



May 2013

Governance Brief

Governing to the Core:
Professional Development for Common Core

Issue 4

Why is teacher professional development for Common Core a board issue?

Implementing Common Core State Standards is a significant change. It will require board leadership, professional development, new instructional and learning materials, and support for the change over several years. There is no single right way to implement Common Core, but it's clear that one of the most important aspects of the implementation is providing for the professional development of teachers. Planning for that professional development needs to be integrated into a district's change process, including establishing appropriate goals, aligning budgets and resources, establishing a culture of support for the change, having clear expectations for performance, and engaging the community in the change effort.

The focus of staff development

As districts begin to implement Common Core, teachers are being challenged to change three things simultaneously: the content they teach, the instructional strategies for teaching the new content, and the assessments to inform both. These learning tasks for teachers are extensive and complex. Teachers need time to deepen their understanding of subject-matter content required by Common Core and of what appropriate grade-level rigor looks like for those standards. Teachers need time to practice new instructional pedagogy necessary to teach the new content. They need time to learn how to best assess student mastery of the new standards.

Direction—does the board have clear teacher professional development goals to support Common Core?

Every spring, school districts and county offices of education develop their budgets for the next fiscal year. In order to build

What would surgeons do?

A hospital announces that in 12 months they will implement new surgical techniques for heart operations, new surgical tools for use by doctors, and new criteria for evaluating the success of surgeries *all at the same time*. Important notes: 1) There are very few surgeons with experience at successfully using the new tools and techniques to mentor other surgeons. 2) There is no money available to train surgeons. 3) Surgeries will continue to be performed daily. Doctor's might fairly ask: 'You want to change *all* of this? At the *same time*?'

your local capacity to support implementation, it's critical for the board and the superintendent to develop a cohesive and integrated set of goals that clarify the expectations for implementation of Common Core. The goals are critical, because boards and superintendents cannot align allocation of resources without a clear understanding of expectations.

Pathways for Professional Development

Professional development can take many forms. There are a variety of paths the district might consider. In an Education Week commentary, "Which Path for the Common Core?" [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/CBPP_Sequester_Impact_States.pdf#page=5] published March 22, 2013, Ken Kay and Bob Lenz highlight three features of promising professional development efforts. The first involves aligning the Common Core initiative to 21st century skills and learning outcomes. The second focuses on using professional development to advance the practice of project-based learning because the emphasis on problem solving and communication competencies is consistent with the Common Core. The third feature targets changing assessment strategies, including the use of rubrics and

performance task lists, and the development of portfolios. At the high school level, these would focus on work that demonstrates college and career readiness.

Choosing a pathway for professional development will depend on an analysis of student needs, the skills and interests of teachers, prior professional development efforts, the resources available to support changes in professional development activity, and the training and expertise of those who lead professional development work. Good decision making in this matter is always a balance between what research reveals about best practices in professional development and the best practices of other school communities that show promise in the local context.

The board's role is to ensure that staff recommendations are 1) based on appropriate analysis of district strengths and needs; 2) supported by professional development standards; and if possible, 3) are an extension of the effective practices already in place.

Structure—have we aligned our resources to support Common Core professional development?

Addressing the learning needs of teachers will require a significant investment by districts. Boards are responsible for *allocating and aligning resources* to meet student learning needs. Boards will need to work creatively with superintendents to ensure that the human and financial resources necessary to support the goals are dedicated and protected. This may require postponing other goals or eliminating them altogether.

Funds

Boards and superintendents can use categorical flexibility money as well as the general fund to pay for professional staff development. There are four key sources for federal funding for teacher professional development, but these are decreasing due to sequestration. A recent report from the National Education Association, [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/CBPP_Sequester_Impact_States.pdf#page=5] based on analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, concludes that sequestration cuts will mean at least a 5.1 percent reduction in funding levels for the remainder through Sept. 30, 2013:

5.1% federal sequestration costs in California

ESEA* Title I	\$85,113,000
ESEA Title IIA	\$13,783,000
ESEA Title III	\$8,303,000
IDEA** Part B	\$62,630,000

* Elementary and Secondary Education Act

** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Standards for professional development

Despite the passage of Proposition 30 in November 2012, districts across the state are still facing very constrained budgets. Boards will want to ensure that professional development funds are well spent. There are a variety of sources that have studied the topic and there is wide consensus that high-quality teacher professional development comprises at least five key elements:

- It creates collaborative learning communities of teachers.
- It focuses on classroom practice.
- It embeds the study of student work and student data in teacher learning.
- It relies on skilled leadership to guide teachers.
- It requires resources to support the work of teachers.

Time

While it's true that finances seem to be the scarcest resource these days, time is also a significant challenge. There are very few professional development days each year—often between three and eight days, with some of this time dedicated to needs unrelated to Common Core. K-12 schools are expected to begin to teach to the Common Core in fiscal year 2014-15, with the first Common Core assessments from the Standards Based Assessment Consortium (SBAC) to be used in the spring of 2015. If districts experience any financial relief in the form of new revenue, boards may want to reflect on the benefit of bringing back instructional days for students versus bringing back professional development for teachers. Time is not only a challenge for teachers who want professional development but also a constraint for those who lead these efforts. Currently, there are few “experts.” Common Core is relatively new, so there is not a large pool of experienced practitioners who can effectively guide teacher training.

