

An information brief from New Jersey ASCD

~ an award-winning organization with a focus on teaching, learning and educational leadership ~

The Common Core Initiative: Dimensions of Implementation

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*"This time, like all times, is a very good one,
if we but know what to do with it."*

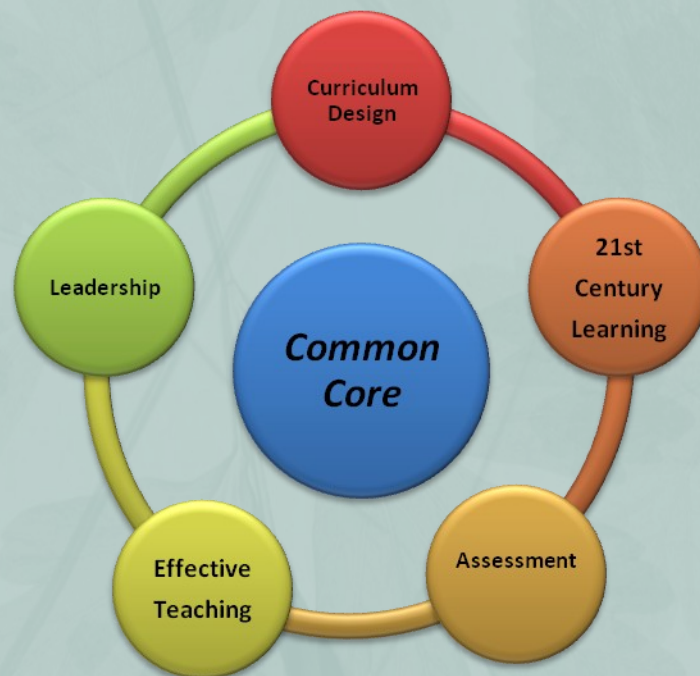
Ralph Waldo Emerson

At no other time has a quality education been more crucial to our state and our country. Learning, teaching, leading are the pathway to the future. As New Jersey continues to create the best experiences and environments for learning to occur, educators face major change and a new set of standards for content in the core areas of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.

This national effort, initiated by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), launched a set of state standards entitled the *Common Core* on June 2, 2010. The New Jersey State Board of Education approved the *Common Core* at its June 2010 meeting, authorizing these as the new standards in English language arts and mathematics for New Jersey.

Standards provide the foundation for what students are expected to learn and be able to do; however, they are the beginning. Important issues connected to the implementation of standards quickly come into view and need to be addressed and developed. NJASCD has identified new and revised standards, **21st Century learning** environments and skills, **curriculum design**, **instruction**, and **assessments** that measure what counts, as important connectors to effective implementation of the **Common Core**. Being informed to deliver schooling that responds to these components of school change is the focus of this Info-Brief.

Leadership from every professional level is essential for all to be effective in their positions of responsibility. We hold a common goal: to educate. Collectively, we accept the responsibilities that accompany that goal. Collaboratively, we anticipate the issues and shape the responses. Organizationally, we identify successful colleagues and effective practices and invite them to inform the profession. Together, we learn, teach, lead.



Shaping the Implementation

Fully recognizing that follow-up activities are essential to the success of *the Common Core* and its connected issues, NJASCD, with partners and outstanding practitioners throughout the state, has designed several opportunities for professional learning. These initiatives build capacity in leadership to develop processes for implementation. A brief description of these key components follows with an open invitation to visit www.njascd.org for further information and offerings.

I. The Common Core Initiative: a New Vision for Teaching and Learning

In order to form a collective vision for understanding the intent and opportunities associated with the adoption of *The Common Core*, NJASCD convened a symposium of high-profile leaders who provided national, federal, state and local perspectives on the Common Core Initiative. This event, held on September 24, 2010, introduced the approval of *The Common Core* by the NJ State Board of Education, as the standards for New Jersey students in English language arts and mathematics. Leaders of all state-level content area organizations, professional organizations, and representatives in administration from school districts, the State Department of Education, the state, business and community were in attendance.

The symposium raised awareness, engaged New Jersey stakeholders in new thinking and requirements for learning that are inherent in these core areas, and hosted discussion about the impact on schooling in New Jersey. Recommendations from this symposium will be further explored and developed in various formats throughout the year.

II. The Curriculum

NJASCD recognizes that the *Common Core Standards Initiative* provides the foundation for change in the content and process of what students will learn during their school career. To enable delivery of the new vision, designing professional development in the dimensions necessary for successful implementation would include the following:

- **Curriculum Design**

The recognition that a rich and balanced curriculum that addresses the needs of all students is the basis of schooling is widely accepted and understood by educators. The new standards provide the framework for designing and developing curriculum that prepares New Jersey students for college and careers.

