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of academic content and instruction
in the common-core era

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Arnett Elementary kindergarten pupils play in groups of four during class time. The Kentucky school is using a system of "learning targets" to gauge student progress.

Pat McDonogh for Education Week

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www.edweek.org/go/standards-download

6 Success of Standards Depends On Translation for Classroom

Advocates of the common core worry weak implementation could derail venture

12 Many Teachers Not Ready For the Common Core

To ensure that students master the new standards, educators will have to change the way they teach

18 Across the Subjects, Reading on Agenda

To meet the expectations of the common standards, Kentucky's science and social studies teachers are incorporating language arts into their classes

24 Big Shifts Anticipated for Math Instruction

Some topics will be introduced earlier, some omitted, and students will have to show their understanding

32 States Adapting Best Practices From Special Ed. for Standards

Timing ideal for RTI, UDL, experts say, as curricula are rewritten

34 Sophisticated Language Use Awaits ELLs in Standards

Students required to go well beyond grammar, vocabulary

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 Magnifying glass and chalkboard images throughout: iStockphoto

Great change
begins with
great ideas.

Joseph F. Murphy

- *Frank W. Mayborn Chair of Education and Associate Dean*
- *Led the Development of ISLLC Standards for School Leaders*
- *Author of The Educator's Handbook for Understanding and Closing Achievement Gaps*

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Review the milestones in the academic-standards movement from 1983 to the present. This online timeline provides links to related stories in *Education Week's* archives.

▶ <http://www.edweek.org/go/standardstimeline>

Common-Core Collection

Read more stories about the common standards in this collection of *Education Week* articles, blogs, and on-demand events.

▶ <http://www.edweek.org/go/commonstandards>



Pat McDonough for Education Week

Arnett Elementary 4th grader Kyleigh Johnson works on a practice test in language arts. Social studies and science teachers are also responsible for teaching the subject in Kentucky. PAGE 18

| EVENTS |

Education Week has lined up several online events expanding on common-core coverage.

English/Language Arts, May 1, 2 p.m. ET

Join this webinar featuring two Kentucky teachers who are using new instructional tools to implement the English/language arts standards in their classrooms.

▶ <http://www.edweek.org/go/webinar/ccss>

Math, May 16, 2 p.m. ET

In this webinar, math officials from the Chicago and Howard County, Md., schools share their strategies and early experiences in working to transition to the new math standards.

▶ <http://www.edweek.org/go/webinar/math>

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Success of Standards Depends On Translation for Classroom

Advocates of the common core worry weak implementation could derail venture

By CATHERINE GEWERTZ

In less than three years, the Common Core State Standards have vaulted over three key hurdles, surprising more than a few naysayers. In June 2009, governors and education chiefs in 46 states pledged their support for the idea. A year later, panels of experts unveiled the completed standards. By last November, all but four states had formally adopted them.

Now, the standards face what experts say is their biggest challenge yet: faithful translation from expectations on paper to instruction in classrooms.

The implementation stage brims with possibilities both promising and threatening, depending on one's perspective.

To some critics, the standards carry the specter of lock-step curriculum imposed by outsiders. To others, they represent a step down from some states' top-notch standards, or an overemphasis on skills at the expense of content. The standards' most ardent backers see them as a brilliant distillation of what students urgently need to master to thrive in college and work, and as a door-opener to better teaching.

Whether opponents' nightmares come true, or advocates' hopes are borne out, will depend largely on how the standards are put into practice.

"The biggest potential pothole, by far, is failed implementation," said Chester E. Finn Jr., the


president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a Washington think tank that has been tracking the standards and counts itself as an advocate. "It's a huge, heavy lift if we are serious about teachers teaching it, kids learning it, curricula reflecting it, tests aligned with it, and kids passing those tests."

The common standards in math and English/language arts took shape in only a few years, but the sentiments that prompted them have longer roots.

Since 1983, when the report *A Nation at Risk* warned of U.S. education's growing "mediocrity," attempts to create a shared set of academic expectations have surfaced and disintegrated. An advisory panel under President George H.W. Bush recommended national standards and tests, but the idea collapsed in the aftermath of controversy over history content. President Bill Clinton proposed national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics, but Congress demurred.

States crafted their own standards—often incorporating pieces of the voluntary national standards—but the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress and state tests administered for the No Child Left Behind Act called the quality of many states' standards into question. Momentum built for better-quality expectations applied to all children.

"It's historic that in this country, with our better-than-two-century-old tradition of local control, state leaders would agree on common standards like this," said Jack Jennings, the founder of the Center on Education Policy, a Washington-based policy and research organization that has tracked common-



standards implementation. “It’s a departure, but it’s not abrupt. It’s a departure that builds on the last 20 years of debate and experience.”

That agreement hinged on a concept that was pivotal and deliberate, given previous political controversies: that the initiative was to be led by the states. Panels of experts wrote the standards with input from states’ education departments, subject-matter organizations, teacher groups, and others.

FEDERAL INTRUSION?

But critics contend that states didn’t drive the common-standards effort as vigorously as did foundations and Washington-based organizations that embraced the idea. The “state-led” descriptor came in for additional skepticism when the federal government began offering incentives to adopt the standards.

States, fiscally battered by the recession, stood a better chance of winning a share of the Race to the Top competition’s \$4 billion if they adopted the standards by Aug. 2, 2010. As that date drew near, adoptions picked up speed. Thirty-four had adopted by that day, including two on deadline day itself.

Other moves by the federal government in support of the standards fueled the perception that they were an extension of the Democratic administration’s policy agenda. The U.S. Department of Education awarded \$360 million in grants to two groups of states to develop tests for the new standards. To participate in those consortia, states had to have adopted the standards by the end of 2011. Additionally, the government’s offer this year to waive key requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act is easier to obtain for states that have

embraced the standards.

Those moves sparked questions in some quarters about whether the federal government had overstepped legal restrictions on the role it can play in local education decisions.

“The message here seems to be that the federal government has the money and can make it available according to the conditions they set,” said Kent Talbert, a Washington education lawyer who co-wrote a recent white paper concluding that the federal government has overstepped its authority in pressing for common standards and assessments. “Once you agree to that, down the road everyone will have to do the same thing, with only a few differences here and there, because of the way standards interact with curriculum and assessment.”

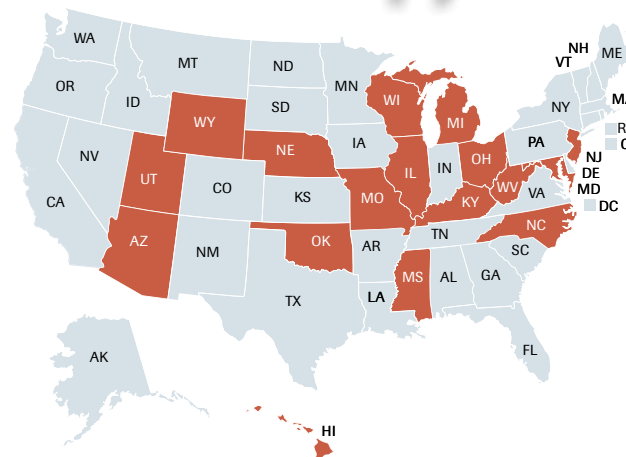
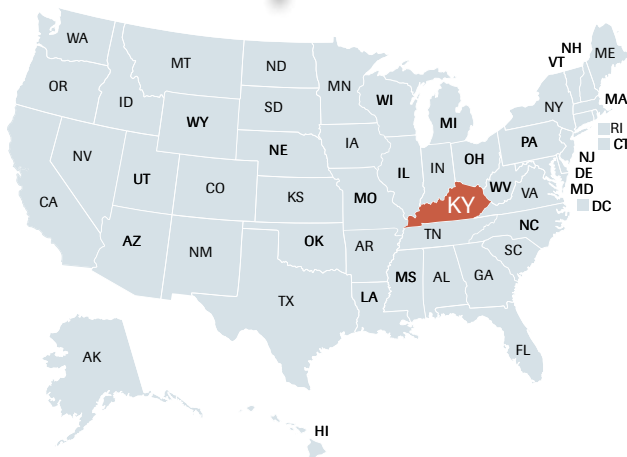
Common-core advocates argue that one shared set of standards doesn’t dictate content or pedagogy, because content is not prescribed, and there are many ways to teach the specified skills. Officials who favor them, including U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, have repeatedly said that states are free to choose whether to embrace or reject common standards and tests.

But echoes of the questions about the federal government’s role have rippled through a few state legislatures, where lawmakers are just beginning to examine the ramifications of adoption decisions made by their state boards of education. Such bills have called for repeal of the standards adoptions, or for keeping a close watch on their implementation.

Few progressed very far, but they sent up flares for common-core advocates. Mr. Duncan himself responded to South Carolina’s attempt to roll back the standards by accusing the state of lowering its

\$360 million
in federal grants has
gone to groups of
states developing
common assessments.

- State adopted standards
- State has not adopted standards
- State adopted standards in only one subject



SPEEDY PROCESS

Once the federal government dangled benefits for signing on to the common core, states quickly adopted the standards in English/language arts and mathematics.

academic expectations. In Utah, where lawmakers had raised questions about federal intrusion into local education decisions, Mr. Duncan responded to a letter from state schools Superintendent Larry Shumway by saying that “nothing in federal law or in current or proposed policies of the U.S. Department of Education in any way contradicts” Mr. Shumway’s insistence that Utah retains “complete control” of its standards and curriculum.

A persistent perception that the common core is federally driven, however, poses a potential threat to its widespread implementation, its advocates say. Mr. Finn, for instance, said that Mr. Duncan risks “loving it to death” by taking a high-profile

public stance on the common core’s behalf.

Misgivings about the federal government’s role in the standards is but one potential danger zone lurking in their implementation. Grappling with teaching the skills demanded by the new standards is no small challenge.

NEW VISTAS

Math teachers face having to teach skills to which they’re unaccustomed, since some concepts have been moved to lower grades in the new standards. They’re also being asked to focus longer and more deeply on fewer concepts and to emphasize conceptual understanding and practical applications of math. In many places, such as Howard County, Md., that has resulted in a flurry of activity as teachers brainstorm about how to design curriculum and pedagogy that embody the standards.

The English/language arts standards present challenges of their own. More than most states’ own standards, they insist on students building content knowledge and reading skill from independently tackling informational texts. They demand better analysis and argumentation skills, and they involve teachers from all subjects in teaching the literacy skills of their disciplines. Teachers in Kentucky, among other places, are experimenting with new templates that attempt to capture these key shifts.

Without good instructional materials, the common standards could be hamstrung, experts say. And the quality of the materials produced for the common core remains to be seen. Publishers large and small have jumped into the fray, offering an array of programs they say are “aligned” to the common core. States and districts are working individually and together to draft their own. Those who led the writing of the standards are crafting explanatory documents to guide teachers and publishers. Subject-matter groups are offering resources, and the two groups of states working on tests are creating, or planning, an array of supports including online banks of teaching tools.

Professional development remains a central area of concern as the standards are implemented,



It’s historic that in this country, with our better-than-two-century-old tradition of local control, state leaders could agree on common standards.”

JACK JENNINGS

Founder
Center on Education Policy

And there is little sign that teacher-preparation programs are revamping their work to prepare newly minted educators for the new standards.

Most current teachers have read the standards for their grade level, think highly of them, and are willing to teach them, but few understand the profound changes in teaching that they will require, according to William H. Schmidt, a Michigan State University professor widely known for his studies of mathematics curricula. He is currently conducting research, through the university’s Center for the Study of Curriculum, on districts’ preparedness for the common standards.

“A majority of the teachers indicate that they think the new common-core standards are pretty much the same as what they have been doing,” Mr. Schmidt said in an email. “The difficulty I foresee is that, in spite of this openness toward their implementation, the data suggests that most teachers do not recognize how difficult that process will be.”

Particular challenges lie ahead for teachers of special education students and those still learning English as they try to build bridges that allow their students to respond to the new expectations.

The emphasis on mastery of complex texts and academic vocabulary, for instance, in addition to the typical grammar and vocabulary, is uniquely challenging for English-learners, advocates say. And experts say students with cognitive disabilities, in particular, could struggle with the standards. But the new guidelines also seem to be spreading techniques typically used for special education students, such as Response to Intervention and Universal Design for Learning, to a broader population.

Educators in big-city districts are grappling with how best to teach the common standards, since many urban students come from poverty and are academically underprepared. They’re trying to figure out whether they can adapt the materials they have to the new expectations or whether they must buy or produce new materials, said Michael D. Caserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents the nation’s 67 largest districts. At the same time,

and many in the field say the success of the initiative rests on it.

“Teachers are not accustomed to teaching the way the standards envision,” said Barbara A. Kapinus, who helped shape the standards as a senior policy analyst at the National Education Association before retiring this month.

