
White Paper

10 Steps for Migrating Your Curriculum to the Common Core



The Leader in Differentiated Instruction

Forty-five states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands have formally adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for K-12 education “to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce.”¹ Many educators, educational consultants and other experts interviewed for this white paper agree that the Common Core standards do far more than merely shift curriculum topics around from grade to grade; they aspire to truly enable the next generation of U.S. students to succeed in college and in work by introducing new rigor and demanding new analytical and evidence-based argument skills.

Yet, despite such widespread adoption and clear importance (given the nation’s slide in educational standings and workforce readiness vis a vis other countries), there is also considerable misunderstanding of the Common Core.

For example, despite indirect federal funding support, the CCSS were developed by a coalition of U.S. states: they are a joint project of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. There is no direct federal mandate for CCSS adoption. In addition, while many educators focus on details of required changes from current curriculum, it’s the new level of higher-order thinking skills demanded by the Common Core that will drive “revolutionary” changes in instructional practice, as Kevin Baird, Co-Founder and Chairman of the Common Core Institute and its sister organization, the Curriculum Institute, explains. Further, the standards provide no “how-to” for that revolution. Rather, “The standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach,” according to the CCSS documents themselves.²

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— Saki Dodelson,
CEO, Achieve3000

Perhaps most important to the dozens of states and thousands of districts charged with implementing the CCSS is the question, *how do we get there from here?* The current economic environment clearly exacerbates this challenge. Moreover, *how do we get there quickly?* CCSS assessments developed by two separate consortia are scheduled to begin being administered in the 2014-2015 school year.

As we get closer to actual Common Core implementation, local school districts, administrators and teachers are finding themselves challenged by the task of moving from well-established state standards to the new, more demanding standards, which will almost certainly require unanticipated change in the way teachers teach and students learn. Certainly, meeting the Common Core standards’ more demanding requirements – particularly for reading and the integration of non-fiction, text-dependent questions and evidence-based argument into the classroom experience – will require new educational strategies and materials. In particular, it will demand increased emphasis on differentiated instruction, because *all* students are required to meet the standards.

Because the Common Core necessitates changes in instructional practice, professional development was emphasized by many of those interviewed for this paper. “The number one thing on principals’ minds is professional development. They ask themselves, ‘How can I get my teachers to become stronger leaders,’” says Saki Dodelson, CEO of Achieve3000, a leading provider of differentiated online literacy instruction solutions.

This paper identifies 10 critical steps on the migration path to successful CCSS implementation. It is based on a synthesis of interviews with experts and curriculum developers in those states leading the way toward Common Core compliance and achievement. These “lessons learned” by the earliest Common Core adopters can clarify the path for “fast followers.”

■ Critical Common Core Questions

A survey of deputy state superintendents of education conducted by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) reveals widespread acknowledgement that the Common Core standards are more rigorous than previous, individual state standards, and will be instrumental in improving students' English language arts and math skills.³

That said, the 38 states that responded to the CEP survey also acknowledged that implementing the standards will require substantial changes in curriculum and instruction.

One of the key reasons is the way in which the new standards overlay a demand not just for rote memorization of facts but for an understanding of material deep enough that students can effectively integrate and apply the learned knowledge. Assessments from two consortia (the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium) are the instruments being developed to measure this integration and application.

"The biggest change coming from the Common Core standards is not in the content itself, it's the notion of a learning target, or level of cognitive demand and critical thinking, attached to a content standard," explains the Common Core Institute's Baird. "These are overlays that demand changes in instructional practice. And, frankly, this change is revolutionary. It will cause a big change in how you do your job as a teacher."

Indeed, while the goal of the Common Core standards – to achieve student readiness for college or work in a technologically advanced global economy by the end of high school – is clear, what's less clear is how district and local administrators, educators and other staff will make the transition. Some key questions include:

- How do the new standards differ from a state's existing standards?
- What methodologies or approaches can best address the challenges to administrators, teachers and students of stepping up to more rigorous standards?
- Where the standards describe new skills and content for students to learn (and teachers to teach), will funds be allocated for new curriculum and materials?
- What kinds of professional development will teachers need, especially when it comes to helping them lead students to the higher-order thinking and independence the Common Core standards demand?
- Who will pay for the training, and how will time be carved out for educators to participate in it?
- How will students be assessed, and what are the consequences for failing to meet the new requirements?