NJASCD is a leader in curriculum. As such, we embarked on a special venture, conceived to be representative and ongoing, with school districts to create sample curriculum and unit plans in English language arts and mathematics in grades K-8, anchored on the Department of Education Curriculum Template. Using this organizational format for curriculum design, practitioners design curriculum and units based on the *Common Core* standards for their districts/schools and offer them as samples to educators in New Jersey.

Curriculum institutes, *The New Essential Curriculum: Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century*, are also offered in partnership with the NJ State Department of Education and the Foundation of Educational Administration. Content specialists provide professional development in understanding the components of the Template as well as the application of the revised NJ Core Content Standards. Exemplars are shared for secondary grades. This fall, an added dimension will include the samples for K-8 in English language arts and math.

For further details on curriculum development with NJASCD, please contact njascdmail@aol.com or call the office at 609.860.8991.

- **21st Century Learning and Skills**

Educating a generation of students who live in a rapidly changing world and have instant access to knowledge becomes a new challenge for schools. The Partnership for 21st Century Schools provides information on a framework that integrates *the Common Core* with the four Cs of Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration. This skill set is known as 21st Century learning and skills.

The value of these skills as essential components of a 21st Century education requires articulation in curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Acquiring the knowledge and ability to embed the four Cs into *the Common Core* standards is required for success of both students and staff.

NJASCD began to address this challenge by forming a cadre of professionals schooled in 21st Century learning and skills. These educators are preparing workshops/institutes (entitled *21st Century Skills: What are they; Why are they needed; and How do we get there?*) at three levels: Awareness, Implementation, and Leadership. The Awareness workshops are posted on the web site at www.njascd.org and are available to you, your school, or your district on site as well as at the conference center.

III. Assessment

Of greatest concern to all involved are the issues of assessing learning. The call for measuring what counts, basing assessment on performance tasks, using new methods and technologies in testing, and applying formative and summative strategies, when taken to scale, can be daunting. However, schooling in the 21st Century demands these components of measurement.

Developing multiple indicators for measuring success and achievement is the responsibility of educators. Research and experience underscore that there is more to determining the degree of student learning than depending on a single test score. The presentation of *The Common Core* standards requires that learning be measured through a multitude of projects, activities, and processes that mirror real-world situations.

Consortia of states to discuss these issues and create appropriate assessments based on *the Common Core* standards are formed and conducted with the US Office of Education. Results in the form of recommendations, samples, and new assessments will provide the platform from which states will progress.

IV. Effective Teaching

Research substantiates that the quality of instruction has the largest and most profound effect on learning. Instruction holds the greatest promise for increased achievement. Qualified staff, knowledge of content, facility in appropriate and effective strategies, data review as a natural step in the instructional cycle, feedback, and reflection all contribute to effective teaching. The components of planning and preparation make a huge difference in the delivery of programs and instruction.

Characteristics and qualities of an effective teacher are researched, documented, promoted, learned, and emulated, as indicated in the contributions to the field by national leaders held in high regard: Linda Darling-Hammond, Robert Marzano, James Stronge, Charlotte Danielson, and many others. As this dimension unfolds, the connected legal issues of tenure, pay increases based on gains in student achievement, promotion, and merit pay will also be parsed and re-configured. A new profession of teaching will emerge, one that reflects 21st Century values and skill sets but retains the core of what researchers reveal to be constant and necessary for learning. Perhaps this dimension presents the greatest personal challenges to the profession.

The Importance of Leadership

Informed leadership, the key to the successful implementation of *the Common Core*, is the crucial element on which all else is based. Leaders who are knowledgeable and collaborative and who build capacity in themselves and their staff to embrace the work connected to new standards will experience success. They will become the models for the profession.

Conceptually, our profession is the *profession of learning* for adults as well as students. Ongoing professional learning available in many different formats will become the norm for a successful faculty in high achieving schools. The expectations that are embedded - to accomplish the common goal, to remain a profession, to learn, to teach, and to lead - require continuous professional growth. Leaders will emerge as the mental models of the profession with the physical presence to garner necessary support, thereby rising to the challenges of change.

Resources

1. ASCD: www.ascd.org
2. Council of Chief State School Officers: www.ccsso.org
3. New Jersey ASCD: www.njascd.org
4. New Jersey Department of Education: www.state.nj.us/njded
5. New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association: www.njpsa.org
6. The Foundation for Educational Administration: www.featraining.org
7. The National Governors Association: www.NGA.org
8. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills: www.p21.org



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