

REL Mid-Atlantic Teacher Effectiveness Webinar Series
Common Core State Standards and Teacher Effectiveness
Q&A with Ross Wiener, Ph.D.
October 10, 2013

In this webinar, Dr. Ross Wiener, Vice President and Executive Director of the Education and Society Program, Aspen Institute, discussed strategies for integrating the CCSS into teacher effectiveness systems, including ways in which the CCSS can support professional growth and inform teacher evaluation systems. This Q&A addressed the questions participants had for Dr. Wiener following the webinar. The [webinar recording](#) and [PowerPoint presentation](#) are also available.

Questions

1. How do you see the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiatives addressing the complexities of our increasingly culturally diverse classrooms?

In three ways: First, the CCSS in their literacy expectations talk about the need to read literature from many different cultures to make sure students feel comfortable in diverse settings. The standards also talk about issues and ideas from multiple cultures. Second, they create a shared context for everyone, and creating a shared context, including talking about the importance of students learning standard English as they go through public education, is important to being inclusive of all students in and out of school (e.g., ensuring they have the ability to take advantage of everything society has to offer). Finally, the teaching frameworks used to assess teaching often are explicit about having culturally responsive and inclusive classrooms, which will spark conversations about how to use Common Core to meet these expectations.

2. How can the building administrator best provide effective feedback to teachers on their effectiveness concerning CCSS? What recommendations could you give administrators for providing quality feedback to teachers so that we advance the implementation of CCSS?

Three recommendations for administrators are:

1. Work with teachers, teams, or individuals to identify aspects of the framework that are especially important to advancing Common Core implementation as areas of focus in terms of professional growth for the school year. One example is how to craft questions and class discussions that build students' ability to draw evidence from text. Many teachers need to develop in this area, which is covered explicitly in most teaching frameworks and is central to Common Core's instructional shifts.
2. Identify areas of strength in the teacher's current practice that can be built on to address those areas that need development. Research on human capital suggests that people improve more when they are building on strengths than when they are remediating weaknesses. Therefore, being explicit about teachers' strengths can help increase both principals' and teachers' ability to have productive feedback conversations.
3. Ask teachers directly, "Are these feedback conversations helping you to improve your instruction?" Make sure to use the data to improve the process and to track progress

over time, so teachers see their perspective being valued and experience their supervisors as modeling the same openness to feedback that the teachers are expected to embrace.

Two resources for administrators are:

1. [The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research](#). Data from this recent survey suggest that three quarters of teachers felt positively about the feedback they received. While these results are encouraging, they indicate that one quarter of the surveyed teachers did not feel the feedback was supportive.
2. [Evaluating Evaluations: Using Teacher Surveys to Strengthen Implementation](#). This paper published by The Aspen Institute examined how employers in and outside of education use surveys to ensure feedback conversations are productive and actually being appreciated by teachers or employees.

3. How do you build teacher efficacy and measure student impact on a teacher's effectiveness?

The recent investment in and emphasis on the observation and feedback cycle between teachers, principals, and other observers of instruction is an important development. This shared understanding of instruction creates opportunities because, for example, if we ensure that the most important work we want to see under the Common Core is embedded in teaching frameworks, then we are more likely to have conversations that help people see how these elements come together. One recommendation is to consider focusing some observations on these Common Core instructional shifts; that is, being clear about some of the priorities in the CCSS that could also be made priorities in developing teacher evaluation systems. Research conducted by [Achieve and Education First](#) identified important attributes for aligning teacher evaluation systems to the CCSS and could support this thinking (see question 5 for a discussion of attributes of this alignment).

In addition, many frameworks and exemplars of practical observation tools are available online to help observers and teachers deepen their knowledge of and skill in using standards and improve teaching. Self-assessment and observation tools could be used, for example, to assess whether classroom instruction is focusing on the instructional shift. Available frameworks and tools for teachers include the [Insight Core Framework Rubric](#), [Danielson Framework](#), [Aspen Institute Professional Learning Modules](#).

