

## EDUCATION WEEK

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### COMMENTARY

## Common-Core Work Must Include Teacher Development

### Standards movement must embrace teacher professional learning

By Stephanie Hirsh

Now bearing the imprimatur of 46 states and the District of Columbia, the Common Core State Standards represent a major step forward for schools and the students they must prepare to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Yet a fundamental contradiction underlies the progress: While we are promoting radical change in creating a coherent national framework for what students should know and the way they learn, we have not yet committed to offering teachers the deep learning they will need to transform the way they work.

Too much of today's professional learning is not up to the task of supporting the substantive changes required of teachers to meet these new standards for English/language arts and mathematics—and too many plans for supporting the transition to the common core read more like communication plans than serious road maps for preparing educators to teach the standards.

Gene Wilhoit, the executive director of the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#), one of the groups behind the common-core initiative, made this point directly to state leaders recently when he asked them: "What made you think you could transform teacher practice and student learning with traditional models of professional development?" To their credit, most states acknowledge the contradiction as they struggle with the scope of this undertaking in an ambitious time frame. Still, few states can say they are taking the steps to address the challenge. That must change.

For all the investment of time and resources in the common core, we will not achieve the outcomes we expect and need without comprehensive professional learning for educators that supports the new standards. The dramatic shift in teaching prompted by the common core will require practical, intensive, and ongoing professional learning—not one-off "spray and pray" training that exposes everyone to the same material and hopes that some of it sticks.

For the same reasons that common standards for students make sense, states should also adopt common standards for professional learning. They must infuse the new standards into existing school improvement processes, plans for professional learning, and relicensure requirements.

Because the common core focuses on the application of knowledge in authentic situations, teachers will need to employ instructional strategies that integrate critical and creative thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, research and inquiry, and presentation and demonstration skills. They will need subject-area expertise well beyond basic content knowledge and pedagogy to create dynamic, engaging, high-level learning experiences for students. They will need greater data literacy as we shift from current accountability systems to more

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granular ways of assessing student learning. And, their leaders will need to champion professional learning in their buildings and back the teachers who coach and support each other.

Too few states and school districts act consistently on what research has shown to improve educator practice and student achievement. And even fewer take steps to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.

We know from research what constitutes highly effective professional learning and how to engage educators in it. Administrators and teachers working together plan, execute, and assess professional learning. It is driven by data that pinpoint what students need. It is collective and collaborative within and across buildings, so the quality of instruction improves

consistently from classroom to classroom and from school to school. It includes time for teachers to learn from each other, examine research and effective practices, and problem-solve. It demands leadership from teachers as coaches and mentors, while continuing to tap the knowledge of outside experts and resources.

Emerging technology holds the promise of making this kind of high-quality professional learning more accessible and relevant to more teachers. Platforms that facilitate shared learning, learning analytics, and continuous improvement and evaluation systems can accelerate the pace of change needed to put the common core into place. Along with emerging tools such as classroom video capture, earbud coaching (in which teachers receive real-time coaching via an earpiece while they work), virtual classroom simulations, and online tutoring, innovative technology can support an approach to professional learning that addresses each educator's individual needs, incorporates data, monitors the impact of new learning, and supports the spread of best practices to improve teaching at scale.

For the common core to be successful, states will have to be much more thoughtful about organizing, managing, implementing, and evaluating these tools and strategies. State leaders will have to work together, with consortia, and with K-20 systems to develop comprehensive programs that deeply immerse teachers in the common core, its related curriculum and assessment systems, and content-specific pedagogies—and then provide ongoing classroom support and feedback.

Education leaders must alter school calendars—both the yearly calendar and daily schedules—to provide dedicated time for professional learning and for teachers to collaborate on a continuing basis. They must promote professional-learning academies and the use of knowledge systems and other interactive technology. In short, to meet the end goal of graduating students who are competent in the common-core standards and college- and career-ready, states must create a culture that supports and accelerates change, not delays and diffuses it.

To help identify ways of establishing the needed infrastructure to support common-core implementation, our organization, Learning Forward, selected Kentucky as a demonstration site late last year for a laboratory for effective professional-learning models that align with the common core. Other states—Georgia, Illinois, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Utah, and Washington—are also part of this effort, serving as critical friends, helping pilot and evaluate tools and strategies to create a truly comprehensive professional-learning system.

Along with its commitment to the standards, Kentucky has already made progress toward some of its key goals; for example, it is working on organizing classwork around reading and writing in all subjects. It has also signaled its willingness to make real changes to support professional learning. Our work developing this infrastructure for professional learning will also be supported by new technology and partnerships within and beyond the seven participating states, with support from the Sandler Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates



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Foundation. It is through this combination of commitment to the standards and comprehensive change in professional learning that we hope to see the promise of the common core come to life.

The common core will not be self-implementing—executing this overhaul of expectations for students and teachers represents a tremendous undertaking.

We hope that states will watch closely, learn from these efforts in Kentucky, and take action, and that additional funders and policymakers will develop strategies to inspire states to build transformative professional-learning systems. The most powerful tools that states and districts have at their disposal to improve teacher effectiveness and ensure that students can meet the new standards remain unchanged. Thoughtful professional learning is crucial if we want to promote deep understanding of content and transformed instruction, rather than merely aim for higher standards and hope for the best.



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