Laurel Ruff Center, San Juan USD  
Meeting Agenda for May 13, 2014

I. Attendance Role Call & Approval of Previous Minutes: ACTION ITEM  approximate time 2:45 PM

II. Old Business:
(note – will consider if any items can be deleted from the ongoing agenda as we proceed through agenda)

A. Laurel Ruff Site Council Membership & By-Laws  approximate time 2:50 PM
  1. Membership review - as necessary
  2. By-law review (as needed)
B. Laurel Ruff Team & Committee Reports  approximate time 2:55 PM
  1. Safety Committee & Grounds / Safety Plan Review
     ♦ Safety Plan
     ♦ Site crime & safety report
  2. Facilities updates
     ♦ Restroom re-mod
     ♦ Measure N updates
  3. Health & Attendance Updates

C. district updates  approximate time 3:05 PM
  1. District changes / updates
  2. SJUSD Special Education Department updates.
  3. Workability changes for 2014/15
D. Community, Climate & Culture  approximate time 3:25 PM
  1. accomplishments
  2. parent support updates
  3. Extracurricular events
  4. Laurel Ruff public relations

III. Site plan & budget review and actions  ACTION ITEM  approximate time 3:40 PM
A. Assessment, Curriculum & Instruction
  1. Article 24 – school leadership team & ‘collaboration’ Thursdays update
  2. curriculum & assessment updates
  3. Staff development updates
  4. Project Search updates
B. Site Plan & related budgets – review and amend as needed
  1. Character Education budget - $300 has been encumbered
  2. LCFF funds (Local Control Funding Formula) – for 14/15 (incorporates EIA) - $18,364
  3. Common Core State Standards - $17.50 per student - $2030
  4. Budget actions as necessary
C. LCAP – Local Control Accountability Plan – merge into site plan
D. Special Education Strategic plan (met on January 27) – merge into site plan
E. Current Site Plan Goals – add activities as needed
  1. Goal 1 – POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE
  2. Goal 2 – POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION – INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS
  3. Goal 3 - POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION – EMPLOYMENT & VOCATIONAL TRAINING
  4. Goal 4 - POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION – EDUCATION
F. English Language Learner advisory committee (ELLAC)

IV. Component Reports  approximate time 4:10 PM
A. Certificated
B. Classified
C. Parents
D. Community

V. New Business:  approximate time 4:20 PM
A. Open Forum for new items

VI. Correspondence and/or Public Comments  approximate time 4:25 PM

VII. Next Meeting Date/Time

VIII. Adjournment  ACTION ITEM  approximate time 4:30 PM

At Laurel Ruff our mission is to educate students in the least restrictive environment as they attain their maximum potential.
I. Attendance: Julia Arreguin, Laurie Hale, Kim Willbee, LeAnn Thiele, Shari Studebaker, Jake Gerving

Approval of Previous Minutes: Laurie Hale motioned to approve the minutes from the two previous meetings. LeAnn seconded the motion. Motion approved.

II. Old Business:
(note – will consider if any items can be deleted from the ongoing agenda as we proceed through agenda)
A. Laurel Ruff Site Council Membership & By-Laws
   1. Membership review - as necessary – Jake Gerving has joined the team.
   2. By-law review (as needed)
B. Laurel Ruff Team & Committee Reports
   1. Safety Committee & Grounds / Safety Plan Review
      ♦ Safety Plan
      ♦ Site crime & safety report
   2. Facilities updates
      ♦ Restroom re-mod
      ♦ Measure N updates
   3. Health & Attendance Updates
C. district updates
   1. District changes / updates
   2. SJUSD Special Education Department updates.
D. Assessment, Curriculum & Instruction: Julia Arreguin motioned to delete this area of the agenda because it is redundant and should be discussed in the Site Plan Section. Laurie Hale seconded it. Motion approved.
   1. Article 24 – school leadership team & ‘collaboration’ Thursdays update
   2. curriculum & assessment updates
   3. Staff development updates
   4. Project Search updates
   5. proposed Workability changes for 2014/15
E. Community, Climate & Culture Julia Arreguin motioned to delete this area of the agenda because it is redundant and should be discussed in the Site Plan Section. Laurie Hale seconded it. Motion approved.
   1. accomplishments
   2. parent support updates
   3. Extracurricular events (e.g. Mighty Milers, Visual & performing arts, VIP & Special Olympic sports etc….)
   4. Laurel Ruff public relations

