Practical Leadership

Improving the Schools of Today

Inventing the Schools of Tomorrow

RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

Common Core State Standards: Aligning Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

In A Nutshell

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have become the central concern in many districts and schools as they struggle to align their curriculum, instruction and assessment to these widely-adopted standards for student success. Although the process for a major overhaul of the school program is daunting, and financial resources are scarce, there are numerous guides and other sources of help available at little or no cost. This brief provides a succinct guide to those resources and where to find them.

Forty eight states are now part of the Common Core State Standards initiative – a program many believe will have an impact on schools that eclipses even the mandates of No Child Left Behind nearly a decade ago. This effect of CCSS will be felt by literally every school in the nation that is accountable to state-mandated curriculum and performance requirements.

What are Common Core State Standards?

According to the Council of Chief State School Officers, "The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of high quality academic expectations in English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics that define the knowledge and skills all students should master by the end of each grade level in order to be on track for success in college and career. The development of the standards was a state-led effort spearheaded by governors and school chiefs. CCSSO and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices coordinated the development process in partnership with Achieve, ACT, and the College Board. A diverse team of teachers, parents, administrators, researchers and content experts developed the CCSS to be academically rigorous, attainable for students, and practical for teachers and districts, and an expert validation committee provided an independent review of the standards. The standards are research and evidence-based and internationally benchmarked." (CCSSO, 2013).

Although the standards are currently written only for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, their impact is far-reaching and profound. Other subject fields, including even the Arts, P.E., and technical subjects, are gearing up to contribute to meeting these standards, and teachers in all fields are expected to align their curriculum and their classroom assessments with the CCSS. Indeed, one criticism of this huge undertaking by districts is that it is often mandated without additional resources to do the planning and development work. (Resources listed at the end of this brief provide guidance and examples for subject areas other than math and English.)

Curriculum Alignment

Fortunately, a number of organizations and agencies, chief among them the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2013), offers help in the form of tools and planning templates that can guide local district efforts. According to P21,

'The following practices are suggested as educators work to align CCSS, the P21 Framework and core academic subjects in curricula and assessments:

• **Use backward-design principles** (such as *Understanding by Design* from ASCD) to design curriculum that encourages inquiry-based learning and enables embedded, performance-based assessments.

• **Develop interdisciplinary performance tasks** and/or project-based learning units that integrate the full P21 Framework in alignment with CCSS; consider capstone performances such as senior portfolios.

• **Create curricula-embedded assessments** to enable assessment as and for learning.

• **Collect and share exemplary student work** that demonstrates mastery of college and career ready knowledge and skills. Use these examples to improve professional understanding among educators of "how to identify 21st century knowledge and skills" in student work.

• **Provide meaningful opportunities for educators** to collaboratively review curricula, student work and student performance data, in order to refine the curricula and assessments over time.' Follow the link in the Resources section for very specific help in taking these steps in local schools and districts.

Many organizations, including the major subject matter associations, have produced excellent examples, templates and models for implementing CCSS at the classroom level. Two examples follow.

8th Grade – Sample Math Lesson Starter 2

Sample Student Outcome: **Students use algebraic thinking, statistics, critical thinking and problem solving skills to compare and contrast outcomes in a sports game.**

EXAMPLE: Students assemble fantasy sports teams and track their progress against other teams using a customized point system using non-algebraic and algebraic methods. Students follow their players on television, in newspapers, or online. They document, analyze and report on player statistics.

MATHEMATICS CORE STANDARD(S):

N-Q.1. Use units as a way to understand problems and to guide the solution of multi-step problems; choose and interpret units consistently in formulas; choose and interpret the scale and the origin in graphs and data displays.

F-LE.2. Construct linear and exponential functions, including arithmetic and geometric sequences, given a graph, a description of a relationship, or two input-output pairs (include reading these from a table).

8.SP.4. Understand that patterns of association can also be seen in bivariate categorical data by displaying frequencies and relative frequencies in a two-way table. Construct and interpret a two-way table summarizing data on two categorical variables collected from the same subjects. Use relative frequencies calculated for rows or columns to describe possible association between the two variables.

