



**REL** / research digest  
WEST

October 2012

## Conference on Common Core Draws 200 California Educators

With the clock ticking toward 2014–15 implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), state and local education agencies across West Region states—Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah—are working hard to prepare educators and education systems for the big conceptual and practical shifts called for by the standards.

To bolster this effort, more than 200 participants representing a wide range of California stakeholder groups gathered on August 14–15 in Redwood City for an event designed to deepen their understanding of the CCSS; develop a good sense of their own district’s challenges, assets, and next steps; and foster intra- and interagency collaboration on strategies to implement standards. Collaborating for Success: Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California drew teams from 31 districts, 12 county offices of education, and a number of support organizations and foundations.

Cosponsored by REL West and the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd, the California Collaborative on District Reform at the American Institutes for Research, and California Education Partners, the event featured national experts who spoke about various aspects of standards development and implementation.

Noting that the growth of knowledge in the world increased more between 1999 and 2003 than it had over the whole course of prior human history, Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, focused her keynote

remarks on the “deeper approach to learning” promoted by the CCSS. “Simply remembering [the knowledge] you’re taught no longer works in today’s world,” she said. “Students must also *learn to learn*—to understand the meaning and purpose of a concept or idea and apply it to solving a problem.”

Quoting the popular description of American standards as “a mile wide and an inch deep,” Phil Daro, a Site Field Director for the Strategic Education Research Partnership, told participants: “We learned from educator feedback and from comparing ourselves to other countries that there is too much to cover in the old standards; we realized we would have to throw out some good things in order to identify fewer topics and devote more instructional time per topic.”

Three overarching themes in the CCSS for English language arts instruction were described by David Liben, a consultant with Student Achievement Partners: First, teachers will provide students tools to manage the “bumps” in literacy learning involving complex texts, he said, rather than “smoothing out those bumps.” Second, they will teach critical

*REL West Research Digest* keeps educators and others abreast of the research carried out by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West at WestEd. In addition to providing abstracts of selected REL West research reports, this twice-yearly digest may include descriptions of upcoming REL West work, services, and events, and, as relevant to the West Region, of publications developed by other researchers.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Highlights from Two Recent Webinars on Implementing Common Core Standards**

*continued on page 4 >>*

## Experts Advise on Shifting Instruction to Common Core

Two national experts offered educators in-depth information and practical, affordable suggestions for implementing instructional shifts related to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) during REL West webinars in October 2012. Excerpts from the webinars' Q&A periods are presented below.

### INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS IN CCSS FOR MATHEMATICS (90 MINUTES) OCTOBER 11, 2012 PRESENTER: PHIL DARO

**Phil Daro** is Site Field Director at Strategic Education Research Partnership. He chaired the Common Core Standards Mathematics Workgroup that wrote common College and Career Readiness Standards on behalf of 48 states. He was also a member of the lead writing team for the K–12 Common Core State Standards.

**Q: Is there a place where the rationale for placing specific standards at specific grade levels is explained?**

A: We developed a progression of mathematics topics as we wrote the standards and we also asked math experts of all types to write progressions for us. Those progressions [in narrative form] were so valuable to us that we had them edited and placed on the website of the **Institute for Mathematics in Education** at the University of Arizona so that other people could view them. They tell why topics are where they are.

**Q: Teachers are nervous about dropping old standards in California because their students are still being tested based on them. Which of the old standards can I eliminate?**

A: The advice I give is: Look forward, not back. If it's not in the Common Core standards, drop it. Now that's going to cause some discrepancies with [California's current standardized achievement test], but not as many as some people think. In the long run, it's better for students and teachers to move forward with the new standards.

**Q: Without appropriate instructional materials, what should districts do? And who's doing it well?**

A: New York City School system has gotten a lot of resources and used them wisely. Their website is a great resource for any district. Vermont and Delaware have also leapt out in front. So, look at those websites. I'd also keep an eye on the Massachusetts website. Those states have more resources than California and they've jumped on the standards.

### INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS IN THE CCSS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (90 MINUTES) OCTOBER 18, 2012 PRESENTER: DAVID LIBEN

**David Liben** has worked for several years as a consultant with Student Achievement Partners to reform reading instruction and develop the CCSS for English language arts. He was responsible for gathering and synthesizing much of the research on text complexity, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.

**Q: How can we help teachers make the transition to Common Core standards in English language arts?**

A: By far the best way to make the transition to the new standards is the Basal Alignment Project. [Go to "Steal these tools" on the **Achieve the Core** website.] Because the basal [readers] were developed before the Common Core standards, their passage questions don't align with the standards. Student Achievement Partners (SAP) and Great City Schools gathered curriculum leaders from district offices across the country and rewrote the questions for passages in the basals for grades 3 to 5. Basals from across the country are included; 5,000 teachers have signed up with the Basal Alignment

### Two New Resources from REL West

Need a survey instrument to learn about data use in your district? Take a look at **Understanding How Teachers Use Student Assessment Data** (October 2012) to learn more about the topic and download a list of data collection instruments for assessing teachers' use of data.

Looking for middle school climate assessment instruments? Check out our report, **Summary of Existing School Climate Instruments for Middle School** (October 2012).

Project to participate. There's no better way to make the transition to the standards than to begin using the questions that teachers ask every day. We also upgraded vocabulary study in the basals to align with the standards.

