

R&D ALERT

Expert guidance on the Common Core

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New assessments for new standards

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A shift in learning focus

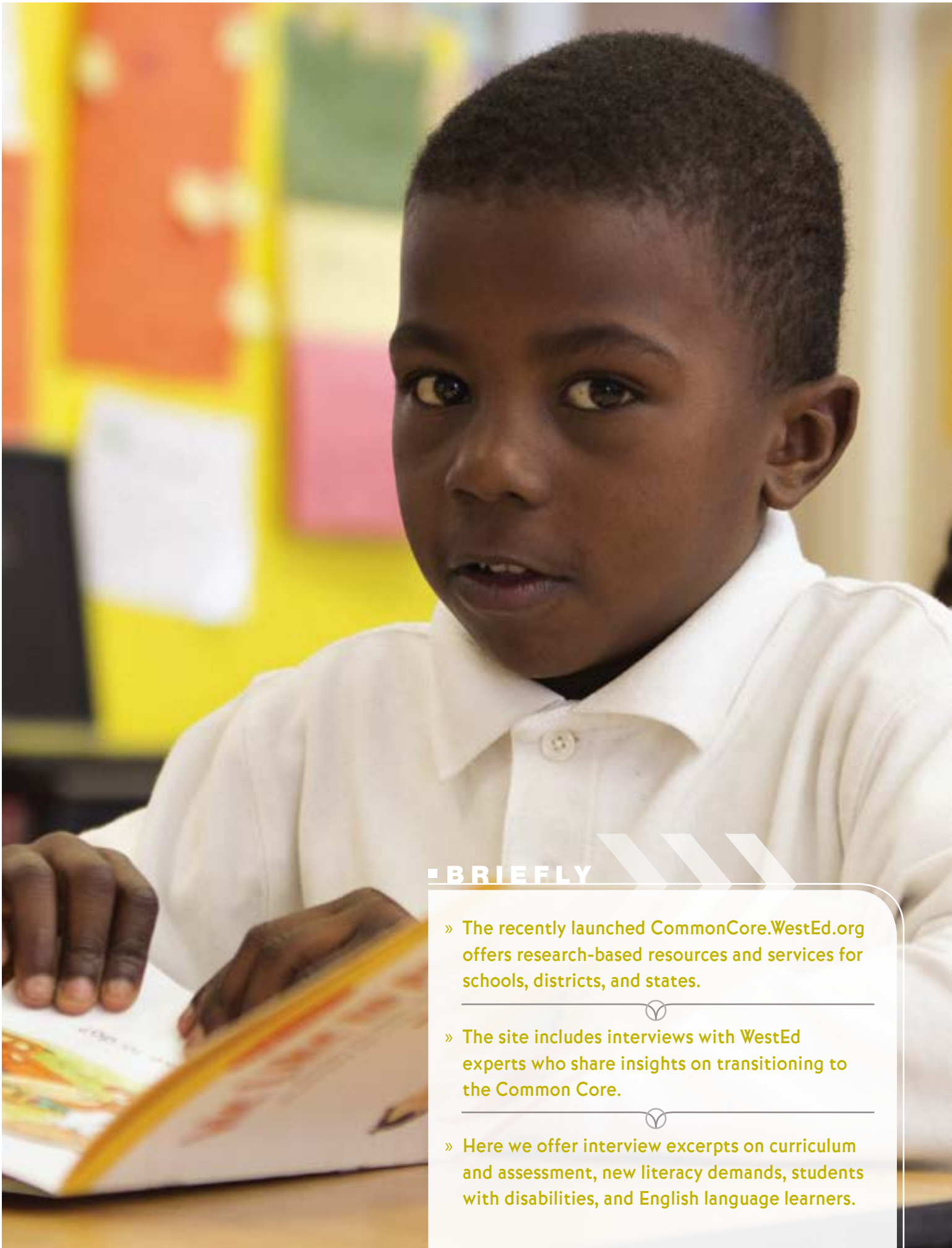
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Transitioning to the Common Core

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A Common Core special edition





■ BRIEFLY

- » The recently launched CommonCore.WestEd.org offers research-based resources and services for schools, districts, and states.

- » The site includes interviews with WestEd experts who share insights on transitioning to the Common Core.

- » Here we offer interview excerpts on curriculum and assessment, new literacy demands, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

Q&A

WestEd experts offer Common Core guidance

As educators, administrators, and policymakers throughout the nation prepare to implement the Common Core State Standards, WestEd staff have worked hard to provide the support needed to meet the challenges of this process. In April 2013, CommonCore.WestEd.org was launched to offer research-based resources and services for schools, districts, and states. Among the site's features are interviews with WestEd experts who share insights based on their respective areas of expertise, which include early childhood education, English language learners, response to intervention, and science and math.

The interviewees represent a wealth of research knowledge and practice-based experience—each having worked in education for 20 years or more. Their backgrounds include classroom teachers, an early childhood education program director, researchers, a principal, an assistant principal, university-level teachers, and curriculum specialists. Following are excerpts from their interviews.

DEVELOPING CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENTS FOR THE COMMON CORE

**Bob Rosenfeld, Senior Program Associate,
Comprehensive School Assistance Program**

**Steve Hamilton, Director, District and School Services,
Learning Innovations**

Q: What advice would you give to schools and teachers working to implement the Common Core standards?

A: Although the Common Core makes it easier to agree on “essential learnings,” we still need to have deep discussions around the specific content and skills that we teach students, and how we can measure their learning. Certainly we can tap into the many wonderful resources

that now exist to support implementation, but to simply copy or purchase a curriculum would only provide the “what” or the “how” behind our teaching. The ultimate goal is to understand the “why.”