MATHEMATICS PRACTICE(S):
• Reason abstractly and quantitatively
• Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them
• Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others
• Look for and make use of structure
• Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning

P21 SKILLS
• Critical Thinking
• Problem Solving
• Communication
• Creativity and Innovation

(Source: http://fantasysportsmath.com/pdf/SampleProblems021308.pdf
and http://www.fantasysportsmath.com/pdf/NCTM_Standards.pdf)

12th Grade – Sample ELA Lesson Starter 1

Sample Student Outcome: **Students collaboratively write a proposal to help solve a community problem in innovative ways.**

EXAMPLE: After completing a literature unit on the American dream where students have read *The Great Gatsby*, *Death of a Salesman,* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, they explore what it means to have access to an American dream.

Students are asked to create non-profit organizations that would help to meet the needs of their community by helping a group of people to meet their American dream without duplicating current services offered in the community. Students conceive of organizations, formulate extensive grant proposals that help them vie for funding from the fictitious Society for the American Dream, and finally compete against each other for funding of up to $500,000. Students pitch their ideas and advocate for funding to the grant panel, comprised not of teachers, but of community representatives.

COMMON CORE STANDARD(S):

RL.11-12.9. Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

SL.11-12.2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

WHST.11-12.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

WHST.11-12.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

P21 SKILLS REPRESENTED:

• Civic Literacy
• Critical Thinking
• Collaboration
• Communication
• Creativity
• Information Literacy
(Source: Sarah Brown Wessling, National Teacher of the Year 2010-2011)

Aligning Assessment

Clearly, the kinds of assignments shown above call for a very different assessment than those often used in classrooms or on state standardized tests.   The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is a leader in promoting "next generation" assessments that call for the kind of complex thinking, problem solving and communication called for in the CCSS. They write: "The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is a state-led consortium working to develop next-generation assessments that accurately measure student progress toward college- and career-readiness. The work of Smarter Balanced is guided by the belief that a high-quality assessment system can provide information and tools for teachers and schools to improve instruction and help students succeed – regardless of disability, language or subgroup. Smarter Balanced involves experienced educators, researchers, state and local policymakers and community groups working together in a transparent and consensus-driven process." (Smarter Balanced, 2013).

Sample assessment items on the Smarter Balanced website show just how teachers can create classroom assessments that prepare students for the kinds of "next generation" testing already in use in many states. http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/. Other resources provided at the end of this brief also give helpful guidance for designing both instruction and assessment that is clearly linked to the new CCSS.

Technology and Assessment

The key to creating authentic assessment tasks and reporting their results may lie with the judicious use of technology. Bill Tucker writes (2009) "Students today are growing up in a world overflowing with a variety of high-tech tools, from computers and video games to increasingly sophisticated mobile devices. And unlike adults, these students don't have to adjust to the information age—it will be all they've ever known. Their schools are gradually following suit, integrating a range of technologies both in and outside of the classroom for instructional use. But there's one day a year when laptops power down and students' mobile computing devices fall silent, a day when most schools across the country revert to an era when whiteboards were blackboards, and iPhones were just a twinkle in some techie's eye—testing day."

Some of that has changed in the last few years, largely because of the efforts of Tucker and other technology experts. For the latest in technology innovations and resources related to the CCSS, educators can subscribe to two outstanding free services, one provided by *T.H.E. Journal* and the other from *eSchool News*. Both can be found in the Resources section of this brief.

CCSS and College Preparation

Achieving the CCSS may be necessary for college success, but it might not be sufficient. Based on research conducted by Dave Conley and his colleagues at the University of Oregon, they conclude, "The study suggests that students who are generally proficient in the Common Core standards will likely be ready for a wide range of postsecondary courses, and the more Common Core standards in which they are proficient, the wider the range of postsecondary-level classes they will be ready to undertake. We note the danger in assuming that this finding is synonymous with the idea that students who have learned the Common Core standards are fully ready for college and careers. Other important dimensions of readiness exist, upon which the Common Core standards are necessarily silent. Careful attention should be given to comprehensive conceptions of college and career readiness when considering which aspects of readiness the standards address." (p. 7). The additional skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for success in college can be found in Conley's monograph *Redefining College Readiness*.