“We have a whole group of teachers out there who have come in in the last 10 years, under No Child Left Behind, who have been given scripts to follow and have marched kids through those scripts and through sequences of little, teensy skills. What we’re talking about with the [common] standards is a completely different kind of teaching.”

PREPARING TEACHERS

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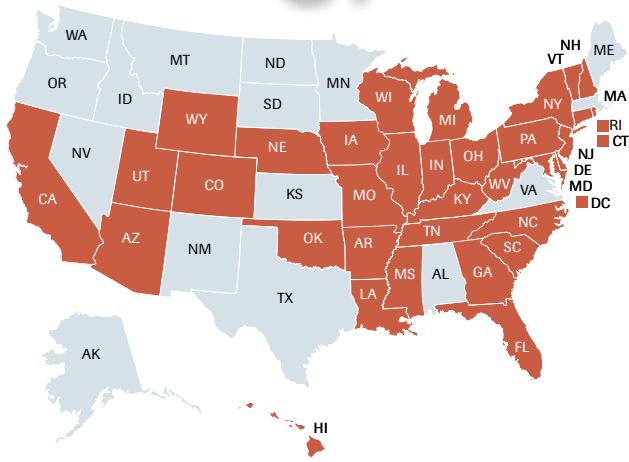
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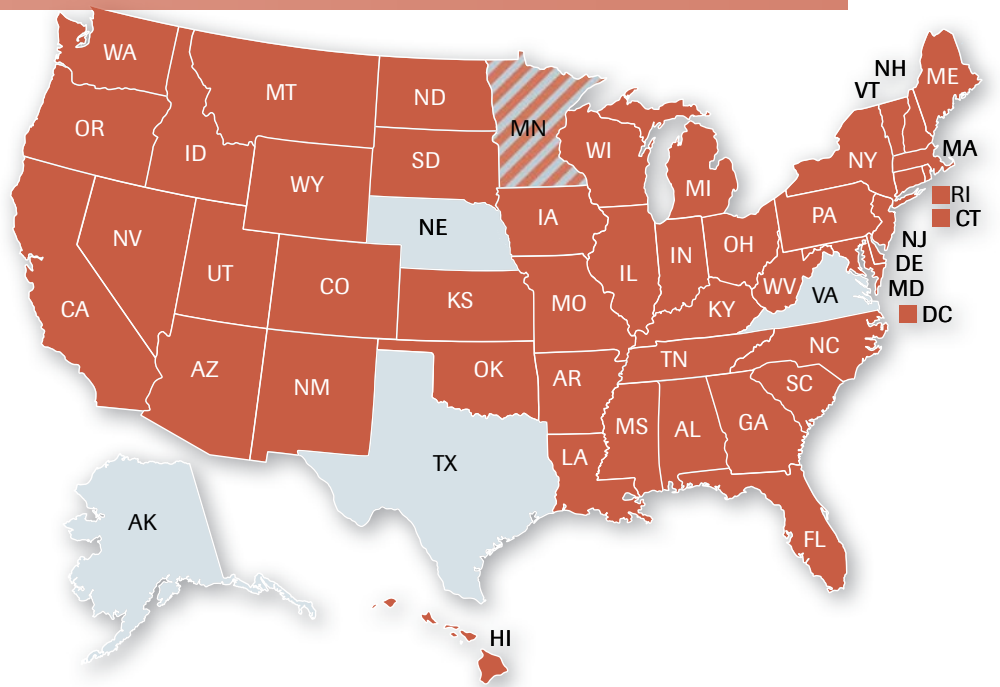


2011 TODAY

TOTAL STATES

46

PLUS THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



they're attending to other pieces of their cities' or states' reform agendas, such as teacher quality and school turnaround work, all with deep cutbacks in their budgets, he said.

Nonetheless, the stakes are high to get the common standards right in urban districts. "It's important that we get implementation right where there aren't as many kids in need, but it's vital that we get it right in communities where lots of students need extra help," Mr. Caserly said.

WAITING FOR TESTS

One of the biggest questions hanging over common-standards implementation is what will be on the tests designed for them. Some educators have reported reluctance to move ahead with curriculum because they don't yet know what the assessments, scheduled to be fully operational in 2014-15, will look like. Others feel confident enough to move ahead based on what they can glean from the standards themselves.

Educators' judgments about whether the tests truly reflect the standards will be crucial to sustaining the standards over the long term, said Mr. Jennings of the Center on Education Policy.

"The biggest potential obstacle is the tests," he said. "Because of their experience with NCLB, teachers want to know, what are the tests going to require? Will the tests back up what they are supposed to do with the new standards? If they don't, then the entire effort is lost."

The depth and breadth of the common standards' reach remains to be seen. Given the size of the implementation challenge, even some of the core's advocates anticipate a bit of unraveling. Fordham's Mr. Finn gives the possibility of strong implementation in all 46 common-standards states a "one in 100" chance.

"Maybe two dozen [states], if we're lucky, will take it seriously," he said. "That will be a dramatic, positive good for the country. But only half the country."

Mr. Jennings takes a more optimistic view.

"Nobody gets all the pieces right, ever, on anything," he said. "It's whether we get most of the pieces right for most kids and most teachers that will matter." ■

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MILESTONES IN THE MOVE TOWARD COMMON STANDARDS

1983

A Nation at Risk warns of U.S. education's mediocrity, sparking a focus on academic standards.

1989

President George H.W. Bush and the nation's governors agree to set national education goals.

1991

President Bush unveils the America 2000 Act, which proposes voluntary national standards and tests. It fails to win congressional support, but his administration funds development of voluntary national standards.

1994

President Bill Clinton signs the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which provides grants to help states develop content standards and sets up a standards-certification panel. The voluntary national standards in arts, civics, geography, social studies, English/language arts, history, science, and foreign languages are released.

1994

Lynne V. Cheney, the former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which had subsidized the history standards, attacks a draft, arguing that it presents an overly negative picture of the United States and Western civilization. The U.S. Department of Education withdraws funding for the English standards.

1995

The Senate passes a nonbinding resolution denouncing the history standards.

1996

The Republican-led Congress eliminates the standards-certification panel.

2002

President George W. Bush signs the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires annual state testing in math and reading in grades 3-8 and once during high school, and mandates states align their tests with their academic standards.

2008

The National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, in consultation with state leaders, release a report advocating U.S. standards be equivalent to the expectations of academically successful countries.

APRIL 2009

The CCSO and NGA launch the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Two months later, all but four states have pledged their support.



of K-12 public school students in the U.S. now live in states that have adopted the common standards.

KEY SHIFTS IN COMMON STANDARDS

ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS/LITERACY

1. Informational Text

Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts.

At the elementary level, the standards call for a 50-50 balance between informational texts and literature. They shift the emphasis to 55 percent informational by middle school, and 70 percent by high school. Such reading includes content-rich nonfiction in history/social studies, science, and the arts. Informational text is seen as a way for students to build coherent general knowledge, as well as reading and writing skills.

2. Citing Evidence

Reading and writing grounded in evidence from text.

The standards place a premium on students' use of evidence from texts to present careful analyses and well-defended claims. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge or experience, the standards envision students' answering questions that depend on reading the text or texts with care. The standards also require the cultivation of narrative writing throughout the grades. The reading standards focus on students' ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on text evidence.

3. Complex Text

Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary.

The standards build a "staircase" of increasing text complexity to prepare students for the types of texts they must read to be ready for the demands of college and careers. Closely related to text complexity—and inextricably connected to reading comprehension—is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as "ignite" and "commit").

JULY 2009
Development and feedback groups for “career and college readiness” standards—the skills students should have upon graduation—are announced.

SEPT. 2009
The draft college- and career-readiness standards are made available for public comment.

NOV. 2009
The development and feedback groups for the grade-by-grade K-12 standards are announced.

Unveiled Race to the Top rules say states can get points on their applications for adopting the standards by Aug. 2, 2010.

FEB. 2, 2010
Kentucky becomes the first state to adopt the standards, conditionally, in draft form.

MARCH 2010
Draft K-12 grade-by-grade standards are made available for public comment.

JUNE 2, 2010
Final common standards are issued.

JULY 14, 2010
Half the states have adopted the standards.

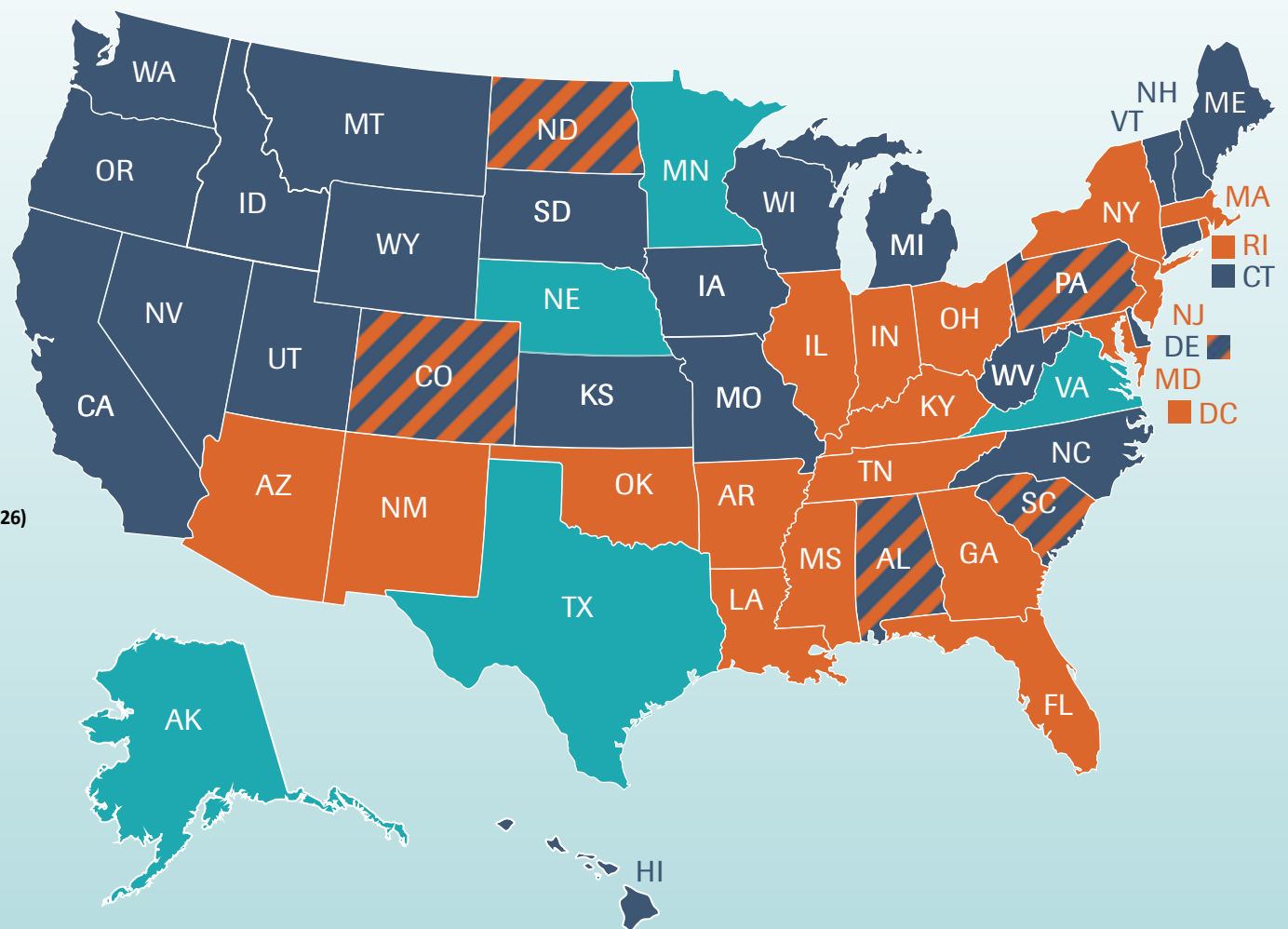
APRIL 2010
The Department of Education invites applications from groups of states to design tests for the standards. To belong to the consortia, states have to adopt the standards by the end of 2011.

SEPT. 2010
The Education Department awards \$330 million to two consortia to develop tests for the common standards. Four months later, the department awards \$30 million more to the two consortia to develop supplemental resources for the standards.

SEPT. 2011
The department announces guidelines for states wishing to apply for waivers of key requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. To qualify, states must adopt “college- and career-ready standards.”

NOV. 2011
All but four states have adopted the standards. All but five are participating in one or both assessment consortia.

ASSESSMENT CONSORTIA MEMBERSHIP



SOURCES: Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium; Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

MATHEMATICS

4. Focus

Focus strongly where the standards focus.

Rather than racing to cover topics in a mile-wide, inch-deep curriculum, significantly narrow and deepen the way time and energy are spent in the math classroom. The standards focus deeply on the major work of each grade so that students can gain strong foundations: solid conceptual understanding, a high degree of procedural skill and fluency, and the ability to apply the math they know to solve problems inside and outside the math classroom.