Another way to build teacher capacity is networking. First, there is an opportunity to create productive networks both within and across districts for principals, principal supervisors, and teachers. For principals and principal supervisors, the conversations could focus on how the CCSS and teacher evaluations are being integrated and how their faculty is coming to see these as parts of a whole. Principals are an important lever to inspire and motivate changes associated with the CCSS; one resource for principals is The Aspen Institute's [School-Level Transition Guide](#). For teachers, a time and space should be created for them to engage and collaborate with each other to set clear and consistent expectations within and across content areas and to discuss how these expectations can be reinforced across content areas. The Aspen Institute's [Professional Learning Modules](#) are one space available online for teachers to come together across content areas. The academic writing module, for example, focuses on the cross-curricular implications of the Common Core and supports this collaboration and thinking among teachers.

4. Some have suggested the CCSS are too broad to actually impact instruction. What are your thoughts on how the CCSS impact direct instruction? How can these outcomes be evaluated or assessed?

One project that sprung up around the CCSS is [The Literacy Design Collaborative](#). It is a program that uses prompts for writing assignments as the key lever for inviting and supporting teachers to backward map from the standards, through expectations for student work, to arrive at instructional strategies and “mini tasks” for students that build toward mastery of Common Core expectations. One takeaway from the Literacy Design Collaborative work is that when genuine implementation of CCSS in the classroom occurs, students are motivated to work harder and make more progress than teachers expected. If teachers are willing to redesign instruction around the expectations of the CCSS, it will lead to dynamic classrooms where students are more actively engaged and asserting more ownership over their own learning. This will take practice—teachers need to learn to release more responsibility to students, and students will need to learn new norms of interactive, respectful dialogue, discussion, and debate in class.

In addition, the design considerations of the standards impact instruction. That is, the standards and learning progression frameworks can help guide curriculum and instruction. For example, a teacher can assess a student’s relative level against the standards and then use the progressions to guide instruction that will help the child achieve mastery at the current grade level and up to college and career readiness.

The standards do *not* include curriculum, so local educators have tremendous flexibility and responsibility to choose the content and the texts students will work with in school. It is through the exercise of professional judgment that Common Core will come to life in classrooms. The Common Core provides an essential foundation, but teachers and other educators also have an essential role in making this work.

5. What are examples of measurable evidence of implementation in the classroom to include as part of an evaluation? What are teacher evaluation measures that align with the CCSS?

Research conducted by [Achieve and Education First](#) identified important attributes for aligning teacher evaluation systems to the CCSS. Among these attributes are statewide assessments, student learning objectives and other classroom assessment tools (e.g., curriculum-embedded projects that draw on the CCSS for nontested grades and subjects) that are aligned to the CCSS, as well as teacher observation rubrics that express the knowledge and skills that teachers must have to deliver CCSS- aligned instruction and professional development that supports the instructional shifts and knowledge building.

These attributes overlap with many existing teaching and observation frameworks and those that are being developed. Perhaps the most widely used framework is the Danielson Framework. The Danielson Framework for teaching is a research-based set of components of teaching with four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson Group, 2011). The CCSS have clear implications for the first three domains.

6. How can the CCSS be effectively explained to new teachers without overwhelming them?

First, unpack the standards to understand where teachers need the most content building. The new expectations for mathematics require deeper focus and mastery, and the expectations for literacy involve skills (e.g., critique logical arguments of others, select complex text) for which teachers will need more support and practice. Second, provide professional learning that focuses on building teachers' content knowledge regarding expectations in the Common Core and provides opportunities to practice the skills required to effectively teach in alignment with the CCSS. The professional learning should model the experiences of the CCSS and engage teachers in not only discussing strategies but also participating in the activities they will ask students to perform; Aspen Institute has created literacy learning modules for teachers that are available for free download on the web. Third, recognize that the CCSS are present in the education world so incorporate them in conversations and experiences. Lastly, make time for educators to collaborate and engage across schools and states to look out for the integrity of the standards through online learning communities and take advantage of resources in a way that builds ownership of the standards.

A resource for building CCSS knowledge is the [PARCC content model frameworks](#), which show how the content standards differ and increase across grades. This could be useful for teachers who want to dig into the standards in a different way and to gain a broader understanding.

