

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards A Transition Guide for School-level Leaders

*Developed by the Aspen Institute Education and Society Program, Education First, Insight Education Group,
Student Achievement Partners and Targeted Leadership Consulting*

September 2013





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The Common Core: Shifts in Whole-School Practice

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) build on the highest state standards in the United States, defining the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in college and careers and increasing our expectations to the level of other high-performing countries. A higher bar for students means a higher bar for our schools, which will have to make changes in how they approach teaching and learning. Teachers, school leaders, parents, and other community partners will have to not only consider new content and curricula, but they will also need to think differently about their roles and daily work. Educators will need to study the grade-level progressions of the standards deeply and understand the key shifts in teaching they require. Appendix I contains an outline of the instructional shifts, as well as three accompanying vignettes to illustrate the high-impact actions and indicators outlined in this guide.

The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program, along with Education First, Insight Education Group, Student Achievement Partners, and Targeted Leadership Consulting, have developed clear advice, planning tools, and metrics to help schools accomplish this significant transition. This implementation guide is intended for use as a reference and an action-planning springboard for school leadership teams committed to ensuring that the many interconnected components of high-quality CCSS implementation take hold in their schools.

How to Use This Guide

Built around seven interdependent indicators, this guide provides specific steps and tools for successful transition to the new standards at the school level.

Guidance for each indicator is divided into three parts:

High-Impact Actions: *Critical moves that the leadership team and other stakeholders should take to implement the indicator in their school.*

Measures: *Examples of ways to collect and analyze data to assess the implementation of each indicator.*

Tools: *Links to supporting materials that will help the leadership team and other stakeholders address the indicator.*

The guide also includes vignettes with discussion questions to encourage further exploration of the indicators among leadership team members and other school community members (see Appendix II).

Getting Started

The indicators represent related components of an overall process. Some of the steps are sequential; others require parallel and dependent action. One step, though, must be tended to first: the formation of a school-based leadership team, as described in indicator 1. Everyone in the school community must be engaged if the CCSS are to be implemented successfully. But first, the process must be owned by a team that is empowered to lead the work and be accountable for the associated metrics. Establishing this team is a critical first step; its members are key actors and are the primary audience for this guide.

Conditions Conducive to Success

Successful school-level implementation of the CCSS requires actions and commitments from district, state, and school-level leaders. If schools are to implement the indicators in this guide, they must have the support of state and district leaders. They also must have sufficient resources, including:

- Time (and funds) for the school leadership team to meet
- Time for teacher teams to plan and learn together from data
- Funds to purchase CCSS-aligned curricular materials, or time for highly trained teams to adapt existing materials to the CCSS using established alignment tools
- Highly skilled instructional coaches who deliver ongoing and embedded professional learning

Districts and states can help secure these conditions by communicating clear support for the CCSS with educators and external stakeholders, providing schools flexibility or additional resources to facilitate leaders' and teachers' meetings, aligning district-level expectations for teaching with the CCSS, and providing guidance on purchasing or developing CCSS-aligned instructional materials and assessments.

CCSS Transitions at a Glance

The following summary of how to successfully transition a school to new standards provides a high-level view of transition indicators and recommendations for school-based leadership teams. School leaders can use the summary to quickly monitor and assess their work and to communicate the key areas of focus for CCSS implementation to school staff and external stakeholders.

<i>Indicator of High-Quality Transition</i>	<i>What the School Must Do</i>
#1: A team that includes classroom teachers and administrators leads and is accountable for common understanding and implementation of the CCSS.	Form a team of key decision-makers, administrators, and teachers that is highly knowledgeable about the CCSS and develop a plan for executing the activities and indicators that follow.
#2: The leadership team establishes common expectations for CCSS-aligned instructional practice. School personnel use observation tools to support and assess this practice in mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and technical subjects.	Create, adapt, or adopt a set of common expectations for what CCSS-aligned instructional practice looks like, beginning with careful study of the standards, the necessary instructional shifts and teaching standards, rubrics and protocols. Revise as needed all teacher support mechanisms in the school (such as protocols for observation, feedback, and instructional coaching) to ensure that they help teachers achieve these common expectations.
#3: Ongoing professional learning, including feedback and coaching systems, is focused on deepening educator knowledge of and facility with the CCSS.	Evaluate existing professional learning (including feedback and coaching systems) and develop new experiences and systems for teachers that both prioritize the CCSS and feature high-quality content, multiple delivery modes, and more opportunities for ongoing collaboration and reflection.
#4: School personnel use data from a CCSS-aligned assessment system (including interim/benchmark and summative assessments as well as ongoing collection of student work) to inform instruction and gauge effective implementation of CCSS.	Design a comprehensive assessment strategy that places instruction and actionable data for teachers at its center. Work directly with teachers to translate qualitative and quantitative data into effective, CCSS-aligned instruction.
#5: Instructional resources, whether purchased or developed, are aligned to the CCSS.	Ensure the alignment of instructional resources used by teachers and students with the goals and expectations of the CCSS. Develop and/or implement a comprehensive curriculum that includes instructional materials that are content-rich and also build knowledge and academic vocabulary coherently from year to year. When purchasing or developing new materials or assessing existing ones, use widely agreed-upon criteria to determine their alignment with CCSS.
#6: Families and communities are engaged in supporting the success of the CCSS.	Identify and execute messages and methods that will help families and other stakeholders understand the how and why of the CCSS and support student success.
#7: Decisions about staffing, time, and spending reflect a prioritization of the CCSS.	Evaluate and reallocate time, people, and money to ensure that school leaders, teachers, and students have what they need to succeed with the CCSS.

THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

INDICATOR #1:

A team that includes classroom teachers and administrators leads—and is accountable for—common understanding and implementation of the CCSS.

What It Means

A leadership team that facilitates and guides improvement of instruction and learning based on student achievement is critical for successful and full implementation of CCSS at the school level. A high-functioning leadership team provides the structure needed for schools to develop collaborative and collegial cultures where practice can improve systematically. To be effective, the leadership team must be knowledgeable about the content of the standards, the instructional shifts they require, and the work that needs to be done to implement them. The team must include key decision-makers from the school including teachers.

HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

- The school establishes a leadership team that is diverse and inclusive of key decision-makers, including teachers from instructional teams that are organized by grade level, cluster, subject area, department, or small learning community.
- The leadership team ensures its own deep understanding of the CCSS and related instructional shifts and develops an implementation plan that integrates the CCSS into other school, district, and state initiatives.
- The leadership team grows its skills in areas such as leading change efforts, planning agendas, facilitating meetings, and using metrics to monitor CCSS implementation.

- The leadership team monitors and supports the implementation of CCSS as described in indicators 2 through 7.
- The leadership team measures its own and the school's success by reviewing quantitative and qualitative data from key CCSS implementation metrics.

MEASURES

- To what extent is the leadership team representative of the diversity in the school community?
- How often does the leadership team meet, and how effective are those meetings? Do they focus on CCSS-related content? Do they include high-quality dialogue on CCSS?
- How frequently does the leadership team communicate with other stakeholders and teacher teams?

TOOLS

Planning guides and materials for establishing and maintaining an effective school leadership team:

- *Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT) Professional Development Module*, The Aspen Institute: This module helps school-level leaders build a leadership team to guide Common Core implementation and outlines how to purpose professional learning time towards looking at student work (LASW).
www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/iltmodule
- *Sample CCSS Program Review Matrix*, ASCD: This self-assessment tool helps school leadership teams organize evidence from multiple sources to evaluate the current quality of their school's CCSS transition as they develop an implementation plan.
groups.ascd.org/resource/documents/122463-CCSS_Principals_Role_Handout_2_Sample_Program_Review_Matrix.pdf

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

INDICATOR #2:

The leadership team establishes common expectations for CCSS-aligned instructional practice. School personnel use observation tools to support and assess this practice in mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and technical subjects.

What It Means

Effective implementation of the CCSS requires that teachers not only understand the standards but also make necessary adjustments in instructional practice—for instance, ensuring students are highly engaged in academic discourse and building perseverance in solving complex problems. Common expectations, support systems, and accountability structures are critical to building a community of practitioners who demonstrate deep knowledge of and facility with the CCSS and standards-based instruction. All teacher support mechanisms, such as observations, feedback, and instructional coaching, should focus on implementation of the CCSS and the key instructional shifts they require.

HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

- The leadership team agrees upon a shared set of expectations for CCSS-aligned instructional practice and ensures that all teachers understand these expectations.
- The leadership team aligns teacher support tools, both formative and evaluative, to the expectations for instructional practice.
- The leadership team clearly communicates the purpose and use of these aligned tools to teachers.
- Supported by the leadership team, staff utilize data from observations and coaching feedback to inform and continuously improve classroom practice.

MEASURES

- What percentage of teachers can articulate the instructional shifts required by the CCSS and the agreed-upon expectations for instructional practice?
- What percentage of teachers demonstrate application of CCSS-aligned instructional practice?
- What percentage of teachers can describe how the instructional shifts have been integrated into decisions about their instructional practice (in terms of content and pedagogy)?

TOOLS

Planning guides and exemplars for establishing common expectations for CCSS-aligned practice and observing them in practice:

- *CCSS Instructional Practice Guides*, Student Achievement Partners: These guides, divided by subject and grade level, provide concrete examples of the CCSS in planning and practice, both in a single lesson and over the course of the year.
www.achievethecore.org/instructional-practice
- *Insight Core Framework*, Inside Education Group: This website provides tools to help schools align their instructional frameworks with the CCSS and focus on instructional practices that improve student outcomes.
www.insightcoreframework.com
- *Framework for Effective Teaching*, Newark Public Schools: This CCSS-aligned evaluation framework sets clear expectations for instructional practice throughout a school building.
www.newarkexcels.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Framework-for-Effective-Teaching.pdf

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

INDICATOR #3:

Ongoing professional learning, including feedback and coaching systems, is focused on deepening educator knowledge of and facility with the CCSS.

What It Means

Effective implementation of the CCSS is tied to deep understanding of the standards and the instructional shifts they require, as well as the understanding of and ability to make those shifts in classroom practice. Professional learning should focus on practices that help students meet the new standards, such as teaching them to conduct close reading of complex texts, publicly struggle with difficult mathematics problems, and communicate their thinking through speaking or writing. These expectations necessitate robust professional learning experiences and systems for teachers that prioritize the CCSS and include high-quality content, multiple delivery modes (such as workshops, feedback systems, and coaching), and enhanced opportunities for teachers to collaborate and reflect as they look at student work, plan for instruction, and observe each other.

HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

- The leadership team develops a plan for professional learning that supports all teachers in understanding and implementing the CCSS.
- The leadership team develops a plan for professional learning that:
 - ⇒ Incorporates multiple modes of delivery (such as workshops, peer observation, study groups, and coaching) and prioritizes ongoing teacher collaboration and reflection.
 - ⇒ Creates opportunities for teacher voice and leadership in planning for and delivering professional learning experiences.
 - ⇒ Includes a system for gathering and addressing teacher feedback and data on classroom impact.

- The leadership team and other school staff design professional learning opportunities that meet the expectations of the CCSS.

MEASURES

- What percentage of professional learning resources (dollars and time) is spent deepening educator understanding of the CCSS and the instructional practices that support them?
 - ⇒ Is it sufficient? And how do you know?
- What percentage of teachers articulate increased knowledge of the instructional shifts as a result of participating in professional learning opportunities?
- How does the school determine which professional learning opportunities are the most effective?

TOOLS

Modules for CCSS-aligned professional learning:

- *CCSS Professional Development Modules*, Student Achievement Partners: These are flexible, ready-to-use modules intended to support educators in understanding and effectively implementing the CCSS and to support leaders in delivering PD. The modules include materials for teachers to strengthen their understanding of the CCSS.
www.achievethecore.org/PD
- *Professional Learning Units*, Learning Forward: These school-based resources train leadership teams as trainers, preparing them to deliver PD to colleagues about CCSS-aligned instruction.
www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core/professional-learning-units
- *Tools for Teachers*, The Aspen Institute: These modules help educators learn and practice key changes in the CCSS in English language arts and literacy. These modules on academic writing, text complexity, close reading, and text-dependent questions include a PowerPoint presentation, guide for trainers, and supplemental exemplars and activities.
www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/toolsforteachers

DATA AND ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

INDICATOR #4:

School personnel use data from a CCSS-aligned assessment system (including interim/benchmark and summative assessments as well as ongoing collection of student work) to inform instruction and gauge effective implementation of the CCSS.

What It Means

When schools implement the CCSS effectively, students produce work and complete well-designed assessments that allow teachers to gauge student knowledge and abilities against standards. It is essential that this qualitative and quantitative data is not just collected but used. Successful implementation of CCSS requires that schools have a comprehensive assessment strategy and aligned assessments to ensure that stakeholders possess accurate and actionable data.

HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

- The leadership team defines the school's comprehensive assessment system, — which includes interim/benchmark, and summative assessments—as well as a formative process of data-gathering (such as collecting student work) and adjusted instruction that aligns to the CCSS.
- The leadership team sets SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) goals based on a multiyear vision for student learning, and it continuously assesses whether the school is on track to meet end-of-year summative goals.
- The leadership team makes sure teachers have time to review assessment items, data, and student work so that they:
 - ⇒ Understand the rigor of the CCSS and what mastery of the CCSS looks like.
 - ⇒ Understand what their students know and don't know and what their intervention needs are in relation to CCSS.
 - ⇒ Identify and address strengths and gaps in their teaching.
 - ⇒ Identify the instructional actions they will take to ensure students meet expectations.
 - ⇒ Identify opportunities to maximize peer-to-peer learning with colleagues.
- The leadership team leverages data from different assessments at set times of the year to make key management, resource allocation, and professional development decisions.

MEASURES

- What percentage of instructional staff report that they have the assessment information they need to improve their practice and meet student needs? What percentage say the assessment data is fundamental to adapting their instructional practice?
- What percentage of instructional staff are using assessment data to monitor progress of students and adapt planning and instruction?
- How much time does the school allocate for teachers and administrators to review data to make instructional adjustments?
- Is it sufficient? And how do you know?
- In which subjects and grade levels have assessments been externally reviewed to ensure rigor and alignment to the CCSS?

TOOLS

Rubrics for assessment alignment and guides for data-driven instruction:

- *Assessment Evaluation Tool (AET)*, Student Achievement Partners: These tools can be used to evaluate the alignment of grade or course-level assessment materials for alignment with the CCSS, including interim or benchmark assessments and classroom assessments. In addition, the AET can also be used to deepen a shared understanding of the criteria for CCSS-aligned assessments. There are separate AET tools for K–High School Mathematics and 3–12 English Language Arts/Literacy.

www.achievethecore.org/AET

- *Implementation Rubric for Data-Driven Instruction & Assessment and Driven by Data: Culture Implementation Calendar*, Paul Bambrick-Santoyo: The rubric guides teams in assessing the state of data-driven instruction and assessment in their school; the calendar is a planning tool with tasks and timelines designed to grow data-driven school practices.

www.engageny.org/resource/driven-by-data-data-driven-implementation-rubric

www.engageny.org/resource/driven-by-data-culture-implementation-calendar

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

INDICATOR #5:

Instructional resources, whether purchased or developed, are aligned to the CCSS.