III. Site plan & Budget
2013/14 Site Plan & related budgets – review and amend as needed: Site plan reviewed. We began to revise it in order to align it with the Special Education Strategic Plan. Staff will continue to revise the plan during Thursday collaboration. Plans for related budgets will be discussed at the collaboration meeting. We will develop a plan for LCFF and CCSS funds.
A. Site plan monitored budgets
   1. Character Education budget - $300 (previously allotted)
   2. EIA – LEP funding 13/14
   3. LCFF funds (Local Control Funding Formula) – $18,364 for 14/15 (see attached)
   4. CCSS Funds - $2030
B. LCAP – Local Control Accountability Plan – merge into site plan
C. Special Education Strategic plan (met on January 27) – merge into site plan
D. Current Site Plan Goals – add activities as needed
   1. Goal 1 – POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE
   2. Goal 2 – POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION – INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS
   3. Goal 3 - POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION – EMPLOYMENT & VOCATIONAL TRAINING
   4. Goal 4 - POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION – EDUCATION
E. English Language Learner advisory committee (ELLAC)

IV. Component Reports
A. Certificated
B. Classified  
C. Parents  
D. Community  

V. New Business:  
   A. Open Forum for new items  

VI. Correspondence and/or Public Comments  

VII. Next Meeting Date/Time  
   May Site Council meeting is scheduled for May 13th at 2:45 PM  

VIII. Adjournment  
   ♦ Motion by: Shari Studebaker  
   ♦ Seconded by: Jake Gerving  
   Vote: Approved
Characterize the Purpose of SPSA and how it can be leveraged to unify the work at the school and drive innovation

**Single**: Encompasses what came forward from other plans

**Plan**: doesn’t mean we go blindly forward no matter what happens

**Student Achievement**: keep our eye on the prize; it’s about student learning
All site funds are accounted for; fund actions which arise from site strategic plan and/or other plans at the school
SPSA details what will happen and how it will be funded

Remind them that they need to account for all LCFF Supplemental funds AND CCSS funds (and Title if they have it)

End of Year Evaluation

Essential Question for Today

- Given your 2013-14 SPSA, how will you:
  - Report on progress made on your objectives to close this year’s cycle?
  - Report on the actions/work done this year to achieve those results?
Mid-year and End of Year Evaluations are part of the Continuous improvement process in determining how much progress we are making toward objectives and whether our actions need to be revised or entirely re-written (it is OK to abandon an action that is not effective)...("doing 'it' right vs. doing the right 'it'.")

Today’s objective is to examine the **objective, metrics, and data collection portion** of the continuous improvement cycle. We will examine data analysis, revision of actions, modifications, and re-implementation phase in May.

Leverages change based on a review of data throughout the year rather than just an annual cycle.

For SP used to do quarterly reports – cutting that down to 2x/year means stronger analysis.

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**Objectives and Data**

- **What** will happen, by **when**, and by **how much**? (from SP or other plan)
  - What is the source of evidence or data that **BEST** shows this?
  - How will you look at that data/evidence?
  - How is it best collected?
  - Who is responsible?
  - When will it be collected?
  - How/when will it be reviewed and analyzed?
  - How does data analysis impact future planning? (May)

Data analysis has been problematic for many due to the objectives, data/evidence listed in plan

Check mark indicates minimum that should be a part of the plan.
Walk through this one pointing out the features of thinking this through

**Example 1 (A)**

- **Objective:**
  - By 2016, all students will develop and work toward academic and social goals
- **Metrics:** % students with goals completed school-wide as evidenced by classroom data; schedule for crafting/maintaining plan (action)
- **What:** Classroom roster to track progress (in DD3)
- **How:** Pct of students by school-wide (or subgroups: grade, ethnicity, SES, EL)
- **Who:** Designated teacher collects/aggregates class rosters OR runs DD report
- **When:** Wkly; a week after reports run Admin & teachers will review data for progress; discuss at next staff meeting (Action and Timeline)

**Example 1 (B)**

**Objectives:**
- By 2014, 30% of students school-wide will have completed goal setting
- By 2015, 60% of students school-wide will have completed goal setting
- By 2016, 100% of students school-wide will have completed goal setting

**Metrics:**
- As measured by trimester classroom reports

What: Students will draft goals
By When: 2016
How much: All
Example 2

- **Objectives**
  - All students will demonstrate growth in reading as measured by MAP assessment.
  - **Metrics:** MAP results. Percentage of students who met/exceeded growth target in MAP reading disaggregated by (...)