These questions and many more are top-of-mind as states prepare to fully implement the Common Core standards. This white paper offers 10 actionable strategies that curriculum developers can use to move quickly from wherever their starting point may be to the Common Core standards compliance they need to achieve.

1. Identify and Engage All Stakeholders

Many schools and districts make a common misstep as they begin to adopt the Common Core standards, say experts: They don't include all key stakeholders from the very beginning, from teachers, administrators and district leaders to support staff and parents.

"I worry about states and districts that, with a small group of people, take on the responsibility of what we might call aligning the Common Core to their standards," says Carolyn Felux, Education Director of Math Solutions, which was founded by renowned math educator and author Marilyn Burns. It is dedicated to improving math instruction in grades K-8.

Felux says it is especially important that teachers participate in the process of comparing existing standards to the Common Core standards, and of developing strategies for ensuring that curriculum content, delivery and assessment will meet the new expectations. They should not just be handed a new binder of standards.

"Teachers really do need the experience of seeing and analyzing the standards and comparing them to the things that they are familiar with; they need to spend time exploring how those are the same as and different from the Common Core," says Felux. "That whole process will build their understanding of the Common Core."

However, it is not just those who deliver the instruction who need this kind of knowledge and experience. District leaders, administrators and parents must also be included.

"Some districts provide information just for the teachers," says Jennifer Brinson of Common Curriculum Consulting, which assists district leaders and classroom teachers in developing Common Core standards implementation strategies. "They plan training and staff development for their teachers, and somehow administrators and district leaders get left out of that loop. The thinking is often that these people don't have to deliver the information, so they don't need to be involved in the training."

"But what districts ultimately realize is that this plan does not work out very well, because now the people that are charged with making decisions or charged with being the liaison between the schools and the community don't have the knowledge, vocabulary and the understanding to bridge that gap," says Brinson.

Brinson adds that parents must also be involved from early on, but that the message about Common Core standards as they apply to the school and school district must be kept separate from discussions regarding individual students.

"It's very important to get parents involved, to help them understand what the changes are and why the changes are occurring. That has to be done in many different venues – traditional parents' night meetings, and PTO-type meetings where the how and the why and the path are explained. As a parent, I need to know the big picture of what's happening and why it's happening and how it's happening, and I need to have that information before I hear about my own personal child in relation to these changes," Brinson asserts.

Of note, districts need to ensure that all parents and guardians have access to information about the Common Core standards and their implementation by providing that information in a variety of formats.

“The parents who can’t come to these types of events, or who prefer information delivered in another way, also need to be considered,” says Brinson. “We need to have webinars, videos that they can access – different ways of getting information to people on-demand.”

2. Perform a Gap Analysis

One of the first and most essential approaches that schools and districts pursue is to determine how their state standards differ from the Common Core standards, and most especially where gaps between the two sets of standards occur (see Figure 1). For example, is a particular skill addressed in the state standards at third grade, but addressed in the Common Core standards at grade four? Is there content in the Common Core standards that has not been covered at all under existing state standards? Conversely, is there content that has been covered under existing standards that Common Core does not mention?

Experts recommend that schools create teams to conduct this gap analysis, or to be the point people for analyzing gap analyses that may already have been conducted by districts or by state departments of education.