Q: What are some best practices you have seen for aligning curriculum and assessments?

A: The work is best when it is conducted by *teams* of classroom teachers and district instructional leaders. Administrators also need to educate themselves on the standards and the process for designing curricular units—so they can be true instructional leaders in this monumental effort to shift teaching and learning.

Q: How do we make sure we address the needs of all students, including English language learners, in implementing and meeting the new standards?

A: To address the needs of all students, we have to make sure to address the needs of all teachers. Teachers need the training, support, and time to meet regularly to discuss instruction and learning, discuss student data, and implement a system of interventions and enrichment.



MEETING THE COMMON CORE'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS AND CONTENT LITERACY DEMANDS

**Cynthia Greenleaf, Co-Director,
Strategic Literacy Initiative**

Q: What major changes do you see coming from the Common Core standards?

A: Literacy must become more integrated into the teaching of all subjects. Many teachers of the academic subject areas have thought of literacy as a separate subject to be taught in English language arts alone. But complex texts like science models, diagrams, and data tables are not something a teacher of language arts or literature is best prepared to teach. Yet not being able to engage subject-specific texts—in science and all other subject areas—hampers academic success and independence for many students.

Q: What are some key features of the Common Core literacy standards?

A: In my view, the literacy standards make four important contributions:

- » Recognition that specific literacy practices and texts are central to every academic discipline and thus reading and writing of disciplinary texts is a vital part of subject area teaching
- » A focus on close, attentive reading to clarify and interpret text meaning as a means for learning in the subject areas
- » A focus on grade-level, academic texts and text complexity to raise the challenge level for all students
- » Evidence-based argumentation to demonstrate reading comprehension and learning

Q: Do you have any concerns as implementation moves forward?

A: The standards are reaching for a level of literacy proficiency that has never been broadly attained in our nation. Once we have a new assessment system linked to these much higher standards, test scores are going to drop in many communities because we are holding a higher standard for students' achievement. We need to be prepared for this eventuality and start working to help parents and business and community leaders understand the new standards, the promise the standards hold, and the instructional support which that promise requires.

We know from experience that teachers in all subject areas and students with diverse educational experiences can reach these goals. But teachers will need support to learn to teach in what for many will be fundamentally new ways.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

**Sharen Bertrando, Special Education Development
Program Specialist**

Q: How will the Common Core State Standards impact students with disabilities?

A: Many features of the Common Core are particularly helpful to students with disabilities:

- » The standards explicitly address students working in collaborative groups with multiple opportunities to share, discuss, and problem solve. This allows teachers to intentionally structure groups of students according to strengths and learning needs in order to provide opportunities for peer-assisted learning based on desired outcomes of the lesson.
- » The emphasis on speaking in addition to listening provides opportunities for teachers to have students practice social discourse in many settings and for different purposes and audiences. Being able to appropriately interact with others is essential for all students to succeed in postsecondary life.

- » The standards state that it is the teachers' responsibility to accommodate learning for all students to allow access and mastery to the standards. Teachers can accomplish this by scaffolding the delivery of content and differentiating instruction to accommodate the interests, strengths, and needs of students.
- » The literacy standards include an equal balance of nonfictional texts that are often more engaging to students. This is particularly the case for students with autism because they typically have difficulty grasping concepts such as figurative language.
- » Students have opportunities to learn and demonstrate literacy strengths in a variety of content areas. A student struggling to comprehend fictional text might be masterful in interpreting charts, diagrams, and tables in nonfictional text.
- » The integration of technology into the design of the curriculum to address the standards can motivate struggling students. It also allows for multiple ways to access literacy and demonstrate mastery of skills.

Q: How do we make sure we address the needs of students with disabilities in implementing the new standards?

A: Special educators must work collaboratively with general educators and English language specialists. This will ensure equitable access and opportunity for students with disabilities to master the standards. Special educators need to be prepared to participate in the planning and implementation of the Common Core by understanding its design, structure, and alignment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure curricula are conscientiously designed to be barrier-free for our diversified classrooms. This includes applying technology supports such as digital text and software applications for multimodality accessibility.

SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Aída Walqui, Director, Teacher Professional Development Program

Leslie Hamburger, Associate Director, Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL)

Q: How will the Common Core impact English language learners?

A: The new standards, including the Common Core State Standards, give national urgency to the notion that quality learning opportunities for English language learners should engage students in the reading, discussion, and production of complex, multimodal texts.

For too long in American education, expectations and supports for second language students have been lowered and simplified. But for over a decade, WestEd's QTEL initiative has maintained that *amplification*, or the elaborations teachers use as they engage in academic practices with their students, is what our students need. Our work in New York City, San Diego, Chicago, Austin, and Fort Worth demonstrates that.

However, just having more ambitious and amplified standards will not change the status quo. Educator capacity needs to be developed to catch up to what contemporary societal conditions require.

Q: How do we ensure that the needs of English language learners are addressed as we implement these new standards?

A: One major change is to move away from a focus on atomistic pieces of language or ideas (vocabulary items, isolated sentences) to a focus on the practice students are being asked to engage in. For example, writing an expository essay will require learners to first have a clear sense of the essay's purpose (Why am I writing it?), then address the text to a specific audience (Who is my reader?)



BRIEFLY

- » The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is developing and rolling out a new assessment system aligned to the Common Core.
- » The system will feature a suite of professional resources, including formative, interim, and summative assessment tools available online.
- » The new assessments and supports are expected to help shift the emphasis in education from focusing on recall to more complex tasks and problem solving.

Building

a next-generation

assessment system

aligned

to the

COMMON CORE

From February to May this year, about a million students in 21 U.S. states were scheduled to take a new set of standardized tests. That might seem like any other spring term in American education until you consider the significance of this wide-ranging assessment process:

- » It represents the rollout and review of about 5,000 test items that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards for math and English language arts and will eventually be part of a huge bank of formative, interim, and summative tools accessible to states.
- » It includes technology-enhanced questions and performance tasks that will let students write, draw, and solve problems on the computer, provide rapid feedback to learners and teachers, and tailor the complexity of test items to each student's knowledge and skills.
- » It represents a unique collaboration of states that have crafted a single assessment system to determine whether their students have met national and international benchmarks and are ready to take college credit-bearing courses.

All of these efforts are tied to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, a states-led initiative started in 2010, funded by a four-year, \$175-million Race to the Top grant from the U.S. Department of Education with additional contributions from charitable foundations.*

"By drawing upon the experience and expertise across our membership base, we are bringing a level of creativity to this enterprise that we've never seen before," says Joe Willhoft, Executive Director of Smarter Balanced.

"This development process allows states to consider the bigger picture," adds Juan D'Brot, Executive Director of the Office of Assessment and Accountability within

the West Virginia Department of Education, which has been participating in the Smarter Balanced consortium. "The Common Core State Standards aim for international expectations, whereas traditionally states have thought about standards from within their own borders. That's not to say that states worked in a vacuum in the past, but now an international perspective is at the forefront. Now we're talking about expectations for a student in any state to be nationally and internationally ready."

MORE THAN NEW TESTS: NEW EXPECTATIONS, TEACHING APPROACHES, AND SUPPORTS

"Smarter Balanced is creating an entire assessment system, not just a test," says Stanley Rabinowitz, Director of the Assessment and Standards Development Services Program at WestEd, which serves as the Project Management Partner for the Smarter Balanced consortium.

The assessment system will not only help educators, policymakers, and parents determine how much students have learned in key content areas, it will also reshape the strategies used to teach them. Teachers will be able to access a suite of professional resources that include a digital library of formative assessment tools to track students' progress as well as recommended interventions. The goal is to inform and improve instruction throughout the school year instead

* Smarter Balanced is one of two consortia of states that are developing common assessments; the other is the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC).



The assessment system will not only help ... determine how much students have learned in key content areas, it will also reshape the strategies used to teach them.

of waiting for year-end summative tests that may reveal surprising results.

“The Common Core is very different from most state standards and requires different types of instruction,” says Rabinowitz. “With the resources and brainpower from across the states, we can develop more items, better items, and better scoring systems, and we can develop a clearinghouse of support for teachers that no state could do for itself.”

The Smarter Balanced consortium is piloting many of the assessments and resources it has developed. A broader field test is scheduled for spring 2014, and the operational assessment system is slated to be ready for the 2014/15 school year.

A significant feature of the pilot phase is research—using cognitive labs, for example—to learn about students’ test-taking strategies and how students interact with the test questions. Because much of the assessments will be computer-based, test designers want to understand if they’ve presented information in the best way to gauge what students know. For a math problem, for example, a drop-down menu on the computer might give students access to a digital calculator. But if observations show that students don’t need that tool, the menu might be used for a different purpose. Or, if observations show that students can’t easily navigate reading passages and questions while scrolling through parallel columns of text, another format might be warranted.

Other research is on English learners and students with disabilities. Specialists want to identify appropriate supports that won’t give away answers to the questions. If

a section seeks to measure math skills, for example, glossaries of contextual terms might be needed so language barriers don’t prevent students from demonstrating their understanding of math.

The pilot phase has students “voice their actions and thoughts while answering items so we can understand the congruence,” explains Tony Alpert, Chief Operating Officer of Smarter Balanced. “It’s a cornerstone of validity. Are we measuring what we assert we are measuring?”

In addition to uncovering unintentional bias and evaluating assessment delivery, test administrators are fine-tuning the system’s adaptive platform. Rather than giving all students the same fixed form of questions, the technology-enhanced system allows items to be tailored to achievement levels. For example, gifted students won’t get only low-level items—the computer gauges their fluency by how they answer initial questions and accordingly increases the complexity of later items. Similarly, struggling students won’t get too many items beyond their range. In all cases, the system evaluates students’ progress toward reaching the full range of standards instead of providing a fixed set of items focused on the middle. To develop this adaptive platform, the pilot phase will inform item development and expectations for student performance, which will be further refined during the field test.

SHIFT FROM RECALL TO MORE COMPLEX TASKS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Another key feature of the Smarter Balanced system is performance tasks, which are classroom-based activities that ask students to research, solve multistep problems,

and share information coherently. The assessments are designed to probe students' ability to apply knowledge, not just memorize facts. A typical multiple-choice math test might ask students to identify the correct solution to a problem, where the Smarter Balanced assessments might ask students to provide the answer themselves and describe how they arrived at that solution. Or, students might have to read and compare two presentations, explaining which is more compelling.

It's unlikely that students will perform well on the new assessments without major changes in instruction, which is why the Smarter Balanced system provides so much online support and professional development options for schools, including models of teaching and assessing and suggested scoring rubrics.

