Regenstein

The Common Core State Standards are designed to have a transformative effect on teaching and learning in the United States. But, as we all know, the 46 states and the District of Columbia that have adopted the common core are just beginning the journey of implementation. A great deal of thoughtful work is required to implement the standards successfully, and that work will not come without a price tag.

As the adopting states develop and launch plans for the common core, they are almost universally shying away from honest discussions about how much those plans are going to cost. We believe that a frank conversation about the expense of this work is necessary, largely because state leaders who make smart choices can shepherd the process in a cost-effective manner.

As we argued in our recent report, "Putting a Price Tag on the Common Core: How Much Will Smart Implementation Cost?," the statewide cost of bringing the common core to classrooms could be reduced significantly if states were willing to rethink implementation. Our report focuses on three key areas of expense: new instructional materials, new assessments, and professional development. While we realize that even the most efficient approach is likely to lead to some new expenses, we believe that states can minimize the cost by taking advantage of emerging best practices and consciously repurposing existing state funding streams

focused on these areas.

Our paper attempts to estimate the cost of transition during the initial implementation phase. We first estimated the expenses associated with a business-as-usual scenario, in which states simply spend more on traditional delivery methods—hard-copy textbooks, face-to-face professional development, and paper-based standardized tests. Such an approach would, according to our calculations, require an additional \$12 billion in spending across the 46 states and the District of Columbia, or an average increase of \$289 in per-student spending. Don't let sticker shock set in. This group of states already spends about \$525 billion in federal, state, and local funds on education in a single year. The increase here would represent less than 3 percent of that figure.

But the common core will only cost that much to implement if states make no effort to reduce incremental costs of materials, assessments, and professional development. With some changes in approach—what we call "balanced implementation"—the total cost could drop to less than half the estimate: roughly \$5.1 billion, or \$121 per student. And if we consider the fact that some existing resources could be repurposed, the additional net cost for states could be even lower, likely less than \$100 per student.

What does our balanced-implementation scenario look like? Our ideas include:

■ **Moving away from hard-copy textbooks and doing more sharing of online materials.** New platforms are available for self-publishing

textbooks, and opportunities have grown whereby educators can collaborate beyond their districts to develop great materials. We can already see examples of cross-state sharing of curriculum and materials, such as the tri-state materials-sharing platform utilized by Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island. Florida has begun to look for ways to move away from hard-copy textbooks. And advances in technology are easing the production and use of e-readers and electronic textbooks, as well as online-resource exchanges.

■ **Using computer-administered technology to offer formative assessments.** The federally funded testing consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, are in the process of creating new, universal assessment tools. States should take advantage of these resources, rather than try to reinvent the wheel when it comes to testing.

■ **Delivering professional development through a mix of in-person and online instruction.** Customized professional development should address the needs of individual teachers, including specific gaps in knowledge and areas needing growth. Online libraries of training videos are another resource that can provide teachers with access to relevant professional development. Charter managers, such as New Tech Network, have designed professional-development modules that serve more schools more effectively and facilitate higher-quality conversations among teachers who share similar content and instructional goals.

Leading states, districts, and charter providers have adopted these practices and are finding that they can maintain or increase instructional quality while lowering costs. West Virginia and Utah, for example, are using their top teachers to help develop professional-development units and making those available on a dedicated website. These states are not treating common-core implementation as something above and beyond their usual use of materials, assessments, and professional-development practices. Instead, they are viewing the transition to the common core as an opportunity to adapt their practices in an effort to deliver 21st-century education.

■ **States, districts, and charter providers must be willing to stop purchasing goods and services from their existing vendors if they don't meet their current needs, and seek out new vendors willing to take advantage of the opportunities the new standards present.** These practices could be cost-

effective even if the new standards were not being implemented as widely, but the commonness of the common core has the potential to restructure these markets dramatically, thus opening up a host of new opportunities, including cross-state resource sharing. The conditions are ripe for locally developed curricular modules, lesson plans, formative assessments, and professional-development resources to have a national impact.

Some analyses have portrayed the common core as a restrictive policy change that will hamstring educational professionals. They miss the point. The commonality of the standards should be a blessing for individual classroom teachers, allowing them access to resources that meet their unique needs. The common standards, coupled with 21st-century technology, have the potential to create a new kind of community of districts, school leaders, and teachers—a community liberated to improve instruction in ways that were once thought to be impossible.

We are aware of critics who estimate a shocking price tag for implementation. During lean budgetary times, these dramatic figures can give some pause about moving forward with the core. While states could spend that much money on implementation, they don't have to. Tightened purse strings should force states to seek cost-effective solutions that make the best use of funds while leading to the use of high-quality instructional materials, assessments, and professional development. Implementing the common core won't be cheap, but the expense will be worth it if it leads to improved teaching and learning.

