



# THE ONE BILLION DOLLAR QUESTION:

## How Can Districts and Schools Equitably Implement the Common Core?

This year districts and charter schools will receive a one-time infusion of \$1.25 billion dollars for the professional development, materials, and technology necessary to implement the Common Core State Standards and new Smarter Balanced computerized assessments scheduled to start in 2014-15. This infusion of funds and additional Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) dollars represent an unprecedented opportunity for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to prepare their educators, students, and families for the new, rigorous college and career-ready standards. Equitable implementation of the Common Core has the potential to close long-standing opportunity and achievement gaps impacting low-income students, students of color, and English learners.

For some systems, the extra cash will boost equitable implementation efforts already underway. For others, it will jump start activity that has yet—but urgently needs—to begin. In both cases, effective, equitable and efficient use of these earmarked dollars will require careful planning. And in both cases, it means understanding the unique needs of each district and school and developing an implementation plan that is forward-thinking—not just more of the same. The professional development, instructional tools, and technology of yesterday will not prepare students or teachers for the Common Core. Based on an analysis of best practices we have identified in California and other states, we lay out key questions, ideas, and potential pitfalls that LEA's should consider as they plan how to effectively and equitably implement the Common Core. In addition, this guide is intended to assist parents and community members as they work with district and school leaders to ensure the Common Core is implemented effectively and equitably to close opportunity and achievement gaps.



## ASSESS DISTRICT AND SCHOOL NEEDS

Before developing a spending plan for these new funds, LEAs should assess their readiness to implement Common Core. Below is a checklist of questions that may help districts and charter schools understand the capacity of their people and systems, the status of their current plans, and their areas of need. This list is meant to serve as a guide. Because LEAs are likely to enter this work in many ways, with full implementation taking several years, no one system should expect to be able to check off every item at this stage. While this tool refers to “districts,” these guidelines can also apply to charter schools, charter management organizations, and county offices of education.

### DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TEAM

- Has the district identified the staff responsible for leading Common Core implementation and scoped out their responsibilities?
  - What are they charged with accomplishing, and by when?
  - Do they have the resources and influence needed to be successful in executing an initiative of this magnitude?
  - How does Common Core implementation impact other district initiatives?

### TIMELINE

- Does the district have an ambitious but achievable timeline for implementation, including at-least-quarterly milestones?
- Is this timeline visible to teachers, administrators, and community members?
- Does the district know how progress against this timeline will be documented and communicated to stakeholders?

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Does the district have a plan for training district administrators, school leaders, and teachers on the Common Core?
  - What is the timeline for providing training, and how will subject and grade levels be prioritized?
- Does the plan include thoughtful scaffolding, such that educators receive an introduction to the content and instructional shifts Common Core will require, followed by ongoing opportunities to develop the content knowledge and teaching skills necessary to effectively implement the standards for all students?
- Has the district identified leaders committed to planning, adapting and delivering Common Core professional development with a focus on equity?
- Does the district know how it will make use of technology-enhanced professional development, including web-based delivery methods and online collaboration opportunities?

## STANDARDS, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENTS

- Has the district identified where Common Core standards and instruction have already taken root?
- Has the district prioritized which grades and subjects will be the focus of near-term, mid-term, and longer-term implementation?
- Does the district have a plan for selecting instructional materials, aligning these to the Common Core, and deploying them to school leaders and teachers?
- Does the district have a plan for how it will make use of technology-enhanced and open source materials?
- How will the district assess student progress through the use of formative assessments?
- Does the district know how materials will be adapted for English learners, students with disabilities, and struggling students?

## TECHNOLOGY

- Has the district documented a clear and sustainable plan for how technology will be used to enhance instruction and further student learning, with specific attention to how students with limited access to technology outside of school can be best supported?
- Does the district have a plan for meeting the internet connectivity, bandwidth, hardware, and operating system requirements of Smarter Balanced computer-adaptive assessments?
- Has the district assessed the readiness of each school to administer Smarter Balanced?

- Has the district identified who is responsible for overseeing the technology systems, expansion, and changes necessary to implement Smarter Balanced and realize the full potential of the Common Core? These responsibilities should include:
  - Extending wireless internet connectivity to every classroom;
  - Designing, implementing, and managing this upgraded district-wide network;
  - Ensuring educator access to web-based professional development, online lesson plan sharing, and open source instructional materials;

## EXTERNAL PARTNERS

- Is there an external group of stakeholders and experts who can help guide, support, and monitor the district's implementation efforts, with particular attention to how well high-need students are supported to meet Common Core standards?
- Does the district know how it will partner with local university teacher preparation programs?