Figure 1: Gap Analysis Example

Grade 3: Language	
Language (L)	Language and Composition
<p>Conventions of Standard English:</p> <p>CC.3.L.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their function in sentences. b. Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns. c. Use abstract nouns (e.g., <i>childhood</i>). d. Form and use regular and irregular verbs. e. Form and use simple (e.g., I walked; I walk; I will walk) verb tenses. f. Ensure subject-verb agreement and pronoun-antecedent agreement. <p>g. Form and use comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.</p> <p>h. Use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.</p> <p>i. Produce simple, compound, and complex sentences.</p> <p>CC.3.L.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Capitalize appropriate words in titles. b. Use commas in addresses. c. Form and use possessives. d. Use conventional spelling for high-frequency and other studies words and for adding suffixes to base words (e.g., <i>sitting, smiled, cries, happiness</i>). e. Use spelling patterns and generalizations (e.g., word families, position-based spellings, syllable patterns, ending rules, meaningful word parts) in writing words. <p>f. Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings.</p>	<p>MA.3-4 L 5.5 Recognize the subject-predicate relationship in sentences.</p> <p>MA.3-4 L 5.6 Identify the four basic parts of speech (adjective, noun, verb, adverb).</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>MA.3-4 L 5.7 Identify correct mechanics (end marks, commas for series, capitalization), correct usage (subject and verb agreement in a simple sentence), and correct sentence structure (elimination of sentence fragments).</p> <p>MA.3-4 C 22.4 Use knowledge of correct mechanics (end marks, commas for series, capitalization), usage (subject and verb agreement in a simple sentence), and sentence structure (elimination of fragments) when writing and editing.</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>No equivalent standard at this grade level or below.</p> <p>MA.3-4 C 22.5 Use knowledge of letter sounds, word parts, word segmentation, and syllabication to monitor and correct spelling.</p> <p>MA.3-4 L 4.9 Identify the meaning of common prefixes (<i>un-, re-, dis-</i>).</p> <p>MA.3-4 L 4.10 Identify the meaning of common Greek and Latin roots to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words.</p> <p>MA 3-4 C.22.6 Spell most commonly used homophones correctly in their writing (<i>there, they're, their; two, too, to</i>).</p> <p>MA 3-4 L 4.15 Determine the meanings of words and alternate word choices using a dictionary or thesaurus.</p>

The example above is one page of a gap analysis between the Common Core standards and the current state standards for Massachusetts.⁴

The full document is 118 pages.

Michael Horning Jr., President of 3rd Learning, an education technology company that spun out of the University at Buffalo, says it's important for schools to conduct such a standards "crosswalk" in order to develop an intimate knowledge of the new standards and how they compare with existing standards.

Says Horning: "You actually do two crosswalks: One would go from your current standards to the Common Core, and the other would go from the Common Core back to your current standards. Not all existing standards will connect with standards in the Common Core, and, likewise, not all Common Core standards will connect with existing standards. This will show you where different standards have moved from one grade to another and whether some have been newly added or eliminated altogether."

Once a gap analysis has been completed, educators at the local and district level can identify where materials and resources need to be shared between and among grade levels, where materials and resources are absent altogether, and how materials and resources must be differentiated to enable all students to access curriculum aligned with the new standards.

“The CCR anchor standards increases the Lexile and instructional level that students receive in school so when they get to college and the work force they are better prepared.”

— Rivki Locker,
Senior Vice President,
Product Research
& Development,
Achieve3000

Research Reveals a Different, ‘Scary’ Gap

But there is a completely different gap that also is concerning to educators: the Lexile level required of high school graduates has increased significantly as a result of research that fed into the development of the Common Core standards. "The developers evaluated actual texts real people have to read in college and the work force, and they found a big gap," says Rivki Locker, Senior Vice President, Product Research & Development for Achieve3000.

In fact, according to Appendix A of *Common Core State Standards For English Language Arts & Literacy In History/Social Studies, Science, And Technical Subjects*, a 2006 study "found a 350L (Lexile) gap between the difficulty of end-of-high school and college texts – a gap equivalent to 1.5 standard deviations and more than the Lexile difference between grade 4 and grade 8 texts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)."⁵ The Lexile Framework for Reading referenced in the previous sentence was developed by MetaMetrics and uses word frequency and sentence length to produce a single numerical measure to indicate a text's complexity.