What It Means

Effective implementation of the CCSS will require that instructional resources used by teachers and students closely align with the goals and expectations of the CCSS. The school develops or implements a comprehensive curriculum that includes instructional materials that are content-rich and build knowledge and academic vocabulary coherently from year to year. When purchasing, developing, or assessing existing materials, schools should use widely agreed-upon criteria to determine their alignment with CCSS.

HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

- Appropriate school personnel use widely agreed-upon and school-supported criteria to review existing materials for alignment with the CCSS. The leadership team, working with other instructional leaders in the school, identifies available resources to supplement gaps in existing materials and fills additional gaps with materials developed collaboratively by teachers.
- When existing materials do not meet the criteria, all personnel are instructed to no longer use them.
- Appropriate school personnel assess potential purchases of curriculum and textbooks to ensure that the school does not purchase materials that do not meet the alignment criteria.

- When developing new curriculum, teachers and administrators use the criteria to guide development and review prior to implementation.

MEASURES

- What percentage of school expenditures on new instructional materials (purchased or developed) is spent on resources aligned to the CCSS?
- What percentage of existing materials have school instructional staff reviewed to determine their alignment to the CCSS—and revised if necessary?
- What percentage of teacher-created lessons and units address agreed-upon criteria?
 - ⇒ For all measures, are these percentages sufficient? And how do you know?

TOOLS

Rubrics and criteria for assessing alignment of materials to the CCSS:

- *Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards*: The CCSS authors provide criteria for aligned instructional materials for ELA (grades K-2 and 3-12) and math (grades K-8 and 9-12).
www.corestandards.org/resources
- *Instructional Materials Evaluation Tools (IMET)*, Student Achievement Partners: These review tools can be used to evaluate alignment of textbooks and/or textbook series to the CCSS in Math and ELA.
www.achievethecore.org/IMET
- *Rubrics for Lessons & Units*, Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQulP), Achieve: These rubrics serve as tools for evaluating a wide range of instructional materials.
www.achieve.org/EQulP
- *Basal and Anthology Alignment Projects*, Student Achievement Partners: These are free, CCSS-aligned replacement lessons for basal readers in grades 3 through 5 and anthologies in grades 6 through 10.
www.achievethecore.org/basal-alignment-project
- *Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC)*: The LDC offers an instructional system, framework, and instructional resources, including task templates and guidance for teachers to create modules for high-quality assignments that develop student skills to meet the CCSS in science, history, English, and other subjects.
www.literacydesigncollaborative.org/resources

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

INDICATOR #6:

Families and communities are engaged in supporting the success of the CCSS.

What It Means

For families and community members to make a positive impact on the implementation of the CCSS in a school, they must be engaged in ongoing efforts with the school's principal and teachers. Families and community members need to understand the standards, the compelling reasons for transitioning to them—including how they will help students succeed in college and careers—and effective strategies for supporting students at home, at school, and within the broader community.

HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

- The leadership team identifies or adapts from external resources a core set of clear, aligned messages to families and community members about the implications of the CCSS for students and why success with standards will help them.
- The leadership team identifies the learning and sharing opportunities (such as Parent Nights, newsletters, and parent-teacher conferences) that the school will use to promote increased rigor in classrooms, ensure that families understand the new requirements for their children, and articulate how new expectations will impact instruction and the school.
- The leadership team or appropriate personnel adapts or creates resources to ensure families play an important role in supporting their children at home.

- The leadership team or appropriate school personnel creates and monitors a calendar for teachers to meet regularly with family members to review students' progress toward mastery of the CCSS, checking for families' understanding of the implications of the higher rigor of the CCSS.

MEASURES

- What percentage of families are involved in events focused on the transition to the CCSS?
- What percentage of families understand the changes and expectations of the CCSS and how the CCSS will help prepare their children for college and career?
- What percentage of parents report active engagement in helping their children with the CCSS?

TOOLS

Materials and presentations for helping families engage with the CCSS:

- *Toolkit for Parent Engagement*, EngageNY: This toolkit provides a school's family coordinators and leadership team with turnkey (but adaptable) tools and materials for hosting a parent night on the CCSS, including slide presentations, event checklists, annotated agendas, and handouts.
www.engageny.org/resource/planning-a-parent-workshop-toolkit-for-parent-engagement
- *Parent guides*, National PTA and Council of the Great City Schools: These are short and mid-length guides to the CCSS, organized by grade level and content area, that describe what students will learn under the new standards and how parents can help.
PTA Guides:
pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583
Council of Great City Schools Roadmaps:
www.cgcs.org/Domain/36
- *The Common Core: A Flier for Families*, The Aspen Institute: This flyer makes the Common Core accessible to families and other stakeholders, explaining what the standards are and why they are important for improving public education. Available in English and Spanish.
www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/ccssflier

RESOURCE PRIORITIZATION

INDICATOR #7:

Decisions about staffing, time, and spending reflect a prioritization of the CCSS.

What It Means

An evaluation and possible reallocation of school and district resources (time, people, and money) will be necessary to ensure that school personnel have the support to implement the CCSS effectively. The leadership team needs to be knowledgeable about all available resources and make resource allocation decisions with CCSS as the primary consideration. Leaders also need to articulate reasons for those allocations; investigate alternative uses of time, people and money to better support implementation; and use student achievement data and qualitative data to align resources to the CCSS.

HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

- The leadership team conducts an inventory of available resources and uses data to prioritize the allocation of those resources to advance implementation of the CCSS.
- The leadership team reviews and adapts processes for hiring and induction so that new staff are able to deliver CCSS-aligned instruction.
- The leadership team reviews the staffing plan to ensure it reflects the school's focus on the implementation of CCSS.
- The leadership team reviews the allocation of teacher time across staff meetings, professional learning communities and other professional development, to ensure it reflects CCSS as a central priority.
- The leadership team reviews the allocation of student instructional time, expectations for lesson formats, and instructional mandates to ensure that they enable students to meet the demands of the CCSS.

MEASURES

- What percentage of non-staffing dollars (including grant funding) are allocated to the CCSS?
- What percentage of discretionary personnel dollars and positions are allocated to CCSS?
⇒ Are these percentages sufficient? And how do you know?
- What evidence shows that the school schedule and professional development schedule reflect the prioritization of CCSS?
- What evidence shows that there is a clear plan for communicating how and why resources are allocated the way they are?
- How is the CCSS integrated into grant programs (e.g. IDEA, Title I, etc.) and other activities in the school?

TOOLS

Planning and Self-Assessment Tools:

- *Resource Check*, Education Resource Strategies: This self-assessment enables district and school leadership teams to measure their allocation of time and financial resources against goals such as teaching quality and instructional time and receive customized results with recommended reading materials to improve targeted areas.

www.erstrategies.org/strategies/school_design

APPENDIX I

Common Core Shifts for English Language Arts/Literacy

- 1. Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction*

Building knowledge through content rich non-fiction plays an essential role in literacy and in the Standards. In K–5, fulfilling the standards requires a 50-50 balance between informational and literary reading. Informational reading primarily includes content rich non-fiction in history/social studies, science and the arts; the K–5 Standards strongly recommend that students build coherent general knowledge both within each year and across years. In 6–12, ELA classes place much greater attention on a specific category of informational text—literary nonfiction—than has been traditional. In grades 6–12, the Standards for literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects ensure that students can independently build knowledge in these disciplines through reading and writing.

To be clear, the Standards do require substantial attention to literature throughout K–12, as half of the required work in K–5 and the core of the work of 6–12 ELA teachers.
- 2. Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational*

The Standards place a premium on students writing to sources, i.e., using evidence from texts to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge or experience, the Standards expect students to answer questions that depend on their having read the text or texts with care. The Standards also require the cultivation of narrative writing throughout the grades, and in later grades a command of sequence and detail will be essential for effective argumentative and informational writing.

Likewise, the reading standards focus on students’ ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas and details based on text evidence. Students should be able to answer a range of text-dependent questions, questions in which the answers require inferences based on careful attention to the text.
- 3. Regular practice with complex text and its academic language*

Rather than focusing solely on the skills of reading and writing, the Standards highlight the growing complexity of the texts students must read to be ready for the demands of college and careers. The Standards build a staircase of text complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college-and career-level reading no later than the end of high school.

Closely related to text complexity—and inextricably connected to reading comprehension—is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as ignite and commit).

[More on the shifts at *achievethecore.org*](http://achievethecore.org)

Common Core Shifts for Mathematics

1. *Focus strongly where the Standards focus*

Focus: The Standards call for a greater focus in mathematics. Rather than racing to cover topics in today's mile--wide, inch--deep curriculum, teachers use the power of the eraser and significantly narrow and deepen the way time and energy is spent in the math classroom. They focus deeply on the major work* of each grade so that students can gain strong foundations: solid conceptual understanding, a high degree of procedural skill and fluency, and the ability to apply the math they know to solve problems inside and outside the math classroom.

2. *Coherence: think across grades, and link to major topics* within grades*

Thinking across grades: The Standards are designed around coherent progressions from grade to grade. Principals and teachers carefully connect the learning across grades so that students can build new understanding onto foundations built in previous years. Teachers can begin to count on deep conceptual understanding of core content and build on it. Each standard is not a new event, but an extension of previous learning.

Linking to major topics: Instead of allowing additional or supporting topics to detract from the focus of the grade, these topics can serve the grade level focus. For example, instead of data displays as an end in themselves, they support grade--level word problems.

3. *Rigor: in major topics* pursue:*

- *conceptual understanding,*
- *procedural skill and fluency, and*
- *application with equal intensity*

Conceptual understanding: The Standards call for conceptual understanding of key concepts, such as place value and ratios. Teachers support students' ability to access concepts from a number of perspectives so that students are able to see math as more than a set of mnemonics or discrete procedures.

Procedural skill and fluency: The Standards call for speed and accuracy in calculation. Teachers structure class time and/or homework time for students to practice core functions such as single--digit multiplication so that students have access to more complex concepts and procedures

Application: The Standards call for students to use math flexibly for applications. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply math in context. Teachers in content areas outside of math, particularly science, ensure that students are using math to make meaning of and access content.

