



AYPF/CHSE DISCUSSION GROUP

Implementing the Common Core State Standards – Examining Teacher and School Leader Professional Development and Raising Parental Awareness
December 9, 2013
Washington, D.C.

This discussion group, organized by the American Youth Policy Forum and the Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE), focused on efforts across the country to address two equity challenges related to implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) — teacher professional development systems and communications with parents about the importance of the standards. This conversation was part of a larger series of events that will highlight key educational issues of interest to the civil rights community. Participants in this and future discussions include staff from AYPF, CHSE and its partner organizations representing the civil rights community, and other education reform organizations.

The goal of this discussion group was to educate and inform the group on key implementation and equity issues related to the CCSS, to learn about positive strategies for the CCSS implementation, to foster and strengthen relationships, and to encourage learning across organizations, all with the aim of promoting equitable policy change for communities and students of color.

Welcome and Introductions

AYPF Executive Director Betsy Brand introduced AYPF and providing an overview of the series of discussion groups, held in collaboration with CHSE. This event was the first of five discussion groups focused on preparing every high school student for college and career success. Rufina Hernández, the Executive Director of CHSE explained CHSE's work as a coalition of civil rights groups, comprised of ten organizations¹, that aims to ensure, through federal advocacy efforts, that every student is prepared to be college and career ready.

Setting the Stage: An Overview of the Common Core State Standards – Implications for Teaching and Learning

Carrie Heath Phillips, Program Director of Common Core State Standards at the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), set the framework for the day's discussion by explaining the background of how the CCSS began and what implementation currently looks like².

¹ CHSE's partner organizations include: National Urban League, National Council of La Raza, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Leadership Conference Education Fund, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Alliance for Excellent Education, National Indian Education Association, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

² Currently, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories have adopted the CCSS.

Phillips highlighted several areas where the Common Core State Standards has promoted change and requires ongoing attention:

- *Building the capacity of districts to understand instructional shifts*
The CCSS will require significant shifts in instructional practices and in order to successfully make that shift, entire schools, districts, and states must ensure that the standards are comprehensively integrated into their work. In order to build capacity within districts, CCSSO recommends that districts move towards creating a core set of experts on college and career readiness that also have a deep understanding of the CCSS. They should be charged with offering technical assistance to educators and others within the district. States like Alabama, Kentucky, and Louisiana have created groups with such experts at the district and occasionally school level.
- *Assessment and Accountability*
Nearly all states plan to administer new assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards in the 2014-2015 school year. Most states plan to deliver the PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessment, while some others are pursuing using an assessment developed by a third-party vendor. Some states have decided that accountability tied to new assessments will be delayed so that teachers have time to help students adjust to new standards and testing. However, Phillips cautioned that what is important is finding the right balance between tests that are at higher levels that could result in more failures while applying the right amount of pressure to raise standards. She suggested that those in charge of deciding to delay accountability should begin by asking themselves if students had the right amount of exposure to the CCSS content.
- *Addressing the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs)*
Phillips noted that while the Common Core State Standards does not have a separate set of standards for English language learners (ELL) there is [guidance on the Council of Chief State School Officers' website on how to interpret the CCSS for ELL students](#). Several participants raised the need to continually focus on the implications of the standards for ELL students.
- *Expanded Learning*
In order to ensure that all students have exposure and opportunity to learn to the new standards, districts and states should ensure that a range of stakeholders is involved, including expanded learning opportunities (ELOs). ELOs, which are learning activities that happen beyond the school day which can include afterschool, summer, work-based learning, or college exploration activities, can provide students with experiences that reinforce, augment, and apply the learning that happens during the school day. She also encouraged participants to continually engage ELOs in district and state level discussions



about the standards so that students have multiple opportunities to be exposed to the CCSS.

Following an overview of the CCSS, participants then learned more about professional development being provided to educators in a number of settings. These opportunities were explored in the next two sections of the discussion group meeting.

Providing Educators the Necessary Professional Development and Instructional Supports to Implement CCSS

Brian Sevier, Standards Project Director at the Colorado Department of Education, discussed the state's role in helping Colorado's teachers design sample curricula aligned with the Common Core. Clint Bowers, Research and Policy Associate at the National Indian Education Association, talked about the efforts of his organization in preparing American Indian communities to teach the Common Core. Efrain Mercado, Project Director of the Common Core State Standards for the National Association of State Boards of Education, discussed issues the Common Core State Standards has faced since its creation in 2010.