The CCSS defines a series of College and Career Readiness (CCR) "anchor" standards, one of which – Anchor 10 – specifically addresses text complexity. "The CCR anchor standards increases the Lexile and instructional level that students receive in school so when they get to college and the work force they are better prepared," explains Locker (see Figure 2). "Also in Common Core there is a much greater emphasis in non-fiction reading than there has been in the past. Think about what you read now in real life, and what you read in college. Something like 90% of the reading real people do in the real world is non-fiction, while only about 20% to 30% of the reading kids do in elementary school is non-fiction. That's a big difference," Locker adds.

Figure 2: Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Lexile Ranges (in Lexiles)⁶

Text Complexity Grade Band in the Standards	Old Lexile Ranges	Lexile Ranges Aligned To CCR Expectations
K–1	N/A	N/A
2–3	450–725	450–790
4–5	645–845	770–980
6–8	860–1010	955–1155
9–10	960–1115	1080–1305
11–CCR	1070–1220	1215–1355

This table compares current expectations for Lexile achievement by grade level with new expectations that match the actual reading requirements of college and work by the time of high school graduation. The new levels are included in the CCSS.

More specifically, CCSS requires a 50-50 split between fiction and non-fiction by fourth grade, changing to 45%/55% in favor of non-fiction by eighth grade and continuing the trend until twelfth grade, when 70% non-fiction is specified.⁷ The size of the change suggests a looming gap schools face in terms of non-fiction reading materials. “There will be a big need for schools to find text that is non-fiction and is sufficiently complex,” says Locker.

Districts and schools will need to ensure that they have all the resources available – including training, curriculum materials and appropriate assessments – to scaffold students and enable their progress. Achieve3000’s *KidBiz3000*, *TeenBiz3000* and *Empower3000*, for example, all provide differentiated text – the same non-fiction article in multiple versions indexed to different Lexile levels – enabling readers of different abilities to read and discuss the same topic in the same classroom. Providing differentiated text leveled to an individual student’s reading ability allows students to develop the reading strategies and background knowledge they need to subsequently access grade-level text.

3. Provide Professional Development

While there are areas of disagreement when it comes to the Common Core standards, there is one point on which most would agree: key to a smooth transition is purposeful, pragmatic professional development for educators.

According to the CEP survey, states that have adopted the Common Core standards are taking various actions to help teachers master the new standards and use them to guide instruction. All of the states that responded to survey questions about teachers are developing materials for professional development, and all are carrying out statewide professional development initiatives for teachers about the new standards.

Of the 38 Common Core-adopting states that responded to the survey (including the District of Columbia):

- 27 are aligning the content of teacher preparation programs with the CCSS
- 25 are modifying or creating educator evaluation systems that hold educators accountable for student mastery of the standards
- 23 are developing and implementing new-teacher induction programs to help new teachers master the standards

One of the most important things educators will need to learn is how to deliver instruction so that students are empowered to effectively apply their knowledge in real-world situations, says Marji Freeman, Director of Professional Development at Math Solutions.

“With Common Core, students are expected to apply higher-order thinking and be able to argue points and back up their arguments with data and evidence,” says Freeman. “Many teachers were not taught this way, which makes it a challenge for them to teach this way. Professional development that provides experiential training will give teachers the tools they need to support students in this newer model of thinking and learning.”

The specific training teachers will require revolves around better strategies to draw students into classroom discussions, according to Susan Gertler, Chief Academic Officer at Achieve3000. “To reach the college and career readiness levels in Common Core, we have to think about how to develop students’ listening and speaking skills, as well as their reading and writing skills,” says Gertler. “One way to accomplish this is to create an environment in which discussions are going on in the classroom – discussions in which everybody is truly participating. It’s critical that we provide professional development that empowers every teacher to achieve this.”

Adds Brinson: “We’ve paid lip service to higher-level thinking and Bloom’s Taxonomy, but there hasn’t always been a clear path for that to happen. Common Core gives some meat to what we’ve been saying all along.”

4. Visualize the Standards’ Full ‘Trajectory’

Experts agree it’s important to look at any educational standard vertically. Don’t look at just one grade because that’s the grade you teach (or the grades for which you serve as an administrator). Rather, look at (at least) a grade below and a grade above to determine what students should have learned before and what will be expected of them next. The Common Core standards, in particular, are oriented in this fashion.