5. Coherence

Think across grades, and link to major topics within grades.

The standards are designed around coherent progressions from grade to grade. Carefully connect the learning across grades so that students can build new understanding onto foundations built in previous years. Each standard is not a new event, but an extension of previous learning. Instead of allowing additional or supporting topics to detract from the focus of the grade, these topics can serve the grade-level focus.

6. Rigor

In major topics, pursue conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and application with equal intensity.

- Emphasize conceptual understanding of key concepts, such as place value and ratios. Teachers support students’ ability to access concepts from a number of perspectives so that students are able to see math as more than a set of mnemonics or discrete procedures.
- Use math flexibly for applications. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply math in context. Teachers in content areas outside of math, particularly science, ensure that students are using math to make meaning of and access content.
- Help students build speed and accuracy in calculation. Teachers structure class time and/or homework time for students to practice core functions, such as single-digit multiplication, so that they have access to more complex concepts and procedures.

SOURCE:
Adapted From Student Achievement Partners



Many Teachers Not Ready For the Common Core

To ensure that students master the new standards, educators will have to change the way they teach

By STEPHEN SAWCHUK

A quiet, sub-rosa fear is brewing among supporters of the Common Core State Standards Initiative: that the standards will die the slow death of poor implementation in K-12 classrooms.

"I predict the common-core standards will fail, unless we can do massive professional development for teachers," said Hung-Hsi Wu, a professor emeritus of mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley, who has written extensively about the common-core math standards. "There's no fast track to this."

It's a Herculean task, given the size of the public school teaching force and the difficulty educators face in creating the sustained, intensive training that research indicates is necessary to change teachers' prac-

tices. (*See Education Week, Nov. 10, 2010.*)

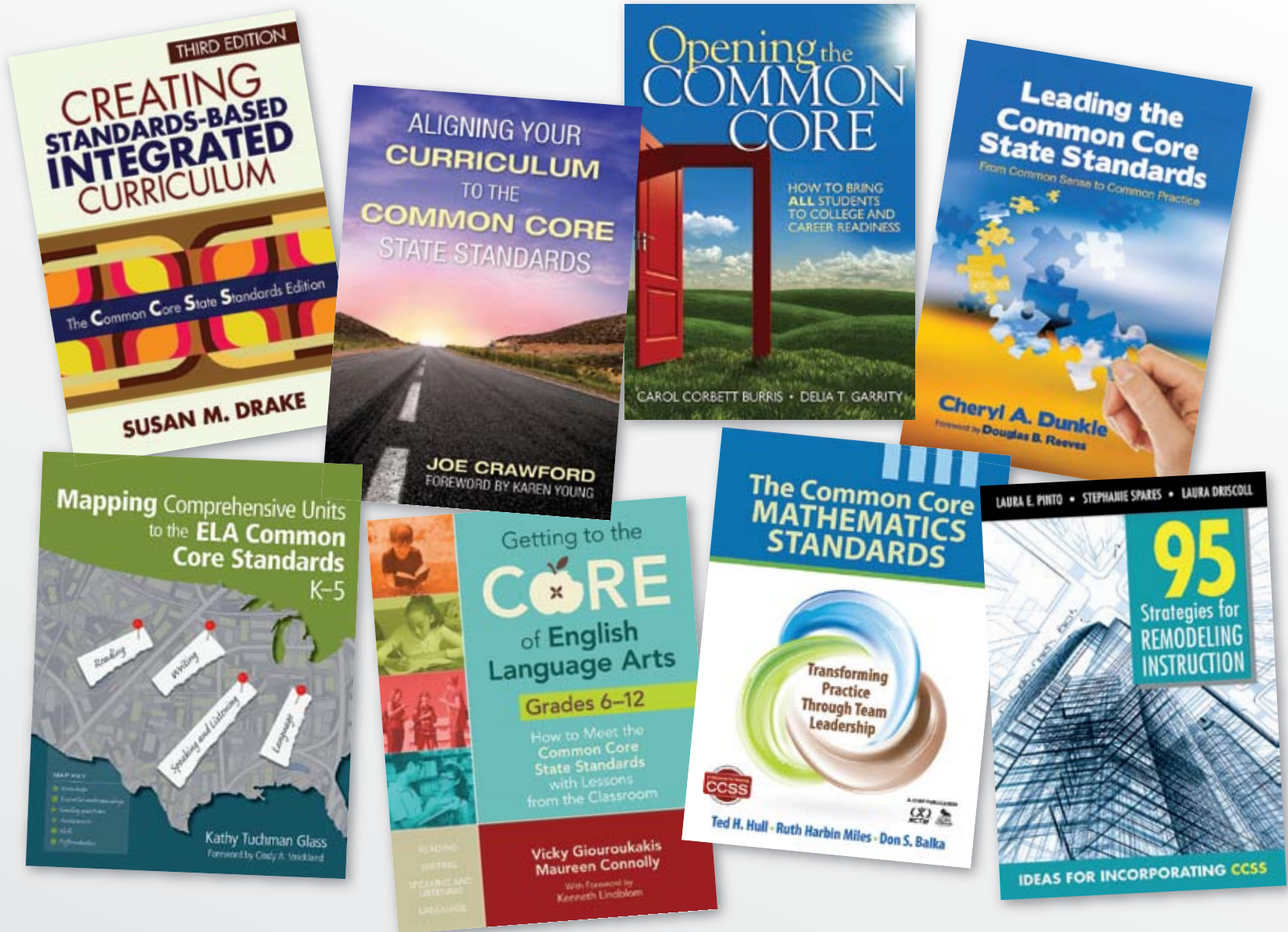
"It is a capacity-building process, without question," said Jim Rollins, the superintendent of the Springdale, Ark., school district. "We're not at square one, but we're not at the end of the path, either. And we don't want to just bring superficial understanding of these standards, but to deepen the understanding, so we have an opportunity to deliver instruction in a way we haven't before."

In Springdale, which is fully implementing the literacy and math standards for grades K-2 this year, kindergartners in the 20,000-student district are studying fairy tales and learning about those stories' countries of origin. Their teachers have scrambled to find nonfiction texts that introduce students to the scientific method. They've discarded some of their old teaching practices, like focusing on the calendar to

Fewer than half of districts planned to provide professional development aligned to the standards during the current school year.

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for Education Week

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▲
Gretchen Highfield gives her 3rd graders instructions for their reading lesson at Robert Kerr Elementary School in Durand, Mich. The school was an early adopter of the common-core standards.

▼
Third graders work on consonant blends and digraphs with Ms. Highfield. "I'm always thinking about how what we talked about in social studies can be emphasized in reading," the teacher says.

build initial numeracy skills.

The Durand, Mich., district is another early adopter. Gretchen Highfield, a 3rd grade teacher, has knit together core aspects of the standards—less rote learning, more vocabulary-building—to create an experience that continually builds pupils' knowledge. A story on pigs becomes an opportunity, later in the day, to introduce the vocabulary word "corral," which becomes an opportunity, still later in the day, for students to work on a math problem involving four corrals of five pigs.

"I'm always thinking about how what we talked about in social studies can be emphasized in reading," Ms. Highfield said. "And it's like that throughout the week. I'm looking across the board where I can tie in this, and this, and this."

Such pioneers of the standards can probably be found the country over. But data show that there is still much more work to be done, especially in those districts that have yet to tackle the professional-

development challenge. A nationally representative survey of school districts issued last fall by the Washington-based Center on Education Policy found that fewer than half of districts had planned professional development aligned to the standards this school year.

COGNITIVE DEMAND

By any accounting, the challenge of getting the nation's 3.2 million K-12 public school teachers ready to teach to the standards is enormous.

With new assessments aligned to the standards rapidly coming online by 2014-15, the implementation timeline is compressed. Teachers are wrestling with an absence of truly aligned curricula and lessons. Added to those factors are concerns that the standards are pitched at a level that may require teachers themselves to function on a higher cognitive plane.

When standards are more challenging for the students, "then you

also raise the possibility that the content is more challenging for the teacher," said Daniel T. Willingham, a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville. "Of course, it's going to interact with what support teachers receive."

Anecdotal evidence from a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation study suggests that teachers already struggle to help students engage in the higher-order, cognitively demanding tasks emphasized by the standards, such as the ability to synthesize, analyze, and apply information. (The Gates Foundation also provides support for coverage of K-12 business and innovation in *Education Week*.)

As part of the foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching project, trained observers scored lessons taught by some 3,000 teachers against a variety of teaching frameworks. No matter which framework was used, teachers received relatively low scores on their ability to engage students in "analysis and problem-solving," to use "investigation/problem-based approaches," to create "relevance to history, current events," or to foster "student participation in making meaning and reasoning," according to a report from the foundation.

Supporters of the common standards say the standards encourage a focus on only the most important topics at each grade level and subject, thus allowing teachers to build those skills.

"It could make things simpler and allow teachers and schools to focus on teaching fewer, coherent things very well. That's the best hope for teachers to build in-depth content knowledge," said David Coleman, one of the writers of the English/language arts standards and a founder of the New York City-based Student Achievement Partners, a non-profit working to support imple-



I predict the common-core standards will fail unless we can do massive professional development for teachers."

HUNG-HSI WU
 University of California, Berkeley



mentation of the standards.

“That said, the standards are necessary but not sufficient for improving professional development,” he added.

Each of the two content areas in the standards poses a unique set of challenges for teacher training.

Mr. Wu, the UC-Berkeley professor, contends that current math teachers and curricula focus almost exclusively on procedures and algorithms, an approach he refers to as “textbook mathematics.”

But the common core emphasizes understanding of the logical, structural concepts underpinning mathematics—the idea being that understanding how and why algorithms work is as important as crunching numbers.

Many teachers, Mr. Wu contends, will themselves need more mathematics-content preparation. But training focused at least initially on content could be especially difficult for classroom veterans to accept, he concedes.

“After 26 years of doing things only one way, the common core comes along and says, ‘Let’s try to do a little bit better at this,’” Mr. Wu said. “Well, suppose you’ve been smoking for that long, and someone says, ‘Just stop raising a cigarette to your mouth.’ It’s difficult—it’s 26 years of habit.”

Some teacher educators believe that conversation will need to begin at the preservice level, especially for elementary teachers, who tend to enter with a weaker initial grasp of mathematics, said Jonathan N. Thomas, an assistant professor of mathematics education at Northern Kentucky University, in Highland Heights, Ky.

“It’s a great opportunity to say, ‘Let’s just take some time to think about the mathematics and set the teaching strategies aside for a moment,’” Mr. Thomas said. “It’s imperative we don’t send people out the door with just strategies, tips, and tricks to teach fractions. We have to make sure they understand fractions deeply.”

TEACHER GAPS

Meanwhile, the English/language arts standards demand a focus on the “close reading” of texts, a literary-analysis skill that has been thus far mainly reserved for college English classes. And they call for expansion of nonfiction materials into even the earliest grades.

“We haven’t worked deeply or strategically with informational text, and as the teachers are learning about the standards, they are finding their own instructional gaps there,” said Sydnee Dixon, the director of teaching and learning for Utah’s state office of education. “That’s a huge area for us.”

In the Springdale Ark., district, instructional coach Kaci L. Phipps said those changes are also requiring teachers to pay more attention to teaching the varied purposes behind writing—something not as emphasized when most reading materials are fictional and students are asked merely for their responses.

“We keep having to say to these kids, ‘Remember, it’s not what you think, it’s what’s in the text,’” she said. “What is the author doing? What is his or her purpose in writ-

ing? How can you support that conclusion with details from the text?”

PEDAGOGICAL SHIFTS

Pedagogical challenges lurk, too, because teachers need updated skills to teach in ways that emphasize the standards’ focus on problem-solving, according to professional-development scholars.

“Teachers will teach as they were taught, and if they are going to incorporate these ideas in their teaching, they need to experience them as students,” said Thomas R. Guskey, a professor of educational psychology at the University of Kentucky’s college of education, in Lexington. “The PD will have to model very clearly the kinds of activities we want teachers to carry forward and use in their classrooms.”

Moreover, Mr. Guskey warned, many teachers won’t be inclined to actually change what they are doing until they become familiar with the assessments aligned to the new standards.

Some districts don’t want to wait that long, and have found other ways to help teachers begin working with the practices outlined in the standards. In the 1,700-student Durand district, Superintendent Cindy Weber has used a state-required overhaul of teacher evaluations as a springboard.

The Michigan district’s new professional growth and evaluation system, which is being implemented this spring, draws key indicators of teacher practice directly from the common core—in essence closing the often-wide gap between expectations for student and teachers.

Principals observing teachers are trained to look, for example, at whether a teacher “uses multiple sources of information” when teaching new content, and “challenges students to present and defend ideas” in the strand on applying learning.

To gauge changes in student growth across the year, as part of the new evaluation system, the district has settled on growth in academic vocabulary as an indicator. In every grade and content area, teams of teachers have come up with those words and related concepts all students must master by the end of the year.

Ms. Weber’s reasoning is that teachers will feel new standards really matter if instructing to them is part of their professional expectations.

“You look back over the course of education, and there are so many things tried, yet somehow many classrooms still look the same across the country,” Ms. Weber said. “I felt that with our evaluation process, we needed to look at teacher commitment to this model and type of delivery—or teachers may give us lip service and go back to doing what they’ve done in the past.”

STATE ROLE

States, the first stop on the professional-development train, are themselves having to change their delivery systems in preparation for the standards.

“Many states are moving away

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Teala Patterson, a 3rd grader, works on a reading lesson at Robert Kerr Elementary in Durand, Mich. Teachers there have discarded some of their old practices and picked up new ones as they strive to get their students to master the standards.

from the ‘train the trainer’ model and trying to have more direct communications with teachers, because the message either gets diluted or changed otherwise,” said Carrie Heath Phillips, the program director for the Council of Chief State School Officers’ common-standards efforts.

Delaware has reached every teacher in the state directly through online lessons that lay out the core shifts in the standards from the state’s previous content expectations—a process it tracked through its education data system.

Now, state officials are hard at work building an infrastructure for deeper, more intensive work.

The state has organized two separate “cadres” of specialists, one in reading and one in math, who are fleshing out the core expectations at each grade level, outlining how each standard is “vertically linked” to what will be taught in the next grade, and crafting model lessons in those subjects. They’re also each constructing five professional-development “modules” for high-demand topics, such as text complexity.

“We’ve had other standards, but different interpretations of what they meant,” said Marian Wolak, the director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development for the state. “We want this to be very clear and distinct about how the standard applies at that grade level and what the expectations are for that standard.”

Based on the cadres’ work, every district will have a clearinghouse of resources for professional development and be able to tap a local specialist for additional training, Ms. Wolak said.

Utah doesn’t have the benefits of Delaware’s limited geography. Its strategy has been building the capacity of a critical mass of trained educators in each district, and then gradually shifting professional-development responsibilities to the local level.

In summer 2011, the state trained about 120 facilitators—teachers nominated from the field with a track record of high student achievement in their subject—in pedagogical content knowledge and adult-learning theory. Then, those teachers facilitated “academies” in ELA and in 6th and 9th grade math for their colleagues, which were given at 14 locations in the state, according to Ms. Dixon, the state’s director of teaching and learning.

All teachers attending the sessions come voluntarily and are expected to have read the standards

beforehand. Afterwards, “the expectation is that both the facilitators and the attendees are back in their classrooms, using the standards, working with the standards, sharing student work, and studying it in [staff meetings], so their colleagues are getting second-hand experience,” Ms. Dixon said.

Additional academies are now being set up; the state estimates about 20 percent of its teachers have attended one so far.

DISTRICT PIONEERS

For districts, the professional-development challenge is in finding the place to begin. Those districts apparently the furthest along in the process are integrating the training with successful efforts already in place.

In Springdale, the district has focused on providing teachers with enough time to sort through the standards and observe some of them in practice. It’s given teachers up to four days off to develop units aligned to the common core and encouraged teams to discuss student work samples, or “anchors,” to help inform their understanding of expectations aligned to the standards.

This year, the district is working to train teachers in grades 3-8 in math. It has spent five years using a problem-solving approach to mathematics known as Cognitively Guided Instruction that district officials say aligns well with the common standards’ math expectations.

With a handful of teachers now well-versed in the curriculum, it’s creating opportunities for teachers new to the district to observe those “demonstration classrooms” at work.

The Durand district’s new teacher-evaluation system has helped to make the common standards real, said Ms. Highfield. And while teachers are understandably a bit nervous about the system, it’s also causing them to rethink long-standing practices.

“How do I show [an evaluator] that students are thinking and analyzing without a project or experiment? It’s a big challenge, and I think it will take a little time to get there,” she said. “Before, with the rote learning, you could create a handout, put it in your file and just use it again next year. You can’t do that when you’re looking at students to apply these skills.”

Nevertheless, Ms. Highfield said, she’s starting to see the benefits for her students.

“Durand is a fairly poor district; a lot of students don’t have a lot of experiences,” she said. “We ask them, ‘What do you want to do in your life, with your learning? Can you imagine it? How would you get there?’”

“I’ve seen a change in my students, and I think that is a good thing.” ■

Coverage of policy efforts to improve the teaching profession is supported by a grant from the Joyce Foundation, at www.joycefndn.org/Programs/Education.



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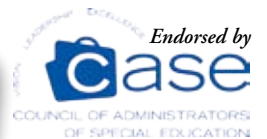
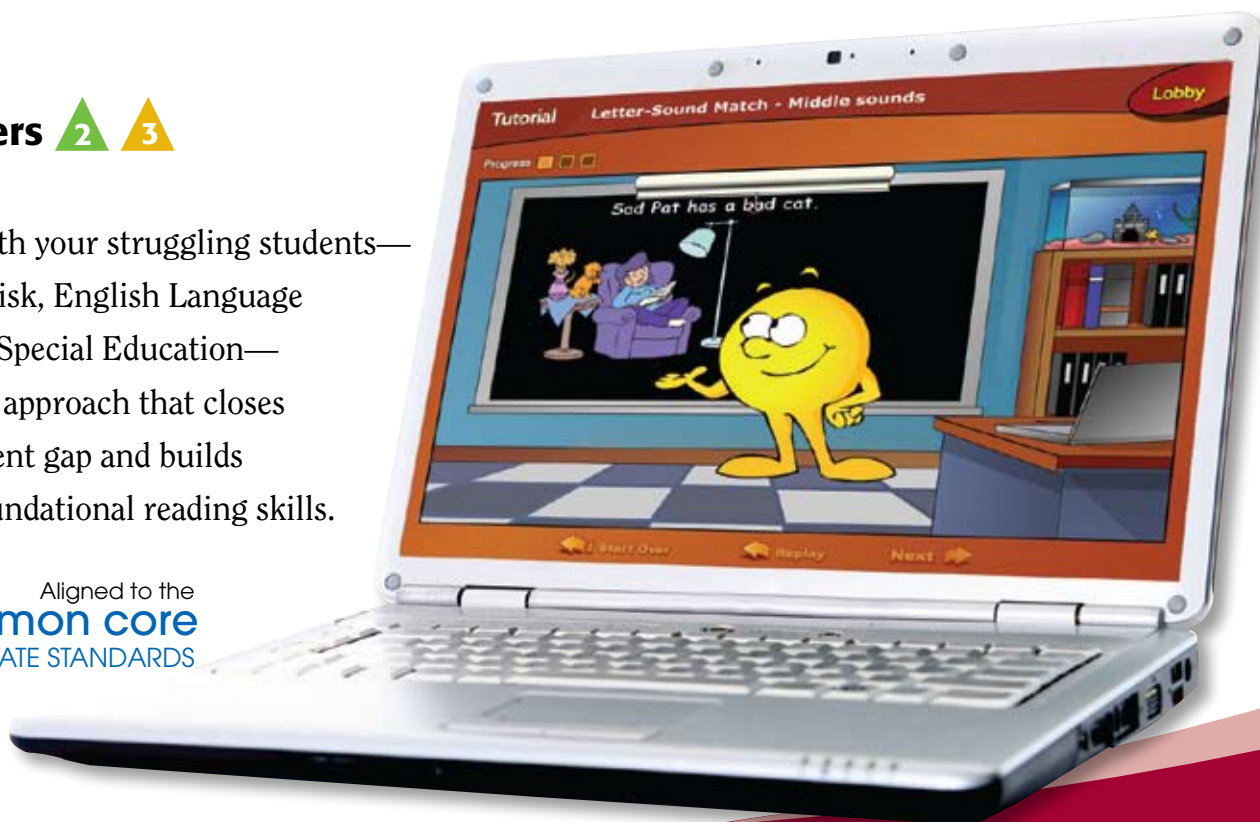
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ENGLISH/ LANGUAGE ARTS

Across the Subjects, Reading on Agenda

To meet the expectations of the common standards, Kentucky's science and social studies teachers are incorporating language arts into their classes

By CATHERINE GEWERTZ
Taylor Mill, Ky.

Beth Fahlbush is moving from desk to desk, helping her high school juniors sharpen their essays. They're zeroing in on their lead paragraphs and hunting for the evidence they must marshal to build the bodies of their essays.

"If the evidence does not directly relate to your thesis, cut it out," Ms. Fahlbush tells one girl, who listens as she twists a strand of hair in her fingers. "Remember," the teacher says to a tall boy slouched in a nearby seat, "you are writing an argumentative essay. So you need to defend each of your points."

The teenagers in Room 122 of Scott High School, here in northern Kentucky, are not in English class. They're in U.S. history. And what's happening represents a leading edge of key changes that are taking shape as states and districts put the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts into practice.

The seven middle and high schools here in Kenton County are among the first in the country to pilot a new approach to the discipline. It targets the most pivotal ideas in the standards, which demand that students become strong readers not only of fiction but of informational texts, and that they become writers able to wield research, analysis, and argumentation skills as powerful tools. Reflecting the standards themselves, the approach involves teachers of all subjects in teaching literacy skills pertinent to their disciplines.

Variations on those themes are echoing nationwide, since all but four states have adopted the

standards and are now starting to grapple with how to turn them into instruction. As the first state to adopt the standards—in February 2010—Kentucky jumped into the work early.

SHAPING A STRATEGY

Kenton County's version is guided by a set of teaching tools that were developed by the Literacy Design Collaborative, a loosely knit group of consultants working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has poured tens of millions in grants into supporting the common standards. More than 3,500 teachers in 50 districts in eight states, including Kentucky, are using the foundation's grants—and guidance—to try out the tools. The foundation is supporting a Mathematics Design Collaborative that is creating teaching tools for the math standards, as well. (The Gates Foundation also provides support for coverage of K-12 business and innovation in *Education Week*.)

The centerpiece of the English/language arts toolkit is a collection of "template tasks." These short, fill-in-the-blank prompts are designed to open doors to instructional tasks that demand reading, writing, and analysis, and can be customized to each teacher's subject matter. They are structured to address three types of writing—argumentation, explanatory, and narrative—and nine types of cognitive process, such as synthesis, comparison, and evaluation.

A template task that focuses on argumentation and analysis, for instance, looks like this:

"[Insert a background statement that introduces the prompt] After reading _____ (literature or

Photos by PAT MCDONOGH
for Education Week



Katie Ebert and Ryan Davis read during teacher Mindy Ball's class at Arnett Elementary School, where charts track each student's progress.



Arnett Elementary 2nd grader Jalynn Miller explains a subtraction problem to Makaya Sims, left, while Ms. Ball and David Butler observe. Teachers at the school in the Erlanger-Elsmere district are asking students to help design their "learning targets."



Template tasks create work for students ...

Template tasks are fill-in-the-blank "shells" that allow teachers to insert the texts to be read, writing to be produced, and content to be addressed.

Task 12 Template [Insert question] After reading _____ (LITERATURE OR INFORMATIONAL TEXTS), write a/an _____ (ESSAY, REPORT, OR SUBSTITUTE) that defines _____ (TERM OR CONCEPT) and explains _____ (CONTENT). Support your discussion with evidence from the text(s). What _____ (CONCLUSIONS OR IMPLICATIONS) can you draw?

ELA Example:

What is a "metaphor"? After reading *The House on Mango Street* and drawing from other works you've read this year, write an essay that defines "metaphor" and explains how authors use it to enhance their writing. Support your discussion with evidence from the texts.

Social Studies Example:

What did the authors of the American Constitution mean by "rights"? After reading the Bill of Rights, write an essay that defines "rights" and explains "rights" as the authors use it in this foundational document. Support your discussion with evidence from the text. What implications can you draw?

Science Example:

Can "talent" be learned? After reading scientific sources, write an essay that defines "innate abilities" and explains its relevance to "talent." Support your discussion with evidence from the texts.

informational texts), write a/an _____ (essay or substitute) that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the text(s)." It includes two additional levels of demand teachers can add if they choose: "Be sure to acknowledge competing views" and "Give examples from past or current events or issues to illustrate and clarify your position."

Kenton County social studies teachers used such a template to form the instructional task: "Does America still provide access to The American Dream to the 'tired, the poor, and the huddled masses?' After reading 'The Right to Fail,' the keynote address from the 2004 Democratic National Convention, and other literary and informational texts, write a synthesis essay that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the texts."

Science teachers created their version of the instructional task by asking students to consider whether uranium use and nuclear fission are the best methods of producing energy in light of concerns about global warming. It was built into a larger instructional module for chemistry classes, aimed at building argumentation skills as students explore nuclear energy.

