By now, most California K-12 boards of education know that the California State Board of Education officially adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in August, 2010. Most are probably also aware that the timeline for implementing the Common Core is aggressive, with all schools in California expected to implement the English-language arts and mathematics standards in the 2014-15 school year, and to assess students with the Common Core-aligned assessments being developed by Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The governance decisions for local boards related to the Common Core are summarized in the first edition of Governing to the Core which is available for download on CSBA's website. This governance brief takes a deeper look at the board role in setting direction for the CCSS by providing elected board members with a broader and deeper vision of the Common Core.

The advent of the Common Core highlights a constant challenge to boards. Because boards are not expected to be professional educators, it can be challenging to determine how much board members need to understand about an initiative in order to approve and support the recommendations of staff. Board members may not have an understanding equal to that of professional staff, but they need to know enough to make informed decisions. Setting direction in the district for implementing the Common Core is a perfect example of this dilemma.

What's the big deal about the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core address several persistent challenges in K-12 education: 1) a persistent disparity between the performance of U.S. students and their counterparts in top-performing countries; 2) the remediation rate for first-year college students; 3) feedback from the workforce on student preparation for the workplace, and 4) the disparity in learning expectations across the states.

The Common Core are:

- Internationally benchmarked to the top-performing nations and grounded in research and evidence

- Aligned with college readiness expectations.

- Aligned with Career and Technical Education standards

- Being implemented in 45 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Common Core, if implemented with fidelity, have the potential to dramatically improve K-12 education. For more information, board members may wish to watch a short video commissioned by the Hunt Institute and the Council of Chief State School Officers here.

Does adopting the Common Core mean just replacing all the old standards with the new ones?

No. The change does not mean that old standards will go away and new ones will be put in place, and then teaching and learning will continue as they have in the past. The Common Core for English-language arts and mathematics are not a list of discrete knowledge or skills that can be taught in isolation one at a time. You won't see a standard written on a chalkboard and a lesson designed to teach that one standard.

Will learning look different in the classroom with the Common Core?

Yes. In a recent interview John Fensterwald, editor of EdSource Today, provided a simple example explaining the nature of the change in mathematics as we transition to the Common Core. He noted that students will study fractions and proportions in earlier grades for longer periods of time so that they achieve a deeper conceptual

understanding of mathematics. "Students will be asked to explain their knowledge ... in multiple ways in word problems and in modeling and in timelines, and in feedback to their teachers and their peers to show they really understand the concepts." The full interview is available at www.californiareport.org/archive/R201208171630/a.

The standards are written for students to demonstrate higher levels of understanding. For example, a lesson introducing the concepts related to time and distance in the middle grades might currently look like this:

> **John can run 40 meters in 40 seconds. How fast can John run 80 meters?**
>
> The students might be shown an equation and asked to apply it. In this case:
>
> Rate x Time = Distance. The focus is on applying a mathematical procedure.
>
> Under the Common Core, the same lesson might be introduced like this:
>
> **John can run 40 meters in 40 seconds.**

Note that there is no answer to be calculated. The teacher might spend a significant amount of time—possibly an entire class period—determining the extent to which students can understand the relationship between distance and time. The focus of the lesson is on a conceptual understanding of the mathematical principles involved.

This kind of teaching will require a broader understanding of mathematical concepts and changes in instructional practice in the classroom, which will mean shifting the focus of professional development for mathematics teachers.

Are the Common Core a big change or a little change?

In School Leadership That Works (2005), Robert Marzano and other researchers have published the results of their investigation on effective practices of school leaders. Within that research, the authors distinguish between two kinds of change: first order and second order change. Second order change is deep change; it involves dramatic departures from the expected, both in defining a given problem and in finding a solution. It moves the system in a new direction.

Implementing the Common Core is not a simple change. It is not merely a task of having schools and districts

replace the old standards with the new standards, and then teaching and testing will go on as before. The Common Core mean much more than that because the depth of what students will be expected to learn is changing significantly. The content standards call for a deeper conceptual understanding of language arts and mathematics. The content knowledge and pedagogical practice of teachers will have to change to accommodate student needs for this deeper kind of learning. The testing that is currently being designed to assess student ability to meet these standards will be wholly different: technology-based, adaptive and with multiple types of responses, including student-constructed responses.

