Upholding Common Standards: Adopting and Implementing Common Core
Curriculum in Context

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Upholding Common Standards: Adopting and Implementing Common Core

In 1918 Franklin Bobbitt, professor and curriculum consultant, suggested that emerging complexities of the 20th century required a new approach to teaching and learning. Bobbitt’s solution was to summon educators to create a scientific curriculum. The most notable characteristic of this effort was Bobbitt’s attempt to document the “total range of human abilities, habits, systems of knowledge... that one should possess” to succeed in modern society. Since 1918, educational reformers have advanced Bobbitt’s vision. For example, in 1946, Ralph Tyler distilled essential elements of teaching and learning into the four-fold pillars which are familiar to us today: objectives, instruction, activities, and assessment. Forty years later, Robert Mager constructed a protocol putting Bobbitt’s vision and Tyler’s model into action. Most notably, Mager emphasized instructional objectives, performance rates, and assessment criteria.

Emergence of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) represents another effort to codify and quantify instructional goals, methods, and assessments. It is narrower than Bobbitt’s vision of the scientific curriculum, but broader than Mager’s instructional protocol. It may become more commanding than Tyler’s four-fold model for teaching and learning. Despite many similarities and a few differences of what came before, adoption of CCSS will ensure standards-based education as the leading paradigm for decades to come. One reason for this is that all but five states have adopted CCSS numeracy and literacy standards. The financial and psychological advantages for State education leaders to pool resources in such areas as assessment construction and teacher training are clear.

Nevertheless, critics have suggested that CCSS diminishes creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. Common Core enthusiasts contend the opposite, placing special emphasis on standards reform as a method for promoting equal access to learning opportunities.

One interesting point in this debate is that national sentiment surrounding CCSS seems to be less definitive in comparison to the optimism which inspired all but five States to enroll. According to the 44th Annual Gallup Pole of the Public’s Attitude toward education, 50% of participants said CCSS would improve schools, while 40% said it would have no effect (Bushaw & Lopez, 2012). Perhaps more important are the results from a study by Hart Research (2011), indicating that high school students continue to think broadly about their educational experience. Students value academic learning, but also other domains of knowledge, such as personal development, exploring one’s capabilities, and becoming a good citizen. Arguably, few Americans would suggest pursuing gains in achievement at the expense of moral, emotional, and social development. Nevertheless, over the last 20 years, our collective attention has focused on improving academic knowledge and skills.

The historical roots of standards-based reform, along with public sentiment about this movement, are just a few issues surrounding adoption and implementation of CCSS. Improving schools is complicated. Nevertheless, readers of this edition of CiC are sure to benefit from the overview of implementation timelines, training opportunities, document analyses, and integration examples. These are informative topics, to be sure. However, it is hoped that this edition of CiC will inspire thoughtful and productive discussion about the future of CCSS in Washington.

References


David W. Denton, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor at Seattle Pacific University. Before joining Seattle Pacific, David taught middle school students, in a variety of disciplines, for ten years. In 2005, David earned National Board Certification in early adolescent mathematics.
Over the past decade, educators have experienced a number of new educational reform efforts. It is sometimes the case that new means better. Adoption of Common Core is certainly new, but whether it is better remains to be seen. Regardless of our feelings and opinions about educational reform in Washington, Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have arrived. It may feel like the next new thing. Nevertheless, the Common Core initiative is larger by virtue of the number of States participating and their pooled resources, which means that it has significantly more momentum in comparison to anything that has come before. For a number of reasons, it is critical that educators in Washington State participate wholeheartedly in adoption and implementation of CCSS. However, we must do so while simultaneously reinvigorating our attention to developing the whole child. As we embrace what may be perceived as another iteration of standards-based teaching and learning, it is also important to be mindful that Common Core is one part of a balanced and holistic approach needed to exert a positive impact on social, moral, and academic growth.

As we are all aware, preparing students for college and career involves more than head knowledge. It requires careful attention to cultivating the gifts, interests, abilities, and passions of the student. Opportunity and time for debate about CCSS has most likely passed. However, it is not too late to reexamine our broader educational purposes and goals. One way to do this is to compare our activities with key points from Simply Better: Doing What Matters Most to Change the Odds for Student Success (Goodwin, 2011). This document distills decades of educational research and identifies five key points for impacting student learning:

- Guarantee challenging, engaging, and intentional instruction
- Ensure curricular pathways to success
- Provide whole-child student supports
- Create high-performance school cultures
- Develop data-driven, high-reliability district systems

Adopting CCSS does not ensure that each student will experience a safe, healthy, engaging, supportive, and challenging school environment. However, observation of key points from Doing What Matters Most shows that we must attend to multiple factors if we are going to create and sustain student success. Consistency, flexibility, and perseverance are just a few of the characteristics that should permeate the efforts of students, parents, teachers, and administrators across an entire district. Effective and sustainable learning requires standards with alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment, to be sure. However, it also requires attention to other factors, such as programs for managing absenteeism, discipline, social and behavioral disorders, and learning disabilities, among many others.

CCSS infuses additional rigor and consistent expectations for teachers and students, according to advocates. It will likely reduce variability across classrooms with regard to objectives, instruction, and assessment methods. This may be advantageous for making comparisons and promoting equal educational opportunities, but it may confound efforts to diversify and customize classroom learning. Nevertheless, even in light of these advantages and disadvantages, educators in Washington recognize the importance of attending to the whole child in order to produce students who are not just cognitively ready for college or career, but socially, morally, and physically prepared for life. Adopting an attitude of balance and perspective, with the whole child in mind, will improve the possibility that we achieve positive outcomes for the students we serve.

Reference

Tim Nootenboom is President of WSASCD, and Executive Director for Learning and Teaching, Central Valley School District, Spokane Valley.
Many people have asked me in the past two years if I support the Common Core State Standards. My answer is that I’m not just a supporter, I’m a firm supporter.

As directed by Section 601 of the En-grossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 6696, I provisionally adopted the Common Core standards in July 2010. After the 2011 state Legislature had an opportunity to review a report by my office, they agreed that the standards are right for Washington. On July 20, 2011, I formally adopted the standards.

A lot of work went into both support for and adoption of the standards. There were multiple public comment opportunities, feedback groups and validation committees. We produced two reports to the Legislature: One report concerned implementation costs and one concerned how closely our current standards align to the Common Core. We also put together a bias and sensitivity committee to make sure that the standards don’t exclude any underrepre-sented groups.

The obvious next question is, “Why adopt the new standards?” There are many answers to that question, but they all point to one general idea: The new standards will help us move toward true education reform.

Some of the arguments for Common Core are familiar. Washington state, given its high military population, is one of the more mobile populations in the country. A student coming to the Clover Park School District from a district in North Carolina shouldn't have to worry about being behind or repeating coursework he or she has already passed. That student should be able to leave school on a Friday and pick up at Clover Park the following Monday.

A set of standards taught in every state, by every teacher, will make the U.S. education system more consistent. Textbooks will be more closely aligned to learning stan-dards, and states could pool resources to de-vlop instructional materials to better help schools — and maybe even lower textbook costs. Testing costs also will be reduced: Common assessments will eliminate the need for states to develop their own tests.

The standards clearly articulate the crit-ical thinking skills and knowledge students need to learn in the 21st century. Here in Washington, we revised our math standards in 2008, and independent organizations have confirmed that our standards align very closely with the Common Core. This will make our state’s transition to the Common Core math standards easier.

Our English language arts standards were due to be revised because they have been the same since 2005. The Com-mon Core standards, with their emphasis on increased use of technology to gather information, and their focus on technologi-cal literacy, are the obvious choice for our students. Although the transition in ELA will be somewhat more difficult than in mathematics for our state, the change comes at a good time and our kids will benefit.

The new standards will help elevate the educational playing field for all students. They will help our nation become more globally competitive. Our students will be better prepared for post-high school, no matter the path they choose.
Preparing every student for careers, college, and their next steps in life after high school has long been a vision for education in Washington state. In July 2011, Washington State formally adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, one of several pillars of the state’s career and college readiness system efforts. Adopting the CCSS as Washington’s new academic learning standards (to replace 2005 reading and writing standards, and 2008 mathematics standards) gives OSPI and state professional learning partners an opportunity to make the actions of public educators clearer and more focused with a consistency that can increase equity and access for all students to foundational skills and knowledge. For example, in their design and intended delivery the CCSS offer each of these elements – clarity, focus, consistency, equity, access for both students and educators as Washington continues to systematically support CCSS implementation and application in classrooms. This article provides an overview of OSPI’s vision and two-pronged system approach toward implementation of the CCSS. In addition, it will share highlights of statewide activities from 2011-12 and a glimpse into the 2012-13 year.

The Vision

At OSPI, our vision for the CCSS is that every student will have access to the standards through high quality instruction aligned with the standards every day; and that every educator is prepared and supported to implement the standards in their classrooms every day.

In order to achieve this vision, a statewide system was deemed essential that focuses on (a) the “what” – critical content, design, and focus shifts within the CCSS, and (b) the “how” for remodeling professional learning systems to ensure CCSS implementation within and across content areas and other district and state initiatives.

Through the development process among states, including Washington, lead CCSS developers had the imperative to ground the CCSS in evidence regarding what students, in fact, need in order to be prepared beyond graduation day and into careers and college. According to one of the lead CCSS developers,

It is one of the rare moments in educational improvement when an effort starts by communicating that we must stop doing certain things, rather than telling educators about one more thing they can add to their already overbooked agenda to help support their students. You can think of this as the “power of the eraser” over the power of the pen. (Coleman, 2011)

Washington is no stranger to state student academic learning standards that are commonly understood, articulated, and measured across our state. The state’s previous experiences implementing new and revised state learning standards have provided an important foundation for transitioning to the CCSS. In fact, the CCSS offer an opportunity for our state to elevate all four of the State Learning Goals within the Basic Education Act (RCW 28A.150.210) as part of systematic implementation efforts in ways that the structure of our previous reading, writing and math standards did not. The CCSS invite educators at all levels to consider literacy and mathematics skills and attributes that all students and teachers need in order to access and navigate diverse content across subject areas and programs, while at the same time attending to the foundational content and system shifts they require. As a result, successful statewide CCSS implementation can only occur through partnerships and collaboration at all levels (classrooms and communities to the state) that are grounded in core values of clarity, consistency, and commitment to equity, and access to learning for all students and educators.