The prompt instructs students to read scientific sources supplied by their teacher and write a report addressing that question, supporting their positions with evidence from the texts and acknowledging competing points of view, with examples of past or current events to illustrate and clarify their positions.

The Literacy Design Collaborative has created 29 template tasks, which are available free online, along with guidelines that help teachers in scoring the resulting assignments. In the past two years, Kenton County teachers have used the templates as guides to build their own bank of 44 instructional modules in English/language arts, science, and social studies, said Gary McCormick, the district's secondary-level literacy consultant.

A SLIM DESIGN

Kenton County officials say the templates' minimalist structure is deceptive.

"They seem much simpler than they are," said Barb Martin, who oversees the work as the 14,000-student district's assistant superintendent for academic and student support. "How you fill in those blanks is crucial and takes a lot of careful thought. Unwise choices can sink the whole thing."

"This, to me, is the doorway to getting our kids to interact with text. They really weren't. They were being read to, and given notes, and summarizing what they heard," she said.

Weaving together content, reading, and writing marks a sharp departure from common practice, in which science and social studies teachers focus exclusively on content, Mr. McCormick said.

"We've found the structure of the [design collaborative] tools to be groundbreaking, because the content is forward at the same time as the literacy skills," he said.

BURROWING DOWN: A Collection of Template Tasks

Teachers in Kentucky use models to craft questions for their students that elicit in-depth responses requiring them to research and justify their answers.

What would you recommend to help your community improve its air quality?

Does genetic testing have the potential to significantly impact how we treat disease?

How did the political views of the signers of the Constitution impact the American political system?

What ramifications does debt have for individuals and the larger public?

After researching government documents on term limits, write an essay that identifies a problem created by term limits and argues for a solution.

SOURCE: Literacy Design Collaborative

Some Kenton County teachers weren't the biggest fans of the strategy when it was introduced in 2010.

Michelle Buroker, the Scott High School chemistry teacher who designed the nuclear-energy module, said that when science teachers got their first glimpse of it, they suspected it would be tough to find readings that are engaging, age-appropriate, content-rich, and full of writing-assignment potential.

"We thought we wouldn't be able to make it fit authentically into our content, that it would just make it harder for us to get through our [text]book," she said. "But now that we are finding those resources, I see that it's a good thing to have in my bag of tricks."

"It doesn't work for everything," she continued. "But when I can link [chemistry] to something real, like electromagnetic radiation from cellphones, or nuclear energy, the kids see the relevance of what they're learning, and there is more buy-in. They learn the content better."

Ms. Fahlbush, the social studies teacher, said it "was definitely foreign at first" to be explicitly teaching reading and writing strategies

to her students.


"We had that mentality that you're not an English teacher, you're a social studies teacher, so that needs to be taken care of in another class," she said. "When I first started doing it, it definitely did take time away from my content, and I didn't like it."

"But now that I'm in the second year, I see that I am teaching the content, just doing it through the writing assignments. The social studies teachers talk about it; we all see our students writing better, and we can see from their open-ended and constructed responses that they are understanding the concepts better."

DRAWING STUDENTS IN

The emphasis on analysis and argumentation has paid off with student writing that is not only more informed, but more engaged, said Roger Stainforth, a Dixie Heights High School social studies teacher.


His students got "really fired up" by a recent writing prompt asking them to analyze and take a position on how the search-and-seizure provisions of the




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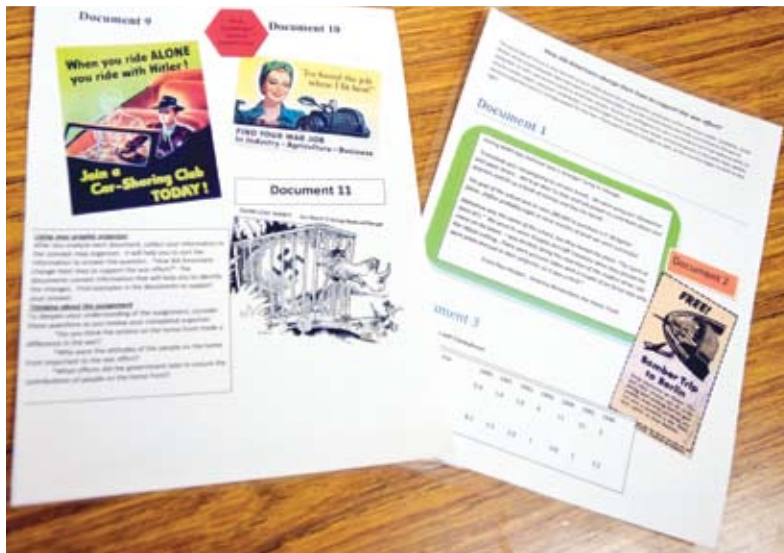
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Beth Fahlbush answers a question for juniors during a U.S. history class at Scott High School. She and other social studies and science teachers in Kentucky are responsible for literacy instruction in their classes.



U.S. Constitution's Fourth Amendment apply to students in school, Mr. Stainforth said.

"Kids this age want to be heard," he said. "They haven't known how to argue. But man, once they figure it out, they get into it! I used to get a few graphs from them, but now I get pages."

Students who have faced the writing prompts notice a difference between them and the kinds of assignments they got before their district began using the template tasks.

"It looked so innocent, just that little paragraph, but man, it was way harder than it looked," said Dylan Rohrer, a Dixie Heights senior who had to write in a social studies course last year about whether juveniles should be tried as adults.

"We spent like two weeks researching stuff, and we had to justify ev-

erything we said. I'm a pretty good writer, and I can usually just get by, writing, you know, whatever," he said with a sheepish laugh. "But I actually had to think through things. When I was done, I considered it an accomplishment. It was interesting to be challenged in school."

The Kentucky education department is working to spread the template-task idea to districts statewide through a statewide group of networks it built as a vehicle to scale up common-standards implementation.

Specialists tapped by the state meet monthly with regional groups of teachers, principals, and district leaders to discuss the literacy-design-collaborative work. In that way, the 166 Kentucky school districts that don't have foundation grants to use those models can learn about them from the eight that do, and adapt as they wish.

Ms. Fahlbush uses primary documents to develop students' literacy skills in social studies classes.

"The leadership networks are built on the premise of building the capacity of every single district to implement the standards in the context of highly effective teaching, learning, and assessment practices," said Karen Kidwell, who oversees the networks for the state education department.

"We focus on the questions, 'What is the intent of each standard, and how do you translate those into effective instruction and generate acceptable evidence of student mastery?'"

Regina Pelfrey, the literacy coach at Arnett Elementary School, in the Erlanger-Elsemere district, said the network meetings have been a powerful way to transmit the Literacy Design Collaborative strategy from neighboring Kenton County. The state's local network leader, Ruthie Staley, has helped the 2,200-student Erlanger district adapt the ideas for elementary school, Ms. Pelfrey said.

"I have to give the state a lot of credit," Ms. Pelfrey said during a break at Arnett. "Teachers are always having to learn new things that the state wants them to learn, but in the 25 years that I've been in education, there was never this kind of help."

MAKING 'TARGETS'

At Arnett, teachers have been working with Ms. Pelfrey to create "learning targets" and a curriculum



We spent like two weeks researching stuff, and we had to justify everything. ... It was interesting to be challenged in school."

DYLAN ROHRER
Dixie Heights High Senior

map that are based on the common standards and reflect the skills and processes outlined in the literacy-collaborative template tasks.

A standard that asks 1st graders to “ask and answer questions about key details in text,” for instance, becomes a “target,” posted on a classroom wall, that says, “I will ask and answer questions about details in my story.”

At the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade levels, teachers are using Bloom’s Taxonomy and the Depth of Knowledge framework to include verbs in those learning targets that reflect higher-level thinking processes, such as “analyze” or “critique,” Ms. Pelfrey said.

The Depth of Knowledge framework, designed by University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Norman Webb as a model to align standards and tests, also can be used as an aid in designing student tasks that reflect the standards. Bloom’s Taxonomy, created in the mid-1950s, is a method of classifying levels and types of cognitive processes.

Many Arnett teachers are including their students in designing the learning targets, Ms. Pelfrey said. In Loretta Simpson’s 4th grade class, students helped create a target that says, “We will critique peers’ writing using six good writing traits.”

“They chose that word, ‘critique,’” said Ms. Simpson. “We talked about what it was they would be doing, and the right word to describe it, and that is what they chose.”

Ms. Pelfrey admits that when she was teaching, she would have just walked her students through a compare-and-contrast exercise and given them questions.

“It would have been me doing it,” she said. “If the teacher creates it alone, the students are just watching. Transferring the work to the students is key.”

NO SPOON-FEEDING

But it can be challenging. Arnett teachers are asking students to do things they’re not used to doing.

In Trisha Bremer’s 2nd grade class, the children recently read *Max Found Two Sticks*, Brian Pinkney’s story about a boy who drums on his front stoop because he doesn’t feel like talking to anyone. Then she asked the children to write about what Max was thinking and to point to places in the text that led them to say so.

“It was very challenging for them,” she said. “They were saying, ‘Please just tell me the right answer!’ But the discussion was awesome. Light bulbs were going off. They realized there was no right or wrong answer, as long as they could defend their answer with examples.”

Students in Dottie Durham’s 5th grade class were doing something similar: combing through a text for clues about characters’ thinking.

They had just read a story about two men sharing a hospital room. Both were confined to their beds, but only one could see out the window, and he described the scenes of life outside for his roommate, who

grew increasingly glum.

Quiet minutes went by as students pored over the text. One student, seizing on a sentence that said the man’s feelings were “fermenting,” offered that he was “getting sour and mean” about his deprivation. Ms. Durham nodded and said, “Good, very interesting.”

Those quiet minutes can be among the most difficult parts of the new standards’ expectations, teachers in Kenton and Erlanger schools said. Learning to direct students back to the texts to search for answers, evidence, clues to meaning—rather than just supplying those answers—is not familiar practice for many teachers.

Kris Gillis struggled with that recently. An English teacher at Dixie Heights High School, Mr. Gillis said that in his nine years as a teacher, his students “have depended largely on me for meaning.” But he is shifting strategies, trying to help students become more self-sufficient in understanding what they read.

That played out when he asked a class of seniors to analyze six poems by American and English writers, with the aid of explications by Harvard University poetry professor Helen Vendler and the College Board’s Advanced Placement TP-CASTT framework for analyzing poetry.

The students had several days

to read and analyze the poems, and then they were expected to “teach the class” how to read them, Mr. Gillis said. They took turns presenting their “lessons” in groups, with their teacher sitting in the back, listening.

“It got really uncomfortable at times,” he said. “They kept directing questions to me, and I kept putting the questions back to them.”

The students delivered a mixed bag; some of their interpretations were well-grounded in the text and others less so, Mr. Gillis said. A few of the students complained that their teacher hadn’t taken a stronger role in guiding the discussion, he said.

“So I asked them, ‘Why do you

think I didn’t?’ There was a pause for a second, and one of them said, ‘Because we have to get it ourselves?’ And I said, ‘Right.’” ■

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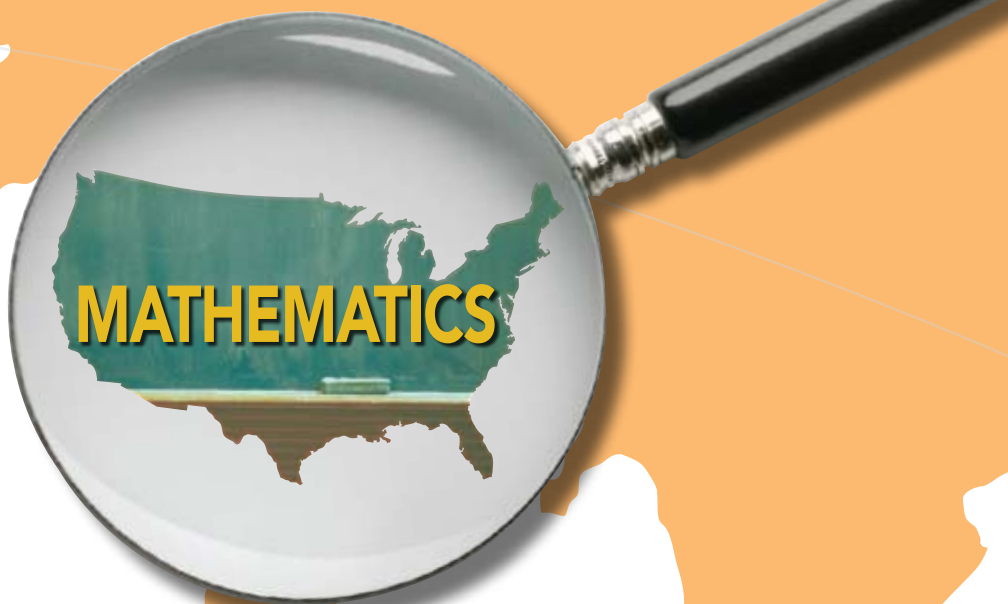


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Big Shifts Anticipated For Math Instruction

Some topics will be introduced earlier, some omitted, and students will have to show their understanding

By ERIK W. ROBELEN
Ellicott City, Md.