For example, the Common Core standards are divided into strands, each one of which is “anchored” by a CCR standard that defines general, cross-disciplinary expectations that are identical across six grades (K-5 or 6-12). These CCR anchor standards must be met for students to be prepared to enter college and workforce-training programs ready to succeed. Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year’s grade-specific standards while working to meet the more general expectations described by the CCR anchor standards.

“Keep in mind the integrity of the Common Core and how it was written to vertically align and to reach a certain point for college and career readiness,” says Common

Curriculum Consulting's Brinson. "When we work with districts, we do that same thing. Instead of having teachers and staff dig down deeply only into their grade, we have them step back and look at the whole vertical trajectory to see where they are going."

The Common Core standards documents are laid out so that it's clear what students should have learned before and will learn after a particular grade. In addition, there is a common progression of standards (and of language describing the standards) throughout grade levels, something that has not always been the case with individual state curriculum frameworks.

"When you look at a set of standards for first grade literacy, you're looking at standards for kindergarten and the second grade, as well," explains Brinson (see Figure 3). "It's intentional that the standards put all three grade levels on one page, to help us to remember not to be in our silos but to understand that this is a trajectory of standards, and that I need to know from where my students come, and where they are going."

Figure 3: Reading Standards For Literature Example⁸

Kindergartners:		Grade 1 students:		Grade 2 students:	
Key Ideas and Details					
1.	With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	1.	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	1.	Ask and answer such questions as <i>who</i> , <i>what</i> , <i>where</i> , <i>when</i> , <i>why</i> , and <i>how</i> to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
2.	With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.	2.	Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.	2.	Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
3.	With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.	3.	Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.	3.	Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.
Craft and Structure					
4.	Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.	4.	Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.	4.	Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.
5.	Recognize common types of texts (e.g., storybooks, poems).	5.	Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types.	5.	Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.
6.	With prompting and support, name the author and illustrator of a story and define the role of each in telling the story.	6.	Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text.	6.	Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas					
7.	With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g., what moment in a story an illustration depicts).	7.	Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.	7.	Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.
8.	(Not applicable to literature)	8.	(Not applicable to literature)	8.	(Not applicable to literature)
9.	With prompting and support, compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in familiar stories.	9.	Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.	9.	Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity					
10.	Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.	10.	With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.	10.	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, in the grades 2–3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

The design of the CCSS document emphasizes the need for educators to view the entire 'trajectory' of student achievement over the course of multiple grades.

Several interviewees pointed out that once curriculum corresponding to the Common Core trajectory is established, students can be assessed using the same measure in which the standards' literacy objectives are defined – Lexile bands. This adds precision to the question of "from where my students come" and enables more effective use

of differentiated instruction techniques to empower students to achieve the Common Core's literacy objectives. Research has proven the efficacy of differentiated instruction to accelerate students' reading achievement.

Brinson recommends that educators team to evaluate their current learning materials and questioning models and determine what will need to change to meet the expectations of the Common Core standards. "Look at your current work – the assignments, the tasks, the questioning – and dissect them against what is going on," she adds.

5. Think About How Standards Cross Curricular Disciplines

With the Common Core standards, reading, writing, speaking, listening and language standards apply across content areas. Curriculum, therefore, needs to enable these standards to be addressed and assessed no matter what the discipline. Likewise, students must be provided with materials that will enable them to access content no matter what their reading level.

Educators and consultants say the new standards will require a whole new level of collaboration among grade-level and interdisciplinary teams. "It's important to promote cross-curricular conversations among teachers and between them and those who write the curriculum, to see that curriculum does not occur in a vacuum," says 3rd Learning's Horning. "The Common Core standards force these cross-curricular conversations among teachers. I'm not just teaching English, I'm not just teaching science, I'm not just teaching math. I'm also responsible for the inclusion of these Common Core standards."

