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FEATURE ARTICLE

Implementing the Common Core Standards Collaborative

By Beth Ratway, Senior Consultant, American Institutes for Research

The Common Core State Standards have been developed and adopted. It is now time to look at implementation. How are states planning to implement the Common Core State Standards? Forty-three states have formally adopted the Common Core State Standards in ELA and mathematics as their own. These states are now in the process of trying to build communication and implementation plans that will help their individual school districts understand how they can plan on phasing in the standards before the 2014–15 assessments come to fruition. A survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy (Kober & Stark Rentner, 2011) points out that the states plan to revise curriculum, professional development, and evaluation systems based on the Common Core State Standards. The states will need to plan through these revisions for the work to impact student learning. This article shares questions, tools, and resources to help states strategically plan for revisions and implementation. Two critical questions to begin planning for implementation are as follows: What does high-quality implementation of the standards look like? How can the states work together to implement the standards while remaining connected to their own individual contexts?

What Does High-Quality Implementation Look Like?

The survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy points out that many states are currently building implementation plans by focusing on the areas of curriculum, professional development, and assessment systems (Kober & Stark Rentner, 2011). Many states have begun adopting and aligning the Common Core State Standards for ELA and mathematics. Unfortunately, adoption and alignment do not translate into high-quality implementation. There is no existing common way for the states to identify how to move forward with implementation.

One possible tool to help states navigate the implementation of the Common Core State Standards is an innovation configuration map. Such maps—introduced by Hord, Hirsch, and Roy (2005)—can help create common language and assist the states in moving toward a more systemic approach to implementing the Common Core State Standards. An innovation configuration map describes what best practice looks like in the areas of curriculum, instruction, professional development, assessment, alignment, and policy. The innovation configuration map can enhance an SEA's ability to assess the improvement needs of school districts and schools and develop solutions to address those needs. In addition, SEAs can use this tool to build and sustain continuous systemic supports for standards implementation. It also allows SEAs and regional service agencies to better assist local education agencies (LEAs) with developing and assessing clear standards implementation goals that focus on aligning assessments and developing instructional materials. SEAs need a tool that can help them

identify the research-based best practices for standards implementation. An [innovation configuration map](#), developed by Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin in collaboration with Great Lakes East and Great Lakes West, can help SEAs create research-based implementation plans.

ISBE, in collaboration with Great Lakes West, has turned the innovation configuration map into an online planning tool for school districts to use to thoughtfully plan through local implementation. The Midwest Common Core Consortia uses the innovation configuration map to guide conversations to help identify areas where the states can work together. Each state has also used the innovation configuration map to guide individual work.

How Can States Work Together?

Many states are currently addressing the adoption and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. SEAs from different states are often responsible for conducting similar work related to common issues. However, each state often accomplishes this work on its own, without the benefit of shared knowledge and experience from its neighbors. In the past, Great Lakes West and Great Lakes East have hosted and facilitated meetings and conferences to help states share knowledge and ideas, but these efforts have not been sustained beyond a single event or a brief series of events.

In January 2011, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin decided it would be beneficial to continue regular, ongoing work around implementation of the Common Core State Standards. These states formed the Midwest Common Core Consortia, with support from Great Lakes West and Great Lakes East. The Midwest Common Core Consortia creates an avenue for the five states to work together to share resources, knowledge, and promising practices to improve implementation of the Common Core State Standards across the region. The work of the consortia is focused on the areas of leadership, communication, alignment, teaching, and learning. Work groups in each area are facilitated by Great Lakes West and Great Lakes East staff to discuss progress toward implementation, issues and possible solutions, and share resources.

The consortia has seen early impact with the development of the [Bridge to College and Career Success](#), which describes the components and essential participants in creating a continuous and comprehensive system that leads to college and career readiness. The consortium has also modified a document created by Great Lakes West and Great Lakes East to “frame the conversation” and created a [planning and communication tool](#) that will facilitate state implementation of the new standards.

Many states are also involved in the Implementing the Common Core Standards Collaborative run by CCSSO. The collaborative brings state teams together to help them think through implementation by helping them revisit their missions and visions for their work. DPI has been involved in this work. They created six guiding principles for teaching and learning that are being placed at the front of every standard document, including the Common Core State Standards for ELA and mathematics. They worked with Great Lakes West to develop research briefs to further define the research, probing questions, and resources for each principle.

Questions to Consider Moving Forward

The movement toward implementation is in full force in states across the nation. It is imperative that states ask questions along the way to ensure implementation is thoughtful, deliberate, systematic, and innovative. The states can use these questions, the blog, the Great Lakes West Common Core State Standards website, and the innovation configuration map to help think through the development of a systemic plan toward implementation. The states do not have to do this work alone. We can use this as an opportunity to work together to collaboratively impact student achievement.

Some questions to consider are as follows:

- Has your department put in place support structures to assist school districts with implementation?
- Has your department developed a plan to collaborate and communicate with stakeholders, including institutions of higher education and the business community?
- Has your department developed tools to help school districts develop curriculum focused on increasing student mastery of the Common Core State Standards?
- Has your department developed a plan to ensure that educators effectively incorporate these standards into daily instruction and practice so that quality, consistency, and the rigor of the curriculum are aligned with those standards?
- Has your department developed a comprehensive and sustained approach to professional development focused on increasing student mastery of the Common Core State Standards?
- Has your department developed tools to help school districts evaluate the level at which students are currently performing relative to the standards?
- Has your department defined what school districts should be doing over the next four years to prepare for the assessments?
- Has your department addressed teacher licensing and evaluation issues with respect to the implementation of the standards?
- Has your department addressed the issues for students with disabilities and ELLs?
- Has your department connected current work and initiatives with the implementation of the standards (e.g., SSOS, Title I, and response to intervention [RTI])?

References

- Hord, S. M., Hirsh, S., & Roy, P. (2005). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice innovation configurations*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.
- Kober, N., & Stark Rentner, D. (2011). *States' progress and challenges in implementing common core standards*. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy.