



Common Standards, Common Goals

Partnership is paramount to local implementation
of the Common Core State Standards

Emilie Amundson

If you happened to be watching the Masters Golf Tournament on a rainy weekend this past April, you may have noticed a frequently aired Exxon Mobile advertisement in support of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and mathematics.

What does a multi-billion dollar oil company have to do with school content standards, you may have asked? The television spot that aired during the Masters laid it out in simple but undeniable terms: “When our kids do better, America does better.”

Exxon is not the only Fortune 500 Company lending support to Wisconsin’s mathematics and English language arts standards, currently shared by 45 states and the District of Columbia. In February, more than 70 top national business leaders posted a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* to underscore the impact of high and clear standards on



COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS
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building a global knowledge economy. This open letter affirmed that, “The United States is once again at a critical place in its quest for educational excellence, and ... America’s business leaders can make a positive difference for schools, students and the country’s future if we join together and share our expectations for education and our support for the people and institutions that move education reform forward.”

As Wisconsin continues on its five-year journey toward full implementation of the CCSS in 2014-15, this strong level of support for Wisconsin’s standards is echoed across our state by professional groups of educators, families and local school boards that have recognized the

opportunity and responsibility we all have to ensure all students are college and career ready. These groups join a very vocal business community in demonstrating the power of partnerships in implementing the CCSS.

■ A Bit of History

From their inception, the CCSS were predicated on partnership. In 2010, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of State School Officers (CCSSO) recognized the opportunity to clearly define the knowledge and skills that will prepare students for the 21st century workplace and will ensure students are truly college and career ready. Leveraging the expertise and experience of educators across 48 states was crucial to developing strong standards that meet the needs of all students.

Since 2010, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS, a set of consistent English

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language arts and mathematics expectations for what students should know and be able to do in kindergarten through 12th grade. Each state made its own decision to adopt after opportunities to review drafts and voice feedback. In fact, Wisconsin stakeholders provided over 800 pages of feedback to CCSS writers prior to the release of the final standards. At that point, Wisconsin was well poised to adopt the CCSS in June of 2010, leveraging the involvement of statewide English language arts and mathematics educator leadership teams in the review process, and gaining statewide support through multiple stakeholder events held in the spring of 2010.

■ What are the CCSS? How are they different?

The CCSS are rigorous, internationally benchmarked English language arts and mathematics standards designed to ensure that students leave school with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and careers.

The CCSS are not a national or state curriculum nor are they federally mandated; Wisconsin made the

decision to adopt the CCSS because of their rigor and relevance for Wisconsin students. Curriculum decisions, textbook adoptions and scope and sequence work have always been the domain of local education agencies. The CCSS provide more guidance and support at each grade level while still maintaining the local control so important to districts throughout the state.

Since 2010, Wisconsin has begun to link this system of CCSS, instruction and assessment to school accountability measures, educator effectiveness, and accountability for pre-service educator preparation programs. The CCSS provide the foundation for all of these important systems statewide. Additionally, the CCSS provide a framework to Wisconsin educators for research-based instructional practices that will truly transform student learning.

Ensuring the links among these important facets of our educational system requires a collaborative partnership of stakeholders who can help to make the CCSS meaningful for their community of practice.

■ How will Wisconsin assess the CCSS?

Each state, including Wisconsin, will select an aligned assessment to the CCSS where scores will be available sooner than ever before, providing parents and teachers the ability to intervene quickly and support struggling students. Computer-adaptive testing will ensure students are tested on the full range of their abilities, and the full range of English language arts and mathematics standards.

State Superintendent Tony Evers indicated in a video message to Wisconsin educators that “Wisconsin’s selected state assessment must match the academic demands of the CCSS, reflect the instructional shifts evident in the CCSS, and measure college and career readiness.”

To that end, Wisconsin is committed to an assessment system aligned to the CCSS in both letter and spirit, which will also include a college entrance assessment such as the ACT. Wisconsin will continue to work with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SMARTER) to develop a system of multiple assessments at grades 3-11, including formative, interim, and sum-

CCSS ONLINE RESOURCES

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently formed a Common Core State Standards Implementation Team to ensure that all Wisconsin school districts have access to free and available resources to assist with implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Here are a few of the websites available to help:

■ CCSS Implementation Center commoncore.dpi.wi.gov

The homepage of DPI’s new CCSS Implementation Center is packed with resources for particular stakeholder groups, such as parents, educators, principals, and community members.