- **What:** Download from Data Director; use pivot table
- **How:** Pct of students who met target by grade, ethnicity, SES, EL, SW/D
- **Who:** Principal runs report after each testing cycle; list dates; teachers run report from NWEA system following MAP testing
- **When:** Will a week after reports run whole staff will review data for progress; discuss at next SSC

Have group work through this example trying to be as specific as they can

Groups:

**Identify** the **What:** Demonstrate growth in reading
**By when:** (implied by years end)...need to explicit: By the end of 2014...
**How much/many:** All

How is the **What** and **How** information used?
How is the **Who** and **When** information used?

How might this be rewritten or refined to address achievement gaps among student groups?
Example 3

Objectives
- Each trimester increase the percent of K-3 students reading at/above grade level to be at 90% by May 2016
- In groups of 2-3, identify in the objective:
  - What
  - When
  - How much

How can this objective and metrics be made more explicit? Report out:

Identify:

What: increase the pct of kids with a reading level at grade level
By When: 2016
How Much/Many: will vary

How: Measured: DD report on text level
What targets: Pct of students at/above grade level expectations by grade, ethnicity, SES, EL, Sw/D
Who does what: teachers/principals runs report after trimester end dates(list dates)
By When: W/I a week after reports run whole

staff will review data for progress; discuss at next SSC
Example 3 ...

- **Metrics:** % students reading at grade level

- Develop your own
  - what,
  - how,
  - who when
  - (use examples 1 and 2 as examples)

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Looking at Your SPSA

- [www.doc-tracking.com](http://www.doc-tracking.com) *(Upper right Client Login)*
- Username: First.Last Password: firstletterlastname
- For SPSA click on the PDF icon and it will bring up your plan

- Tactic/Goal
  - Is this objective(s) listed with the appropriate goal?
  - Objective
  - Is the data/evidence to be collected clear?
  - When, how and by whom will it be collected?
  - When will it be analyzed and discussed?

Some objectives may target more than one goal, BUT the actions will be different
Homework for May 21 when we'll look at how to analyze specific data and revise actions if necessary

For Next Meeting

- Examine each of your objectives
  
- What 1-2 sources of data/evidence will you look at during the year for your end of year evaluation?
  - What is the source of evidence or data that BEST shows this?
  - How will you look at that data/evidence?
  - How is it best collected?
  - Who is responsible?
  - When will it be collected?
  - How/when will it be reviewed and analyzed?
- Rewrite your objectives and metrics if necessary and bring them to May 21 meeting (peer edits).
A commitment to eliminating inequality is one of the principal rationales driving the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), according to David Coleman, a writer of the new standards and founder of Student Achievement Partners. As part of this commitment, “students with disabilities . . . must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers.”

The standards and their promise of equity have created a great deal of excitement in some quarters—and concern about the degree of necessary change in others. However, according to Barbara Murchison, Administrator of the California Department of Education’s Common Core Systems Implementation Office, there is a great deal about the state’s standards and the system of education that remains familiar. Murchison sees the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as one point of stability. The IEP, which has been in place in schools nationwide since 1975, requires teachers and parents of students with disabilities—and often students themselves—to meet regularly to discuss and agree on specific, clear educational goals for the student—what the student should know and be able to do. That, in essence, is “what establishing standards is all about,” says Murchison. “Our parents are used to the notion of setting and achieving goals” (see article page 11) so that working within a formal system of standards is hardly a new thing.

California first established educational standards in 1997. Yet, Murchison says, “the previous standards covered so much ground. These new standards are no longer a mile wide and an inch deep. Having fewer topics at each grade allows students and teachers more time to move through material thoughtfully and carefully, to read (and reread) closely, and to spend more time building conceptual understanding,” thus benefiting students who struggle to process information and students who are anxious about their ability to learn. The structure of the new standards also makes it easier to develop a coherent progression of goals. This coherence is supported, says Murchison, through “multiple opportunities for students to develop a full grasp of the material”—the cornerstone of Universal Design for Learning (see article page 3).