## COMMUNICATION

- Does the district have a plan for communicating the objectives, details, and timelines of Common Core implementation to key stakeholders, including the board, administrators, school leaders, teachers, students, families, and the broader community?
- Does the district have a plan for soliciting input from these stakeholders?
- Has information been shared with families regarding how Common Core will impact their children?

## EVALUATION AND MONITORING

- Does the district know how it will monitor and evaluate the progress and effectiveness of Common Core implementation?
  - Which outcome metrics and implementation milestones will the district monitor?
  - Do these metrics include low-income students, students with disabilities, African-American, Latino, Asian and other student subgroups?
  - How will the district evaluate progress, and to whom and how often will it report results?
  - What processes and information will inform decisions about how the district adjusts its plans?



## CHOOSE POWERFUL REFORM STRATEGIES

The needs assessment should point toward priority areas for sustained investment over the next several years. But what are some particularly powerful ways in which LEAs can use their per student allocation in the next one to two years? Below, we suggest several high-leverage strategies that LEAs should consider across three areas: 1) professional development and collaboration, 2) instructional supports and materials, and 3) technology.

### ④ Create meaningful opportunities for professional development and collaboration.

The transition to the Common Core presents an opportunity to rethink how teachers are trained and how professional development works. By leveraging the power of collaboration and technology, districts can unleash teachers' professional and creative potential.




- 💡 Through professional learning communities, provide teachers with opportunities to collaborate both within and across subject areas.
- 💡 Provide opportunities for principals and instructional leaders to collaborate with other schools both within and outside the district.
- 💡 Provide release time for teachers and instructional leaders to collaboratively plan, observe classrooms, develop Common Core-aligned classroom assessments, and work with content area experts (including coaches, English learner specialists, and special education teachers).
- 💡 Create opportunities for school and district implementation leaders to work with experts to build and deliver professional development that takes into consideration the unique needs of English learners, students with disabilities, and students who are struggling academically.
- 💡 Use the web to expand opportunities for teacher collaboration beyond the district or state and to deepen teachers' support network. Identify and provide access to online professional development modules and encourage teachers to share lesson plans and classroom assessments virtually on the web.


#### Pitfalls to avoid:





- ⚠️ Explaining the content and instructional shifts demanded of Common Core without also offering teachers opportunities to acquire new content knowledge and practice new instructional techniques.
- ⚠️ Assuming that teachers can make the shift to the Common Core without having time devoted to planning instruction aligned to the new standards.
- ⚠️ Exposing only math and English-language arts teachers to the Common Core, rather than making it a school-wide priority.
- ⚠️ Counting on teachers to effectively make the shift to the Common Core without meaningful collaboration and support.

## **Align instructional supports and materials to the Common**




**Core.** Until California provides stronger guidance on which instructional materials best align with the Common Core, the California Department of Education (CDE) has recommended a list of supplementary materials that bridge the gap from current standards. It also suggests districts use resources from the library, internet, and primary source documents to develop Common Core lessons. Regardless of where instructional materials come from, they must be thoughtfully vetted for quality and standards alignment.

-  Inventory existing instructional materials and supports, and identify gaps between what the district needs to effectively teach the Common Core and what it currently has. Pay particular attention to gaps in resources between high-need students and their more advantaged peers.
-  Engage teachers in developing scope and sequences that align with the state-developed curriculum maps; in doing so, identify the topics or units for which instructional materials are needed.
-  Access supplementary materials that can change in real time, rather than static materials that can gather dust and become dated. Find open source and online (or at least digital) unit plans, lesson planning materials, teacher guides, classroom assessments, and other classroom tools, and make these available to educators.



 **Build technology infrastructure and capacity.** With the Common Core, schools must transform into digital learning environments, where student learning, teacher professional development, and student assessment can happen in a computerized and online world. This change is likely to be daunting and challenging for many districts.