Reaction to change

Board members should understand that the magnitude of a change is defined by the implications it has for the people expected to implement it or those who will be impacted by it. Change, even good change, can be difficult. It pushes us out of the comfort of our routines. Marzano and Waters (2006) also found that when schools and districts experience second order change—big change—it affects how people perceive how well leadership skills are exercised. They identified four specific leadership skills, listed below in rank order, which stakeholders might perceive as less effective. In other words, if these four skills were satisfactory in the past, they might be perceived less effective during times of change even if the practice of these skills has remained consistent.

1. **Culture** includes developing a shared vision of what teaching and learning could look like, and building cohesion, collaboration and a common sense of purpose among all staff.

2. **Communication** includes creating effective two-way communication with all stakeholders.

3. **Order** refers to how leadership establishes policies, practices and routines that define the daily operation of the school or district. Leadership can mitigate the feelings that change is leading to chaos.

4. **Input** includes opportunities for appropriate teacher and staff input on the decisions related to the change, and possibly including appropriate staff in various levels of decision making.

Certainly, for some students, parents and staff, the Common Core will constitute a big change. This has implications for how the board supports the superintendent. If the district is in the midst of second level change, then the district's leadership will need the board's strong and unified support to carry out the goals. This includes being proactive in planning for how various stakeholders are likely to respond to implementation of the Common Core. Given the attributes of leadership that can be negatively

perceived during second order change, the board, superintendent, and senior staff may wish to focus on a few key strategies to smooth the way forward.

1. **Summon the culture.** Articulate the vision for the Common Core. Create a clear and compelling vision for why the Common Core matters and where it will lead the district. Leadership can provide assurance that the district is not 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

2. **Over-communicate.** Create regular two-way communication specifically about the Common Core implementation, making sure that information is easily accessible for staff, parents and students, and making leadership available to staff regarding the Common Core implementation. Communication must also be sustained throughout the implementation. A single explanation—whether by letter, presentation, or word-of-mouth—will not be sufficient. It will be important to remind stakeholders regularly of 1) the reason for the change, 2) the key aspects of the change, and the 3) timeline for the change. This will be particularly important since the details are a little fluid and could possibly change throughout implementation.

3. **Preserve order.** Clarify what is not changing. Be sure to articulate which structures, rules and procedures are not affected by the Common Core implementation. These routines create and maintain order for the staff, and it may help them to perceive the change as less chaotic if they understand that some of the order that has already been established will endure.

4. **Invite and involve.** Create opportunities to actively engage teachers, other staff, parents and students in the implementation of the Common Core.

Direction from vision

Districts cannot simply present this as a state-mandated change, and setting direction is not just about selecting goals; it's bigger than that. Research on effective governance highlights the importance of the board's role in creating a sense of urgency for change. The board can play a key role in this effort, working with the superintendent to create a strong and compelling vision for the implementation of the Common Core standards.

The Common Core can take us where we want to go. Based on analysis of the best content standards by subject matter experts, and compared to the best practices in curriculum and instruction in the top-performing countries, the adoption of the Common Core can create opportunities to engage students in deeper levels of learning that are more rigorous and exciting, produce graduates ready to compete at home and abroad, and re-establish California schools as the envy of K-12 education in America.

Governance team conversations

There are important decisions for the governing board to make. The following questions should serve as a guide to district and county governance teams.

1. Do we need to establish the Common Core as a district priority?

2. How does this affect other long-term priorities? Will other priorities need to be postponed or dropped to support the Common Core implementation?

3. What is our vision for the Common Core?

4. How can we build excitement and support for the Common Core with staff, students, parents and community members and involve them appropriately?

5. What timeline will the district establish for implementing the Common Core?

6. What are the specific short-term goals and measurable outcomes we will monitor for implementing the Common Core?

7. How do we communicate this in a way that anticipates and addresses possible anxiety or concerns of stakeholders?

Coming up

Right now	Share your Common Core board work on CSBA's LinkedIn group
Fall 2012 *Date TBA*	CSBA / CDE webinar: *Your Board and the Common Core*
Nov 2012	Look for these Common Core workshops at CSBA's Annual Education Conference in San Francisco » Common Core Implementation: *Effective Resource Coordination and Optimization* » Common Core State Standards: *Professional Learning and Instructional Resources* » Preparing Academic English Learners for the Common Core State Standards: *Targeting Student Language Needs*