Brian Sevier, Colorado Department of Education

Brian Sevier discussed the process that his team undertook to prepare Colorado's teachers for the Common Core. The State Department of Education acquired a foundation grant in order to support increasing teacher capacity to implement the standards. They commenced this effort with a statewide summit for educators. Following the summit, teachers asked for a sample curriculum on how to implement the standards. As a result of Colorado's strongly-held belief in local control, teachers would not accept a top-down curriculum that was dictated by the State Education Agency. Therefore, Sevier and his team proposed a sample curriculum that was created by teachers for teachers. However, Colorado has many rural school districts, with 70 percent of Colorado's districts made up of fewer than 1,000 students. Faced with these circumstances, Sevier and his team set out to accomplish two main goals: to engage in individual district outreach and to work with teachers to produce curriculum examples.

During phase one of the project, the team convened teachers for six workshops in Denver. The teachers worked in small teams and were divided into grade levels. Higher education institutions generously offered meeting space for the three-day workshops. Attendees included special needs teachers, ELL teachers, gifted and talented teachers, and general education teachers. Over 550 teachers representing 61 of 178 districts authored the curriculum. They jointly discussed what students need to understand and be able to do and developed [over 700 examples for K-12 educators](#).

During phase two, Sevier said that teachers across the state were given the option of using the curriculum materials. The curriculum samples went live on January 31, 2013, and since then roughly 35 districts have adopted the standards into their curriculum. There are also blank templates included with each standard and a guide for teachers to make their own samples, which



is helpful since some districts are just now realizing that these samples are not unit guides but instead unit overviews. Districts are encouraged to develop the units locally.

The third phase is currently underway and uses the samples to build [full units with assessments, resources, and opportunities for differentiation](#) for future use and curriculum adjustment.

However, instead of bringing teachers to Denver, Sevier and his team have been going out to school districts across Colorado because many of the rural schools did not have the capacity to send a teacher to out-of-town training. By visiting the districts, Sevier and his team were able to expand their outreach to 120 districts across 9 regions across the state. The goal of Sevier's team is to form teams of six teachers who can act as experts on the Colorado Academic and Common Core State Standards for their district.

Clint Bowers, National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

Clint Bowers began his presentation by explaining that Native students are often forgotten when implementing education reform issues in the United States. NIEA decided to work with four schools in New Mexico located on tribal land that were concerned about the implementation of the Common Core. While there was initial difficulty in gaining the trust of the tribal leaders, NIEA did establish positive relationships with the leaders in all four schools.

However, challenges persisted. The culture and language within the CCSS differed from what the students were used to; many students spoke English as their second language and were unfamiliar with cultural references in the given examples. There was a need for more customized and culturally sensitive materials that students understood and could relate to.

Also, the tribes wanted onsite rather than virtual training, in large part because internet access is often unreliable. NIEA hosted three onsite trainings in May, July, and August of 2013. They used trainers from the Bureau of Native Teachers who taught both teachers and teachers' aides.

The initial training in May was focused on exposing the native educators to the CCSS and the training process. The second training in July focused on teaching the educators specifics about the CCSS. Following initial trainings, NIEA brought in trainers from Hawaii for the August training session. This exposure was a huge help for the Native teachers who learned from their Hawaiian counterparts strategies for incorporating their culture into the lesson plans. Ideas to use natural land formations, rivers, and pottery to help students learn math were helpful in encouraging educators to become excited about the Common Core. NIEA will continue to check with the schools to learn how they are incorporating the CCSS into their instruction and teaching.

Efrain Mercado, National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)

Efrain Mercado began his discussion by noting that, while places like New York, Kentucky, North Carolina, Colorado, and Louisiana implemented the Common Core State Standards early on, many states took a slower approach. In the 2011-2012 school year, the number of states

implementing CCSS increased, but educators were still learning how to change their instruction to align with it. Initially, many educators did not expect that they would have to alter their teaching significantly. However, once educators began looking at examples of CCSS-aligned curriculum, they realized that they were not sufficiently prepared to teach based on what the CCSS would require.