"It's the combination of content and what we ask students to do, not just recognize but recognize, apply, and generalize," Rabinowitz says. "In English/language arts, that means not just writing about what I did on my summer vacation, but also composing research-supported conclusions. Or understanding the difference between facts and the trustworthiness of sources, and knowing that writing about science is different than writing a poem. If you don't assess this way, then teachers won't teach this way."

SYSTEMWIDE ALIGNMENT

The Smarter Balanced system aims to better align student outcomes in grades K–12 with postsecondary expectations. Because colleges and states have such variable standards and don't typically communicate well, most K–12 teachers are "shooting in the dark" about how to prepare students for life after high school, says Jacqueline King, director of higher education for Smarter Balanced. The consortium is leading an initiative to get states and postsecondary institutions to agree on the role and value of the new assessments.

"A focus of our work is that these assessments provide an indication to colleges and universities, through our grade 11 summative assessment, of how well prepared students are for entry-level, credit-bearing coursework,"

she says. "If kids can come in ready to do credit-bearing work, they are much more likely to get a degree and not spend money to learn things they should have learned in high school."

Each phase of the assessment development and delivery process has involved shared decision-making—among states, K–12 and higher education systems, and educators and policymakers—a depth of collaboration that many thought was impossible. One of the valuable lessons of the assessment system rollout is that collaboration can be both efficient and effective if every member's voice is heard and respected.

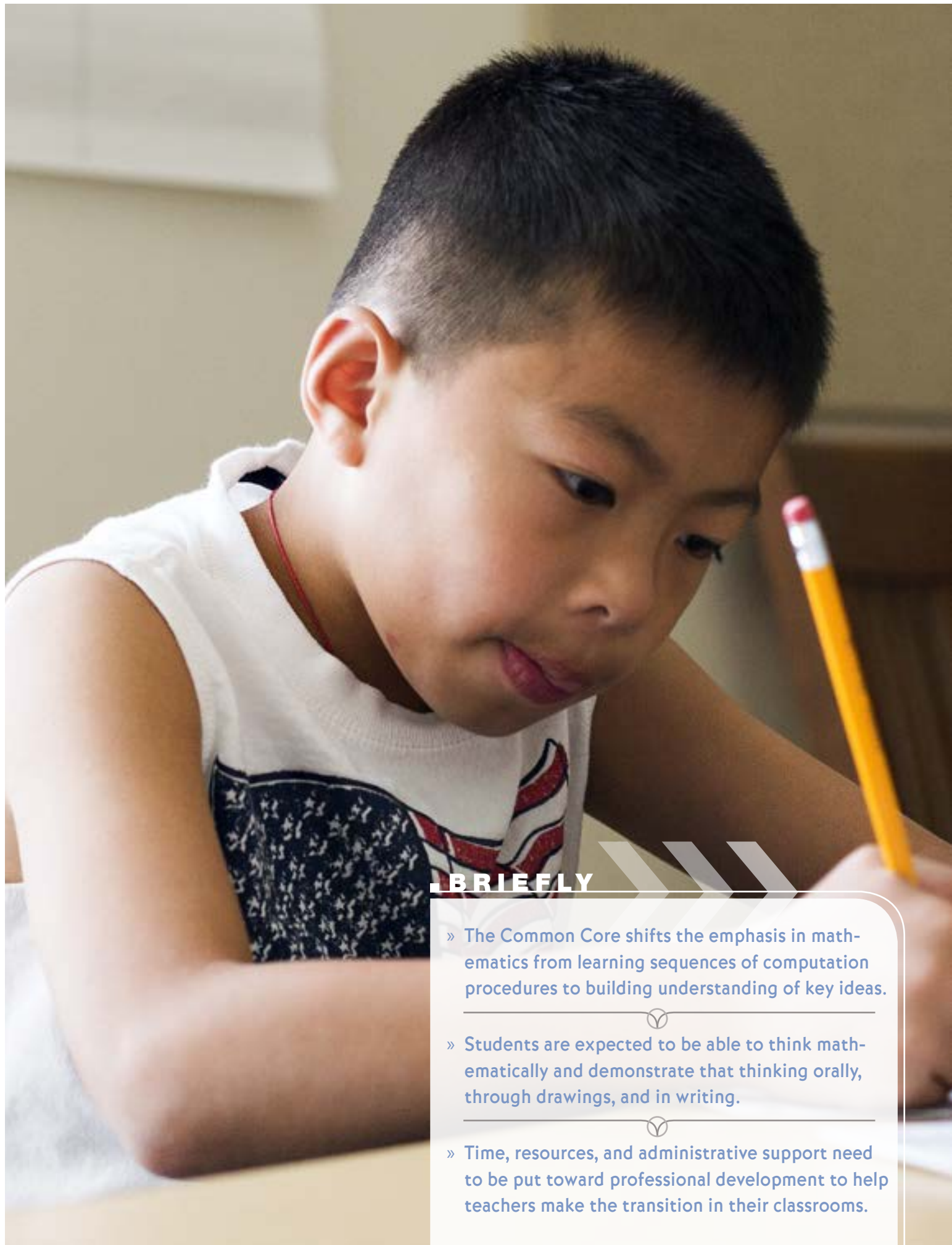
"One of the biggest lessons learned is not in assessment or contracting or financing but in how we go about our work," says Willhoft. "State education agencies tend to be top-down. That is not how we do business. Our way does take a bit more time, but it has proven effective to check in regularly and let everyone say what they want before moving forward. If this was a top-down organization, we would not have the level of commitment and progress we've achieved."