**Focus Areas in Support of Rich Instruction and Expectations of Fluency and Conceptual Understanding*

- | | |
|-----|---|
| K–2 | Addition and subtraction—concepts, skills, and problem solving, and place value |
| 3–5 | Multiplication and division of whole numbers and fractions – concepts, skills and problem solving |
| 6 | Ratios and proportional reasoning; early expressions and equations |
| 7 | Ratios and proportional reasoning; arithmetic of rational numbers |
| 8 | Linear algebra and linear functions |

*For a list of major, additional and supporting clusters by grade, please refer to 'Focus in Math' on achievethecore.org pp. 4 - 12

[More on the shifts at achievethecore.org](http://achievethecore.org)

VIGNETTE I

Implementing CCSS Math Through Instructional Collaboration

Eighth grade math teacher Ari Klein, tore into a granola bar as he headed for his standing meeting with the math team leader, Jasmine Park. He geared up for these lesson-planning meetings the same way he prepared for a long bike ride. Except, he mused, he'd now substituted an open mind for the open road.

Of the 10 years Klein had been teaching algebra, the last three had been the most satisfying—and the most challenging. Klein's early experiences as the lone algebra teacher in a rural district were fresh in his mind. He planned solo, taught solo, and—at the end of the day—biked solo down those country roads. A few weeks after being hired at Metropolitan Middle School, Klein had shared an observation with Park.

"Being part of this math department is like cycling with a practiced riding club," he had said. "I have to watch every move I make or I crash into someone. I miss just riding on my own."

"Don't worry, Ari," Park told him. "You'll soon be taking a turn out in front. Give it a few months. In our professional learning community, our team rotates the responsibilities of department chair. It challenges each of us to get to know the content more deeply. Next up—the department's cross-grade coherence meeting."

"Sounds like I should enjoy the slipstream while I can."

"Slipstream?"

"When you ride fast and close behind another cyclist, you're pulled along by the air currents they create through their hard work. It's the same with the benefits created by strategic coordinated teaming." Thinking about that conversation now, Ari realized that the continual emphasis on team effort that he once found restricting he now experienced as fluid, efficient, and effective.

Three years of partnering had given Klein and Park opportunity to hone their team functioning, and to develop a strong appreciation for the contributions each brought to the joint planning sessions. Klein followed Park to the long table where they always spread out their materials: student work from their classes, sample lessons and model units supporting Common Core math standards, and rubrics to assess whether their own class plans and assignments would truly support their middle schoolers in mastering these standards. During the first week, the team spent time unpacking the standards in order to truly understand the level of cognitive functioning that was expected of students. The next few meetings were spent identifying benchmark assessments aligned to the standards. These steps provided a strong platform for aligning units and lessons to the standards. In just a few short weeks, Klein and Park were engaging in deep discussions about what went well in their lessons—and what didn't. They examined student work and shared ideas about how best to change their lessons to address the stumbling points their eighth graders evidenced. Since they had teamed up, fewer students slipped through the cracks. And math scores were rising.

During a recent professional development session, they had opportunity to focus on the changes required in Common Core math. Since then, Klein and Park set aside time at each planning session to talk about the evidence of student learning and mastery of the standards. Were their students developing the habits of mind and dispositions they need for a deeper understanding of content? Could students be seen making sense of problems—reasoning abstractly and quantitatively—and persevering?

"How'd we do with focus today?" As a cyclist, Klein understands the dynamics of focus. He couldn't maintain his disciplined cycling routines if he let distractions interfere. The same is true when teaching math, he thought. With practice, Klein and Park had gotten better at holding instructional content to the level of eighth grade standards for Algebra I. Support from the math department chair had helped the math team think

across grades, which resulted in more coherence and deliberate linking to the major topic in each grade. And they had developed methods for equally pursuing conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and math applications in their units.

Eliminating extraneous content from lessons was freeing up time for them to go deeper on important concepts. And it felt as good as emptying a pebble out of your bike shoe.

“I admit to a feeling that presenting just a few expressions to the students today was not enough,” Park said. “But the lesson was like a window to their thinking. I could pinpoint where they hesitated, and saw their struggles with rewriting an expression as a difference of squares. Figuring out what to put in every cell in the table we created helped them attend to fluency.

“I tried out your tactic today, Jasmine—praising my students for admitting they were confused—and explained that learning is a process of clearing up confusion. Our new motto for the month is: ‘Be courageous. Admit your confusion.’”

“Ari, let’s make our word of the week ‘Persistence,’” Park said. “What if we add a third star to the self-graded individual work? For not giving up—for demonstrating diligence.”

“I like it! Persistence paid off in this introductory lesson. My students were less confident and made more errors, but they appeared to fearlessly factor trinomials.”

“I really like that we’ve taken the ‘gotcha’ out of our classes. When they engaged in critique and defense, I heard students using the respectful disagreement phrases we rehearsed and posted in our rooms. You know what else I heard, Ari? Mr. Klein—all the way down the hall—shouting ‘Yes!’ every time a student got it right.”