This issue of The Special EDge provides an overview of how instruction, the IEP, and assessments will change under the new CCSS—and of how these new standards promise to create a system that improves and enhances educational benefit for all students, especially for students with disabilities.

California is seeing important, simultaneous changes that will significantly influence the way students with disabilities are educated. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) represent one particularly sweeping change, as does the new assessment system that is being designed to measure student progress on the CCSS. In addition, the new federal accountability system—specifically, the State Systemic Improvement Plan—now requires high-stakes measurement that goes beyond mere compliance with the law to account for a student’s educational progress. Together, these changes serve to propel our educational system toward increased integration and fuller alignment with the original intents of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and, even more importantly, toward improved outcomes for all students.

The CCSS have changed what all students will be expected to learn and how teachers will need to teach. These changes give school administrators and teachers an opportunity to rethink—and re-emphasize—special education as that constellation of supports and services primarily designed to assist students’ success in general education. This is their least restrictive environment (LRE). Fundamentally, special education was never intended to be a separate place, except for those very few students with unique needs. We are charged with implementing one educational system for all students.

To support success for students with disabilities in the LRE, we must improve general education practices and interventions by incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into classroom instruction and a Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) into school and district processes, both of which serve to successfully maintain students in the LRE and result in improved outcomes.

Efforts to implement the various components of CCSS make even clearer the importance of aligning the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with IDEA. Both of these critical pieces of federal legislation send consistent messages that all students need equal access to quality education and quality instruction, all students must be held to high standards of achievement, and all students must be measured appropriately by statewide assessments. Further, as we assess students, we must assess them on what is taught and in the way it is taught: assessment must be directly tied to instruction. The ability of teachers to determine what students need to know next is essential to the success of any assessment.

The CCSS and new statewide assessments are discussed throughout this issue, with special inserts targeting pertinent information for parents, students, teachers, and administrators. In addition, I invite you to periodically visit our Web site—http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/—dedicated to providing Common Core resources and up-to-date information for special educators. With the numerous, ongoing changes, information sharing is critical to everyone’s success.

Now is the time to come together, embrace the change, and renew our commitment, energy, and passion for serving students with disabilities. —Fred Balcom
Reflections: Universal Design for Learning and the Common Core

by David Rose, EdD, with Anne Meyer and David Gordon

Aren’t the Common Core standards great for kids with disabilities? Aren’t the Common Core standards inaccessible? Aren’t they wholly in sync with Universal Design for Learning (UDL)? Don’t they conflict with the core values of UDL?

Whenever I talk to educators these days—in Webinars and seminars, in my graduate class at Harvard, at conferences around the country—the subject of the Common Core State Standards invariably comes up. The standards always seem to get a strong reaction—some love them, others hate them, and others are bewildered by what they mean for education. Few responses are neutral.

The discussion reminds me of the one we had around No Child Left Behind (NCLB) a decade ago. Like the Common Core, the principles and aspirations of NCLB were promising for students with disabilities. For too long, these students had not been included in mainstream education. NCLB welcomed students with disabilities and other at-risk learners for the first time to attain the same standards as their peers—and vowed to hold schools accountable for achieving this. The Common Core presents a similar aspiration.

All good educational design begins with a clear purpose, and the Common Core helps define that purpose by providing a better idea of the baseline knowledge and skills we want everyone to learn. Only by clarifying our destination can we begin to map a plan.

But aspirations are not enough. With NCLB, the aspirations of the law soon ran aground in its execution, especially in the ways that large-scale standardized tests were used to “measure” and essentially punish failing schools. The same will happen with the Common Core if appropriate attention is not paid to how the standards are put into practice and how they are measured.

Any effort to meet the needs of struggling learners by simplifying the curriculum or lowering expectations would be misguided in three ways. First, lowered expectations are rarely positive for anyone (because they usually lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of lowered achievement), and the history of lowered expectations for students with disabilities has been especially diminishing. Second, research has sometimes shown that “simplified” curricula or language are often not actually simplified, because much of the meaning and the helpful context have been diluted. Lastly, there is a problematic underlying assumption: that the difficulties a student faces in a standards-based curriculum are the result of something broken or disabled in the student. UDL turns this assumption on its head by taking the position that it may be the curriculum that is broken or disabled. Through poor design, many curricular methods and materials are not adequate to the task of helping and guiding all students to reach high standards. Worse, many impose unnecessary difficulties or outright barriers for some or all students, interfering with their opportunities for success.