For D'Brot, the consortium's cooperative exchange of ideas has revealed another important insight about improving instruction and learning. Whereas many school reform initiatives seek to replace one cog in the education machine with another, he says, the Smarter Balanced work has shown states how and why all the cogs must fit together.

"This approach is much more comprehensive," he says. "What I think it's doing is really defining what a system of assessment looks like within a larger system of education."





For more Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium information and updates, including practice tests in each grade and subject area, visit www.smarterbalanced.org or contact rdalert@WestEd.org.



BRIEFLY

- » The Common Core shifts the emphasis in mathematics from learning sequences of computation procedures to building understanding of key ideas.
- » Students are expected to be able to think mathematically and demonstrate that thinking orally, through drawings, and in writing.
- » Time, resources, and administrative support need to be put toward professional development to help teachers make the transition in their classrooms.



How the Common Core shifts the focus of mathematics learning

Imagine two different fifth-grade classrooms, each learning to add $1/2 + 1/3$. In one, students succeed when they can remember the correct calculation procedure and arrive at the right answer: $5/6$. But in the other classroom, guided by the new Common Core State Standards, getting the right answer is *not* enough.

The new standards shift the emphasis from learning a sequence of computation procedures to building an understanding of key mathematical ideas. Students are expected to be able to explain mathematics concepts and to justify problem-solving solutions. In the example of adding $1/2 + 1/3$, students must not only learn to convert these into equivalent fractions with a common denominator, they must also understand when to apply this procedure and *why* it works.

Students aren't the only ones facing a steeper learning curve. As districts across the country move toward full implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), many teachers are tackling the dual challenges of improving their own mastery of mathematics concepts and making fundamental changes in the way they teach the subject.

UNPACKING THE CONCEPT OF "CONCEPTUAL"

"The biggest shift in mathematics instruction driven by the CCSS is that teachers are required to teach mathematics more conceptually, not just procedurally," says Cynthia Lee, formerly a Senior Program Associate with WestEd's Local Accountability and Professional Development Services (LAPDS). Lee says that prevailing practice in recent decades has emphasized teaching mathematics as a series of computation procedures aimed at quickly getting the correct answer. But the CCSS require students to *think mathematically* and demonstrate that thinking orally, through drawings, and in writing. Right answers, while still important, are less often the criterion for a successful lesson.

For many teachers making the shift to more concept-based mathematics instruction, the new methods can look a lot like their old ways of teaching. Careful unpacking of "conceptual" is required. To illustrate, during CCSS training Lee often describes a commonly taught procedure for converting fractions such as $1/2$ and $1/3$ into two respective equivalent fractions with the same denominator so that the fractions can be added. In this example, the procedural teaching can contradict important concepts that students need to learn. Once students have determined that the lowest common denominator is 6, Lee explains that the teacher often instructs them to "multiply the top and bottom number of the fraction by the same number; always do the same thing to the top as you do to the bottom." Although that may work procedurally, Lee points out that "mathematically speaking, it is simply *not accurate*."

To build mathematical understanding, she emphasizes, students must understand that they can convert a fraction to an equivalent fraction with a different denominator by multiplying the original fraction by a *fraction equal to the number 1*. In this example, students would multiply $1/2$ by $3/3$ and would multiply $1/3$ by $2/2$, converting each to sixths, allowing the students to calculate a sum, $5/6$. Using and justifying this strategy requires students to solve the problem mathematically. To do so, they must understand *why* they multiply $1/2$ by $3/3$, and *why* they can multiply any fraction by a fraction equal to 1 and get an equivalent fraction.



The process of having to describe in detail what students would know and be able to do is what made the standards really start to “come alive” for teachers.

Teaching conceptually, Lee says, raises the cognitive demand on students—from memorizing a procedure to applying a mathematical idea to a problem. This yields both immediate and long-term benefits. “First, if students don’t understand *why* to use a procedure,” she explains, “they get confused about *when* to use it. As a result, they may apply the procedure indiscriminately, whenever a problem contains a fraction.” On the other hand, Lee adds, when learning to add or subtract fractions, if students learn that they can create an equivalent fraction with a different denominator by multiplying the original fraction by a form of the number 1, this puts them on the path to understanding the “flexible” usefulness of the number 1 for solving many types of problems. “Learning to use the number 1 when solving problems will help students in their mathematics coursework forever,” she asserts. For example, students in later grades will need to understand that an X in an equation with no number next to it is actually 1X.

Referencing the “fewer, deeper” elements of the CCSS tagline, Lee says, “You can easily spend two or three days just teaching students about equivalent fractions.”

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW STANDARDS AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL

Marsha Cody is a seventh-grade mathematics teacher in the Alamosa School District in south-central Colorado, one of several districts where Lee and her LAPDS colleagues provide CCSS-related professional development and coaching. Cody has taken on several kinds of responsibilities for CCSS implementation over the past three years, at the state, district, school,

and classroom levels. Not surprisingly, she has strong convictions about the support teachers require during the transition to CCSS.

“In Colorado, there is a huge disparity between the academic content we used to teach in fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade mathematics and what we teach now,” Cody says. “We can’t just expect teachers to know how to bridge that gap. Students currently coming through the pipeline haven’t had CCSS-level training in their previous grade, making the load even more daunting. The professional development we offer has to make the transition to the new standards ‘doable’ or teachers will become frustrated and overwhelmed.”