Key points

- The learning challenges for teachers are complex.
- Funding is still problematic.
- Time is limited.
- There are few experts to guide professional development.

Demonstrating support—how will staff know the board supports this change?

Boards should not underestimate the importance of supporting the Common Core initiative. After allocating resources, “support” in this sense means that board members demonstrate interest in the professional development needs and experiences of the staff. Teachers need encouragement and the assurance that their professional

development work is a critical part of the plan for student success. Teachers need to know that board members understand the learning demands of teachers and appreciate the efforts of teachers. This can be as simple as attending professional staff development on Common Core issues, and asking teachers and principals about professional staff development efforts and what they're learning. The governance team may wish to have Common Core professional development reports on the board's agenda; that would demonstrate the issue's importance by allocating time at the board meeting, because how the board spends its time is an expression of what's important.

Accountability—how will we know the professional development goals were achieved?

Accountability measures for such professional development might be difficult for several reasons. Development of the pedagogy and content demanded by Common Core will take time, and boards need to recognize that teachers—like students—can only be taught at the speed of learning. Secondly, the depth and scope of the learning that will be needed is still unfolding. We don't really know yet exactly how much professional development will be necessary. The answer to that question may be different for districts based on the experience of the teachers, the effectiveness of the leadership, the availability of resources and funding, and the culture in the district for embracing the change.

These unknowns notwithstanding, boards need clarity—to the extent that's possible—regarding how they will determine the success of professional development efforts. Expectations for outcomes need to be aligned to the resources that support the effort. Unrealistic expectations can damage morale. Outcome measurements need to be “stretch goals”—*challenging but achievable*.

Community leadership—what should we tell the community about Common Core and when should we tell them?

School boards will want to work with superintendents to determine the timing of communication with the larger community regarding the Common Core initiative. Parents and community members will be able to better support Common Core when they have a firm understanding of the changes they can expect, how district and state assessments will be impacted, and the resources and support needed for the best possible implementation.

The messaging from the board will be important because local residents might have already heard a great deal about Common Core. While there is much support for Common Core from many sectors, that support is not

universal. A December 2012 article from watchdogwire.com quoted Sandra Stotsky, professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas and former senior associate commissioner at the Massachusetts Department of Education: “Common Core's standards not only present a serious threat to state and local education authority, but also put academic quality at risk. Pushing fatally flawed education standards into America's schools is not the way to improve education for America's students.” This spring, a Michigan legislative committee was reportedly considering a bill that would remove the state's schools from the Common Core initiative.

Boards will want to be intentional and explicit about the rationale the district will use to defend the implementation of Common Core. Parents and community members need confidence that the district plan for improving student learning has a rational basis and that the resources dedicated to teacher professional development are a smart investment as part of the overall strategy for successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the district's long-range vision for student achievement.

Governing conversations for spring 2013

- **Direction:** Does the board have clear teacher professional development goals to support Common Core?
- **Structure:** Have we aligned our resources to support Common Core professional development?
- **Demonstrating support:** How will staff know the board supports this change?
- **Accountability:** How will we know the professional development goals were achieved?
- **Community leadership:** What should we tell the community about Common Core and when should we tell them?

Current resources in teacher professional development

Teacher Professional Development for Common Core Standards Transition; Hanover Research, July 2012. This 38-page report published in July 2012 provides a review of the available literature on the skills and abilities teachers must acquire in order to implement the new standards, as well as four profiles of professional development services offered to teachers working toward implementation of the Common Core.

<http://www.hanoverresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Hanover-Research-Teacher-Professional-Development-for-Common-Core-Standards-Transition.pdf>

National Staff Development Council Staff Development Standards; Learning Forward. Formerly the National Staff Development Council, Learning Forward has developed 12 standards for high-quality teacher professional development.

www.naepdc.org/Quality%20Framework/NSDC%20Standards.doc

CCSS Professional Learning Modules for Educators; the California Department of Education. CDE posted two new modules to this online repository in January 2013: *CCSS Mathematics: K-12 Standards for Mathematical Practice*, and *English Language Arts: Informational Text—Reading*. This brings the total number of modules available to five, with seven more under development.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/ccssplm.asp>

Content Knowledge—Online Edition: Billed as “a compendium of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 education,” this site maintained by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning includes Common Core in its database of standards, as well as links to lesson plans for math, economics, science, social studies, civics, foreign languages, technology and more.

<http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/index.asp#>

Learnzillion.com—LearnZillion is a learning platform that combines video lessons, assessments, and progress reporting. Each lesson highlights a Common Core standard, starting with math in grades 3-9. After recruiting 123 teachers from 29 states, it now has over 2,000 lessons that have been viewed over 1 million times.

<http://learnzillion.com>

For your communities

The K-8 Common Core Standards Parent Handbooks have been translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese (simplified and traditional).

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/ccsesahndbktrans.asp>

Coming up

Governing to Core issue 5—The Core and Technology

Look for an entire Common Core strand at CSBA’s Annual Education Conference and Trade Show in San Diego Dec. 5-7, 2013

Find more CSBA Governance Briefs at <http://www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources/GovernanceBriefs.aspx>