Nena F. Hupp pauses from reading her kindergartners the picture book *Let's Count* to help them better understand the math assignments they are about to tackle in small groups.

"Remember, when you get to 10 dots, a better way is to represent those 10 dots with just a stick," said Ms. Hupp, who teaches at Worthington Elementary School in this community near Baltimore. "It takes us forever to have to count all those dots. Mathematicians were smart when they came up with that idea, because it makes it so much easier."

Prior to this school year, kindergartners in the 50,000-student Howard County district—and in public schools across Maryland—were not expected to learn about representing tens and ones, a building block for understanding place value, explains Kay B. Sammons, the district's elementary-math coordinator.

"Prior to the common core," she said, "it was a 1st grade objective."

That's now changing, along with a whole lot more.

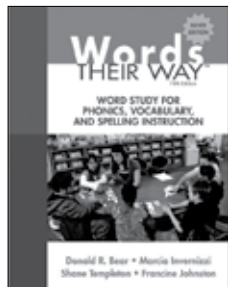
Across the nation, big shifts are afoot as 45 states and thousands of school districts gear up to implement the Common Core State Standards in mathematics. The standards will change the grade levels at which some content is introduced, push aside other topics altogether to achieve greater depth, and ask students to engage in eight "mathematical practices" to show their understanding, from making sense of problems to reasoning

◀ Nena Hupp helps Chase Toler in her class at Worthington Elementary School. Students in the Howard County, Md., district are being taught math concepts at an earlier age.

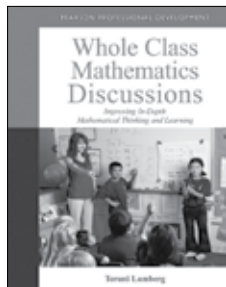
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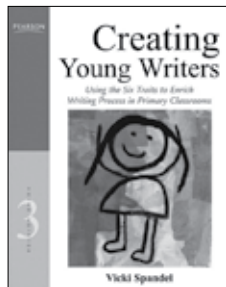
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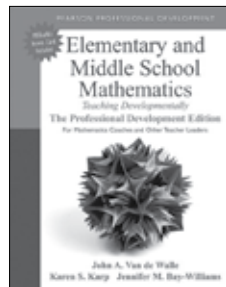
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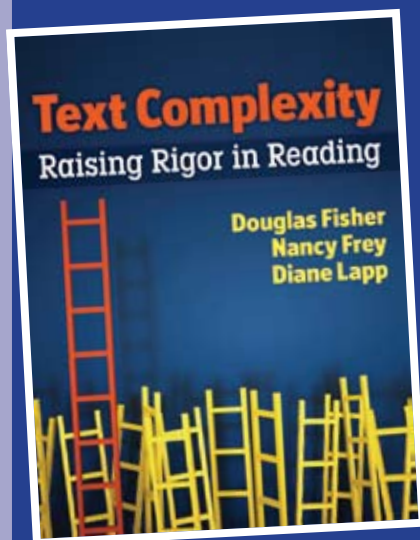
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abstractly and constructing viable arguments.

Some districts are already working hard to make the transition.

In Albuquerque, N.M., more than three dozen 4th and 8th grade math teachers are piloting the new standards this school year. In fact, several of them starred in videos recorded last fall in their classrooms to demonstrate lessons.

In Boston, teams of teachers and teacher-leaders are developing new curriculum-guidance documents, grade by grade, and combing through the district's textbooks and other instructional materials to see how they fit with the common core, what's useful, what's not, and where material should be reordered or supplemented.

In Howard County, the math standards were inaugurated for kindergarten this school year, with the 1st and 2nd grades to follow in the fall. To help prepare, district math leaders brought together some teachers, including Ms. Hupp, to serve in a focus group that delivered feedback on draft curricular materials for kindergarten.

"We would create things and get reactions from the teachers, asking: 'Does this make sense to you? Would you change this?'" said Ms. Sammons. "They gave us some terrific insights into how to develop this tool that is useful and user-friendly."

The suburban district also has started to communicate with families, whether at back-to-school events, in newsletters, or on the district website, to make sure they understand the changes coming. In fact, the district is planning a broader public relations campaign, with brochures, public forums, local TV spots, and even podcasts.

Gail F. Burrill, an academic specialist at Michigan State University and a former president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, suggests that bringing families on board is critical.

"It's not going to be enough just to support the teachers in making this change," she said, "if the broader community doesn't understand and support it."

'FLIPPING A SWITCH'

States and districts face a host of challenges in adapting to the standards, from ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared and supported to overhauling the curriculum and, more broadly, figuring out exactly what exemplary classroom practices tied to the standards should really look like.

The transition is tricky since, even as districts are beginning to move toward the new standards, common assessments pegged to them have yet to be developed. District officials note that, for the time being, schools will be judged on existing state tests that don't align to the new standards.

Meanwhile, many state and district officials say textbook publishers are scrambling to catch up with the common standards and few, if any, materials that truly align are available.

In addition, it's not simply a matter of flipping a switch to have instruction at all grade levels reflect the new standards. After all, a lot of math content builds on prior learning.

"You can't say, from one year to the next, we're going to go 100 percent common-core standards, because students aren't coming with the [prior knowledge] to embrace it," said Jesch A. Reyes, the director of math and science for the 405,000-student Chicago district, which has a group of "early adopter" schools in which teachers are starting to implement the new standards and share lessons learned. "Over the next several years, we're ... introducing them incrementally, building teacher capacity and student capacity."

Many district and state officials say they expect, to varying degrees, that the new standards will be tougher for students to meet.

William Barnes, the Howard County district's secondary-math coordinator, describes the new standards as "very different" and "much more rigorous" than Maryland's prior math standards.

"This is fewer, higher, so that's a significant shift in paradigm for Maryland," said Mr. Barnes, the immediate past president of the Maryland Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

On average, students will be expected to master about half as many standards as before, he said, but they'll be asked to understand that content in much greater depth.

"Here in Illinois, a lot of the content taught at each grade level is being pushed down to other grade levels, even several grades down," said Mr. Reyes from the Chicago school system.

His colleague, district math specialist Matthew S. McLeod, adds that while many teachers in the city's early-adopter schools seem enthusiastic about aspects of the standards, such as the eight mathematical practices that are a key focus of their work right now, the teachers are apprehensive about the new expectations.

"They are panicked about how hard it's going to be to get our students to this level of rigor," he said.

An array of initiatives have emerged to ease the transition to the new standards. For one, the 11 states, plus the District of Columbia, that won a slice of \$4 billion in federal Race to the Top aid have had extra money to fuel professional development and devise new resources to help schools, among other activities.

ADVISORY GROUP

Meanwhile, a set of leading national groups, including the NCTM, the Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics, and the Council of Chief State School Officers, have formed the Math Common Core Coalition to offer expertise and advice on the standards.

One new resource touted by several math educators is the Illustrative Mathematics Project website, which aims to supply high-quality math tasks, all carefully vetted by math experts and teachers, to illustrate the range and types of work that students will experience in a "faithful" execution of the standards.

William G. McCallum, a University of Arizona math professor who spearheaded the project and also was a lead writer of the common standards, said plans are in the works to expand the site to



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STANDARDS FOR MATHEMATICAL PRACTICE

The common standards in mathematics do not simply address academic content. They also outline a set of eight Standards for Mathematical Practice, which describe ways in which students ought to engage with the subject matter as they grow in mathematical maturity and expertise throughout the school year.

- 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.

SOURCE: *Education Week*

become a thriving online community of math educators with expertise in the new standards and how to translate them for the classroom.

'STRONGER FOUNDATION'

The Howard County district, one of Maryland's top-performing school systems, is working on many fronts to implement the standards, from providing professional development to revamping its curriculum, in an effort to be sure schools are ready for all the changes to the *what, when, and how* of math instruction envisioned with the common core.

On the when issue, for example, Mr. Barnes said about 40 percent of concepts now taught in Algebra 2 will shift to Algebra 1.

At kindergarten, the only grade level where the district has fully implemented the standards, the core focus is number development and spatial thinking.

"The children will have a stronger foundation in number as they move into 1st grade than they historically did," said Ms. Sammons, the elementary-math coordinator.

In the past, for instance, kindergartners were expected to be able to count up to 31, by ones; the new standards ask them to count to 100, by both tens and ones. In addition, she said, they are asked to start counting from any number.

The district has a three-year transition plan, she said, so that by 2013-14 all grade levels will



fully reflect the new standards.

It is developing a detailed curriculum—described as a set of "living documents"—that will evolve and grow to meet the needs of educators and students.

The material, posted on a wiki site, walks Howard County teachers through the math standards one by one. First, the standard is presented. Then, the district translates it into plain language with further explanation for teachers. The wiki site identifies common student misconceptions to watch out for, provides a sequence map of the curriculum and a progression chart to help see where students need to be, with benchmarks along the way. It also identifies a host of instructional resources, as well as information on formative and

summative assessments.

"We really unpack what's supposed to be going on in the standards," said Ms. Sammons.

Ms. Hupp, one of three kindergarten teachers at Worthington Elementary, raves about the wiki site, saying it's a vital resource. Overall, she's upbeat about the new standards and her experience so far teaching them.

"I like it so much better," said Ms. Hupp, a 15-year teaching veteran who notes that she is now better able to meet individual children where they are academically.

One big challenge, she said, is figuring out how to reach the deeper level of math understanding the standards espouse.

"The question is: How do you dig deeper?" she said. "For any-

▲
Teacher Nena Hupp reads the book *1+1=5 and Other Unlikely Additions* to children in her kindergarten class at Worthington Elementary.

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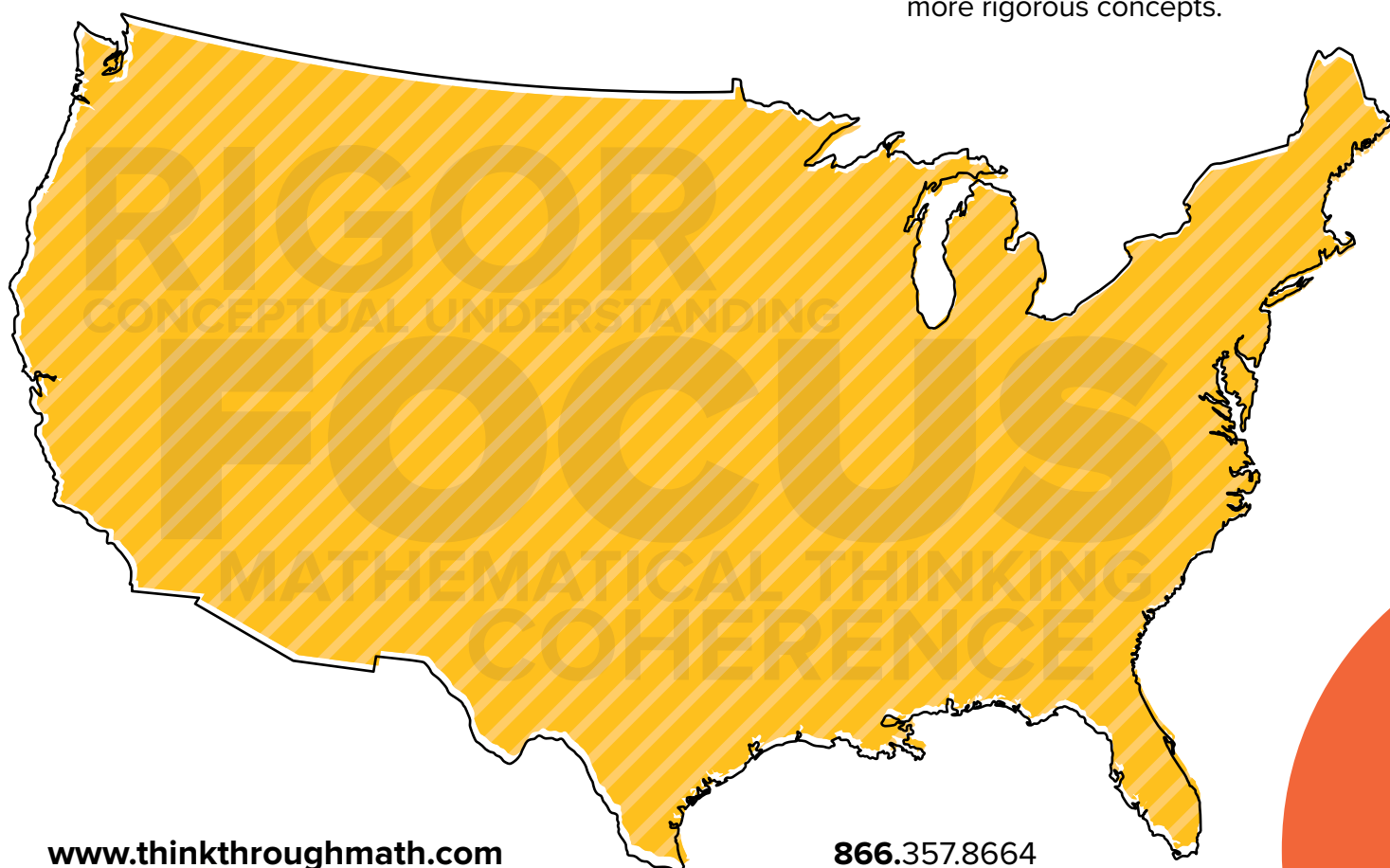
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body who starts teaching the common core, that is going to be the challenge.”