Illustrates Indicators: #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #7

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What is the relationship between more focused content and a consistent learning experience for all students?**
- 2. How does joint lesson planning and review of student work help teachers achieve the depth of change, content mastery, and rigor required by the transition to CCSS?**
- 3. How can instructional leaders demonstrate the efficacy of teacher collaboration and reflection?**

VIGNETTE II

Leveraging Observation to Improve CCSS ELA Instruction

Principal Akeisha Johnson-Green reread her notes from her fourth observation of Anthony Velazquez's 9th grade English classroom. She would never say so publicly, but she enjoyed visiting Velazquez's classroom more than any other. Not because he was the school's most accomplished teacher. He wasn't. Not because she was a former English teacher herself. No, it was because Anthony Velazquez's instruction had improved more than any other teacher's at Martin Luther King High School, the result, she believed, of the school's and her leadership team's focus on high-quality implementation of the Common Core.

Velazquez didn't like all the changes at the school this year at first. An accomplished lecturer, he could mesmerize the students in his class with brilliant recitations, analysis of text, and jokes that kept his classroom filled with laughter. Johnson-Green always looked forward to visiting his class. At the end of each year, both she and Velazquez would wonder why only 10 to 15 percent of his students read at grade level.

Now, after several months of intensive coaching and honest feedback—based on an instructional framework aligned to the Common Core State Standards and an observation rubric developed by the school district—Velazquez had shown steady and great progress. At first, the pre-evaluation conference was not at all comfortable. Johnson-Green had told Velazquez that he would need to change his instruction to align it to the demands of new standards. She insisted that these changes would require much more of his students, and would result in a different sort of application of Velazquez's intelligence and talent for teaching.

Velazquez would need to give up lecturing and use collaborative learning methods. His students were going to have to learn how to marshal evidence from text to defend an argument, an instructional focus the school leadership team had identified for the entire school. Johnson-Green emphasized that her classroom observations would focus on a very important outcome: students' ability to cite evidence in appropriate ways, from multiple sources.

During a conference in September, Johnson-Green remembered, she had given Velazquez tools and materials for planning lessons and curriculum development. She had reviewed the instructional leadership team's plans to guide the school through its transition to the Common Core. Velazquez seemed pleased that the team would work with faculty to establish a system of supports, including coaching, workshops, and professional learning communities. In fact, twice a month, Velazquez had participated in a PLC of English teachers focused on instructional practices to help students use evidence in oral and written arguments.

Velazquez also co-led the English department's efforts to determine whether the texts currently in use for the core 9th and 10th grade classes provided teachers the means to support students in the type of reading and writing demanded by the Common Core. And, to Johnson-Green's great satisfaction, Velazquez worked with the English department chair to devote portions of department meetings and release days to the analysis of student essays, with a particular focus on whether students were effectively citing evidence from text to support their arguments. This focus, the department chair observed, was consistent with the professional learning objectives established by the school's leadership team.

Velazquez used to encourage students to gather evidence from poems, books, and essays that would support the soundness of his own arguments. He reluctantly moved away from this approach and had adopted a new slogan: "Arguments are like jigsaw puzzles." His students now had to come up with many details that exactly fit their arguments. Velazquez used the slogan to help change student behavior—and his own. His deliberate attention to this particular aspect of his instruction was paying off. Velazquez enjoyed interacting with his students, and this approach to collaborative learning multiplied opportunities for dialogue on the literary content he enjoyed.

Earlier in the year, Velazquez's students complained about spending an entire class period and sometimes more on a single page of text. Now they were used to it. Close reading had become a regular practice across classrooms at Martin Luther King High School because it had become the focus of professional development for all teachers. The lesson Johnson-Green was now observing focused on the use of imagery from a single page of text in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Four students were participating in a guided small-group conversation at the table next to her.

“Okay,” began the girl who was the scribe for the group. “So we think the author is describing the rocks in this paragraph, but he calls them ‘stacks,’ ‘chimneys,’ and ‘a motor car.’ Things he remembers from when he was home.”

“Yes, but what are stacks? Ask Mr. Velazquez,” suggested a girl slouched in her chair.

“You know he won’t answer us,” a boy said. “Just look for the puzzle pieces yourself, and write them on your index card. Each of us should find at least one different piece of evidence on our own.”

“We can figure this out,” said the scribe. “Here’s my evidence. The author says that the rock ‘lifted up,’ so this means a stack is something that sticks up, the same way a chimney does.”

“I get it,” the boy with the index cards said. “My dad sometimes talks about the pollution coming from smokestacks. A smokestack must be like a chimney.”

“Write this down. When the boys threw the rocks, they imagined bombs,” the boy next to her said. “Like the bombs that scared their parents so much that they put their kids on an airplane to fly somewhere safe.”

“The page we have doesn’t say anything about a war. We’d better find that in the book. Mr. Velazquez will ask for the details.” All four students began flipping through pages, searching for the proof they’d need.

Johnson-Green nodded at Velazquez approvingly as she left the classroom.

Johnson-Green smiled and decided to use this classroom observation as a data point at the leadership team meeting that afternoon. It was a clear indicator of the school’s steady progress toward successful implementation of the new standards. Anthony Velazquez had come a long way. Her observation notes confirmed that Velazquez’s students could cite evidence from text appropriately. “Perhaps Anthony will be a good candidate for the leadership team or department head some day,” she wrote.