Washington’s Plan

The opportunities presented by the CCSS through economies of scale and cross-state-, district-, and regional collaborations are unprecedented for the more than 40 states that have adopted the CCSS, many of which are struggling with how to finance even the most basic levels of K-12 educa-
tion. Like many other states, Washington’s implementation plan consists of 5 phases that began in 2010 with exploration and adoption of the CCSS by OSPI and state, regional, and local partners. The 5 phases and their timeline (see Figure 1) provide a framework for CCSS implementation that connects initiatives, and creates opportunities and structures that build capacity, resources, and infrastructure supports around the professional learning necessary to implement and assess the CCSS.

Since each of Washington’s 295 school districts is at a different place regarding readiness for the CCSS transition, both in terms of individual and district capacity, this coordinated, multi-layered structure incorporates various entry points for adoption and implementation. Furthermore, this structure is intended to articulate the importance of a strong vision and foundation of resources for every district to access and engage with based on district readiness, capacity, and context.

As one of the last states to adopt the standards, Washington has a unique opportunity to collaborate with and learn from other states already engaged in the process. OSPI is working with key partners across the state to establish and maintain a statewide infrastructure that will (a) support full implementation of the CCSS in 2013-14, and (b) align with the implementation of a new state assessment system in the 2014–15 school year and beyond.

Highlights for the first year, 2011 – 2012, include the following:

- Initiation of a State CCSS Steering Committee comprised of state professional learning organizations, school district representatives, and higher education partners to set the course and vision for Washington’s implementation of the standards.
- Partnerships with:
  - Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) regional math and literacy coordinators to establish 3-year Transition Plans for ELA and Math to guide the development of professional learning supports accessible to each district.
  - Washington State ASCD, Federal Way and Spokane Public Schools to offer two statewide CCSS symposia for school district teams that resulted in participation of more than 500 educators from over 60 districts.
  - Over 300 district leaders and educators from 49 high poverty school districts to participate in 4 days of professional learning with funding from Washington’s GEAR-UP program that provided mini-grants for district teams to learn about shifts required in the standards and begin building CCSS professional learning system implementation plans.
  - The Washington Student Achievement Council (formerly the Higher Education Coordinating Board) to pool federal Title II, Part B, funds for math and science professional development and to offer a coordinated grants to create CCSS professional development supports over the next two years free of charge to districts.
  - State professional education organization leaders to host two annual collaboration opportunities to calibrate professional learning so that it is coherent for educators and useful for connecting larger statewide implementation support efforts.
- Participation as one of 10 states in the Care to College: Preparing Students for College Readys Success project that focuses on fostering long-term collaborations between state higher education and K-12 entities to improve student college readiness and to increase enrollment and graduation rates.
- Implementation of Year One of the OSPI CCSS Quarterly Webinar Series to keep educators and district leaders apprised of emerging resources; to discuss any challenging issues

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Figure 1: Washington’s CCSS Implementation Timeline and Phases
districts may face with the transition to the CCSS; and to share the latest information about the Smarter Balanced Assessment system.

Much of the 2011-12 work that was completed will continue into 2012-13 as OSPI and its state partners define and refine respective roles with CCSS transitions and associated professional learning needs. Forthcoming supports during 2012-13 will expand in the following ways:

• Partnering with school districts, Educational Service Districts, and state professional learning partners to offer CCSS Symposia in each of the state’s nine regions;

• Focusing in and building on existing opportunities that can support developing cadres of CCSS teacher and building leaders to support CCSS implementation within districts, buildings, and classrooms; and

• Creating opportunities for educators and districts to share CCSS implementation success and challenges in supportive venues.

For information and background about, and resources to support CCSS implementation visit the OSPI CCSS web site at: http://www.k12.wa.us/CoreStandards/default.aspx. This Web site provides links to learning opportunities focused on the CCSS, links to the most useful and relevant professional learning resources in the country that we have found, as well as extensive background about OSPI’s decision to adopt the CCSS.

An Imperative for Washington and the Nation

The foundational skills and knowledge that every student needs to know and be able to do in order to move successfully into their next postsecondary steps should be relevant and applicable to real-world contexts. As the National Association of State Boards of Education explains,

For the transition to college- and career-ready standards to be successful, both horizontal and vertical alignment between education entities must occur. Current teachers must receive extensive professional development on the CCSS, curricular materials, and strategies on teaching these standards that now require students to delve deeper and develop critical thinking and analytical skills that previous standards did not adequately address. (2011)

Clearly the status quo for implementing standards and supporting professional learning must be re-examined. In this spirit OSPI and its partners are entering a collaborative path in the coming years that holds the potential for having a positive impact on the life and professional opportunities for each of Washington’s 1 million students and over 70,000 educators.

References


Jessica Vavrus, MPA, is the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. She oversees statewide implementation of and professional learning support for all state learning standards. Jessica has served at OSPI since 2001 leading multiple state and federal education reform initiatives.

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The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative is a multi-state project launched in 2009 to create a national set of English language arts and mathematics standards. Every state in the union, with the exception of Texas, Alaska, Virginia, Minnesota, and Nebraska, has signed-on to the CCSS initiative (CCSS, 2012a). Minnesota has adopted the English language arts portion, but not mathematics. Interestingly, educational leaders in Virginia, who assisted in authoring Common Core standards, have yet to officially adopt, although the Virginia Department of Education has included CCSS in its 2010 English and mathematics curriculum framework. Despite incentives, Governor McDonnell of Virginia told reporters “The problem is that the way they have structured this program to mandate that we adopt a common core of standards to replace the [Virginia authored] Standards of Learning is unacceptable…Our standards are much superior” (Anderson & Helderman, 2010).

Standards-based education reform and the pursuit of developing a national set of academic standards are ideas which have been on the minds of reformers for some time. The first Bush administration discussed the development of a set of standards that all public schools would follow in a policy initiative optimistically titled America 2000. This initiative was followed by the Clinton administration with a similar program titled Goals 2000 (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). The CCSS initiative builds upon these initial efforts to address imaginary as well as real weaknesses in the American education system.

As with these previous reform movements, an important rationale behind CCSS is to provide all students with equal educational opportunities, regardless of geographic location, socio-economic status, and the like. The ultimate mark of success, according to reform literature, is preparing students for college or the workforce (United States Department of Education, 2009). This rationale has been reinforced by anecdotal and empirical evidence of low-test scores in literacy and numeracy of American students in comparison to students from other industrialized nations. According to the CCSS Initiative (2012b), “The standards are benchmarked to international standards to guarantee that our students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace.” Nevertheless, some experts question the validity of integrating international-type comparisons between the United States and other countries, such as Singapore, which is a wealthy city-state with 5 million inhabitants (Darling-Hammond & Liberman, 2012).

The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) coordinated a state-led effort to create the CCSS. The NGA strives to “develop innovative solutions to today’s most pressing public policy challenges” (National Governors Association, 2011). The NGA also represents state governors’ views on shaping federal policy. The CCSSO is a non-profit, non-partisan national organization of public officials in education which provides leadership, advocacy, and assistance on major educational issues. CCSSO is currently collaborating with interested states to create implementation strategies for CCSS.

In 2009, adopting CCSS was one of the selection criteria for winning Race to the Top (RTTT) money. According to RTTT documents, “For Phase 1 applications, the State’s high-quality plan demonstrating its commitment to and progress toward adopting a common set of K-12 standards…and to implement the standards thereafter in a well-planned way” (United States Department of Education, 2009 p. 7). The Department of Education describes common standards as “a set of content standards that define what students must know and be able to do and that are substantially identical across all States in a consortium” (United States Department of Education p. 12). In other words, eligibility to win RTTT dollars means adopting Common Core State Standards.

Supporters of CCSS reform claim that an advantage of creating a nationalized set of learning standards is to systematize high school diplomas across participating states, with the purpose of showing that a diploma represents the same level of learning and content mastery, whether a student comes from California, Florida, or New Mexico. Another advantage, according to supporters,
is the potential to promote academic unity and eliminate significant differences between high school graduates (CCSS, 2012).

In 2011, Superintendent Randy Dorn formally adopted Common Core Standards for Washington. The new standards will be fully implemented by 2015, after deploying a five-year implementation plan (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, OSPI, 2012). As a part of the plan, and not unlike the competitive funding strategy used in RTTT, OSPI offered fifty grants worth $4500 each to school districts to offset implementation costs, such as travel and training. Seventy-five school districts applied for these Implementation Pilot Project grants. Preference was given to districts with a high number of disadvantaged students, as well as districts with teams already dedicated to CCSS implementation. Some of the school districts selected include Tacoma, Auburn, Renton, and Kent. Leaders at OSPI plan to pilot CCSS assessments in 2013 and fully implement them during the 2014-2015 school year (OSPI, 2012). This reform effort is being done in a time of significant education funding challenges.

As this work to adopt and implement CCSS continues, States across the country struggle with reduced operating budgets (Odden & Pusic, 2011). As a result, an important question related to CCSS integration is who will pay for it? There seems to be some continued debate about how States will fund the implementation of Common Core since many governments are burdened to find adequate resources to maintain basic education services (Kober & Rentner, 2012). However, the combined effort and assets of the Common Core Consortium is sure to distribute the financial load. Moreover, States adopting Common Core are eligible for additional Federal grant money, if they can win Race to the Top. However, adoption of Common Core does not guarantee RTTT funds. Indeed, there is some research to show that States have significantly underestimated the cost of CCSS implementation in the areas of assessment, professional development, textbooks, and instructional materials (Accountability Works, 2012).

Along with these challenges, the Pioneer Institute (2012) places the total cost for the 45 CCSS State adopters at 16 billion over the next seven years, stating that “Very few of the states that adopted Common Core vetted the costs and benefits” and “While test-development costs will be covered by federal grants, [State adopters] are also likely to see their overall expenditures increase” (Pioneer Institute, p. 1). Unfortunately, the hope of RTTT money to offset State expenditures for new reform efforts may end up being a case of “many called, but few chosen.”

Although concerns that CCSS is a new extension of the United States Department of Education into the affairs of State education affairs, initial authoring of the standards was done by a coalition of 48 states, incorporating input from school administrators, teachers, and content matter experts from higher education.

Arguably, the adoption of Common Core represents an opportunity for educators to engage in another round of school reform. Advocates suggest that CCSS gives teachers the opportunity to develop strong lesson plans that focus on valuable and worthwhile knowledge and skills that will encourage successful learning experiences (National Education Association, 2009). Detractors suggest that standards diminish creativity and innovation, by homogenizing instruction and dismissing context-specific factors. The validity of these claims is difficult to determine. Standards-based reform, such as the kind exemplified through CCSS, may solve significant problems in education, or over time it may be sidelined with a host of other educational reform efforts which were unsuccessful in fulfilling their promised improvements.