Teachers can also use reading aloud of informational texts as a way to meet the standards. You can cover the standards without having to buy a whole set of books. The feedback that SAP has gotten from around the country is that teachers are very happy to do this because it brings the world into their classroom in a way that hasn't happened before. The great virtue of read alouds is that they bring in a great deal of complex academic vocabulary and syntax.

**Q: How do we scaffold reading for students reading below grade level?**

A: Although there is not a lot of new information on supporting struggling readers, there are a few effective approaches that Student Achievement Partners has learned from around the country. When you implement complex text in a class that has a variety of reading levels, you have to support it. Go to the **Achieve the Core** website; we have several exemplars, mostly for middle school grades, that show very clearly how you can support all students [to engage with] complex text. Multiple readings of the same text, chunking the text into smaller pieces, asking text-dependent questions—these approaches support all students in transitioning to more complex text. By far the best resource I've seen for supporting [struggling] readers to do this is the book *Writing for Understanding* by the Vermont Writers Collaborative. It's like it was written for the Common Core, except that it was written 10 years ago.

**Visit the  
REL West website!**

**Featuring:**

- Collaborative work with Research Alliances
- Free reports on state issues
- Events that connect research, policy, and practice

## Selected Common Core Resources

### WEBSITES

#### Common Core State Standards Initiative

Updates and resources for Common Core implementation, including text of the complete standards

#### National Governors Association Center for Best Practices

One of two conveners of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI)

#### Council of Chief State School Officers

One of two conveners of the CCSSI; offers ongoing support for implementation of CCSS through a webinar series and tool development

#### Doing What Works Website

Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education: The DWW website is a source for videos and tools on fractions and literacy, some aligned directly to CCSS. These include: *Developing Effective Fractions Instruction for Kindergarten through 8th Grade Practice Guide and Planning Instruction Using Common Core State Standards for Mathematics*. For Common Core literacy maps (not yet available on the DWW website) contact: Kelly Stuart at WestEd: [kstuart@WestEd.org](mailto:kstuart@WestEd.org) or 415.615.3209.

### DOCUMENTS

#### Selected Common Core Standards Websites

Prepared by organizers of the Collaborating for Success: Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California conference, August 14–15, 2012 (see page 1 of this digest); includes standards websites for mathematics and English language arts

#### Setting Priorities for Common Core Implementation in English Language Arts

Prepared by Meredith and David Liben of Student Achievement Partners for the Collaborating for Success: Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California conference, August 14–15, 2012 (see page 1 of this digest)

*continued from page 1 >>*

thinking “with and about texts,” and, third, they will ensure mastery of fundamental literacy skills to enable lifelong learning.

Kenji Hakuta, an education professor at Stanford University, whose work with the Understanding Language initiative includes a special focus on helping English language learners meet the CCSS, described the new standards as a fresh opportunity to promote high achievement among English learners, because the standards “raise the bar for learning, raise the demand for language, and call for a high level of classroom discourse across all subject areas.”

Conference participants had the opportunity to interact with two panels that addressed challenges, resources, and lessons learned from early CCSS implementation efforts: One was a panel of “early implementers” of Common Core standards, including two California and two out-of-state district administrators; the other was a team from the California Department of Education charged with guiding and providing resources to local education agencies to implement CCSS. Then, in both cross-role and role-alike breakout sessions, educators described their challenges and questions related to implementing CCSS and shared ideas for resources and next steps.

During breakout sessions, participants asked presenters and one another wide-ranging questions. On the practical end, educators asked how to get templates, information, resources, and models for implementing the standards.

District-level personnel wanted to see other districts’ Common Core implementation plans. Others wanted a clearer picture of how teaching and learning would change under the new standards: “How can we support teachers in using complex texts for literacy instruction?” “What will the classroom look like during this type of lesson?” In a session on shifting mathematics instruction to the new standards, an educator asked, “How would you link this lesson [just demonstrated] to the standard? Before, the standard was written on the board and you taught to it.” In a session on communication, participants wrestled with how to describe the shift to the new standards to their various district constituents “so that people will understand the change.”

In his wrap-up observations of the conference, Michael Kirst, who began his second term as President of the California State Board of Education in 2011, described CCSS implementation in California as “a huge exercise just from the standpoint of state policy alignment.” Kirst said that “the biggest thing on the state agenda is putting ELD standards and the CCSS into closer relationship with each other.”

Spin-off events from the conference included two October webinars on implementing the CCSS (see article on page 2).

For print and visual resources from the conference, go to the [REL West website](#).

For further information about the event, contact Meg Livingston Asensio at 415.615.3196.

## ASK • A • REL

**Ask A REL** is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories. Functioning much like a technical reference library, it answers education-related questions by providing referrals to IES research projects, publications, and reports; references for and bibliographies of existing education research; referrals to federally funded education organizations and websites; and regionally specific educational information. To **Ask A REL**, go to <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/askarel> and click on your state.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

REL West at WestEd  
730 Harrison Street  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
866.853.1831  
[relwest@WestEd.org](mailto:relwest@WestEd.org)  
[relwest.WestEd.org](http://relwest.WestEd.org)

*This digest was prepared under Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, by the Regional Educational Laboratory West, administered by WestEd. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.*