States that had a more advanced technology capacity and better professional development infrastructures have been able to adjust to the CCSS more easily than states that waited to upgrade their technology and professional development systems. An effective transition to the standards also requires that states have aligned all of their policies around the Common Core. For example, Mercado said that in some states teachers are being assessed on standards that they are not teaching anymore. Teacher evaluation policies can potentially derail Common Core State Standards efforts if they are not properly aligned. Alignment with graduation policies and entry standards into postsecondary education could also potentially be an issue. States need to consider what a drop in Common Core-aligned test scores will mean for school and district level accountability and potentially even students' ability to graduate and qualify for postsecondary programs.

Question and Answer

During the question and answer period, participants addressed issues of political pushback, cut scores, resource availability, teachers' participation in curriculum development, the role of the business and higher education communities, and the needs of English Language Learners.

- *Political Pushback*

The Common Core has been a politicized issue that has fostered a great deal of pushback. Communities are concerned for a number of reasons, including the federal government's support of the state standards and the implementation challenges associated with the transition. When asked how politicians were responding to the pushback from constituents, Mercado responded that many officials were elected in 2012 on a platform of change and distrust of any top-down policies. In this context, common standards became a political issue. Also, given the publicity the standards have received, public opinion has played a much bigger role in the views of elected officials with respect to the Common Core. Bowers argued that regardless of who is in office, the standards were going to be a politically difficult issue. In Colorado, political pushback from the state legislature was mitigated by the fact that the authors of the curriculum materials were teachers within the districts and state.

- *Cut Scores*

Another issue that was addressed is how states are defining cut scores. States will not necessarily set common cut scores and individual state policies will vary depending on a

number of factors, including current proficiency levels, public perception, and the role of the test in district, school, and student accountability.

- *Resources*

When asked how Colorado has responded to the state and district need for resources, Sevier explained that convening teachers in one location allowed them to recognize that smaller districts did not have all the resources that larger districts had available to them. The process of integrating the new curriculum samples took a minimum of a year, and teachers had to be kept informed of everything throughout the process. Any resources used had to be open source so that all teachers in Colorado could use them. Sevier said that every two years he and his team plan to assess what the learning outcomes and targets look like. The resources are available online and include over 700 curriculum examples, with at least one per grade in each subject. Bowers had a different experience, saying they struggled with providing resources due to funding restrictions, especially in communities that were already struggling.

- *The Role of the Business and Higher Education Communities*

When asked what role the business and higher education communities have played, Mercado responded that districts with business support are further along in implementation and support. Higher education is also important and oftentimes support comes from an individual or small contingent within the higher education institution. It is more difficult to receive university-wide buy-in and support. Sevier said that Colorado was intentional about reaching out to higher education by participating in methods courses, talking about the focus of the CCSS with higher education professionals, and discussing the incorporation of the Common Core State Standards into the training of prospective teachers.

- *Incorporating the voice of the community*

This session concluded with Hernández emphasizing that the perspective of community-based organizations and community members is essential to ensure that the implementation of the standards reflects the culture of students and the community. Sevier agreed and added that he and his team offer one evening at the end of each workshop to the district so that the district officials and parents can see what the teachers have written.

- *English Language Learners*

Participants were keen to learn about any particular successful strategies for working with English Language Learners. Sevier shared that in Colorado all of the district teams of teachers have special education and ELL teachers involved in developing the curriculum.



Participants then shifted focus to the role of communications efforts to promote the successful adoption and implementation of the Common Core.

Communicating the Common Core State Standards to the Public: Enlisting their Participation and Enhancing their Advocacy

Jim Ferg-Cadima, Regional Counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, served as moderator in a panel discussion with Bill Wright, Vice President of Outreach and Advocacy at America's Promise Alliance; Luis Torres, Director of Education Policy at the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC); and Iris Maria Chavez, Assistant Field Director for The Education Trust. Wright focused on how various community stakeholders are collectively responsible for ensuring children can succeed on the Common Core. Torres discussed LULAC's involvement with parental outreach in New Mexico and Florida. Chavez highlighted a variety of community outreach strategies that are taking place around the country.

Bill Wright, America's Promise Alliance

The America's Promise Alliance is focused on forging a strong and effective partnership alliance committed to seeing that children receive the fundamental resources they need to succeed at home, in school, and in the community. Wright discussed the Graduation Campaign, which has the goal of 90 percent high school graduation rate across the country by 2020. They see the Common Core State Standards as an important component of a system that prepares students to be college and career ready. However, it is important to keep in mind that the standards will not be successfully implemented if the schools are the only party involved. Business leaders, higher education, expanded learning providers, and others need to be involved in addition to schools to help ensure that the CCSS are successfully implemented.