Whether standards-based reform efforts succeed or fail, one thing is certain: students, across the world, and not just in America, will encounter an increasingly complicated and confusing set of life circumstances. Then again, each new generation contends with its own set of challenges. Arguably, overcoming these requires not only academic knowledge, but also a variety of other personality traits, such as hope, perseverance, and wisdom. With a bit of luck, students subject to standards-based reform efforts will adopt and implement some of these traits along the way.

References


Destiny McFarlan just finished her Masters of Arts in Teaching at Seattle Pacific University and is currently teaching Language Arts and drama at the high school level in the Bellevue School District.

Rachael Harrison (MAEd. from Azusa Pacific University) teaches 6th grade in San Juan Capistrano. She specializes in data driven instruction and use of Thinking Maps to encourage students in their learning.
The Mathematics Common Core State Standards (CCSS), adopted by Washington on July 20, 2011, represent a set of standards to provide national coherency in mathematics expectations for students, K-12. To date, the CCSS have been adopted by 45 states and three territories.

The CCSS represent a coherent learning progression of expectations that typically begins with students learning the big ideas for a particular domain before proceeding to the algorithms and procedures for solving problems. For example, students in third grade are expected to develop the concepts of multiplication and division. However, it is not until fourth and fifth grade when students are expected to apply this understanding through formal use of algorithms. Third-graders would learn these concepts with deep understanding using manipulatives, arrays, models, understanding relationships and other strategies for problem-solving. Clear learning progressions are evident as the concepts from early grades to high school are followed. The concepts and skills learned in lower grades are directly linked to algebraic thinking students will need in middle and high school.

There are eight Standards for Mathematical Practice (SMP) that are consistent throughout all grade levels. These standards include the expectation that students will

- be able to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them,
- reason abstractly and quantitatively,
- construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others,
- model with mathematics,
- use appropriate tools strategically,
- attend to precision,
- look for and make use of structure,
- look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning

Students throughout K-12 will be expected to demonstrate proficiency in the mathematics content within the context of the Standards for Mathematical Practice (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011).

The CCSS document begins with an overview that explains the philosophy of the Common Core Initiative. This includes an explanation of how standards are meant to go in-depth with fewer standards, rather than wider, with more standards per grade level. There is also a statement of the importance of maintaining a clear learning progression throughout the grade levels. Following this is a brief explanation of how the grade level standards are organized with an example, reminding the reader that the standards do not dictate curriculum or teaching methods, in particular the order with which the standards are taught. The eight Standards for Mathematical Practice are listed next in the document with a paragraph of explanation for each one. There is a brief description of how the SMP are connected to grade level content standards. An overview that explains the main emphasis and domains that should be taught precedes the standards for each grade level. The Standards for Mathematical Practice are also listed on one of the two the overview pages at every grade level. In the back of the document is a glossary of terms as well as common situations involving addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, including examples showing properties of operations.

Teachers may not necessarily need
to make vast adjustments to their teaching practice. However, teaching for deeper understanding first, then tying this understanding to procedures next is a positive change. Perhaps the biggest shift will take place in developing teacher skills to use the Standards for Mathematical Practice so that students demonstrate increasing levels of performance across grade level and mathematical strands. A greater emphasis on creating a classroom environment conducive to problem-solving, along with modeling and communicating mathematical thinking, is required where Common Core standards are used.

One of the weaknesses with Common Core State Standards in Mathematics documentation is that there are no examples to help teachers understand each of the expectations. Additionally, some standards are written using nuanced terminology. Teachers may have difficulty, or low tolerance, for deciphering unclear or elusive descriptions. Finally, a few new terms, including “within” can lead to some confusion regarding the specific expectation of fluency up to a certain number. Fortunately, because this is a nation-wide effort, there are plenty of very useful documents and websites that teachers can use to understand and apply the Common Core Standards.

The CCSS document is a clear and easy resource to use. It is organized in such a way that it enables individual teachers to learn about their own grade level and understand how skills progress through grade-level bands. Educators switching to CCSS have much to look forward to, specifically teaching the Standards for Mathematical Practice. If taught authentically, there is great potential for students to become better problem-solvers, engage in mathematics at a deeper level, and perform tasks that are more rich and rigorous.

**Resources for Common Core State Standards**

All things Common Core – in the state of Washington
http://www.k12.wa.us/CoreStandards/

All things Common Core – Nation wide
http://www.corestandards.org/

Latest news, tools, thinking by the top “guys”
http://commoncoretools.wordpress.com

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/

**CCSS Mathematics**

Mathematics Common Core in the state of Washington—state transition documents, links
http://k12.wa.us/CoreStandards/ Mathematics/default.aspx

Illustrative Mathematics – contains some tasks that address specific standards
http://illustrativemathematics.org

Inside Mathematics – classroom videos and tasks
http://www.insidemathematics.org

Smarter Balanced Assessments
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/

Achieve -- Achieving the Core
http://www.achieve.org/achieving-common-core

Common Core Toolbox
http://www.ccsstoolbox.org

Education Northwest: A Closer Look at the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics
http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/1800

Wisconsin Videos aligned to Standards for Mathematical Practice
https://sites.google.com/a/dpi.wi.gov/disciplinary-literacy-in-mathematics/

New York City Schools – CCSS Aligned Tasks, Lessons, Units
http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/CommonCoreLibrary/TasksUnitsStudentWork/default.htm

**Specifically for Parents**

PTA Parent Guides: Provide grade-by-grade parent guides that reflect the Common Core State Standards. Individual guides were created for grades K-8 and two were created for grades 9-12 (one for English language arts/literacy and one for mathematics).
http://www.pta.org/4996.htm

**A useful collection of all things Common core**
http://www.livebinders.com/play/play/187117

Robin Henrikson (M.Ed.) is a doctoral candidate at Seattle Pacific University. Her area of research focuses on characteristics of effective professional development. She works as a Mathematics Specialist at Olympic Educational Service District 114. Robin is also an adjunct instructor at Seattle Pacific University.
Shifts in the Common Core State Standards: Getting to the Vision for Washington

The Common Core State Standards describe the knowledge and skills in English Language Arts and Mathematics that students will need when they graduate, whatever their choice of college or career. These standards define the knowledge and skills students should have to succeed in credit-bearing academic coursework and workforce programs.

Washington’s adoption of the CCSS marks a turning point in education for all of our students. It is a step closer to the goal that educators hold dear:, to support all students well and give them what they need to be successful participants in our state, national, and international community.

Shifts in Mathematics

There are three shifts that were attended to in the writing of the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics. These three shifts addressed the “mile wide, inch deep” treatment of mathematics in our country. Many states, including Washington State, have made dramatic improvements to standards in recent years in order to address this concern. Still, while states have improved standards, instructional materials haven’t followed suit. Even though standards were more focused, they were not common nor equitable school-to-school. Materials addressing standards needed to be created to address the multitude of different standards across the states. There are three major shifts that implementing the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics bring:

FOCUS: Focus where the standards focus

Focus requires that we significantly narrow the scope so students have the opportunity to dig in deep with the standards and gain rich understanding of the mathematics. Through focus, students will be able to make sense of the mathematics that will lead to conceptual understanding, time to build procedural skill, and opportunities to apply mathematical understanding through rich and engaging tasks.

The focus of the CCSS in the elementary grades is arithmetic along with clusters in measurement that support it. Focus continues into the middle and high school grades, giving students opportunities to use modeling to link important concepts to solve problems.

This shift to more focus will not come easily. Historically we have been more concerned with coverage than focus. When new standards are adopted, many of the activities educators engage in are concentrated on coverage. These standards must be attended to differently, making natural connections with standards and clusters so a greater depth of understanding can be achieved for all our students.

COHERENCE: Think across grades, and link to major topics in each grade

Coherence links standards together so the mathematics makes sense both within and across grades. Mathematics is not a list of tricks or memorized procedures. It is a subject built from a small number of important principles. The CCSS were built with these natural progressions in mind, determining the highest leverage concepts and building these concepts towards career and college readiness.

It is because of this intentional design of coherence along with focus that there are not strands that lead through the entire K-12 experience. Instead, there is a purposeful attention to how key ideas build from each other and lead to other concepts. Careful study of the progression documents can illuminate how the mathematics is developed across grades and allows both the educator and student to gain deeper understanding of the mathematics.

RIGOR: In major topics, pursue with equal intensity conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and applications

The 2008 Washington State standards were written to give equal importance to the three aspects of rigor: conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and applications. Curricula haven’t always had an equal approach to these three components. The CCSS seeks to end the debate regarding which three elements takes precedence. It shouldn’t be that teachers have to make a choice. It should be an “and” not an “or.” But without focus and coherence, the components of rigor conflict rather than concur.

If the vision of the CCSS is to be
Achieved in mathematics, it will happen because all stakeholders in the system understand and engage in activities that support these three shifts. This isn’t something that educators can do alone. All sectors of the system need to work together to make the vision a reality.

**Shifts in English Language Arts**

As with mathematics, the shifts in English Language Arts are a focused response to the challenges of our students in literacy. There are three main “shifts” that distinguish the Common Core State Standards from our Washington State Grade Level Expectations in Reading, Writing, and Communications. The Common Core provides guidance to teach literacy in a comprehensive way, with the understanding that reading, writing, speaking, and listening work together to push students to deep comprehension and critical thinking.

**A deeper, more intentional focus on building knowledge through content-rich informational and nonfiction texts**

The CCSS respond to the successes and challenges of literacy skills in content areas. The goal is for Washington’s students to transfer strong literacy skills from their English Language Arts reading and writing experiences into all domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Included in this shift is a thoughtful re-balancing of the types of texts and literacy experiences provided students, supporting students’ progression toward college and career readiness when reading and writing in all disciplines. Students will develop the ability to read and respond to texts, using the norms, conventions, and vocabulary of different disciplines, synthesize information from multiple sources, and develop an enhanced understanding of the information in texts.

**Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational**

Grounding literacy work inside texts makes reading and writing experiences and learning more parallel to the demands of post-K12 life. To achieve this goal, students will attend less to “text to self” work and more to understanding the text itself. This shift provides more focused literacy work that is independent of background knowledge, instead teaching children the critical thinking and analysis skills they need to unpack complicated documents, articles, memos, stories, and make confident and critical consumer decisions. Based on information within the text, students will make inferences and draw conclusions from the text and support inferences and conclusions with textual evidence.

**More intentional, regular practice with complex text and its academic language**

With a careful eye to the increasingly rigorous reading, writing, speaking, and listening students do as they progress through school, the CCSS focuses teaching on developing stronger skills in argument and research. Students will engage in reading texts of increasing complexity, including texts that will stretch students’ reading abilities. Included in this practice with complex text, students will be able to evaluate, integrate, synthesize, and present coherent arguments and claims using multiple sources.