Patrick J. Murphy is a professor of politics at the University of San Francisco. His research focuses on public management, finance, and public-policy issues. He is a senior research affiliate at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, which is located in Seattle, and an adjunct fellow at the San Francisco-based Public Policy Institute of California. Elliot M. Regenstein is a partner at the Chicago-based law firm EducationCounsel LLC. He provides legal, policy, strategic-planning, and advocacy services to governments, foundations, and nonprofit organizations. From 2004 to 2006, he served as the director of education reform for the state of Illinois.

Copyright ©2013 by Editorial Projects in Education, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication shall be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic or otherwise, without the written permission of the copyright holder.

Readers may make up to 5 print copies of this publication at no cost for personal, non-commercial use, provided that each includes a full citation of the source.

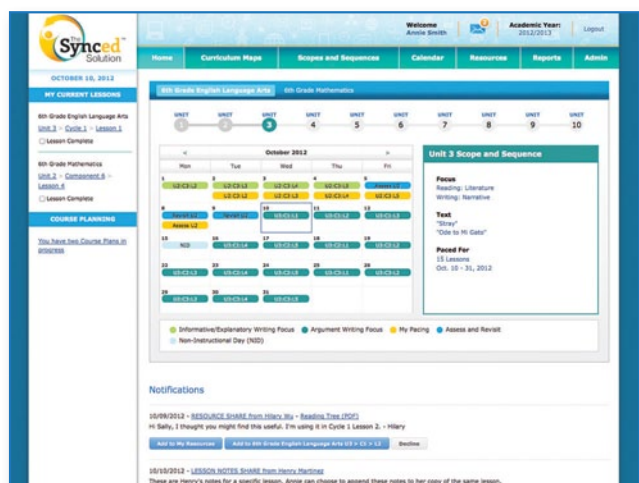
Visit www.edweek.org/go/copies for information about additional print photocopies.

Published by Editorial Projects in Education, Inc.
6935 Arlington Road, Suite 100
Bethesda, MD, 20814
Phone: (301) 280-3100
www.edweek.org

Avoiding the transition to the Common Core State Standards?

Get Synced

The **Synced** Solution is web-based software that lets you align your district's existing textbooks and instructional materials to the Common Core State Standards.



thesyncedsolution.com

The first of its kind, end-to-end solution that lets teaching and learning be the focus of your CCSS journey

With **The Synced Solution**, districts and schools can:

Sync textbooks to pre-loaded sequences of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and measurable objectives.

Sync district and school calendars to complete course pacing.

Sync grade-level and subject-area expectations to collaboration time.

Sync student mastery to CCSS-aligned interim assessments.



For more information, call **877.228.8125** or email us at info@thesyncedsolution.com

Powered by SchoolCity, Inc.

© 2012 Action Learning Systems Online, LLC. All rights reserved. JADPAD00074 1112



Think Synced!

WEB
LINKSEDUCATION WEEK
RESOURCES

Resources on Implementing Common Standards

NOW FEATURING INTERACTIVE HYPERLINKS.
Just click and go.

Common Core State Standards Initiative

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

EngageNY

<http://engageny.org/>

Literacy Design Collaborative

<http://www.literacydesigncollaborative.org/>

Mathematics Design Collaborative

<http://www.mygroupgenius.org/mathematics/>

**National Association of Secondary School Principals:
Common-Core Resources**

<http://www.nassp.org/commoncore>

**Partnership for Assessment of Readiness
for College and Careers (PARCC)**

<http://www.parcconline.org/>

Primary Sources: 2012, America's Teachers on the Teaching Profession

www.scholastic.com/primarysources/

Scholastic Inc. and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012

**Putting a Price Tag on the Common Core: How Much Will Smart
Implementation Cost?**

<http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/putting-a-price-tag-on-the-common-core.html>

By Patrick J. Murphy, Elliot Regenstein

Thomas B. Fordham Institute, May 2012

SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>

EDUCATION WEEK SPOTLIGHT

Get the information and perspective you need on the education issues you care about most with Education Week Spotlights

The Achievement Gap • Algebra • Assessment • Autism • Bullying • Charter School Leadership • Classroom Management • Common Standards • **Differentiated Instruction** • Dropout Prevention • E-Learning • ELL Assessment and Teaching • ELLs in the Classroom • Flu and Schools • Getting The Most From Your IT Budget • Gifted Education • Homework • **Implementing Online Learning** • Inclusion and Assistive Technology • Math Instruction • Middle and High School Literacy • Motivation • No Child Left Behind • Pay for Performance • **Personalized Learning** • Principals • Parental Involvement • Race to the Top • Reading Instruction • Reinventing Professional Development • Response to Intervention • School Uniforms and Dress Codes • STEM in Schools • Teacher Evaluation • Teacher Tips for the New Year • Technology in the Classroom • Tips for New Teachers



VIEW THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF EDUCATION WEEK SPOTLIGHTS
www.edweek.org/go/spotlights