Time, resources, and administrative support are among the top requirements for effective professional development, according to Cody. She and her math department colleagues at Ortega Middle School benefited from their administrators’ commitment to implementing the CCSS, she says, because “getting” the deep shifts required by the CCSS standards takes time and hands-on experience. When she helped mathematics teachers two years ago to develop common formative assessment items, she had her biggest “aha moment”—even though she’d already been working with the standards for years at that point. “It was clear that the process of having to describe in detail what students would know and be able to do is what made the standards really start to ‘come alive’ for teachers,” Cody says.

An example of a formative assessment item they developed together to address the fifth-grade standard for fractions is the following word problem:

Matt is in charge of making punch for a party. The recipe calls for $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of juice and $2\frac{1}{3}$ cups of soda. He is planning to make 5 batches of the punch to serve everyone. How much juice and soda will he need to make all the punch? Show all your work and explain your thinking.

A: He will need _____ cups of soda and _____ cups of juice.

B: Explain how you solved the problem.

Cody also knows from experience that it's possible for teachers to participate in professional development and not reach the kind of insights that can lead to more effective teaching. "If teachers don't take in the bigger meaning of the CCSS—for example, if they don't focus in on the significance of key verbs used in the standards, like *understand*, *justify*, *model*, *explain*, or *draw*," Cody says, "it's really easy for them to believe that they understand and can teach the standards, but then fall right back into teaching the way they've always taught."

SUPPORTING THE SHIFT

Ortega Middle School principal Susie Paulson, who was a mathematics teacher before becoming an administrator, has similar ideas about supporting teachers—and some strategies to help address the challenges. "An important part of my role in making this process work is to be in the classroom providing support to teachers as they struggle with the challenges they face." Access to an external resource like LAPDS, which provides regular classroom

observations and ongoing guidance, is also valuable for keeping the multifaceted process on track, Paulson notes.

Because of her own training in a more conceptual approach to teaching, Cody has firsthand experience of how such teaching changes student learning. "We know that when cognitive demand is higher," she says, "and students are supported to persevere in using mathematics concepts to solve problems, that the learning lasts." Teachers and schools with a grounding in what is variously called "student-centered," "inquiry-based," or "constructivist" pedagogy are definitely at an advantage in implementing the CCSS, Cody adds. "Instructional approaches that involve a lot of classroom discourse about applying mathematical knowledge to solve real-world problems—where students learn to justify and evaluate their mathematical thinking—put learning at such a different cognitive level."

Cody has found that as teachers make the shift toward this type of instruction, positive student responses start to become a source of motivation for them. "Teachers are excited when they realize that students can deepen their understanding of mathematics ideas through investigation and discourse," Cody says. "Teachers often come to this realization when they have the opportunity to participate in professional development that provides those same kinds of learning experiences."



For more information about Common Core State Standards implementation, contact Joseph Sassone at rdalert@WestEd.org.



BRIEFLY

- » The new standards require teaching more rigorous content in ways that emphasize higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis and application.
- » WestEd is drawing on successful strategies to help teachers shift what and how they teach in order to effectively meet these new standards.
- » Teachers first explore the instructional shifts necessitated by the standards, then develop curriculum and assessment tools aligned to these shifts.

SUPPORT
FOR A BIG
OPPORTUNITY:



TRANSITIONING to the Common Core State Standards

Schools and districts that are putting a Common Core State Standards–based curriculum into place are in the midst of “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reexamine their teaching practices,” says WestEd’s Robert Rosenfeld. He calls the effort nothing less than a “game changer.”

Adds Rosenfeld’s colleague, Liz Jameyson, “The standards are based on the best educational research we have. We have good reason to believe this will work. People are sitting up and taking notice.”

Rosenfeld, Jameyson, and other members of WestEd’s Local Accountability Professional Development Series (LAPDS) are working with educators in more than a dozen states, using strategies honed over the last decade by LAPDS, a customized service that helps schools and school districts meet their accountability goals. In their current efforts, LAPDS team members are helping teachers change both what and how they teach in order to effectively implement the Common Core State Standards.

A CHALLENGING TRANSITION

Transitioning to a curriculum based on the Common Core is not simple or easy. Educators first need to be aware of and fully understand how teaching to these new standards differs from what and how they have taught in the past. In part, that will mean teaching more rigorous content material in ways that better develop students’ higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis and application. To prepare, teachers need to align their curriculum, materials, and instructional practices to the standards. Then they must build assessment tools to evaluate student mastery of the skills and concepts addressed in the standards.

According to Rosenfeld, school personnel are reacting to the challenge of implementing the standards in a variety of ways. “We’ve noticed varying degrees of urgency, excitement, and anxiety,” he says. “Some districts have adopted more of a wait-and-see attitude; others, particularly those under school improvement mandates, are being required to begin implementation and are taking it much more seriously.” In those districts where educators understand the standards and how students’ mastery of the standards will be assessed, there is the greatest interest in implementation.

He cautions educators against viewing the standards, which are designed to describe the knowledge and skills that students ultimately will need to succeed in postsecondary school and the world of work, as “just the latest” in a long line of short-lived school accountability initiatives. “This is not about coverage, or getting through a certain amount of material by the end of the year,” says Rosenfeld. “It’s about helping students grasp big ideas, make connections between those ideas, and demonstrate deep understanding of those ideas through more interesting and novel ways than simple recall.” For example, rather than answering a multiple-choice question on when the Civil War began, students might need to write a short essay to describe the war’s main causes.



INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS

The first step in LAPDS's training process of preparing teachers for the transition usually takes place during a one-day workshop at which teachers are introduced to the standards and, specifically, the "instructional shifts" that the standards will necessitate. These shifts—which involve changing the way one teaches in order to bring about different learning outcomes—call on language arts teachers, for example, to assign more nonfiction reading than in the past. What's more, students as young as those in second grade are asked to place high value on the information found in the texts they read, both in conversations about what they've read and in their written work. "They need to be able to demonstrate the ability to answer text-dependent questions, to ground their answers in specific evidence," says Jameyson. Another shift is an expectation that students will spend more time learning and reading increasingly complex vocabulary.

In mathematics, the standards call for students to learn in ways that go beyond memorizing formulas and using them to come up with the right answer to a problem. "It even goes beyond having students show their work," says Rosenfeld. "To meet the standards, students need to understand the relationship between numbers—for example, the numerator and denominator in a fraction, or numbers along a number line—and be able to demonstrate their understanding of those relationships, maybe by writing about why a negative number multiplied by another negative number is always positive." Mathematics teachers also will be responsible for finding ways to increase students' speed and accuracy when it comes to simple calculations and

make sure students know how to apply math concepts to problem solving.

According to Rosenfeld and Jameyson, these are the kinds of skills that help students understand abstract ideas and concepts, and ultimately master complex, high-level mathematics, as well as write research papers in which they convincingly defend their arguments. "It's about preparing them, up to 10 years in advance, for college, careers, and the real world," says Rosenfeld.

NEW CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT TOOLS

In the most difficult and time-consuming part of LAPDS's process, teachers must create a curriculum incorporating these instructional shifts and the instructional strategies needed to best teach them. Says Rosenfeld, "This is when teachers dig in and do the hard work." That includes building units of study and lesson plans as well as mid- and end-of-unit assessments. Jameyson says she has noticed that as teachers get to know the standards, "they begin to realize the standards are well built and deliberately designed." As a result, the teachers begin "to trust the standards, and us, and the process we're putting forth." She says she frequently notes, as the training progresses, "a collective sigh of relief from teachers who realize that we are going back to something that makes sense."

Rosenfeld points out that asking teachers raised in the world of "following the textbook" to become designers of their own curriculum is no small thing. Still, he says, it's the best way for them to fully understand not only what and how the Common Core initiative aims to change

It's still about giving teachers opportunities to have intelligent, professional conversations about instruction and learning.

teaching and learning, but also *why*. Adds Jameyson, “We know that teachers who put their time, heart, and effort into the process become invested in it and are much more likely to use it well.”

According to Jameyson, teachers seem most concerned about the Common Core assessment systems—due to be rolled out during the 2014/15 school year—that will be used to measure student progress. WestEd’s LAPDS gives teachers access to sample assessment items and helps them design and use their own mid-unit assessments to gauge student progress.

A PROVEN MODEL

According to Rosenfeld, much of LAPDS’s work with teachers around the Common Core is based on successful strategies used in the past. “It’s still about giving teachers opportunities to have intelligent, professional conversations about instruction and learning, and making sure teachers understand the needs of their students,” he says.

One time-honored way to ensure that happens: classroom observations followed by “debriefing” conversations in which WestEd staff note how successfully teachers targeted the instructional shifts called for in the new standards and provide tips on how to do so even more effectively. “We know from experience such sessions help build trust,” says Jameyson.

Administrators in two school systems now working with WestEd say the experience has been fruitful. “We’ve been fortunate to have had WestEd helping us figure out what the Common Core is asking us to do and how to

implement it,” says Mark Meyer, Assistant Superintendent in Colorado’s Alamosa School District. Jackie Zeller, Director of Secondary Curriculum Instruction for California’s San Jose School District, agreed that the help of an outside provider was critical. “We know this is a huge challenge and we needed support.” The Alamosa and San Jose districts, both operating under federal school improvement mandates, have been working with WestEd for the last three and two years, respectively. Meyer notes that Alamosa is already seeing improved student achievement; according to Zeller, new curriculum units and lesson plans were developed in her district this spring.

Among the challenges WestEd faces in its work with school districts around the new standards, says Rosenfeld, is helping educators who view the Common Core as a mandate shift to seeing the initiative as something positive that will enable them to reexamine and refine their teaching practices.

Jameyson notes that with more research into and information about the standards coming out every day, WestEd’s work on the subject is constantly evolving. “We’re growing and changing along with our clients.” She says it’s up to WestEd staff “to make sure we’re staying abreast of the newest research on the Common Core and that we represent that research well in our work.”



For more information on how WestEd’s Local Accountability Professional Development Series is helping schools and school districts implement the Common Core State Standards, contact Bob Rosenfeld and Liz Jameyson at rdalert@WestEd.org.

Featured Resources & Services

Curriculum/Instruction and the Common Core

Math Pathways & Pitfalls K–8 Intervention Curriculum

These materials help students tackle stubborn pitfalls head-on and transform them into pathways for learning key mathematical topics. Each book contains everything needed to teach Math Pathways & Pitfalls effectively, including 20–22 complete lessons, a teaching manual, and a DVD with footage of Math Pathways & Pitfalls in action.