What is perhaps most striking about the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts is that they call out the need for teachers to work together collaboratively to build students’ literacy skills. This bold vision is an enhancement of other efforts in literacy in that we are teaching children specifically how to be literate in multiple content areas. Just as with the mathematics standards—the system must shift to make this happen.

**How will we get there?**

Supporting this implementation in a time of fiscal constraints is an ambitious task, but a doable one. OSPI and the state network of regional, higher education, content association and other stakeholder partners is providing multiple opportunities to learn, practice, collaborate, and shift practice across the state. Thinking more comprehensively than “pick up the book, and go forth and teach,” trainings on content, instructional possibilities, leadership, implementation, and professional learning are occurring at state, cohort, regional, and district levels. Collaborative critical thinking is key.

Additionally, one of the biggest strengths of the CCSS is in the numbers: forty-six states are using the same standards and sharing work with one another and professional organizations across the country. The vision of the CCSS signals a new paradigm in the way “we do education.” With the CCSS, the idea of curriculum and instruction being one teacher’s static responsibility is gone. This initiative breaks silos and demands that educators combine forces and collaborate as we think about professional learning and education standards in a new way, as we work together to support all our children equitably. This collaborative effort—not just the spirit, but the demand—is perhaps the biggest shift of all.

**Resources to Start the Work**

Common Core Shifts at Achievethecore.org

http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools

Common Core State Standards

http://www.corestandards.org/

OSPI Common Core State Standards page

http://www.k12.wa.us/CoreStandards/default.aspx

Greta Bornemann, M5, NBCT, is the Director of Mathematics and Lisa M. Potts, MA, is the Director of English Language Arts for Teaching and Learning at OSPI. They support statewide curriculum and instruction initiatives for their respective content areas, and are currently focused on implementation of professional learning around Common Core State Standards in Washington.
Implementing the Common Core State Standards in the Career and Technical Education Classroom

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs must intentionally integrate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) into instruction with a systematic approach that mirrors the philosophy and activities of the Washington State transition and implementation plan. The reasons are twofold: 1. federal requirements for CTE programs mandate the integration of core academics into CTE instruction and 2., understanding the statewide approach to the CCSS assures integration activities that support student achievement.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act 2 of 1990 placed emphasis on the integration of vocational and academic skills. In the 2006 Perkins reauthorization, an emphasis was placed on professional development that addresses the integration of academic and technical skills, and that involves academic and CTE instructors working together whenever possible (Brustein & ACTE, 2006). For over 22 years, CTE program performance has included academic attainment and technical attainment benchmarks, holding CTE programs accountable for student achievement. CTE is a necessary and integral part of district implementation of the CCSS.

The CCSS requires intentional collaboration across content areas, signaling a fundamental shift to a uniform approach for instruction. The CCSS emphasize the importance of context in Mathematics, integrates English/Language Arts (ELA) instruction into all content areas, and holds all teachers responsible to provide instruction grounded in the vision of the CCSS daily. Successful integration of CTE and the CCSS is a necessity to support student achievement. The implementation activities around the CCSS for CTE programs should include state and district wide initiatives, and make considerations for the unique needs of CTE programs.

This is a critical time for academic and CTE leaders at state and district levels to seize the opportunity to intentionally bridge the gap between disciplines and find systems for the standards to rigorously engage all students. Engagement in both CTE and academic courses builds a base of knowledge and skills across a wide range of subject matter, establishing the potential to create academic and CTE classes that reinforce one another and provide students with multiple ways of mastering college and career ready knowledge and skills.

CTE is no stranger to integration and alignment. For each course, CTE teachers develop a curriculum framework that aligns national industry standards, 21st Century Skill standards, and core content area standards with assessments. The challenges facing CTE teachers mirror challenges that core teachers are facing in their initial approach to transitioning to the CCSS. There has been work accomplished around alignment, but it is important to focus on the structure and recognize the differences from previous state standards: “If you’re just looking at content, it can be easy to overlook the extent to which the common core represents a fundamental change in instructional practice.” (Education Northwest, 2012). Looking for a crosswalk or a standard-to-standard swap in alignment to the CCSS will not allow for a depth of understanding of behaviors, skills, and understanding required of students in the Common Core Standards.

Implementation Strategies suggested by the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) and Achieve include the following:

- Developing a Common Understanding of College and Career Readiness
- Forming cross-disciplinary teams for CCSS planning and implementation
- Ramping up communications and information sharing
- Creating or updating curricular and instructional resources
- Enhancing Literacy and Math strategies within CTE instruction
- Fostering CTE and academic teacher collaboration
- Establishing expectation for and
monitoring the CCSS integration into CTE (Meeder, Suddreth, & ACTE, 2012)

CTE leadership and instructors should be part of the implementation teams for districts, enhancing conversations about relevancy and contextual skill application in districtwide implementation, and to inform the understanding of structures in place to support students across departments. Additionally, CTE programs should develop leadership teams to implement activities specific to CTE instructors focused on addressing instructional methods and strategies appropriate for industry-based content. The diversity of CTE programs within a building can create isolation for programs that do not have peers with a similar learning environment. Creating regional professional learning communities of instructors in like career clusters addresses unique program approaches, while district and building activities provide structure across disciplines for students to engage with the standards.

CTE implementation teams are able to leverage work done by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, ACTE, the Office of the Superintendent of Public (OSPI), and other states around CCSS. OSPI houses resources for the CCSS on its website, including full versions of implementation webinars and materials, allowing teams to access the same information presented statewide at any time. Resources are also available to discuss the CCSS with key stakeholders, and advisory committees for CTE programs. Common standards promote collaboration, especially around materials and professional development.

Key Considerations for Implementation

CTE programs looking at implementation should begin with modeling the strategy and philosophy of Washington’s implementation to ensure the same message is given to all teachers. The state is in the second year of a four-year phase-in implementation strategy with four key phases: Awareness, build educator capacity, classroom transitions, and application and assessment.

The structure and intent of the CCSS is important, and initial trainings should focus on an understanding/awareness of the CCSS and build over time to an analysis of instructional practices. This development schema follows the model adopted by Washington State for the CCSS implementation. Although CTE courses are only offered in grades 7-12, focusing on only the upper grade standards does not address the philosophy and progression of standards over time.

The CCSS in ELA includes literacy standards for the teaching of history/social studies, science and technical subjects. These explain what students should be able to do in reading and writing in technical content, which is taught in CTE courses. CTE instructors can support and assist in student development of these standards. The standards for speaking and listening, media and technology, and language can be applied within the CTE context.

CTE should make the following considerations around ELA Alignment:

- Understand ELA “big ideas” and anchor standards
- Review text with consideration for reader and task
- Create text dependent questions to encourage student analysis
- Maintain the authenticity of reading tasks in relation to the CTE content area
- Generate writing for both short purposes, and longer sustained projects within the content discipline
- Non-equivalent courses will align to the ELA standards for science, math, and technical subjects

In the English and Language Arts CCSS, the shift toward content-rich nonfiction and informative writing is a natural fit to CTE courses. CTE alignment to national industry standards means considering the text complexity of materials when looking at ELA reading alignment. Many industry texts used in CTE courses make the assumption the reader is employed in the industry, and is familiar with the vocabulary and skills of the text. For example, the vocabulary, structure, and skills in a cosmetology product manual indicate an assumption that the reader has a prior knowledge of cosmetology, and a student approaching the text without prior knowledge of the content area would have difficulty in navigating the text. Similarly, a CTE student comfortable with reading a technical manual, such as a welding student, is able to transfer knowledge to a manual in a different context, such as a repair manual for a small engine.

The focus on evidence-based writing in the CCSS aligns well to CTE courses. Writing alignment in CTE courses is dependent on the occupational needs of the task, and is evidence-based and expository in nature. For example, the Automotive Technology student demonstrates evidence based writing by effectively documenting the customer complaint, the cause of the issue, and the corrections taken to fix the issue.

CTE should make the following considerations around Mathematics Alignment:

- Understand structure and progression of Mathematics Standards
- Align to the Standards for Mathematical Practice when appropriate
- Incorporate Mathematical conceptual and procedural skill in alignment to application skills
- Use content and mathematical vocabulary in CTE classrooms
- Collaborate with mathematics instructors

In Mathematics CCSS, the balance between conceptual understanding, procedural skill, and application of skill are equally stressed. CTE alignment has typically focused on application of skill, except in cross-over equivalency-credited courses. For meaningful alignment to the CCSS to occur, mathematical vocabulary and procedures must incorporate into instruction. This shifts mathematical integration beyond only teaching the application of skill to include students analyzing why the application of skill works. CTE teachers should find the Standards for Mathematical Practice provide a point of alignment for concepts both directly and indirectly related to Mathematics. These mathematical habits of mind are relevant across content areas, and although alignment to the Standards of Practice does not indicate a strong connection to Mathematical Content, integration reinforces the processes and proficiencies used in the Mathematics classroom.

For CTE, the work of integrating the CCSS encompasses understanding the standards, and using their structure and vocabulary in the classroom to reinforce student learning. This helps make connections across content areas, and support the relevancy of student learning through real world application. CTE programs have continuously identified the connections to standards in instruction. Building instructional meth-
ods and instructor capacity to deliver the standards brings a cohesive approach across content areas positively impacting student engagement, achievement, and career and college readiness.

References

References

Research-Based Instructional Strategies for Educators to Increase Student Achievement

Part II
Thursday, December 4, 2012 • Federal Way School District Office
Registration information is available online at www.wsascd.org

Focus: Brief review of session one PLUS Cooperative learning; Cues, Questions and Advance Organizers; and Nonlinguistic Representations

This session is the second of a five-part series. Participants do not have to attend all sessions. Research shows that an individual teacher can have a powerful effect on his/her students even if the school doesn’t.

Dr. Stone will share the research related to what those highly effective teachers do, as presented in the McREL publication Classroom Instruction that Works, 2nd Edition.

All workshops in this series provide information that will be useful for the Marzano, Danielson, and Cel 5 Dimensions forms of teacher evaluation.

Subsequent Sessions – Save the dates!