Wright explained that a communications plan can help communities develop a plan around the Common Core. He shared America's Promise Alliance's experience with communities in Indianapolis, Nashville, New Orleans, Durham, and Atlanta to develop communications plans for each community. The cities appreciated the assistance because they recognized that in order to equitably transition to the Common Core, they needed additional communications efforts. As a result of this project, webinars, service learning, and a large seminar were developed. Major lessons learned were that equity can be used as a powerful argument for the need for higher standards and that community members who are not involved with the standards are not likely to know much about the Common Core, efforts should be made to educate them.

Luis Torres, League of United Latin American Citizens

Torres explained that his role in the League of United Latin American Citizens is currently focused on a project informing Hispanic parents in New Mexico and Florida about the Common Core. During these meetings parents have the opportunity to interact in small groups both before and after they learn about the Common Core. Such Activities have included discussing translated



sample questions aligned to the CCSS and discussing why the Common Core State Standards is important and beneficial for their children. LULAC also ensures that all information presented is in both English and Spanish and that headsets are available for translations. In New Mexico, LULAC has been successful in involving the private sector to provide support materials in Spanish. Torres hopes that similar partnerships can be established as they begin their work in Florida.

Iris Maria Chavez, The Education Trust

The Education Trust recently surveyed a range of education stakeholders in various states that have been engaged in considerable policy shifts. They looked at communications strategies of states that have engaged in a wide range of significant policy shifts to understand what worked and what did not. Chavez focused on the tactics that Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Virginia, New York, and Kentucky are using to promote new initiatives or policies. While states have different approaches to CCSS rollout plans, parents have similar questions to each other about the Common Core State Standards. The most common questions that were asked on the Education Trust survey of state implementation practices focused on how the standards would impact individual students. The Education Trust learned that advocates for the Common Core State Standards must clearly state how it can personally benefit students so that parents and local communities understand how the standards are affecting their children. State stakeholders in Florida learned that a single clear and consistent message is not as successful as *targeted* clear and consistent messages that vary depending on the audience, i.e. parents, teachers, community members, etc.

The Education Trust has also found that states must not only create channels of communication, but they must also make them accessible to parents. New York has a website, www.engageny.com, which provides information to parents; however, parents do not know how to use the website effectively. Tennessee provides a town hall approach to make sure parents have a firm understanding of the Common Core. Tennessee also developed a crisis hotline that is available when parents receive their child's score and have concerns if the scores are lower than expected. Florida has also adopted this idea. Georgia pursued innovative approaches to communications strategies in two major ways. First, they established a "phone tree" so that parents could call other parents to explain and discuss the Common Core. Second, they created a bus stop communication strategy that consisted of different parents standing at every school bus stop for several days during the school year to talk about and explain the CCSS to other parents.

Question and Answer

Following the presentations from Wright, Torres, and Chavez the presenters answered questions from the discussion group attendees.

- *Parental Aspirations*

Participants asked about the aspirations parents held for their children and the importance of tapping into those aspirations in order to communicate the value of the Common Core. Panelists shared that while many parents aspire to a college degree for their student, there have been several instances where career preparation resonated better with communities. Chavez shared anecdotes of rural communities where college was not a goal and therefore the State Education Department had to amend their presentation and message so that it reflected an emphasis on college and/or career readiness with a primary focus on the increase in opportunity that young people have with a more meaningful high school degree aligned with the Common Core.

- *Conducting Town Halls Meetings Effectively*

Torres shared lessons learned from opposition to the Common Core State Standards during LULAC's town halls. During their first information session in New Mexico, there was a small contingent of very vocal opponents to the standards. In response LULAC trained their moderators on how to manage disruptive audience members. Torres also suggested that requiring audience members to write down their questions on note cards can prevent people from access to a microphone and decrease their chances of creating confusion. From these experiences Torres argued that Common Core State Standards implementers need to think of creative ways to combat the vocal and purely ideologically-driven dissenters. Wright also articulated a distinction between those who are worried about their children and confused about what they know about the CCSS and those who refuse to change their minds. Wright noted that the parents who are confused should be included in discussions so that have all the information necessary to make informed decisions. Participants also discussed the potentially beneficial role of using older youth to advocate for the Common Core.