While the Common Core can shape our expectations for the curriculum, it cannot answer the complex question facing classroom educators each day: how to guide students to reach those standards. Indeed, as the CCSS Web site clearly states, “The standards establish what students need to learn but they do not dictate how teachers should teach.” They shouldn’t.

That’s not to say that efforts won’t be made to dictate teaching and learning methods. In fact, most of the controversy around the standards has to do not with the standards themselves but with the testing, rating, and ranking of teachers that often accompanies the implementation of those standards. But such uses of the standards only threaten to undermine the aspirational purpose of the Common Core. A different approach is needed, one that is “tight on goals, loose on means,” as U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has put it.

So while the Common Core literature itself admits that an intended effect of the standards is “guiding educators toward curricula and teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subject and the skills they need to apply


(UDL continued on page 4)
their knowledge," 2 the Common Core does not, for the most part, prescribe the means of achieving the standards.  

This is where UDL can help. In developing the UDL principles and guidelines, 3 we at CAST [the Center for Applied Special Technology] have defined curriculum as having four essential parts: goals, assessments, methods, and materials. Let’s consider these four components.  

**Goals**

The standards simply provide a jumping off point. Clarifying what we want to accomplish—in the next 10 minutes, in the next lesson, in the next year—is where the challenging work of practice really begins. Goals are not the same as standards.

Well-designed standards articulate what the community values, but they also leave room for teachers to shape classroom goals and to individualize the means for achieving them. Deriving clear goals from standards requires understanding the core purpose of a standard and thinking flexibly about the means for attaining the standards.

As we write in our new book, *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*, (free with registration at [http://udltheorypractice.cast.org](http://udltheorypractice.cast.org)), when applying the UDL framework, goals are unlinked from the means to achieve them so that teachers can effectively plan to provide multiple pathways to success.

For example, students may be asked to read *The Old Man and the Sea* and write a book report to demonstrate what they know about the novel. If the goal is not “writing” per se but rather demonstrating knowledge about the book, then a learning goal that explicitly calls for writing a book report is limiting the ways students can share what they know—and giving a leg up to those who are better at writing.

A tighter setting of that goal would allow learners to use different ways to “compose” a report, using different media that would allow them equal opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of the plot, characterization, setting, and so forth. Artwork, video, dramatic performance, or the traditional book report format may all be effective means of achieving that learning goal—while maintaining a high expectation for what is learned. Obviously, if the goal is the improvement of written expression, then every student should have the same challenge to practice writing. Here there are also many options and alternative pathways that would allow all students to focus on the right goal (high-level expression). Allowing students with dyslexia to use word-prediction and a spell-checker, for example, loosens the means (and broadens the opportunities) without lowering expectations.

**Assessments**

While state-mandated summative assessments get the most attention, a UDL approach pays more attention to well-crafted formative assessments—ones employed during instruction to gauge a learner’s progress. These are important because they tell us how to improve the methods and materials to meet our objectives. And when intentionally included in instruction, they do so in a timely way.

In other words, the best assessments tell us how well the curriculum itself is performing, not just how a particular student is doing. Where students seem to be struggling or even failing, the first place to look for a disability is in the curriculum. Is the content or the presentation somehow limiting learning? Is a student needlessly constrained in the approaches she can take to complete a task? Are there reasons why a learner is losing interest or not persisting in the lesson?

Formative assessment gives teachers a concrete means of getting the data they need to inform their instructional decision making. They might use the results of a formative assessment to coach students in next steps, or to make them more aware of patterns or approaches in their learning that are unproductive. By modeling continuous reflection and monitoring, teachers can help students develop self-regulating strategies so that the students learn to do this for themselves.

Such assessments may be formal (quizzes) or informal (“How are you doing?”). Either way, formative assessments provide opportunities to identify places where the curriculum is failing a student—and to make appropriate adjustments before the student himself “fails.”

**Methods**

Likewise, appropriate instructional methods and materials are flexible and varied enough to accommodate the needs and quite-natural differences of individual learners. Learning environments that are not flexible in this way are themselves disabled: they cannot successfully provide
students with the equal access to learning that those students rightly and legally deserve. One size never fits all. While all students deserve the same opportunities to meet high standards, they do not all have to reach those high standards in standardized ways. Multiple approaches, paths, and supports are needed to reach the highest standards for all students.