Though rare in middle and high schools, our interviews revealed instances where science and language arts teachers, for example, already coordinate the use of differentiated instruction so that science readings are used to help spur literacy gains, while at the same time enabling the science teacher to accelerate the pace of instruction. Moreover, in such scenarios students' improved domain-specific literacy improves mastery of the content standards.

The key to this integrated instruction approach, educators state, are regular meetings where teachers work together to share their understanding of the content and how to teach it so that students can learn the material.

A challenge to the approach, however, is in the availability of the materials required, and their quality. "Schools will be challenged to make sure they provide materials that are rich enough, engaging enough, and relevant enough to draw students into classroom discussions," says Gertler, of Achieve3000. "One answer is to focus materials on real-world events that students have opinions about, and create a routine that pushes students to express their opinions. We have to make sure to provide teachers with the supporting materials they need to have these engaging discussions and debates in the classroom," Gertler adds.

Another challenge is time. An elementary school teacher in Massachusetts told us, "We actually welcome the increased rigor that the Common Core standards will bring. There's some concern, though, about where to find the time and the mindshare to effectively make the shift. Districts and building principals really need to be thinking about how to enable staff to work together and be trained in such a way that Common Core is paid much more than just lip service, or the transition will take a long, long time."

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6. Create A Repository Of Lesson Plans And Other Resources

As noted earlier, the migration to the Common Core standards may require that educators teach new material in new ways. But before teachers start developing lesson plans from scratch, there should be a concerted effort to pool knowledge, materials and resources.

For example, teaching the distributive property in math may be new to one teacher, but chances are good that another teacher within the building or even the district has taught the concept and has materials that will form at least a foundation for development of curriculum aligned with the new standards.

While districts may not be able to formally endorse these materials, Common Curriculum Consulting's Brinson recommends that they provide space on their intranets for educators to share these materials, as well as a forum for discussing best practices and lessons learned.

"With the move to Common Core, teachers may find themselves teaching things they have never taught before and not teaching things they have taught for years," says Brinson. "To ensure that teachers are not creating or buying materials that already exist among their colleagues, dedicate part of a website to the Common Core, including a separate piece for teachers. They can upload lessons, units, etc. None of it may be vetted, but teachers are expected to use their professional judgment."

This type of repository will go a long way toward filling some of the curricular gaps that will no doubt appear as teachers start to develop lessons and instructional strategies aligned with the Common Core standards.

7. Consider All Students' Needs

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers believe that all students should be held to the Common Core standards, including English language learners (ELLs) and those with disabilities. Educators will need to identify the services, accommodations, classroom support and resources that will be needed to make Common Core standards accessible to special education and ELL students.

The Common Core standards make these requirements explicit in two documents, *Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners*⁹ and *Application to Students with Disabilities*.¹⁰

According to the ELL document, "these students may require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge ... Effectively educating these students requires diagnosing each student instructionally, adjusting instruction accordingly, and closely monitoring student progress."

Given the requirement that all students, regardless of their individual situation, must learn the same curriculum, with the same content demands and skill requirements, technology that provides the scaffolds and the differentiation that is needed to make every student successful may quickly evolve into a solution of choice. Many districts and schools have already started to meet ELL and special needs challenges through

the use of differentiated online instruction solutions that can be applied in various settings, can meet the varied needs of student populations, and can ease the demands on teachers.

The CCSS document on students with disabilities states that “in order for students with disabilities to meet high academic standards and to fully demonstrate their conceptual and procedural knowledge and skills in mathematics, reading, writing, speaking and listening (English language arts), their instruction must incorporate supports and accommodations, including:

- Supports and related services designed to meet the unique needs of these students and to enable their access to the general education curriculum
- An Individualized Education Program (IEP) that includes annual goals aligned with and chosen to facilitate their attainment of grade-level academic standards
- Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services”

In conformance with all legal requirements and to meet the expectations and increased rigor of the Common Core standards, schools and school districts must ensure that all students have the ability to access the same curriculum through multiple means of learning, and provide meaningful opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge.

Experts agree that this will require close and ongoing collaboration among educational leaders, regular education and special education teachers, and parents and guardians, especially when it comes to the review and updating of the goals and objectives of students’ IEPs.