Illustrates Indicators: #2, #3, #5

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What supports and processes provided by the instructional leadership team most effectively enable teachers to transform their instruction style and methods? What else is needed to foster this transition?**
- 2. How do the student learning behaviors and strategies described here support success with the CCSS in English language arts?**
- 3. The students are participating in small group discussions during Principal Johnson-Green’s visits; what other instructional approaches might help students grow their ability to cite evidence from text to support a claim?**

VIGNETTE III

Bridging the Gap from Knowing to Doing

Anandi Mehra usually built the agenda for the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings on her computer. Instead, on this Saturday morning, Anandi headed for her favorite spot to think, the footbridge across the creek.

Last night, while engaged in the task of whittling down her ambitious stack of professional reading, Anandi came across an article on the knowing-doing gap. The authors' premise resonated with her: organizations may unwittingly emphasize the value of knowledge as a codifiable commodity over the transfer of that knowledge to practice. As a school leader, she well understood that it was easier to "talk smart," and look good in the process, than it was to take action.

Anandi was eager to move her team deeper into school-wide implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Yet, she could appreciate that her teachers felt like they were standing at the edge of a risky precipice: the knowing-doing gap had morphed into a chasm. To be sure, the staff had collaboratively designed and adopted an instructional effectiveness framework and teacher observation rubric. They had even talked about how it aligned to and emphasized focused work on the Standards. But members of the ILT could not point to classrooms where teaching had moved beyond a minimal nod to the requisite instructional shifts. Despite teachers' "commit to try" declarations, the school team wouldn't leave the safe, well-trod ground of readiness and step onto the seemingly-shaky bridge of implementation. By focusing on a specific instructional practice, she thought, reinforced by cycles of learning, her ILT could both nudge and support the staff to start their path across.

At the Monday afternoon ILT meeting, Sarah Phan, the literacy coach, was animated, "I get what you're proposing, Anandi!" Sarah drew two figures on the white board.

"This wavy line represents our old staff training model. Think of it as a flowing stream. We have teachers put in here, and we think they end up downstream—here—all trained and ready to implement the Common Core," Sarah said. "I think this spiral has to be our new model. Start with a central focus like citing evidence from the text to back up a claim, and circle outwards, supporting our teachers as they apply that instructional shift in more and more lessons and across additional content areas.

"Or, in our case, taking it deeper," interjected Chad Williams, social studies department head. "If we're targeting evidence-based speaking and writing, then the iterations in Sarah's spiral can also represent multi-level supports or ongoing training, so teachers' comfort with text-based discourse in class builds on itself."

Assistant Principal Christina Ramos threw up both hands as though to block a flying object. "That's if the budget can withstand that model," she said. "When I hear words like "ongoing" and "multi-level," I can't help but see dollar signs for new staff and more PD programs. Lots of dollar signs, in fact."

Rachel Cohen, the science department head, couldn't resist the pun "But it's not about dollars – it's more about sense!" Ignoring the groans of her colleagues, Rachel explained. "I'm serious. If we're truly focused on one instructional practice, like citing evidence from text that supports a claim, that cuts across all our classrooms we won't waste resources, Christina. It's a more sensible use of our professional development resources to go deep on this one shift all semester, to follow this Common Core instructional change and provide supports all along, instead of spending our professional development dollars and time upstream on lots of different ideas and approaches and hoping all that training reaches our students at the estuary. Our chances of getting teachers to authentically and authoritatively implement the Common Core will increase. I also like that this model graphically illustrates our expectations about the development of teaching practice, and even the continuity we seek across grade level content and instruction. As the spiral expands, the learning gets deeper."

Next, Anandi was on her feet to take a turn at the white board. "We're used to talking about cycles."

"But not talking in circles..." Chad's one-liners meant he was paying close attention.

"Actually, that is exactly what I was going to say—but with a slightly different intention," Anandi continued. "To represent what we'll do, let's put little nodes—little circles—on this bigger expanding circle: Introduction to theory, modeling, safe practice, peer observation, low risk feedback, and coaching. These are the components that we know help teachers transfer training to their classroom practice."

“Then these are the things we will do—we must do,” Sarah said. “Anandi, let’s talk about how we can cover classrooms so that teachers can engage in collaborative learning, including peer observation. I want to start the English Department on this right away—next week, if possible. It just seems so straightforward!”

“Sarah, let’s figure out how to do training in reflective practice and coaching skills to support that effort,” Rachel said. “And we ought to spend time, I think, talking to staff about safe practice and low risk feedback... assuring teachers we really mean what we say.”

“Strong support and minimized risk can make for a confident crossing of the bridge from readiness to implementation,” Anandi murmured, and was reminded of her epiphany on the footbridge. “This is how you turn theory into practice. This is the first step that gets our teachers on the bridge of implementation.”

Illustrates indicators: #1, #2, #3, #4, and #7

Discussion Questions:

- 1. How can an ILT ensure that professional learning in the school is bridging the gap between teachers knowing about the CCSS and doing CCSS-aligned instruction?**
- 2. Conventional wisdom indicates that expertise cannot be achieved without focus. In what ways is the ILT helping teachers achieve greater focus and coherence in their practice with respect to CCSS?**
- 3. What suggestions for resource prioritization could help the ILT avoid the “talk smart” trap, and ensure that staff action occurs as planned and works to effectively advance the implementation of CCSS?**



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