Experts in any field certainly don’t all take the same path to success. The Rubik’s Cube masters who have learned to solve the puzzle in record time all have the same goal: to arrange all six colors in solid blocks, one color to a side. Yet the different puzzlers employ different strategies to achieve their common goal. Some rely more on memory; others on physical dexterity to achieve record times. What these masters have in common is a commitment to continually evaluate their performance (in formative ways) and make adjustments in their methods and approaches that point them closer to the goal (solving the Cube fast!). They also share their strategies and findings, their successes and frustrations. In short, the community of Cube solvers is strong; mentoring and cooperation are givens.

In classrooms, too, educators can encourage collaboration as a way of enabling all learners to reach the same high standards. Peer-to-peer support gives mentors opportunities to reinforce their skills and knowledge by teaching others, while those who are mentored benefit from individualized coaching. Technology tools can enhance this approach, sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, we have seen students who are reluctant to speak up in a face-to-face setting become powerful leaders in a blogging environment.

Good teachers know that we need uniformly high standards, but not highly standardized methods, and especially not highly standardized students.

Materials

The deeper into the digital age we go, the more difficult it will become to remember when fixed media, especially print, shaped (some might say “warped”) our understanding of what an effective learner is. Those who were “book smart”—who could function well in a print environment—succeeded. Those who struggled with print were shut out. Educational materials limited who could achieve the goals of learning.

New digital media provide many opportunities for teachers to reach and engage learners. And learners in the postprint age have direct access to high-quality audio and video, 3-D animations, digital graphic organizers and glossaries, instant links to background information and source material, and just-in-time supports such as text-to-speech—materials that previously were dispensed through textbooks or through teachers.

The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) requires that publishers provide flexible alternatives to print for qualifying students with “print disabilities.” These alternatives provide a variety of paths to the same high standards for students who cannot see or successfully decode traditional textbooks. Such alternatives are essential for students with disabilities to reach the same high standards as their peers.

Teachers and students are not limited to even these many materials that publishers provide. They can now create their own digital books, videos, audio, and other materials easily and cheaply.

At CAST, we provide free tools to accomplish much of this, including UDL Book Builder, UDL Studio, and UDL Exchange. Providing multiple means of engagement, of action and expression, and of representation—the three principles of UDL—are all much more possible today.

The Common Core presents new challenges—and new opportunities—to improve education for all students, including those with disabilities. Changes in education policy in recent decades have guaranteed students with disabilities the right to participate and progress in the same standards-based curriculum as their nondisabled peers. That’s a good thing. What we need to do now is find a way of dismantling the primary barrier to success: the one-size-fits-all curriculum, the disabled curriculum.

Students with disabilities and their peers and teachers need flexibility in the way learners are motivated and engaged, how standards-based content is presented, and the opportunities students have to approach learning tasks and express what they know. This flexibility—or, in a worst case, lack of it—will determine how successful we are in educating all students under the Common Core.

About the author

David Rose is a developmental neuropsychologist and educator. In 1984, Dr. Rose co-founded CAST, a not-for-profit research and development organization. CAST’s mission is to improve education for all learners through innovative uses of modern multimedia technology and contemporary research in the cognitive neurosciences. That work has grown into a new field called Universal Design for Learning. Dr. Rose has taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Education for nearly three decades.
Getting Ready for the Common Core: The New Assessments

Standards, curriculum, and assessments: what to teach, how to teach it, and how to know if the teaching worked. For years, research has shown the important of coherence and alignment among the three. The new California Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the accompanying assessments will go far toward advancing this kind of educational coherence.

The new standards themselves are internally coherent. They have been developed around a series of “progressions” that build upon each other as students move from one grade to the next. Specifically, students in kindergarten will begin to learn a set of essential concepts and skills that they then deepen and refine through every subsequent grade, with close attention paid to what is developmentally appropriate at each level. David Steiner, founding director of the Institute for Education Policy at City University of New York, sees in this structure a “potential to bolster both skills and knowledge by encouraging sequenced, spiraled, content-rich curricula in the classroom.”

By the time students graduate from high school, they will have learned to their fullest potential those important problem-solving and critical-thinking skills that they will need in college, the workplace, and community life.