Part III – Tuesday, January 22, 2013 – Brief review of sessions one and two AND Summarizing and Note Taking; and Assigning Homework and Providing Practice (Federal Way School District Office)

Part IV – Wednesday, March 6, 2013 – Brief review of sessions one, two and three AND Identifying Similarities and Differences; and Generating and Testing Hypothesis (Federal Way School District Office)

Part V – Thursday, May 9, 2013 – Putting it all together: How can school leaders facilitate good instruction throughout the district, school and classroom? (Federal Way School District Office)

Veneta Willis-Holbrook was previously Program Supervisor for Career and Technical Education, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.
Project Based Learning and the Common Core

In Washington State, and in many states across the nation, the implementation of the Common Core is finally coming to fruition. Districts and Schools have invested in training their teachers to align curriculum and instruction to these Common Core standards. This has been a major challenge for some, while not as much for others. Washington has been working with standards based instruction for some time, and teachers are familiar with targeting standards. The transition to the common core is a transition to new standards, not necessarily the process of standards-based instruction. Where, then, do we need to focus our efforts to ensure that students are meeting these standards? What is the next step in professional development for teachers? What does the Common Core not address in terms of reform? One answer to this question is engagement. To truly ensure that students are meeting standards, we need to focus on creating engaging learning environments where the Common Core Standards are taught and assessed.

Project Based Learning Versus Projects

Project Based Learning (PBL) is one critical, and vastly popular, learning model that can be used to promote student engagement in the classroom. However, there is some misconception around exactly what PBL is and is not. PBL is not the same as projects. We’ve all done projects in the classroom, oftentimes a fun activity or curricular add-on to either synthesize learning or create an extension of learning. Why not use this component of learning to create engagement for an entire unit of instruction? PBL makes the project the “main course” and not the desert. A PBL Project contains and frames the curriculum in rigorous in-depth inquiry (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2012). A PBL Project must meet essential elements for it to be considered true PBL and not just a project. Let’s consider a mathematics PBL Project and analyze the ways that it meets essential elements of PBL, while simultaneously integrating Common Core Standards (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).

Spotlight PBL Project

Significant content and in-depth inquiry. One exemplary PBL project that I have seen in the Algebra classroom is called the Cell Phone project, where students investigate a variety of cell phone plans to find the best one. The Common Core Standards focused on in this exercise include the following:

1. Interpret functions that arise in applications in terms of the context (F-IF.4-6).
2. Analyze functions using different representations (F-IF.7a.linear).
3. Build a function that models a relationship between two quantities (F-BF.1a).

Many other standards are embedded in the Cell Phone project. However, this activity is not just about the standards. It is about critical thinking and application of the standards. It is not just about coverage in activities that are not connected to the real world, it is about inquiry into mathematical principles and constructing knowledge with them. In addition, the Common Core standards in mathematics suggest that students engage in making “sense of problems and persevere in solving them” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, CCSSI, 2012a). Without PBL, this kind of application is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

Driving question and need to know. The driving question for this project is “How do we help our parents select the best cell phone plan?” As an open-ended and complex question, students are required to learn content and do multiple investigations to answer the question. It is student-friendly, and repeated throughout the project in order to facilitate formative assessment and reflection. In addition, to launch the inquiry, students watch a variety of commercials that claim to have the best plan. These types of inviting entry events inspire curiosity, a sense of urgency, and an innate desire to find a solution. Similarly, the content is relevant to students.

Voice and choice. Ultimately students have to present their solutions to the Cell Phone project in a presentation of their choice, along with showing a list of other
products, from brochures to letters. These products all consist of the same underlying mathematical content. However, students are allowed the voice and choice to pick the cell phone company they think best. Students engage in inquiry to decide on the best product and price. The Cell Phone project is not simply about making the correct choice. It is about the mathematical justification and correctness regarding a choice.

**21st century skills.** In addition to doing individual tasks and work, solving the Cell Phone problem involves group work and consensus building. The skill of collaboration is an area of specific focus. The overall project is a problem in and of itself. Students work together to solve a problem that parents and guardians frequently encoun-

ter. Students also present their work to an audience, in this case, family members, as a way to build their professional presentation skills. In addition, many of the process standards mentioned in the Significant Content section of Common Core, such as perseverance, are practiced throughout the Cell Phone project.

**Revision and reflection.** Throughout the process, students are given an opportunity to try new ideas and, at the same time, make mistakes. If students think a certain plan is the best, then they are required to provide reasons why. In some cases, students’ initial thinking may have been wrong, but they are encouraged to reflect on their learning and revise their work. Reflection tools such as Learning Logs, discussions, and Exit Slips, among many others methods, are utilized throughout instruction. Reflection serves a special function, since it promotes students’ analysis of meaningful solutions. Simultaneously, reflective content provides teachers with numerous opportunities to gauge learning, and evaluate progress.

**Reflection serves a special function, since it promotes students’ analysis of meaningful solutions.** Simultaneously, reflective content provides teachers with numerous opportunities to gauge learning, and evaluate progress.

**Public audience.** Students present their work and recommendations to spectators in an exhibition night, a culminating event where student learning is showcased and celebrated. We know that students may or may not do work for the teacher, but if an authentic audience is added as part of the assessment process, then it not only increases the rigor, but also the engagement. The real-world context is built into the assessment, and student work, effort, and final products take-on added significance.

**Alignment between Common Core and Project Based Learning**

The narrative up to this point illustrates PBL at work. However, this description raises several important questions. For example, how do Common Core Standards align to the essentials of PBL? And, what are some best practices in creating PBL projects?

**Inquiry into content.** PBL creates engagement to learn critical content. As a teacher, you design the project and choose the learning objectives. As educators design projects, the “right” standards need to be targeted. When looking at the scope and sequence for the year, educators must include instruction predicated on inquiry so that subject matter knowledge is retained over time. Similarly, many Common Core standards require significant amounts of instruction and practice to develop mastery. PBL project learning aligns with these characteristics through focused and long-term inquiry learning experience. Also, multiple Common Core standards can be clustered within one PBL experience. Indeed, Common Core documents already propose some standards for grouping and use within one activity (CCSSI, 2012b).

**Real world context.** Real world relevance and connections can create engagement for students. PBL projects promote include these features, by utilizing background knowledge, making choices, and selecting methods for showcasing what has been learned. PBL also enables students to connect learning to the real world. Common Core standards, such as those found in ELA or Math, are often skills that can be applied in a variety of contexts. In the Common Core documents, some standards call for explicit exploration of the real world and this is where students engaged in PBL excel. For example, consider the following language from the Common Core Algebra standard (CCSSI, 2012b):

7.EE.3 Solve multi-step real-life and mathematical problems posed with positive and negative rational numbers in any form (whole numbers, fractions, and decimals), using tools strategically. Apply properties of operations to calculate with numbers in any form; convert between forms as appropriate; and assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies.

7.EE.4 Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct simple equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities.

PBL presents an exceptional opportunity for teachers to design units of instruction that integrate real-world context, according to the requirements of Common Core standards, which call for explicitly integrating practical connections. Teachers have an opportunity to enrich the entire process, while simultaneously focusing on standards-based learning.

**Engagement and rigor.** PBL creates engagement not just in learning, but in rigorous learning. This rigor is evident in designing a project that demands inquiry, where the learning is challenging. The Common Core is just the starting point for this rigor. Standards alone do not create rigor, nor engagement. If we consider the discussion of Complex Text in the ELA common core (2012c), we see the matrix of qualitative and quantitative tasks used as methods for ensuring rigor. These standards acknowledge that there must be an engaging
task connected to the learning, here in the context of a text. Students cannot engage in exploring complex text unless the task being demanded in the classroom is rigorous itself. At the same time, students cannot engage in complex tasks and texts without a meaningful and engaging activity, problem, or question that invites a response.

21st century skills. When unpacking many of the standards for the Common Core, keywords and phrases like collaborate, solve real world problems, evaluate text, persevere, and construct viable arguments repeat throughout standards and across documents. These are 21st century skills, commensurate with PBL learning. These skills are transferable across disciplines, environments, and content areas. Educators need to take time to identify 21st century skills, wherever they may be found in Common Core standards, and then integrate these to design activities that promote learning through inquiry, reflection, and collaboration.

Assessment. PBL promotes voice and choice in how students present what they learn. These products can show the same level and sophistication of content mastery learning, while simultaneously allowing students to creatively select a present their findings. While much of our standardized assessments call for evaluation of traditional skills, there are ways to transform evaluation into a process, primarily through on-going formative assessment of project work. At the same time, heavy emphasis on formative assessment does not preclude summative evaluation the conclusion of the activity. Despite this flexibility, it may be necessary to require specific assessment-related components as evidence of learning, regardless of the instructional model deployed. For example, if the objective requires learning how to graph, then integrate graphing as part of the project, and formatively assess this skill as the project is assembled. Likewise, if comprehension of text evidence is the focus of the objective, then integrate this skill as part of the project-learning-reflection cycle.

Conclusion

As educators target the Common Core through instruction and assessment, and spend time unpacking the standards, they will see connections to Project Based Learning. PBL is readily aligned to Common Core in terms 21st century skills, as well as emphasizing real-world context. PBL demands inquiry, rather than coverage. Content coverage is all too familiar to students and teachers. It rarely produces lasting results. In order to ensure that learning is meaningful and effective, educators should target the essential elements of the standard, which can be emphasized through a PBL model. Although Common Core State Standards will not solve all facets of the engagement problem, it is an excellent place to start. Coupled with great teachers, Project Based Learning, and thoughtful implementation, we can continue down the path toward ensuring success for all students.

PBL is readily aligned to Common Core in terms 21st century skills, as well as emphasizing real-world context.
The “Common Core”: Standardization vs. Human Agency and School Leadership

Proponents of the standardization movement, including the most recent push to adopt a uniform national common core of standards for student learning, follow a presumption not shared by everyone; namely that the way to improve schools is to consolidate what is known into a single doctrine enforced by state and federal agencies. This is not only a point of presumption for Common Core learning standards but for leadership standards as well. Whether it is standardizing content for school children, teachers, or leaders, the same concerns persist, not the least of which is the lack of support by either research findings or practical anecdotal evidence that standardization produces the desired effects.

Indeed, we have seen standardization movements before in the form of Standardized Learning Objectives (SLOs) that did not produce promised outcomes. Furthermore, there is little or no empirical research to support the advocacy for another standardized movement. For this article, I focused on a recent study of effective school leaders and how they enact the current standardization movement in leading successful schools.

English and Papa (2010) suggest that the current “standardophilia” (as I am coining the movement) is an attempt to follow an ideological construct, likely leading to a period of intellectual stagnation and will not produce the hoped for improvement in schools. They contend that stagnancy occurs when knowledge becomes fixed or standardized and human agency and contextualization is ignored or devalued. Edward Deming (1993), concurred in a rebuttal he penned responding to the presumed efficacy of standardizing leadership preparation, noting that neither experience alone nor the compilation of “best practices” were adequate to improve leader quality and practice. These researchers contend that the creation of successful leaders lies in our ability to train leaders to think, create, respond to unique contexts, engage in innovativeness, and debate past presumptions of practice.