-  Build a technology plan that defines the goals and actions for using technology to enhance and drive student and teacher learning, paying particular attention to ensuring all students can access technology and develop critical technology skills.
-  Invest in the human capital strength and expertise needed to design, implement, and manage a network that will wirelessly connect every classroom to the internet and help implement the district's technology plan.
-  When purchasing the hardware needed to support computer-adaptive testing, consider how these investments will also support technology-enhanced learning. For instance, purchase computers, tablets, or other hardware that can be used on a weekly or daily basis in the classroom rather than computers that are designated merely for annual testing. And, consider pooling this funding stream with other funds targeted for instructional technology, such as E-Rate.
-  Ensure full wireless internet connectivity in every classroom and "teaching space" within a school, not just in certain zones like the computer lab.

### **Pitfalls to avoid:**

-  Adopting supplementary materials that have not been credibly reviewed and vetted for quality by internal and/or external experts.
-  Assuming that your current, adopted materials won't work. Instead, figure out how they align with the Common Core. For example, some of the materials that worked for one grade level under previous standards may now be a good fit for students in earlier grades.
-  Expecting that one resource will cover everything needed to implement the Common Core in a particular grade.

### **Pitfalls to avoid:**

-  Purchasing devices before investing in the digital infrastructure (including bandwidth, memory, and operating systems) needed to truly close the digital divide.
-  Rolling out new devices to educators and students without providing up-front training and continuous support.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

**NEW YORK.** Through the website EngageNY.org, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) provides educators with tools and resources to support them in implementing the Common Core. Educators have access to instructional content, assessment guidance, professional development “turnkey kits,” a toolkit for parents and families, and a video library. To further support implementation, the NYSED has created 3 to 15-member Network Teams that work in partnership with districts and schools to build their capacity to implement the Common Core and other major initiatives.

**KANSAS.** The Kansas State Department of Education’s two to three-day Summer Academies provide educators and administrators with professional development around Common Core implementation. Over the past two years, attendees have created multi-year implementation plans that addressed areas such as professional learning, curricula, and instructional practices; and they have explored the instructional shifts necessary to effectively implement the standards.

**SANTA ANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.** Santa Ana has focused on effectively and consistently communicating with parents, the community, and educators about Common Core implementation. The district posts blogs, sends frequent newsletters to parents and educators, and includes videos and presentations highlighting implementation plans on its website. Recognizing the important role that parents play in the process, the district has trained Santa Ana parents on the changes in instruction they should expect, and lets them know how they can participate in their children’s learning.

### **SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.**

Sacramento City chose a pilot group of schools in 2012-2013 to focus on the implementation of the Common Core mathematics standards. During the school year, these schools received two school-site professional development sessions, monthly coaching support, eight hours of common planning time, and four offsite professional development sessions. During these offsite sessions, educators worked in grade-level teams to develop learning modules that include assessments, instructional plans, and annotated student work exemplars. The regularly scheduled meetings allowed educators to reflect on their progress and analyze student work.

### **CALIFORNIA OFFICE TO REFORM EDUCATION (CORE).**

The ten unified school districts belonging to CORE believe that Common Core implementation can be accelerated through collaboration and the sharing of best practices. These districts are working together to develop Common Core-aligned assessments, instructional materials, and professional development modules. To jump start this work CORE organized a 2012 Summer Design Institute, during which teachers collaborated in grade-level design teams to develop formative assessment tasks, scoring rubrics, teacher directions, and student work examples.

## RESOURCES

[Common Core State Standards Systems Implementation Plan for California](#), Updated July 2013, California Department of Education

[Implementing Common Core State Standards and Assessments: A Workbook for State and District Leaders](#), Updated March 2012, Achieve and the U.S. Education Delivery Institute

[Implementing the Common Core State Standards: The Role of the Elementary School Leader](#), Updated February 2013, Achieve

[Implementing the Common Core State Standards: The Role of the Secondary School Leader](#), Updated February 2013, Achieve

[Teaching to the Core: Integrating Implementation of Common Core and Teacher Effectiveness Policies](#), March 2013, The Aspen Institute

[Common Core State Standards: Implementation Tools and Resources](#), May 2013, Council of Chief State School Officers

[Professional Learning Initiative Analysis: A Workbook for States and Districts](#), 2013, Learning Forward

[Meet the Promise of Content Standards: The Principal](#), 2012, Learning Forward

[Technology Readiness Tool](#), Smarter Balanced and PARCC

[Raising the Bar: Implementing the Common Core State Standards for Latino Student Success: An Implementation Guide](#), 2012, National Council of La Raza



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