8. Follow the Leading Assessment Consortia

One of the big questions about the Common Core standards is what assessments will be used to measure students’, schools’, districts’ and states’ progress.

Most states have aligned with one or the other of the two consortia mentioned at the outset of this paper, PARCC and SBAC. Interviewees recommend that educators and parents follow the work of the consortia as the assessments are developed.

“Follow closely the work being done to develop prototypes for the national assessments,” advises Brinson. “Both consortia are writing and developing drafts. It’s a very transparent process on their sites. We won’t have national assessments until 2013 to 2014, but people should begin looking at them now.”

PARCC, for example, offers newsletters, webinars and other resources that provide insight into its progress, including calls for and response to public feedback. The PARCC assessment has recently completed its design phase and is now in development, with first-year pilot/field testing set for the 2012-2013 school year. A second year of field testing is planned for 2013-2014, and full operational administration of PARCC assessments is expected in the 2014-2015 school year.

The SBAC likewise provides a rich set of materials and resources that offer insight into the development of its assessments, including work plans and procurement updates. It’s working along a similar schedule as PARCC, with initial field testing in a sample of districts planned for the 2012-2013 school year, and a broad field test of the assessment

system planned for 2013-2014. Full implementation is planned for 2014-2015, with ongoing follow-up research and evaluation.

9. Provide Common Core Information in Many Formats

Experts agree that key to effective migration of curriculum is to ensure that all stakeholders are provided with access to information on demand and in a variety of formats, including text, webinars and videos.

Further, extra effort is needed to ensure that everyone who needs to know, knows. One educator explains that her school formed a committee for migrating existing literacy curriculum to the Common Core. The committee members' first task was the crosswalk. After investing much time and engaging members of their respective grade-level teams, the committee discovered that their state department of education had already done the job. While the committee members certainly learned through the process, they could have focused their efforts on other aspects had they known about the resource.

Experts recommend dedicating space on district and school websites to link to this type of information, as well as recommendations for educational leaders on how the information can be leveraged to meet district and school Common Core standards goals.

10. Conclusion: Step Back and Reflect

One of the hallmarks of a good teacher is the ability to reflect. Did that lesson work for that student? Why or why not? How can I differentiate the material to help the student fully understand?

The shift to Common Core standards is one of the most significant in many years, and that kind of thoughtful reflection needs to be part of migration efforts – now and over time.

“It’s best to avoid the idea that I am going to just do what I have always done and just tweak it,” says Brinson. “If we approach the Common Core that way, we’re missing a huge opportunity as educators.”

“It’s important to step back and assess what these changes really mean, so we can make the kinds of changes that really mean something – how we change our curriculum and methodologies to meet the new standards. Some districts are already on this trajectory, but for others it will take a lot of reflection.”

Finally, suggests Achieve3000’s Gertler, part of this reflection should be about differentiating between short- and long-term plans for change. “The change is not going to happen immediately; states, districts, principals and teachers should all consider thoughtfully and strategically what must be changed immediately and what can wait.

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■ About Achieve3000

Achieve3000 is the leader in online differentiated instruction, serving over one million students across the United States. Our Web-based literacy solutions are proven to increase reading comprehension and fluency, vocabulary and writing proficiency for students in grades 2 to 12, and also for adult learners. Based on decades of scientific research, Achieve3000 solutions deliver engaging, non-fiction content that supports core curriculum, Response to Intervention, Special Education, and other instructional models. KidBiz3000® (grades 2-5), TeenBiz3000® (grades 6-8), Empower3000™ (grades 9-12), and Spark3000® (for adult learners) are aligned with Common Core State Standards for English language arts as well as individual state standards.

In 2011, Achieve3000 launched its first differentiated core curriculum solution, eScience3000, in partnership with National Geographic School Publishing. Achieve3000 supports 21st century education initiatives across content areas and is raising student performance across the country. The company is based in Lakewood, N.J. Learn more about Achieve3000 online at <http://www.achieve3000.com> or call 888-968-6822.



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