Indeed, standardization rests on a number of fallible presuppositions, including the notion that (a) all school contexts are basically identical and (b) we already know everything we need to know about leading schools. These presumptions support the contention that success for schools can be realized if only we could codify a known set of leader behaviors and implement them with greater fidelity. However, Feyerabend (1993) noted that, “...the belief in a unique set of standards that has always led to success and will always lead to success is nothing but a chimera” (p. 160). Moreover, Bourdieu (1998), commenting on the push for educational leaders to standardize their practices; and emulate business, economic, and market theories, noted that the idea was akin to trading “things of logic for the logic of things” (p. 101). John Dewey (1929) noted that approaching leadership or schooling in a standardized, one-size-fits-all approach would populate the institution with people who want to know “how to do things with the maximum prospect of success. Put baldly, they want recipes” (p. 15).

English and Papa (2010) contend that highly effective leadership in schools is characterized not by standardized technologies but by “recognition that leadership is a cultural construct deeply embedded in the mythos of a specific society” (p. 25). Bandura (2001) believed that within a primarily humanistic organization, like schools, individuals would tend to function within the human social system and operate based on the contextual realities and ambiguities confronting them in practice. Thus, as Johnson (1996) noted, “no account of leadership can be complete, or completely adequate, unless it makes some explicit attempt to integrate these two methodological perspectives” (p. 14). The choice that seems to lie before school principals is whether to engage in authentic practice shaped by contextual realities or operate using predetermined and prescribed or common leadership standards. A recent study measured how effective school leaders navigate this dichotomy.

The Study

Using the theoretical continuum between standardization and human agency, this study measured the extent to which practicing school principals choose, consciously or unconsciously, to follow state...
School Leadership Standards when faced with the contextual realities of actual practice. As such, this study provided not only a descriptive account of “what” principals do, but functions as a measure of the level of human agency enacted by these school leaders (English & Papa, 2010).

Sixty-one practicing school principals were asked to rate (in a forced distribution) how they currently enact the State Leadership Standards (their professional standards for certification and evaluation). The school leaders included 29 elementary, 20 middle, and 12 high school principals. Participants were equally split in regard to gender (31 male, 30 female), and with a majority 78% Caucasian and 22% African American. Using Q-methodology, factor analysis generated three model sorts or approaches for leadership [for more detail see Militello, Alsbury, Fusarelli, Warren, 2012].

The three leadership styles that emerged in this study highlight that there is no one way leadership practices are lived in effective schools. The leader approaches can be characterized in terms of focusing on standardized best practices versus human agency and local contextual determination of practices. Specifically, effective school principals practiced leadership using:

- HumanAgency/LocalContext - focused on professional collaboration and local vision building, and view their role as serving local student and community needs.
- Standardization - focused on the established rules and regulations, and view their role as implementer of federal, state, and district policy.

These results seem to provide confirmation of the tension felt by practicing principals between enacting one-size-fits-all standards and the realities of the demands placed on them in actual practice. As suggested by English and Papa (2010) this presents “two sides of leadership” (p. 7), such that each leader has to navigate school complexities daily, hourly, and even minute by minute. On one side of leadership is the current dominant and politically-correct ideology supporting the implementation of a prescribed set of best practices as embodied in leadership standards like those promulgated in the NCSSE or in the similar Interstate School Leaders License Standards (ISLLC).

We may want to re-evaluate our presumptions about what constitutes effective leadership in light of the contextual and humanistic realities of the educational enterprise. Specifically, standardization and efficiency engineering may not be best suited for a uniquely humanistic organization, like schools.

This became clear in this study as leaders readily identified “accepted” leadership styles within the prescribed standards, while intentionally choosing and defending alternative and varied actions in practice. Actual behavior was much less predictable, and described as “responsive to the specific context or circumstances presented.” The deference to non-standardized leadership is also supported by the negative responses provided by all the participants concerning prescribed and top-down district, state, and federal directives. Leaders primarily view these directives as effective tools to motivate change, but devoid of any consideration of contextual realities, fairly ineffective in resulting in authentic or sustainable change.

Human agency in leadership encourages leading as an art form (English, 2009) and the legitimate recognition of emotion and culture in the practice of leadership (English & Bolton, 2008). This component of leadership is well known to leaders in practice but currently resides in what Foucault (1972) called “a field of memory” and no longer accepted or discussed openly. This side of leadership involves taking contextual realities like human passion, weakness, strength, conviction, hope, pity, frailty, altruism, courage, vice, and virtue into consideration when decisions about students and faculty are made (Greenfield, 1988). The tension between these two sides of leadership (standardization versus human agency) can explain why leaders rely more on the opinion of fellow practitioners than leadership standards or the rational structural leadership theories currently being promoted or prescribed by state licensure agencies to many leadership preparation programs (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 2003). Many have used this proclivity for principals to seek collegial advice to criticize the effectiveness of leadership preparation programs, calling for even more standardization of program content and delivery. However, standardization may in fact be a primary cause for preparation program irrelevancy. Indeed, leaders in this study, were well versed in the leadership standards, but reported that upon entering actual practice, they quickly realized that adherence to standardized leader approaches did not often apply in the highly chaotic and contextually-unique world of the public school. In fact, it is precisely because colleagues in the field had learned to respond creatively and react to unique social and cultural realities that new leaders ultimately relied on their advice rather than prescribed and fixed standards.

This tension between standardized prescription and the realities of an unpredictable environment is precisely why leaders in this study, who understood the standards, did not always choose to enact them in the field. While some may interpret this as a failing of the leaders to engage in best practices, others would applaud the ability to react and respond to the unique context and culture of a school. A major challenge for leadership preparation programs is to navigate between the demands of state and federal agencies to standardize leadership preparation programs, while maintaining training techniques that promote the human agency critical to authentic leadership practice.

Some contend that standardization may be nothing more than an attempt to control a human enterprise that is best served by non-standardized leadership approaches (English & Papa, 2010). Other examples of the removal of human agency from leadership exist outside of the field of education; namely in the practice of medicine. Indeed, leadership in medical organizations have often been held up as an effective exemplar for education because both institutions are primarily comprised of people working with people. Interestingly, even in medicine, concerns have risen over what some have called “evidence-based medicine” movement.
This is basically the attempt to standardize diagnosis and treatment in the medical field. Groopman (2007) derides the removal of the human element from doctor decision-making saying, “...today’s rigid reliance on evidence-based medicine risks having the doctor choose care passively, solely by the numbers. Statistics can’t substitute for the human being before you; statistics embody averages, not individuals” (p. 6). He goes on to explain that to have good doctoring you need to have the “total package” (p. 19).

English and Papa (2010) contend similarly that in schools “good leadership is a total package” resting not only on “knowledge but an understanding of cultural and organizational contexts” (p. 34).

**Implications**

We may want to re-evaluate our presumptions about what constitutes effective leadership in light of the contextual and humanistic realities of the educational enterprise. Specifically, standardization and efficiency engineering may not be best suited for a uniquely humanistic organization, like schools. The erasing of irrational human elements from leadership decision-making such as emotion, intuition, whimsy, and fear may be counterproductive.

As noted above, while the dominant trend in education is toward more rigid standardization, the medical field seems to be moving in the direction of embracing human agency as a quality measure of effective leadership. Specifically, the medical field is heavily promoting a new approach to medicine called translational medicine, a branch of medical research that attempts to focus on the unique context of each patient and set of symptoms and individualized patient diagnosis and treatment. In other words, superior medical care is now defined as the exact opposite of standardization…customization. Applying this concept to educational leadership, Alsbury (as cited in Fusarelli, Militello, Alsbury, Price, & Warren, 2010) co-opted the construct translational leadership.

Translational leadership, whether in the medical or educational field, is unique in its focus on leadership practices customized to the contextual realities of organizational variation. In schools, translational leadership focuses on localized cultural and organizational assessment and site-based action research defining the appropriate leadership approach for school administrators. Translational leadership does not advocate a single leadership approach, or standardize lists of effective leadership behavior, but encourages the development of custom-designed leadership emerging from an understanding of the unique needs and contexts of a local school. The use of a comprehensive and continual pattern of organizational assessment allows leaders to fine-tune their approach to match the natural life-cycle of all school cultures in the midst of innovative change.

While translational leadership is not a panacea, findings in this study seem to support these types of leadership constructs that balance standardization with individualized and humanistic approaches to leadership. Likewise, findings in this study indicate that despite the drive for mandated and prescribed standards, school leaders will continue to translate standards into practice, shaping their response to the unique and changing contexts of their schools.

**References**


Thomas L. Alsbury is Professor of Educational Leadership at Seattle Pacific University and serves as Director of the national University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Center for Research on the Superintendency and District Governance. Dr. Alsbury also directs the Innovative Leadership Academy working with district leaders in high minority, high poverty rural North Carolina districts to build capacity and sustainability for student-directed innovations.
The Core of Student and School Success

“Washington Hills Middle School” is among the 284 schools in Washington State designated as Priority, Focus, or Emerging based on the State’s approved ESEA Flexibility Request. The school was identified for additional support and services because of consistent low performance of its students with disabilities (SWD). Washington Hills’ leaders, staff, and other stakeholders are now engaged in turnaround and continuous improvement processes to dramatically increase both educator capacity and student learning, so all students, including SWD, achieve to high and rigorous standards. The school is not alone in its challenge. Rather, Washington Hills typifies the many schools across our state that have yet to meet the ideal of ensuring equality of outcome for all students.

Notably, the performance of its “all students” group on state assessments masked the performance of Washington Hills’ SWD subgroup. As a result, the school was not in a “step of improvement” based on No Child Left Behind. However, the 48% achievement gap between “all students” and SWD on state assessments reveals a significant opportunity gap at Washington Hills.

Reflective Process Surfaces Disparities

Findings from an in-depth Needs Assessment and stakeholder examination of relevant data surface stark contrasts between opportunities for Washington Hills’ SWD and their general education peers to engage in rigorous curriculum and differentiated Tier I/Core Instruction aligned to Washington State and Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Factors contributing to opportunity and achievement gaps animate in multiple ways:

• General education and special education teachers report they rarely engage in common learning around standards-based, differentiated instruction, interventions, and assessments.
• When surveyed, more than 80% reported, “I/our staff do not regularly engage in professional development focused on delivering differentiated Tier I/Core instruction and interventions to all students, including students with disabilities, English Learners, and low-achieving students.”
• Schedules for 2011-12 show no regularly calendared opportunities for teachers to collaboratively examine student work.
• Pacing guides are not aligned with Washington State and Common Core State Standards, and less than 20% of teachers agreed, “I implement the standards in my classroom.”
• Perhaps most importantly, the majority of SWD do not have access to challenging curriculum aligned to rigorous standards. Rather, in 2011-12, 82% of these students spent less than 20% of their school day in general education classes for Reading, Math, Science, and History.