7. Although the CCSS are being implemented across most states, each state has interpreted the standards in a slightly different way. School districts vary within states. Thus, districts have different expectations. Is this a concern?

There are going to be differences in approach and emphasis, but the CCSS set a clear and rigorous standard for student learning. Although some specifics may differ across districts, the skills and knowledge that students can and should demonstrate must stay the same; we can't allow differences in priorities or geographic variation to dilute that standard.

The CCSS are a tool for equity; the expectations are ambitious given where we are now, but Common Core is designed specifically to prepare students for the real demands they will confront in college and work. These are high-level skills that all students need to become economically self-sufficient and full participants in the civic and cultural life of their communities. Past state standards set a bar for proficiency that most students could meet, but those standards did not indicate that students were ready to succeed after high school. One of the important advances of the CCSS is that they set this expectation for all students. There is a risk that this expectation will seem too ambitious to some people, and they will water down the expectations from the start. Therefore, it is critical to stay consistent about the rigor and quality of work we expect from students everywhere.

Action Steps

Participants responded to the question “As a result of today’s webinar, what action steps do you plan to take?” and some of their responses are listed below.

- *I will be sharing the information with others in my organization.*
- *I would like to reach out to nearby districts that are using the same evaluation framework (Stronge) to have a conversation about how we can use the framework to support the implementation of CCSS in our classrooms.*
- *Research how college programs have implemented CCSS.*
- *I will be sharing the information as well with my colleagues. I am also planning to include more discussions about strategies for implementing CCSS in our PD.*
- *I am constantly adding to our toolbox for CCSS implementation—I will be sharing with our curriculum specialists and administration teams.*
- *Following/continuing the recommendations shared.*
- *I will assist teachers with using more effective assessment tools aligned with CCSS, and use more relevant assessments for reevaluations.*
- *Train our CTE teachers in additional questioning and discussion techniques.*
- *Suggest that principals consider using walkthroughs to track Common Core implementation and consider a reset of the SGO discussion to explicitly link the standards and the evaluation system across all content areas.*
- *Address the need to unpack and dig deeply into the CCSS Literacy Standards for teachers across the curriculum to help students improve their reading/writing skills.*

Additional Resources

Aspen Institute Resources

- Tool for Teachers: Professional Development Modules with Rubrics
<http://www.aspendrl.org/portal/browse/CategoryList?categoryId=284>
- Aspen Institute resources for building Common Core content knowledge
www.aspendrl.org
- Aspen Institute Professional Learning Modules
<http://www.aspendrl.org/portal/browse/CategoryList?categoryId=281>
- Aspen Institute School-Level Transition Guide: A resource for principals and leadership teams
<http://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/implementation-common-core-state-standards-transition-guide-school-level-leaders>

Other Useful Resources

- Charlotte Danielson’s Teaching Evaluation Framework
<http://www.danielsongroup.org/userfiles/files/downloads/2013EvaluationInstrument.pdf>

- Newark Public Schools Framework for Effective Teaching
<http://newarkexcels.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Framework-for-Effective-Teaching.pdf>
- Learning Forward Tools and Publications
<http://learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core>
- ASCD Resources and Tools for PLCs
<http://www.ascd.org/professional-development/oscb/plc-booklets.aspx>
- School Improvement Network's Global/National Virtual PLCs
<http://www.schoolimprovement.com/common-core-360/blog/common-core-plc/>
- All Things PLC: Resources for PLC development with no commercial promotion of tools
<http://www.allthingsplc.info/>
- PARCC Content Model Frameworks
<http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-model-content-frameworks>
- Insight Core Framework Rubric
<http://www.insightcoreframework.com/>
- The Literacy Design Collaborative
<http://www.literacydesigncollaborative.org/>
- The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research
<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications>
- Evaluating Evaluations: Using Teacher Surveys to Strengthen Implementation
<http://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/evaluating-evaluations-using-teacher-surveys-strengthen-implementation>
- A Strong State Role in Common Core State Standards Implementation: Rubric and Self-Assessment Tool
<http://www.achieve.org/files/Achieve-CCSSrubricandstatetoolFINAL.pdf>

References

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