CCSS in Oregon and Beyond

Many states, including Oregon, have comprehensive resources online that help educators link CCSS to state accountability measures and provide resources to show how other districts in the state have moved forward to integrate CCSS in their programs. But because the Common Core Standards are just that – common across the states that have adopted them – it is also helpful to look at how other states have implemented the CCSS in their own schools.

- Maryland's Department of Education offers a comprehensive resource that includes materials for communicating with parents and the public about CCSS.
- The Massachusetts Department of Education provides templates for developing CCSS curriculum units and an overall plan for implementation.
- The Florida Department of Education provides helpful tools as well as a catalogue of "best practices" used in some of the state's major school districts.
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The Bottom Line

Rarely does a single initiative have a profound effect on schools from district level policy to actual classroom practice. Because it originates from Chief State School Officers and the National Governors' Council, and is supported in large part by professional organizations and private sector stakeholders, Common Core State Standards are having just that kind of impact on our nation's schools. Fortunately, the resources available to school leaders are readily available and, for the most part, offered without cost. Leading a large-scale initiative in a school is never easy, but, at least in the case of Common Core State Standards, school leaders are equipped with guidance, models, and helpful tips from their peers

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REFERENCES

Conley, D. T. (2007). Redefining college readiness. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center. Retrieved from: http://www.aypf.org/documents/RedefiningCollegeReadiness.pdf

Conley, D. T., et. al. (2011). *Reaching the Goal: The Applicability and Importance of the Common Core State Standards to College and Career Readiness*. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC). https://www.epiconline.org/publications/document-detail.dot?id=09535d00-466a-498f-ac44-98f4c372d9c1

Council of Chief State School Officers, CCSSO, (2013). The Common Core State Standards Initiative. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/The_Common_Core_State_Standards_Initiative.html.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2013). *P21 Common Core Tool Kit*, Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: http://www.p21.org/tools-and-resources/p21-common-core-toolkit

Smarter Balanced (2012). The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/

State Resources Cited

- Florida Countdown to Common Core: http://www.fldoe.org/schools/ccc.asp
- Maryland Department of Education, Common Core State Standards: http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/ccss
- Massachusetts Common Core Standards Initiative: http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore/
- Common Core State Standards – Oregon: http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=3566

Tucker, B. (2009). Beyond the Bubble: Technology and the Future of Educational Assessment. *Education Sector Reports and Briefs*. Retrieved from: http://www.educationsector.org/publications/beyond-bubble-technology-and-future-student-assessment

RESOURCES

Federal Registry for Educational Excellence (FREE)
http://free.ed.gov/#t21
This site provides resources for Common Core Standards in Math and multistate standards in Geography and Science. An article in eSchool News outlines how to make use of these resources in your school: http://www.eschoolnews.com/2013/07/16/free-common-core-digital-resources/?ps=281417-0013000000j0xqa-0033000000qi3ih

T.H.E. *Common Core Tech Update*
https://newsletters.1105pubs.com/nl/THE.do?pc=PCODE
This free resource from the publishers of T.H.E. Magazine showcases technological innovations and resources that support the CCSS.

P21 Common Core Tool Kit
http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/P21CommonCoreToolkit.pdf
From the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, this tool kit shows how to align CCSS with P21 standards and actual classroom practices.

Measuring Skills for the 21st Century
Silver, E. (November 3, 2008). *Measuring Skills for the 21st Century*, Washington, DC: Education Sector
http://www.educationsector.org/publications/measuring-skills-21st-century
A succinct report on approaches to aligning P21 skills, common core, and state accountability measures.