School Plan Focuses on Core Principles for School and Student Success

The Washington Hills’ team considered recommendations from the Needs Assessment, other locally developed data, and practices identified through research (e.g., “Application to Students with Disabilities” [Common Core State Standards, n.d.]) when crafting its Student and School Success Action Plan. Team members first set ambitious and achievable goals for all students, including SWD. They next identified changes in leader and teacher practices required to realize those goals. Finally, team members crafted research-based strategies articulating the specific actions and approaches they will implement to increase educator capacity and significantly improve learning for all students, including their SWD. A summary of proposed actions follows:

• Increase collaboration time for teachers to design supports and instruction to meet the unique needs of their SWD and enable their access to the general education curriculum and Tier I/Core Instruction.
• Provide technical assistance to support general education and special...
education teachers in unpacking Washington State and Common Core State Standards for SWD and incorporating them into Individualized Education Programs.

- Build general education and special education teacher and para-educator capacity to deliver high-quality, differentiated instruction, interventions, and supports aligned with rigorous standards.
- Revise practices and procedures for scheduling SWD to ensure they have access to high-quality Tier I/Core Instruction aligned to standards.

Dedicated resources from the Division of Student and School Success (Division) in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will support stakeholders to address root causes of opportunity gaps and ensure access to high-quality Tier I/Core instruction and rigorous standards for all students, including SWD.

Student and School Success Division Leads the Way

Washington Hills’ journey mirrors that of Priority, Focus, and Emerging Schools across the state. To engage principals, staff, community, and district officials in transforming the school and substantially increasing student outcomes, leaders from the Division created a comprehensive turnaround/improvement process supported by dedicated resources. The Division collaborated with other divisions across OSPI to ensure this process addresses system-wide initiatives (e.g., Common Core State Standards [CCSS], Teacher and Principal Evaluation Project [TPEP]). Division leaders recognize the significant content and system shifts required to implement CCSS and TPEP. These will impact how districts and schools think about supporting educators’ professional learning and improving their instructional and leadership practices and will influence how Priority, Focus, and Emerging Schools approach their turnaround/improvement process.

The process is anchored in eight Student and School Success Principles. These include turnaround principles from federal guidance for ESEA Requests and an additional principle specifically addressing culturally competent practices. Together, these principles provide a roadmap to dramatically change performance. Principles include:

1. provide strong leadership;
2. ensure teachers are effective and able to improve instruction;
3. increase learning time;
4. strengthen the school’s instructional program;
5. use data to inform instruction;
6. establish a safe and supportive school environment;
7. engage families and community; and
8. build and sustain equitable and culturally competent systems and practices for all students.

Principles are numbered to support teams in their dialogues. However, there is no hierarchy among the principles, that is, each must be fully and effectively implemented in order to turn around persistent low performance and transform into a high-performing school.

Reflective Process Ensures Laser-Like Focus on Principles

Division leaders developed the multi-stage improvement process described below. Each stage engages stakeholders in examining current realities and identifying changes in educator practice essential to significantly improve student learning, eliminate opportunity gaps, and turn around consistent low performance. A sample of defined improvement stages follows:

- Develop an Initial Action Plan as basis for ongoing efforts. The plan identifies several high-leverage actions that will be implemented immediately and clarifies expected outcomes for each action, that is, the changes in educator behaviors and student outcomes that should result.
- Engage in an Internal/External Needs Assessment anchored in the eight principles.
- Craft a Student and School Success Action Plan explicated strategies aligned with the eight principles, including expected outcomes (i.e., changes in educator capacity and student learning); professional development; data utilized to monitor progress; and resources to support strategies. The plan also incorporates findings and recommendations from the Needs Assessment, other locally developed data, and research.
- Implement the plan, using benchmark planning processes and interim goals to monitor progress and adjust actions.

Each stage also requires leaders and teams to engage in a laser-like examination of several key initiatives, including implementation of Washington State and Common Core State Standards and a multi-tiered instructional framework that supports all students, including SWD, to meet those standards.

Dedicated Resources Support Principal, Teacher, and Student Growth

The Division identified multiple resources to support leaders and teams in Priority, Focus, and Emerging Schools to engage in improvement processes, implement their plans, and assess progress toward expected outcomes. The following list shows resources allocated by the Division to support staff and students:

- Differentiated leadership coaching, technical assistance, and support (Priority – 50 days/year; Focus – 20 days/year; Emerging – blended learning platform);
- Needs Assessment (Priority and Focus – externally facilitated; Emerging – internally facilitated);
- Data packages, including disaggregated student achievement data for SWD and English Learners;
- Access to OSPI and Educational Service District professional development and services; and
- Minimal funding to support engagement in professional development and services.

Additionally, districts must set aside up to 20% of their Title I, Part A funds to support Priority, Focus, and Emerging Schools to implement their plan.

Courageous Leadership and Transformational Teaching Drive Turnaround Efforts

The Division serves a significant role in building educator capacity and ensuring equality of outcome for all students across Washington State. However, effective implementation of system-wide initiatives—such as transitioning to CCSS—demands coherence across the system, from the state to individual districts and their schools. Dramatic turnaround necessitates thoughtful examination of current realities, leader-
ship and instructional practices, and beliefs about students and learning. It requires careful school-wide planning that addresses disparities and opportunity gaps and articulates expected changes in educator capacity essential for realizing significant growth in student learning. Finally, equality of outcome challenges all stakeholders to boldly act on behalf of all students. Only when we collaborate around the core principles of student and school success can we ensure that each student in our state will achieve to the robust and relevant standards articulated in the Common Core.

**Reference**


Susan Cohn, Ed.D., serves as a School Improvement Specialist for OSPI’s Division of Student and School Success. A former high school principal, Cohn has consulted with OSPI since 2001. Recent assignments focused on strategic planning and facilitating activities related to serving the 284 schools identified through Washington’s ESEA Flexibility Request.

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Regional Support for Implementing the Common Core

On a beautiful sunny day in mid-August, a group of educators assembled at the Puget Sound Educational Service District in Renton. As part of their summer professional learning, the group comprised of teachers, principals and higher education faculty spent the day learning about a new initiative coming their way: the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts.

Most participants indicated that this would be their first real look at the standards. At the end of a very full day of learning, they were asked to write their initial thoughts about CCSS.

What were the words most commonly used in their responses?

- Excited
- Overwhelmed
- Pleased
- Encouraged

And, specifically about the standards:

- Needed
- Overdue
- Helpful

And, from one participant, "I'm a fan."

The positive reaction to this overview made for an upbeat end to the day. However, many days of learning and support over the next several years will be needed to ensure the successful transition to the standards in order to reach the ultimate goal of the CCSS: ensuring all students leave their K-12 education college and career ready.

As our state’s lead agency for CCSS, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction understands the need for a comprehensive plan, and captured the essential elements of our state’s roll out in a four-phase implementation timeline: exploration, awareness, capacity-building and statewide application/assessment.

The Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD), along with the other eight ESDs across the state, are partnering with OSPI and other organizations to support that timeline. In 2011-12, the ESDs helped to create and deliver overview trainings for English language arts and mathematics in order to build awareness across the state. PSESD organized sessions on a “train-the-trainer” model. Teams were encouraged to participate and then take the information back to a wider audience in their districts. To support this effort, PSESD posted all materials on an electronic wiki space so that participants could easily access them later. Additionally, participants were encouraged to post materials they created in order to support the work of others.

State-funded Regional Math Coordinators from each ESD collaboratively developed the mathematics trainings for various audiences. Two-day content facilitator trainings for those who would provide training for teachers included time to decode the standards, deepen understanding of mathematics, and connect the standards to instructional materials. A modified version of this training was specifically geared for those who would train district administrators. This session included a review of the content facilitator training as well as information on how administrators can support the rollout effort in their contexts. The third training, a one-day overview, was open to
anyone interested in learning more about the CCSS in mathematics.

Awareness sessions for English language arts followed suit. ESD staff members who serve on the statewide Literacy Leadership Cadre developed a two-day overview training geared for district leaders who would train other staff in their districts. In the Puget Sound region, this overview session was repeated in different locations in order to provide access. A modified one-day overview was offered as well. Audiences comprised of central office leaders, teacher leaders and faculty from higher education attended.

The content of the English language arts sessions was organized in discreet, related chunks to accommodate the possible time constraints back in districts. The session began with a brief history and high-level overview of the standards, as well as information on the six shifts brought by the Common Core. Next, participants learned how to navigate the standards document itself including the appendices. Subsequent sections of the training included information about vertical articulation and text complexity. In every case, participants were allowed time to process the new information through individual, partner, small group or large group activities.

As the calendar turns to a new school year, our attention shifts to what is needed next in the CCSS rollout and how PSESD can support that work.

PSESD will continue to partner with educators across the state to build awareness and capacity to implement CCSS in English language arts and mathematics. Additionally, PSESD’s regional science coordinator is deeply involved in the development of the Next Generation Science Standards, and PSESD will be poised to partner with OSPI and other organizations for that rollout.

What additional supports are needed? The educators who first learned about CCSS on that bright day in August told us what they needed in order to effectively make the transition to the Common Core. Their responses pointed to four types of supports and resources:

- **Time** to collaborate with their colleagues in professional learning communities in order to examine current practices and then grapple together about how to effectively implement CCSS across grade levels and subject areas.
- **Training** to deepen their understanding about practices that support all students meeting these new rigorous standards, including examples and models of strategies that are effective.
- **Curriculum** that reflects the shifts needed to implement CCSS fully and to support the increased rigor that will ensure that all kids are college and career ready.
- **Sample assessments** to inform ongoing, formative assessments in the classroom as well as more information about the summative assessments that will measure students’ progress toward meeting CCSS.

The training participant who is a “fan” of the CCSS summed up the work ahead beautifully. He wrote, “The expectations are high, and I hope we can maintain the vision throughout implementation. I’m simultaneously humbled and encouraged by what it asks us to focus on in the classroom.” We at PSESD are humbled and encouraged as well. Our work is guided by our Agency End: Success for each child and eliminate the opportunity gap. Supporting the implementation of the Common Core State Standards is an important strategy toward that goal.