- *Concern Regarding Falling Test Scores*

Many advocates are concerned that students of color and ELLs will experience a disproportionate drop in standardized test scores with CCSS. Given the anticipated decrease in proficiency rates due to the Common Core-aligned tests, presenters were asked what tactics states can use to help communities feel more confident about their students' chances of success. Georgia's bus stop idea was discussed as an effective way to spread knowledge about the CCSS. In other states such as Virginia, education officials sent multiple information pamphlets home to parents so that changes in the curriculum did not come as a shock. Others added that they have found that providing information sessions at schools for parents has been very beneficial.

- *State Communication Efforts*

When asked how The Education Trust is going to use the information they have gathered through the state surveys, Chavez responded that they are going to use it to help assess the states of Oregon, Colorado, and Minnesota. They believe that the communication plan that Colorado devises will most resemble Tennessee's communication plan, with the

state working heavily with advocacy groups. They also believe that Oregon and Minnesota will most resemble Georgia's communication plan with the state putting taking on some aspects of the communications strategy, and relying on advocacy groups to conduct the majority of the work.

- *Measuring Communications Outcomes*

Presenters shared the work they have done on measuring the effectiveness of their communications efforts. Torres explained that LULAC distributes generic surveys to parents at the end of every information session. These surveys include questions such as, do we need more time or less time? What did you learn? And, do you have any remaining questions? Chavez stated that The Education Trust performs extensive field testing before putting their practices into action.

Group Reflection and Discussion of Next Steps

During the last session of the day Rufina Hernández invited attendees to share final comments and reflections. Participants shared the potential benefit of holding future events in a workshop style so that everyone could have a better understanding of how the strategies described could unfold as related to their work.

Participants also pointed out that we still had unanswered questions: How do we compromise with the political right and left on the issue of CCSS implementation? Could state-level conversations help with this issue? Furthermore, what are the broader recommendations we can make jointly? Additional questions included, how do we know that our groups are having the intended impact? How do we know what success looks like?

The role of higher education in ongoing implementation conversations was also discussed. Currently, higher education's involvement is inconsistent across the country, and while they generally support the standards, they do not always see their role as supporting implementation. Lately there has been increased engagement in assessment conversations but not as much commitment to improving the teaching process. Moving forward, we need to ensure that higher education is aware and involved with the CCSS so that professors are not re-teaching material students already learned during secondary education. Last, participants commented the transition to new standards and assessments will require far more communications efforts because the expectations are much higher and engagement will need to be much deeper to ensure that parents are involved and in support of the standards.

One participant posed two essential questions: how do we win over the parents in this conversation and how do we build the network of people and organizations working on this issue? Rufina Hernández, CHSE added that the CHSE partners and discussion group members would benefit from information sharing related to Common Core State Standards implementation. Participants proposed that best practices should be shared and believed that the



sharing should not just be of information but also a way to pool resources. AYPF and CHSE will continue to provide information to inform the work of participants as we continue to offer opportunities to convene.

Participants shared resources to understand how several states are implementing the CCSS. See the following:

- [Common Core State Standards Website:](#)
 - This website has links to individual state Common Core State Standards plans.
- [Center on Education Policy: Implementing the Common Core State Standards](#)
 - CEP has offered annual reports on progress toward Common Core State Standards implementation based on surveys of state education officials.
- [Achieve: Achieve the Core](#)
 - Achieve has developed materials to help states, districts, and others understand the organization and content of the standards and the content and evidence base used to support the standards. The resource also includes various state implementation plans.
- [Education First and Editorial Projects in Education: Moving Forward--A National Perspective on States' Progress in Common Core State Standards Implementation Planning](#)
 - This study serves as a follow-up to a January 2012 Preparing for Change report, which detailed state-reported survey responses about the status of CCSS implementation planning in 2011 overall and in three key areas: teacher professional development, curriculum guides, and teacher-evaluation systems.
- [Council of Chief State School Officers: Common Core State Standards: State Spotlights](#)
 - As of the 2013-2014 school year, all states that signed on to the CCSS are continuing their efforts to implement the standards, with some states fully implementing across grades K-12 in 2013-14 and some in 2014-15. This document highlights state initiatives that are supporting Common Core State Standards implementation in the following areas: Communication and Engagement; System Alignment and Systems Change; and Educator Supports