But the wiki guidance has been helpful in identifying sample lessons to foster that, she said.

One especially welcome change, she said, is that with fewer math concepts to cover, she has time to better gauge whether a student truly understands the material.

“Some of the kids that [met] the standard at the surface level were missing some pieces,” she said. “You could start picturing what their knowledge of that skill is, whether it was just memorization or whether they had it.”

A TASTE OF COMMON CORE

Meanwhile, with support from the Seattle-based Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, a handful of urban districts have gotten started on implementing the common core. Six systems, including Albuquerque and Boston, received \$500,000 planning grants in 2010. Those six, along with two others, are also “lead districts” in a common-standards project of the Council of the Great City Schools, which received a \$4.6 million grant from Gates last year for its work. (The Gates Foundation also provides support for coverage of K-12 business and innovation in *Education Week*.)

The pilot project in the Albuquerque school system is mainly aimed at testing approaches to support teachers and schools in implementing the standards in math and English/language arts, from their use of classroom materials and new curriculum maps to administering periodic student assessments and the delivery of professional development.

“The goal was for them to be able to get a taste of the common-core implementation and for us to get feedback so that we know how we should go about this districtwide, what worked, what didn’t,” said Gina Middleton, who is managing the district’s pilot program.

She’s heard a lot of positive feedback from educators.

“What they love, love, love is ... giving the depth to content and not teaching so much of the breadth,” said Ms. Middleton, “so there are less standards, but they are dense, very compact.”

Holly D. Zaluga-Alderete, a math teacher in the city’s Polk Middle School, echoes that point.

“I don’t have a mile-long list of standards to cover,” she said. “For example, with the Pythagorean theorem, in the past, we would say, ‘This is the Pythagorean theorem and how we use it’ and move on. This year, we could get in depth, how it worked, the ins and outs ... and knowing the whys.”

She added: “It’s a lot more rewarding and letting me be a teacher.”

One big concern among participating teachers, said Ms. Middleton, is the lack of resources to show them what the standards should look like in the classroom.

“Teachers have been craving to see it in action,” she said.

As one remedy, several math teachers, including Ms. Zaluga-Alderete, agreed to step in front of a camera to demonstrate lessons.

In Boston, a top priority is “organizing and sequencing the curriculum,” said Linda P. Chen, the 57,000-student district’s deputy chief academic officer.

The district named teams of math teachers and teacher-leaders at every grade level. Those work groups recently began sitting down with the state’s version of the common standards to redesign curriculum-guidance documents.

“Their charge is to become experts with the [new standards] and to use this expert knowledge to assist” the district in overhauling its curriculum, said Christine M. Hall, the school system’s senior director of secondary math.

By early June, each group is to complete work on a set of documents that identify the “scope and sequence” of instruction for their grade level, detailing the standards to be taught in each unit and the time spent on them. Also, each group will provide exemplars of problem types to use in class, as well as sample tasks, to illustrate the math comprehension that should be evident throughout the year, said Ms. Hall.

“Our goal is ... that teachers can leave for their summer vacation with something in hand that clearly articulates the major shifts of the curriculum under the common core,” she said. “While there are major shifts, this will be a fluid process, because you can’t just say we’re going to teach 6th grade anew, you need to attend to the transition.”

The work groups also are poring over the district’s current textbooks and other classroom materials “with a very critical eye, saying, ‘We know we have this, we know what we are being called to teach,’” Ms. Hall said. “How do we selectively choose the problems and questions in our textbook? How do we perhaps rephrase introductions to lessons, how do we reorganize lessons in units to attend to the new focus and coherence of the common core? This is a work in progress.”

Indeed, Ms. Chen, the deputy chief academic officer, said that her district, like some other large urban systems, is holding off on buying new textbooks because of budget constraints and because publishers still have work ahead.

“There really, truly is not something out there that you can buy that is aligned,” Ms. Chen said.

JUST DO IT

Although many educators say it’s a daunting task before them to feel prepared for the common standards, Ms. Hupp from Worthington Elementary said the key is just to plunge ahead.

“We’re feeling so much better about it,” she said of the school’s kindergarten team. “With anything new, you’re going to feel a lot of anxiety. ... The only way you can feel good about something is actually diving in and doing it.” ■

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States Adapting Best Practices From Special Ed. for Standards

Timing ideal for RTI, UDL, experts say, as curricula are rewritten

By NIRVI SHAH

Some instructional approaches associated closely with special education are gaining traction more quickly than ever as more states and districts look to them as the ideal tools to implement the Common Core State Standards.

In particular, two strategies—universal design for learning and response to intervention—are being cited by states in requests for waivers from the No Child Left Behind Act in the section about how they will implement the standards. Those familiar with the techniques say the pairings are logical, and the timing is right.

“To us, it makes perfect sense. With UDL, you really do start with addressing goals that are applicable for all learners,” said Patti Ralabate, the director of implementation for the Center for Applied Special Technology in Wakefield, Mass., which helped develop UDL.

Broadly, universal design for learning is an instructional method that involves creating lessons and classroom materials flexible enough to accommodate different learning styles. And response to intervention is an approach intended to provide early identification of students’ learning problems paired with the use of focused lessons—interventions—to address those problems before it’s too late.

“Without a system to be responsive to student need, we’re kind of back where we started with standards: aiming at the middle. There was going to be nothing intrinsically new unless we seized upon an opportunity to make this about every kid,” said Emilie Amundson, the assistant director of content and learning for the Wisconsin education department. “We have an opportunity to sell RTI as a process that helps implement the common core as opposed to this thing you do for special ed.-identification or special education.”

And because the common-core standards are new, the timing is perfect for states to shift to using UDL and RTI, said Ricki Sabia, the chairwoman of the National UDL Task Force in Washington and the associate director of the National Down Syndrome Society, based in New York City.

States are “redoing their curriculum anyway. We never expected people to just throw out everything and start all over,” Ms. Sabia said. “Now, all of a sudden, they are changing everything.”

MARRYING STRATEGY, CONTENT

Districts already using either or both approaches say there is no question about their benefits for implementing the common-core standards.

When the Bartholomew Consolidated school district in Columbus, Ind., began reworking its approach to instruction to incorporate the principles of universal design for learning a few years ago, it was presented from the start as something to be used with all students, regardless of whether they had a disability.

That approach will stick as the district begins teaching the common-core standards, said George Van Horn, the special education director for the 12,000-student district.

“We don’t believe there’s something for one segment of students that’s not for the benefit of other students,” he said. He illustrates this for some teachers by noting the utility of closed captioning in a crowded bar or noisy gym. “It was created for people with hearing difficulties, yet look at the benefit,” he said.

When a science teacher incorporated common-core vocabulary into her lessons, she didn’t order students to memorize a list and take a test—a task some students wouldn’t be able to manage. Instead, students were able to show they’ve learned the words using journals, doing some kind of project, or carrying out a computer activity. The latter approach reflects the work the district is working on with Ms. Ralabate’s center to improve literacy instruction across subjects, a demand of the common-core standards.

In the Chelmsford, Mass., school system, universal design for learning has been applied in pockets across the 5,000-student district for

several years, said Kristan Rodriguez, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction.

Now, the district is working with the Center for Applied Special Technology on marrying UDL with teaching the common-core standards that require students to show their prowess in persuasive and informative writing.

But teachers already familiar with UDL who are teaching the standards—Massachusetts students will be tested on the English/language arts common-core standards next year—are using it with other standards already, Ms. Rodriguez said.

A recent example: A middle school English teacher said some of her students who had taken a midterm didn’t show mastery of certain skills on the exam. She split them into groups, matching those who missed similar questions, and asked them to demonstrate their knowledge of those skills in another way, by teaching it to the rest of the class.

Providing students with choice, a different way of expressing themselves, is one of the core tenets of UDL.

“Kids that initially had trouble with understanding those skills created an activity that demonstrated their mastery,” she said.

DOUBLING UP

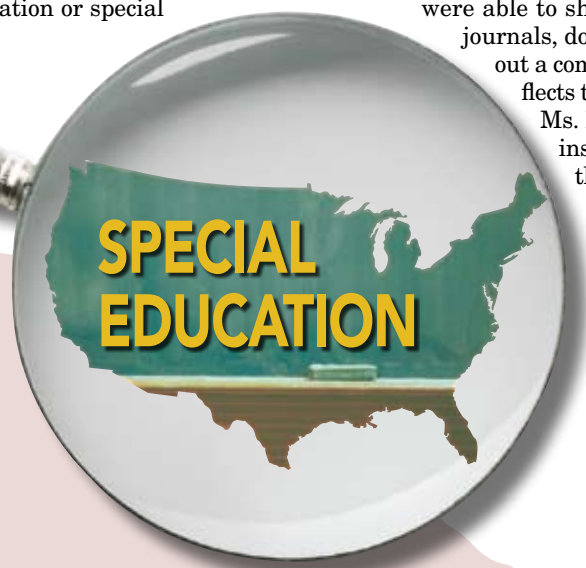
The shift in the use of UDL is also significant for students because of the very aim of the new standards, Ms. Sabia said, which is to produce a generation better prepared for life after high school.


“Being college- and career-ready is not just about mastering content. It’s about knowing how to approach things,” she said. When students know the most effective ways to learn and express themselves, those are strategies they can use the rest of their lives. But if they know something, and their teachers can’t tell, “you’re wasting time reteaching. And the kids are getting frustrated,” she said.

An ideal situation for implementing the common-core standards would be one in which UDL and RTI are employed together—which is the approach in Chelmsford and other Massachusetts districts, Ms. Sabia said.

“UDL is key for RTI. If you’re not letting [students] show what they know,” Ms. Sabia said, “you’re not going to know whether the intervention is working.”

The Center for Applied Special Technology is working with several districts specifically on connecting





the common-core standards with UDL, Ms. Ralabate said. It recently received an \$800,000 grant from the Seattle-based Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to work with four districts for a year on implementing UDL in sync with the standards, including Chelmsford, Bartholomew, and in Maryland, the systems in Baltimore and Cecil counties. (The Gates Foundation also provides support for coverage of K-12 business and innovation in *Education Week*.)

In the past, much of the center's work has been about just informing people what universal design for learning is, Ms. Ralabate said.

"This gives us the opportunity to do more than just awareness-building. It gives us the opportunity to do a lot of matching and coordinating between other initiatives and UDL," she said.

Other states and districts are working through these coordination efforts on their own.

In the Kent Independent School District in the Grand Rapids, Mich. area, special education director Laurie VanderPloeg said pieces of UDL had been in place long before the common-core standards. The strategy was targeted at only a fraction of Kent County's 109,000 students. Now, UDL has been embedded in the curriculum districtwide.

"Before, it was students with disabilities who had it as accommodations," she said. Now, all students benefit, and there is less attention on whether an individual student has a disability.

In North Carolina, universal design for learning has been used for a while, said Claire Greer, the state education department's consultant for autism, severe, and multiple disabilities and the coordinator of its deaf-blind project. But because of the common-core standards, the attitude about its use and potential has changed dramatically, she said.

"For the first time, it's a part of instruction. That is the shift that's being made. The UDL information is no longer just housed in special ed.," Ms. Greer said. "UDL is ... not about special ed.; it's about all learners."

CHALLENGES REMAIN

New approaches to instruction won't erase the challenges of implementing standards that are more demanding of students and teachers than most states' existing standards.

In the 2,800-student Mason County, Ky., district, students with disabilities' education plans are now being written based on the standards, said Greta Stanfield, its special education director.

Some teachers "get these big deer-in-the-headlights looks. 'We can't teach all those standards in one year,'" teachers say. Instead, they determine which standards are truly essential, she said.

"Can they achieve the same [amount of standards] in a single year? No," Ms. Stanfield said. "Even our gifted students are struggling."

To help students who show they are falling behind, the district has increased the amount of time they spend on math from 55 minutes a day to 90. Most of those students have disabilities, she said. Next school year, some will have 60 minutes more on top of that, at the expense of classes she said she knows are engaging, such as art.