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Technology and Educational Assessment

Tucker, B. (2009). *Beyond the Bubble: Technology and the Future of Education Assessment*. Washington, DC: Education Sector.

http://www.educationsector.org/publications/beyond-bubble-technology-and-future-student-assessment

Technology has the potential to do more than just make our current approach to testing more efficient; it can dramatically improve assessment—and teaching and learning. This article explores the research and the recommendations.

Common Core State Standards, Tools and Resources

Smarter Balanced

http://www.smarterbalanced.org/k-12-education/common-core-state-standards-tools-resources/

From the leader in assessment development, this toolkit includes good information on CCSS for teachers, administrators, and families – including videos in Spanish and English.

Teaching Channel

https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos?page=1&categories=organizations_national,topics_common-core&load=1

Teaching Channel offers a free library of high-quality videos featuring real teachers demonstrating their best educational practices. The large library of CCSS videos includes tags that specify the exact standards to which a lesson is aligned.

NEA Common Core Standards Toolkit

http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/14047-CommonCare_Toolkit_14.pdf

These resources from the nation's largest teachers' association are designed to give educators the tools they will need to effectively prepare for the implementation of Common Core State Standards. This is an outstanding resource, including kids with special needs. Very comprehensive, it provides resources for teaching, learning and assessment. Also includes comprehensive information on how to implement Common Core in other subjects, such as social studies, Science, Arts, PE, etc.

Share My Lesson from AFT

http://www.sharemylesson.com/article.aspx?storyCode=50000148

Developed by the American Federation of Teachers and TES Connect, Share My Lesson's Common Core Information Center offers facts, figures, and tips about the CCSS and high-quality resources aligned to the standards across all subjects.

CCSS for Latino Students

National Council of La Raza (2012). *Raising the Bar: Implementing Common Core State Standards for Latino Students' Success*. Washington, DC: Author.

http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/pages/Implementation_Guide.pdf

Focuses specifically on Hispanic students and those with limited English proficiency, this outstanding guide provides help for both educators and parents.

Integrating Common Core Standards in English, Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010). *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects*. Washington, DC: Author.

http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf

This monograph shows how to integrate CCSS into subjects other than English Language Arts and Math. This is a must-read for all school administrators and teachers.

Common Core State Standards Research Center

ASCD

http://www.ascd.org/research-a-topic/common-core-state-standards-resources.aspx

Outstanding materials, tools, and resources – including comprehensive videos/webinars introducing the CCSS, showing how they can be implemented, and sharing the experiences of schools and districts.

Sample Items and Performance Tasks
Smarter Balanced Consortium
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/
The sample items and performance tasks are intended to help teachers, administrators, and policymakers implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and preparing for next-generation assessments.

Instructional Leadership and the Common Core
http://www.achievethecore.org/leadership-tools-common-core/professional-development/instructional-leadership-and-common-core
An outstanding, self-paced module that can be used individually or with a group of school leaders to examine their unique role in implementing CCSS in their schools. Student Achievement Partners (SAP) is a nonprofit founded by three of the contributing authors to the Common Core to support effective and innovative implementation of the CCSS. The organization has created professional development modules designed to support district and school leadership in their transition to the Common Core. SAP has released a total of seven modules as of December 2012. http://www.achievethecore.org/. They have also compiled research articles on the CCSS and their implementation as well: http://www.achievethecore.org/common-core-research/overview/

Mapping to the Core: Planning for Curriculum Success
Heidi Hayes Jacobs, School Improvement Network (May 8, 2012)
http://www.schoolimprovement.com/resources/webinars/mapping-to-the-core-planning-for-curriculum-success/
This is a webinar and recording of the presentation on steps toward using curriculum mapping to align CCSS with the school curriculum.

Aligning Assessments with the Common Core State Standards
Achieve (2010). Chapter 2: Aligning Assessments with the Common Core State Standards, *On the Road to Implementation: Achieving the Promise of the Common Core Standards*. Washington, DC: Author.
http://www.achieve.org/achievingcommoncore_implementation
A somewhat technical and policy-oriented document, this monograph provides important information for school and district leaders.