Grades K–1: Early and Whole Number Concepts with Algebra Readiness

Publisher: WestEd, 2010
Pages: 320 / Price: \$165
Format: Trade paper with DVD, CD-ROM, and Poster
Product #: MPP-09-01RD
ISBN: 978-0-914409-58-8



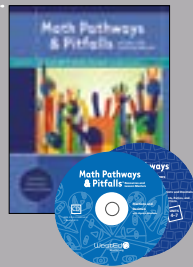
Grades 2–3: Place Value and Whole Number Operations with Algebra Readiness

Publisher: WestEd, 2010
Pages: 352 / Price: \$165
Format: Trade paper with DVD, CD-ROM, and Poster
Product #: MPP-09-02RD
ISBN: 978-0-914409-59-5



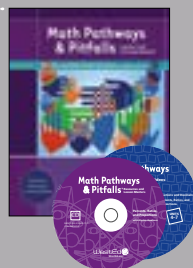
Grades 4–6: Fractions and Decimals with Algebra Readiness

Publisher: WestEd, 2010
Pages: 368 / Price: \$165
Format: Trade paper with DVD, CD-ROM, and Poster
Product #: MPP-09-03RD
ISBN: 978-0-914409-60-1



Grades 6–8: Percents, Ratios, and Proportions with Algebra Readiness

Publisher: WestEd, 2010
Pages: 368 / Price: \$165
Format: Trade paper with DVD, CD-ROM, and Poster
Product #: MPP-09-04RD
ISBN: 978-0-914409-61-8



Making Sense of SCIENCE Teaching Course Materials

This comprehensive series of professional development courses for teachers covers core topics of K–8 earth, life, and physical science. Focusing on science content, inquiry, and literacy, each course provides all the necessary ingredients for building a scientific way of thinking in teachers, helping them significantly improve their students' science learning. Teacher books are also available at WestEd.org/mss.

Matter for Teachers of Grades 6–8

Format: Two paperback books & two CD-ROMs | \$249.95 | ISBN: 978-1-938287-02-2

Energy for Teachers of Grades 6–8

Format: Two paperback books & two CD-ROMs | \$249.95 | ISBN: 978-0-914409-78-6

Force & Motion for Teachers of Grades 6–8

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The Reading Apprenticeship approach is designed to increase teacher effectiveness and improve students' reading and writing skills in content area classes. We offer intensive, hands-on professional development services to help teachers implement the Reading Apprenticeship approach. We provide teachers of all subject areas with the knowledge, tools, and skills to increase students' academic engagement and achievement.

More information online at ReadingApprenticeship.org

Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) Professional Development

QTEL improves the capacity of teachers to support the linguistic, conceptual, and academic development of adolescent English learners. This is especially important as educators implement the Common Core State Standards and other new standards. QTEL's professional development offerings include sustained work with districts and schools as well as open enrollment institutes.

More information online at qtel.wested.org

Assessment and the Common Core

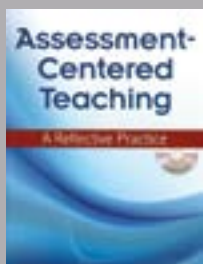


Professional Development on Formative Assessment: Insights From Research and Practice

Elise Trumbull, Nancy Gerzon

Formative assessment is a key component in next-generation assessment systems. This paper outlines how different programs and studies have responded to educators' need for professional development on formative assessment. The authors address the major issues in the design and implementation of professional development on formative assessment and make recommendations for future efforts.

free PDF | 28 pages | WestEd, 2013



Assessment-Centered Teaching: A Reflective Practice

Kathryn DiRanna, Ellen Osmundson, Jo Topps, Lynn Barakos, Maryl Gearhart, Karen Cerwin, Diane Carnahan, Craig Strang

Assessment-Centered Teaching (ACT) is a unique practice that allows teachers to gather information during instruction to uncover learning gaps and guide students toward deeper understandings of complex ideas. Suitable for all grade levels, this resource describes how reflective practitioners can use the ACT portfolio to reflect on, modify, and improve their curriculum and instruction.

\$39.95 | 224 pages | Corwin Press, 2008 | ISBN: 978-1-4129-5463-1 | Product #: MS-08-01RD

Common Core Implementation

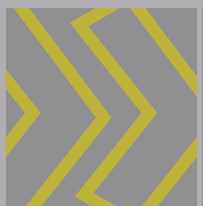


California and the Common Core State Standards: Early Steps, Early Opportunities

Carla Hulce, Natasha Hoehn, Jennifer O'Day, & Catherine Walcott

Leaders and educators in California school districts have many questions and concerns about making changes required by the CCSS. This report addresses questions such as: What are the CCSS and why are they needed? What are districts doing to implement the CCSS, and what can we learn? And what are next steps for CCSS transition in California?

free PDF | 12 pages | American Institutes for Research, 2013



CommonCore.WestEd.org

A new website from WestEd for research-based resources and services designed to help schools, districts, and states implement the Common Core State Standards.

R&D ALERT

R&D Alert covers issues affecting schools, communities, and human development professionals throughout the United States. Current and previous issues are available at WestEd.org/R&DAlert. Your comments are welcomed. Please address them to Noel White at rdalert@WestEd.org.

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**continued
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What do I know about my reader?), and pay attention to the text's macro-organization (What are key ideas I want to explore in the essay? Which ideas should I write first, next, after that, and last?). In this case, language functions and forms are woven in discourse, in action; they are not discrete pieces that students learn in isolation and have to assemble later.

In terms of pedagogical changes, teachers will need to move from being consumers of strategies to becoming deliberate, intentional designers of the right scaffolds that

will mature their students' potential. This shift requires deep knowledge, observation, and the ability to continuously "read" students to support them contingently.

A related shift will be to focus on whether the student understands and communicates ideas in their appropriate relationships, and to accept language that is not perfect. Learning to do this, and to decide when to focus on language, will be a sustained effort of reflective and collegial practice.

All these changes are substantial but indispensable to help our students become autonomous learners and participants in society.

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