For students with disabilities, the standards, accepted by all but four states, could eliminate some of the time students with disabilities lose moving between schools and states, said Lindsay Jones, the senior director of policy and advocacy services for the Council for Exceptional Children in Arlington, Va.

"You should be able to do that and not worry—especially for kids with disabilities where transition is a huge issue," she said.

But one overarching fear remains, despite the changes to instruction the standards may bring, improvements to education plans, and the smoothing of transitions.

"What we saw in the beginning of No Child Left Behind was, blame the kids with disabilities—they're so far behind," Ms. Jones said. Indeed, many schools failed to make the law's hallmark adequate yearly progress benchmark solely because of students with disabilities.

As the stakes for schools have risen, with demands increasing for all students, "it was all of a sudden, 'Wait a minute. Everybody's behind,'" Ms. Jones said.

The rigorous new standards may once again turn students with disabilities into scapegoats for poor school performance, she said.

"I think you're going to see the same thing," Ms. Jones said. "I'm concerned that will repeat itself." ■



ENGLISH-LEARNERS

Sophisticated Language Use Awaits ELLs in Standards

Students required to go well beyond grammar, vocabulary

By LESLI A. MAXWELL

Putting the common-core standards into practice in classrooms is a monumental change for teachers in the nation's public schools, but for educators who work with English-language learners, the shifts in instruction are expected to be even more groundbreaking.

That's because the new academic expectations for English/language arts and mathematics now adopted by all but four states require much more sophisticated uses of language than the mishmash of standards that have been in use for years across the states, say language-acquisition experts.

Grammar and vocabulary, for example, are often the primary focus of instruction for English-learners, as is teaching students to master certain language functions, such as suggesting or complimenting. Under the standards developed through the Common Core State Standards Initiative, however, instruction for English-learners will have to move far beyond those fundamental components of learning the language to include instruction on how to read and comprehend complex texts and to construct and convey arguments in writing across the content areas.

"For the most part, the profession has focused on bits and pieces of language," said Aída Walqui, the director of teacher professional-development programs for WestEd, a San Francisco-based education research firm. "The common core is really going to require teachers to move from understanding language as form or function to understanding it as activity and giving students the supports they need to participate in academic activities using language.

"Vocabulary and grammar are still important, but at a lower level of importance," she added. "That's going to be a momentous change."

This work will no longer be just the province of English-as-a-second-language teachers. The common core demands that teachers across all content areas teach literacy skills and the so-called "academic language" that is at the heart of their area of expertise.

As some states and districts—such as the Miami-Dade County school system in Florida, where 58,000 students are English-learners—push ahead on an early timeline with turning the standards into actual classroom instruction, language scholars, policymakers, advocates, and educators around the country continue to wrestle with important

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We have been very focused on making everything readable for kids, and they haven't been as successful in independently reading difficult texts."

KAREN SPIGLER
Miami-Dade County Schools

questions about how the language needs of English-learners will be met under the more-rigorous standards. A number of small-and large-scale efforts are taking shape to develop tools, resources, and instructional supports to help ensure that English-learners—the fastest-growing subgroup of students in the nation—will have the same access to the rigorous instructional levels of the common core as their peers who are native English speakers.

'ACADEMIC' VS. EVERYDAY

Helping English-learners surmount the higher expectations of the common standards will depend largely on how well teachers get them to understand academic language, in contrast to the informal, everyday English they use outside the classroom.

One of the most far-reaching efforts under way to help teachers in that vein is a project led by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium, a group of 27 states that currently share a common set of English-language-proficiency standards. Using broad input from member states, language experts at WIDA are working to finalize a new edition of the consortium's five English-language-development standards

that will show clearly the connections between the content standards of the common core across every grade level and the academic language that will be necessary to teach across the varying levels of English proficiency.

For example, in 1st grade, the common core calls for pupils to "write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure." The WIDA edition clearly spells out the grade-level vocabulary words and expressions that teachers should use—such as fact, paragraph, topic sentence, main idea, detail—while teaching that writing standard to students at all levels of English development. The WIDA edition also offers example topics that are pulled directly from a content standard in the common core and provide teachers with the types of support and scaffolding of academic language that they need depending on students' proficiency.

The new edition is also more explicit in showing teachers the cognitive demands required of the core-content standards and how to adjust instruction in line with English proficiency.

"I am hoping that teachers can see how to differentiate their in-

struction, so that even if you are a level-one English-learner, your teacher is going to have the tools to help you access the content even though you don't have much English," said Margo Gottlieb, WIDA's lead developer of common assessments for English-learners.

The final version of WIDA's English-language-development standards should be published by June, and, starting in late summer, the group will hold four regional conferences around the country to provide training to teachers and school administrators on the new edition and its connections to the common standards.

WIDA is also leading the effort of a group of 28 states to design new assessments of English-language proficiency that will measure the language demands of the common standards.

READYING EXEMPLARS

Another major initiative unfolding to craft an array of free instructional resources for teachers of English-learners is centered at Stanford University, where Kenji Hakuta, an education professor and an expert on English-learners, is co-chairing a project with María Santos, a former director of English-learner programs for the New York City school system, that will



▲ **Nine-year-old Denib Rojas, a recent arrival from the Dominican Republic, cuts out words that match a sound, then places them on a sheet of paper in a class for English-language learners at Riverside Elementary School in Miami. The Miami-Dade County, Fla., school system is pushing ahead to align ELL instruction with the common-core standards.**

◀ **Kevin Marroquin, 9, left, who is from Honduras, looks around the ELL classroom while his classmate Deyvin Santos, also 9 and from Guatemala, gets help from their teacher, Laurinda Flores.**

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map out the English-language demands of the common standards. Ms. Walqui of WestEd is also on that team of experts.

Earlier this month, the team launched its Understanding Language website with a dozen papers related to the common core and ELLs, along with a collection of practice and policy briefs that will address key issues.

The project is well-funded, with separate, \$1 million grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (Both foundations also support some areas of coverage in *Education Week*.)

Ms. Walqui said the group is hard at work devising “exemplars” to demonstrate to teachers what planning a unit for ELLs under the common core would look like. The first exemplar, she said, is scheduled to come out in June and will focus on middle school English/language arts, because “it’s a critical transition point for English-learners.”

The key for lesson planning is that the goals for students must be the same, Ms. Walqui said, but that there are multiple pathways for students of varying developmental levels of English to achieve the goals.

“The differentiation is within

the activities or versions of the activities for students,” she said.

As the team publishes its exemplars, it will host webinars to train teachers, Ms. Walqui said.

The Council of the Great City Schools—which represents 67 urban school systems that are home to 30 percent of the nation’s English-learners—is involved in a multitude of initiatives to help its member districts implement the common standards as thoughtfully and carefully for ELLs as they do for students who are not learning English. The rigor of the common core is also providing a prime opportunity for some districts to improve their services for English-learners, said Gabriela Uro, the manager of English-language-learner policy and research for the Washington-based council.

“The English-language-learner programs in many of our districts need ramping up anyway, and now they understand that if you are going to improve those programs, you needn’t bother improving to the current standard,” Ms. Uro said. “You need to design it for the common core.”

For nearly two years, the council has offered sessions on the common core during the regular meetings Ms. Uro conducts

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with district directors of English-learner programs. Part of that has included bringing in language-acquisition experts to explain the implications of the new standards for ELLs and to show explicitly, for example, how to teach complex texts to English-learners.

The council is also coordinating a project to help districts provide information to parents of ELLs by writing guides on the new standards in Spanish, Chinese, and up to eight additional languages that are represented in urban school systems.

Ms. Uro is also serving on the steering committee of the Stanford project to keep “the district perspective in the mix and to make sure that we bring all of this down to a greater applicability at the district level.”

DISTRICTS ADAPT

In the 345,000-student Miami-Dade school system, teachers and school administrators are largely forging ahead on their own to adapt the new standards for English-learners, said Karen Spigler, the administrative director of language arts/reading and bilingual education/world languages for the district. This year, the common-core standards are already implemented in kindergarten and 1st grade, with 2nd and 3rd grades on tap to begin in the fall, she said.

The district offered teams of teachers in those early grades a two-day training to focus on how to bridge instruction—especially

in reading—from the state standards they have been using to the common core, Ms. Spigler said.

A major component of that training, she said, was explaining to teachers how they must incorporate more nonfiction into the curriculum and how to figure out ways to judge the complexity of those texts for students.

“Our early-grade teachers think about children reading ‘stories,’ but we have to shift our thinking to how do we prepare them to read a science piece or something about the environment,” she said.

Another big shift for teachers—especially those working with ELLs—will be letting students struggle with difficult texts.

“That’s huge,” Ms. Spigler said. “We have been very focused on making everything readable for kids, and they haven’t been as successful in independently reading difficult texts.”

The vast majority of English-learners in public schools are native Spanish-speakers. That reality has led to at least one large-scale, formal undertaking to translate the common standards into Spanish and provide “linguistic augmentation” to account for the differences between the two languages when necessary.

Called Common Core en Español, the project is being led by ELL practitioners in San Diego, in collaboration with San Diego State University, the California education department, and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

“We are staying very aligned with the common core. It’s the

same content,” said Silvia C. Dorta-Duque de Reyes, a bilingual-services coordinator in the San Diego County office of education. “But because of the challenges that English-learners face in accessing academic content as they learn the language, one of the ways to differentiate for them is to provide the access through their primary language.”

The content standards have already been translated, Ms. Reyes said, and now the team is in the midst of providing the “augmentation” to show, for example, that in Spanish, students must learn accentuation and accent rules.

After a peer-review process over the summer, the goal is to publish the translations and make them available to all states and school districts by the end of the year, she said.

Ms. Reyes is also serving on a key panel of experts in California who are charged with revising the state’s English-language-development standards so that they are in line with the common core. And she is providing professional-development seminars to school administrators and leaders to help them prepare for implementation in another year or so.

Many frontline teachers in California, however, aren’t at the point of being trained for the shift to the common core. The new assessments for common core will roll out during the 2014-2015 school year.

“These teachers are still being held accountable for results on the [state test],” Ms. Reyes said. ■

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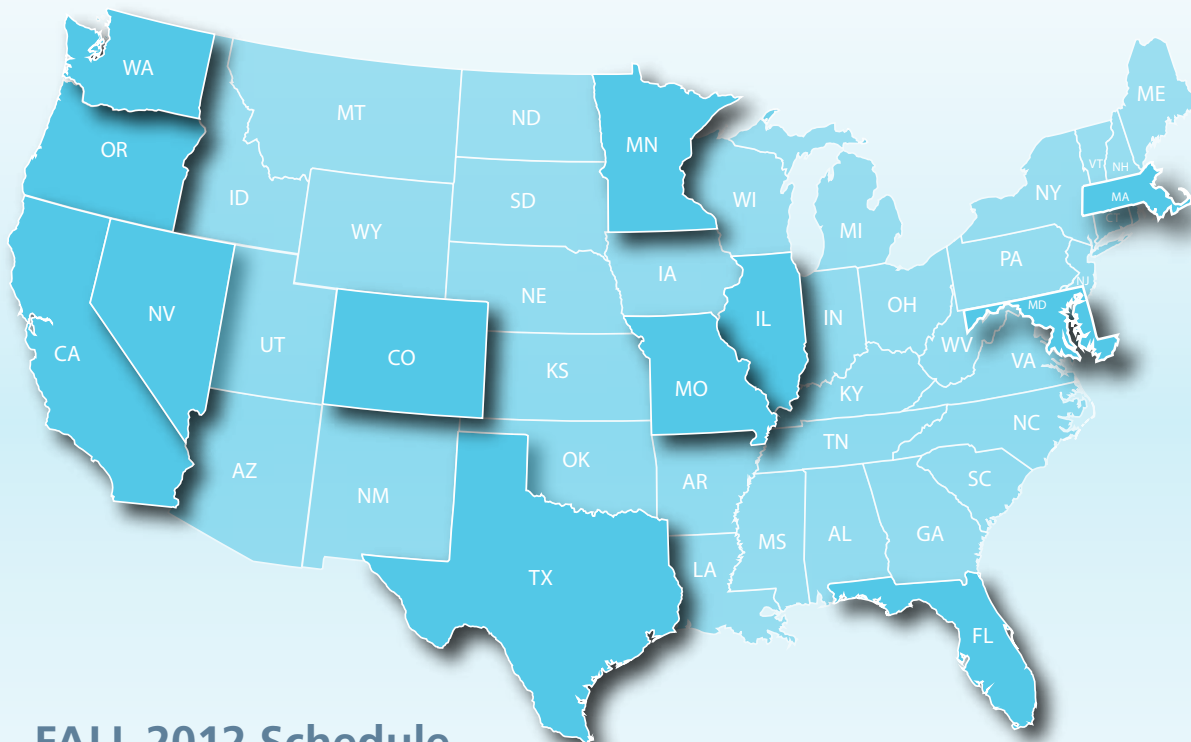
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