■ Wisconsin Professional Learning On Demand commoncore.dpi.wi.gov/learningondemand

Specifically for educators, the DPI’s Wisconsin Professional Learning On Demand webpage is a collection of online modules to assist educators in understanding the standards and implementing classroom curriculum and instruction that meets the expectations of the standards.

■ Student Achievement Partners

achievethecore.org

Student Achievement Partners, a national non-profit group, has invested in robust CCSS portals that are also open and available to educators nationwide.

■ engageNY engageNY.org

Other state education departments such as New York’s engageNY website, have numerous CCSS resources for teacher and school leaders.

Wisconsin is sharing its resources nationally as well, and has received recognition across states for professional learning materials focusing on building school-wide literacy in all subjects, and for our text complexity resources which help educators understand how to select texts that are appropriately complex for each grade level. □





mative tools, as well as resources that will assist with further CCSS implementation.

School districts throughout the state are currently piloting sample SMARTER assessment items and the data collected from this experience will help to inform changes to the assessment for full piloting next year.

■ Implementing the CCSS

As we move closer to full implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), school districts are encouraged to draw on DPI resources, the good work of Wisconsin partners, and other external state consortiums that are working together to implement common standards.

The DPI's newly formed CCSS Implementation Team has developed a website filled with resources for school leaders and educators (see "Online CCSS Resources").

While most of the work in implementing the CCSS will take place at our schools, it is also important to keep your community involved in these changes. Engaging in meaningful conversations with families and community members about the opportunities within the CCSS is also important in sustaining this transformation.

Resources for talking about the CCSS with families and community members can be found on the DPI CCSS website (commoncore.dpi.wi.gov/), and can help stakeholders to understand what the standards are,

why they are important, and how they are being implemented and assessed in our state.

Building this strong coalition of engaged stakeholders may yield important connections and partnerships within your community that might not have existed otherwise. Leveraging the power of these partnerships for increased student learning has been important to our efforts within and across states, and will ensure that moving forward we have a strong and growing vision for college and career readiness for all students. ■

Amundson is the DPI director of the Common Core State Standards Implementation Team.



GEARING UP

Here's a quick look at how two Wisconsin school districts have been preparing to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in their classrooms.

► Is your district ready to implement the CCSS in your schools? Have your teachers begun using the CCSS in the classroom?

Chris Van Hoof, director of instruction, Clintonville School District:

Well, ready or not, here they come. We have been doing a variety of things over the past two years to help our teachers prepare for the instructional changes that the CCSS will bring. For example, two years ago we provided a general overview of the new standards and highlighted the major shifts in both English language arts and math. We also spent time at monthly grade level meetings "unpacking" the standards to build teacher understanding. This past year, we have spent time learning how to use Curriculum Companion (an electronic standards-based curriculum model created by CESA 7). Slowly but surely we are beginning to see teachers make changes in their instructional practices.

► What steps has your district taken to prepare staff for implementation of the CCSS?

Colleen Timm, superintendent, Mishicot School District:

Through CESA 7, our teachers were able to participate in investigations of the Common Core State Standards. During these sessions, our math and language arts teachers had an invaluable opportunity to examine the new standards by

grade level using a modeled process that could be replicated back in the district with other members of our staff. Specifically, their work during these sessions focused on examining and understanding the underpinnings, connections, and context of the new standards; the organization of the standards, the specific learning outcomes for each standard, the vertical connections across the grade levels, and the necessary action steps for implementation.

► Do you think the CCSS will be good for your students?

Van Hoof: I believe the CCSS are far superior to the standards we had in Wisconsin previously. They are designed to be fewer, clearer, and higher than previous standards, and I think for the most part they are. Because they are common across 40+ states, for the first time ever, we can share well designed resources across the nation.

Timm: The CCSS, which clearly delineate what students must learn and be able to do at each grade level, is aiding us in strengthening our capacity to facilitate student growth not only in their knowledge of facts but in their ability to be life-long learners who engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, decision making based on credible evidence, the creation of a viable argument couched in sound data, and clear articulation of thoughts and ideas. □