Terese Emry, Ed.D., serves as Executive Director for K-12 Services at Puget Sound ESD. Prior to her work at the ESD, she directed teacher leadership initiatives at the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession and coordinated national board certification programs at OSPI. Terese is a National Board Certified Teacher who earned certification when she was a teacher in the Sumner School District.
How Will State Assessments Change, Given Common Core State Standards?

The purpose of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is to guide instruction on content needed to prepare students for college or careers. Grade level content standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics are to be mastered to ensure students exit high school ready for the college or career of their choice. To know if students are making the progress needed to master these standards, state assessments will be changing as well. Just as state assessments help measure our current content standards in Reading, Writing, Mathematics and Science, revised assessments will be needed to measure students’, schools’, districts and the state’s progress toward mastery of the CCSS.

Without state assessments we would not have a systematic way of documenting success and identifying gaps. State assessments are used for accountability, comparing schools and districts to each other and to a given expectation in terms of the percent of students passing the test. State assessments are also used in Washington as graduation exit exams. Students in the class of 2013 and 2014 must pass exams in Reading, Writing, Math and Science. Students in the Class of 2015 must also pass an exam in Biology.

From a variety of perspectives, the word to be highlighted in CCSS is ‘Common’. By virtue of nearly all states (except Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, Minnesota and Virginia) adopting the same standards:

- students should be able to move from one state to the next and be ensured a similar curriculum and similar expectations (at least in ELA and Math), more rigorous tests measuring student progress toward “college and career readiness”;
- teacher training programs will be able to train teachers for school districts across the nation; and,
- given a common assessment of these common content standards, schools, districts and even states will be able to be compared on their success of preparing college and career ready graduates.

Because each state has, heretofore, had their own content standards, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 left each state to determine which assessments it would purchase or develop for federal accountability. States have long complained that comparing performance on state tests was not reasonable given different content standards, test designs, and test rigor across states.

Developing state assessments for grades 3-8 and high school (as required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) is an expensive endeavor. Washington spends about $30 per test, with most students taking three tests a year (i.e., reading, math, and science or writing). With the adoption of CCSS sweeping the country, states saw an opportunity for economies of scale for designing new tests of the new standards. Two years ago (October, 2010) the federal Department of Education granted two multi-state consortia for the design and development of CCSS assessments. One of the consortia, the one Washington belongs to, is called Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and the other is called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Both consortia were granted money for four years to do the following:

- Develop more rigorous tests measuring student progress toward “college and career readiness”
- Have common, comparable scores across member states, and across consortia
- Provide achievement and growth information to help make better educational decisions and professional development opportunities
- Assess all students, except those with “significant cognitive disabilities”
- Administer online, with timely results
- Use multiple measures
- Be operational in 2014-15 school year
Smarter Balanced has 25 states participating, PARCC has 22 states and the District of Columbia. A few states are not part of either consortium (and will be developing their own assessments of the CCSS) and a few others are part of both consortia. Participation in a consortium does not necessarily mean that a state must adopt that consortium’s tests when all is said and done, but the likelihood is great that states will stick with their choice given that they are involved along the way in shaping the tests, operational procedures, reporting, and score interpretation. Because Washington is actively engaged in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, the rest of this article presumes that this test will be the CCSS assessment that the legislature will choose, though the possibility exists that PARCC assessments will be adopted instead.

Smarter Balanced assessment design integrates summative and interim assessments with formative tools that will give teachers what they need to modify instruction. This is what is meant by a balanced assessment system.

Smarter Balanced assessments are being designed to be administered on computers, utilize computer adaptive testing for short answer and multiple choice items, and incorporate longer performance tasks. The **summative assessment** will be administered during the last 12 weeks of the school and these will

- accurately describe both student achievement and growth of student learning as part of program evaluation and school, district, and state accountability systems;
- provide valid, reliable, and fair measures of student progress toward, and attainment of knowledge and skills required to be college and career ready; and
- capitalize on the strengths of computer adaptive testing - efficient and precise measurement across the full range of achievement and quick turnaround of results.

The optional **interim assessments** can be administered at locally determined intervals. These assessments will provide educators with actionable information about student progress throughout the year. Like the summative assessment, the interim assessments will be computer adaptive and include performance tasks. The interim assessments will

- help teachers, students, and parents understand whether students are on track, and identify strengths and limitations in relation to the Common Core State Standards;
- be fully accessible for instruction and professional development (non-secure); and
- support the development of state end-of-course tests.

Formative assessment practices and strategies will be provided through a digital library of professional development materials, resources, and tools aligned to the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced assessment targets. Research-based instructional tools will be available on-demand to help teachers address learning challenges and differentiate instruction. The digital library will include professional development materials related to all components of the assessment system, such as scoring rubrics for performance tasks. Teams of teachers from each state will be involved...
in the development of the digital library. Teachers and other content experts will

- participate in identifying formative assessment practices and curriculum resources to put in Digital Library;
- participate on a committee to complete voluntary alignment review of publishers’ materials to the content specifications and develop a “Consumers Report” to upload to the Digital Library;
- develop 54 (3 ELA and 3 math per grade) formative assessment practices exemplar modules that provide model products for Smarter Balanced teachers (housed in Digital Library);
- adapt existing CCSS curriculum projects to align with the Smarter Balanced content specifications (and uploaded to the Digital Library).

What will the new assessments mean for Washington?

Washington will likely adopt the new Smarter Balanced assessments in ELA and Mathematics as accountability tests in Grades 3-8 and 11. The 11th grade Smarter Balanced assessment will be a significant change because, up to now, Washington has used tests in Grade 10 for accountability. Given that the assessments will be designed to assess college and career readiness, rather than minimum high school competency, lower pass rates are anticipated. In a not yet published survey of states by the Center on Education Policy (CEP), most states indicated they anticipate the new CCSS tests to be more rigorous than the tests currently used for accountability and exit exams. Michigan, for instance, recently revised their cut scores to be more aligned with college and career readiness, and predicted a resulting pass rate drop from 52% to 28% in their 11th grade math test, with even larger drops in lower grade levels (see Michigan Department of Education article for additional information).

Washington will also need to decide what tests to use for assessment graduation requirements. The 2013 legislature will need to decide if the high school graduation requirement for passing assessments will use the 11th grade Smarter Balanced test. Disadvantages of that plan include limited time for remediation and retakes should students not meet standard, and the higher standard for passing the test (i.e., college and career ready). Options that can be considered include continuing the current HSPE and EOCs in 10th grade or relying on Smarter Balanced to provide a variation of the 11th grade summative test that can be taken in 10th grade. Either option would allow time for remediation should the student not meet standard in 10th grade, and provide sufficient time for retakes and/or use of alternatives.

How is Washington making the transition to CCSS assessment?

Schools and school districts that have participated in online testing on our current state assessments in Grades 3-8 have a head start on the transition to CCSS assessments. In addition, the state is involving as many teachers as possible in Smarter Balanced development activities, including providing feedback on item specifications, item writing and review, developing accommodations, etc. Schools and districts will be invited to participate in a limited pilot in 2012-13 and extensive field testing in 2013-14. Details about those opportunities are not yet available, but are anticipated by the end of 2012.

For more information on Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, see SmarterBalanced.org, or contact Washington’s Smarter Balanced state lead, robin.munson@k12.wa.us.

Robin Munson, Ph.D., is the Assistant Superintendent for Assessment and Student Information at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and serves as Washington’s K-12 State Lead for the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Prior to joining OSPI in 2006, Robin led the Research and Evaluation department for Tacoma Public Schools.
Research has shown that growing up in poverty can lead to negative health, social, and economic consequences for children that often continue into adulthood. Compared with other children, those below the poverty line are less healthy, have lower education achievement, and are more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system.

As of September 2012, the Population Reference Bureau reported that in Washington State, 18% of children under 18 live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level. With that in mind, implementing the Common Core State Standards in isolation from a more comprehensive school improvement approach can have a minimal effect on student achievement. Schools and districts would be well-served to align their efforts to ensure each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged—a whole child approach to learning.

In Washington State, several schools reflect the commitment to putting this whole child approach into practice. This year, at the WSASCD-OSPI-WASA Annual Conference in October, WSASCD will recognize the following schools which have created a school culture with programs, focus, or achievement that exemplify a specific tenet of the ASCD Whole Child Initiative. Also recognized will be the State School of Character Award recipient. In an era of increased accountability and education reform efforts which require a good deal of our time, attention, and resources, we can celebrate these schools of honor, which are reenergizing their efforts at educating the whole child. Click on each school’s name for more information.

**Healthy School Award:** Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a healthy school where students learn about and practice a healthy lifestyle

- **Opportunity Elementary School**, Central Valley School District, Mandi Poindexter, Principal

**Safe School Award:** Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a safe school where students learn in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults

- **Madison Elementary School**, Olympia School District, Gayle Mar-Chun, Principal
- **Minnehaha Elementary School**, Vancouver Public Schools, Kristine Porterfield, Principal

**Student Engagement Award:** Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a school where students are actively engaged in learning and are connected to the school and broader community

- **Vancouver School of Arts and Academics**, Vancouver Public Schools, James O’Banion, Principal

**Supported Students Award:** Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a school where students have access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults

- **Mullenix Ridge Elementary School**, South Kitsap School District, Anita Chandler, Principal
- **McLoughlin Middle School**, Vancouver Public Schools, Jody ViDelco, Principal

**Challenged Students Award:** Recognizing educator(s) who contribute to providing a school where students are challenged academically and are prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment

- **Skyview High School**, Vancouver Public Schools, Kym Tyelyn-Carlson, Principal

**State School of Character:** Recognizes schools that provide a model of comprehensive, quality character education, representing America’s diverse educational system

Sponsored by WSASCD, Whitworth University and Leadership Innovations Team

- **Hidden Creek Elementary School**, South Kitsap School District, Laura Smith, Principal

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*by Kathy Clayton*
Innovation in Education

Educators across Washington are responding to calls for reform in new and innovative ways. Some schools have devised unorthodox class schedules to provide remediation for struggling students, others have deployed state of the art technologies to enhance content delivery and assessment, and still others are renewing their commitment to engaging students in child-centered instructional practices, such as cooperative learning. The next theme of Curriculum in Context is Innovation in Education. What innovations are being used in your school or district? How are you and your colleagues increasing student achievement through new models, practices, and philosophies? What innovations are you using to transcend the status quo?

These are some of the questions under consideration in the next issue of Curriculum in Context.

The editorial staff invites you to submit a manuscript on this topic by February 15th to David Denton (dentod@spu.edu). Final manuscripts are between 850-2500 words.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE
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