As the CCSS are introduced and taught, the majority of students in California, including most students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), will take Smarter Balanced assessments. These summative assessments were created to align directly to the new standards and will be accompanied by a Digital Library of Formative Tools and Practices. The library will offer numerous educational tools and resources, including formative assessments. The Smarter Balanced Consortium designed these resources with the belief that “putting good information about student performance in the hands of teachers can have a profound impact on instruction and—as a result—on student learning.”

The new tests are able to provide information beyond a single grade level—both above and below—and report on the exact level of a student’s performance.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities may take an alternate assessment similar to the one created by the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), a multistate project that has based its assessment on alternate achievement standards that are aligned with the CCSS. The NCSC assessment, while not yet formally adopted by California, is currently being field tested in the state.

The goal of a new alternate assessment will be to ensure that students are achieving

Notes & Resources


For more information about the NCSC, go to http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/ and click on the “Alternate Assessment” tab.
increasingly higher academic outcomes and leaving high school ready for postsecondary options and community life. (See NCSC resources on page 10).

**Adaptive Technology**

The Smarter Balanced assessments will take advantage of new testing technology that does a number of things that are not possible with paper-and-pencil tests, with the intent to better serve students with disabilities. The new technology gives the tests the capacity to deliver information about student progress quickly to help teachers make decisions about instruction and supports. Probably the most innovative aspect of these new assessments involves the way they use computer-adaptive technology, which makes it possible for the tests to adjust questions throughout the testing process in direct response to a student’s answers, individually tailoring sets of questions for each student. An additional advantage to adaptive testing is the way it is able to provide information beyond a single grade level—both above and below—and report on the exact level at which a student is performing. Adaptive technology makes it possible to provide the kind of specific information that is critical to determining student ability and progress. In short, the new assessments will deliver more accurate and useful scores for all students.4

**Accommodations**

The new tests and the technologies they employ will give traditionally low-performing students and students with disabilities an unprecedented opportunity to show what they know (Assessments continued on page 8)

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### What Changes Will Be Made to California’s System of Student Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old System</th>
<th>New System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper and pencil</td>
<td>Computer based:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Software, hardware, and sufficient bandwidth</td>
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<td>• Keyboarding and basic word processing skills</td>
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<td>• Computer literacy among teachers</td>
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<td>One-dimensional</td>
<td>Computer adaptive:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Adjusts to the level of a student’s answers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Registers what the student knows and doesn’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on California-only standards</td>
<td>Based on nationally aligned standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not coordinated between or among grade levels</td>
<td>Designed like building blocks, grade by grade (progressions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not aligned to college or work expectations</td>
<td>Aligned to college and work expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Used some technology in accommodations</td>
<td>Most accommodations are built into the technology; accessibility features are integral, not “add-ons.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used few tools of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</td>
<td>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) tools are integral.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What Stays the Same**

- Tests are not timed.
- Accommodations for testing must be listed in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- The nature and names of the accommodations generally remain the same.

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*Old System*

- Paper and pencil
- One-dimensional
- Based on California-only standards
- Not coordinated between or among grade levels
- Not aligned to college or work expectations
- Used some technology in accommodations
- Used few tools of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

*New System*

- Computer based:
  - Requires
    - Software, hardware, and sufficient bandwidth
    - Keyboarding and basic word processing skills
    - Computer literacy among teachers
- Computer adaptive:
  - Adjusts to the level of a student’s answers
  - Registers what the student knows and doesn’t know
- Based on nationally aligned standards
- Designed like building blocks, grade by grade (progressions)
- Aligned to college and work expectations
- Most accommodations are built into the technology; accessibility features are integral, not “add-ons.”
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) tools are integral.
and can do through various universal tools, supports, and accommodations, most of which are directly built into the assessment interface. Such universal tools as digital notepaper or scratch paper will be available for all students. Designated resources and supports—such as a translated pop-up glossary or a dictionary—will be available to students when appropriate; teachers and school personnel who know each child and the purpose of each assessment will be able to select the appropriate testing support. And for any student who has an accommodation (distinct from a designated support) listed in an IEP or 504 plan, that accommodation will be available to the student in the assessment. These tools include braille and closed captioning, among others.5

Shared Resources

In the development of the new standards and assessments, states have joined together in unprecedented numbers to pool resources and talents for the good of all students. As new resources and strategies are developed, participating states will continue to share them to enhance both instruction and assessments.

Preparation

To take the Smarter Balanced assessments, students will need to know basic computer and word-processing skills. Parents and teachers both will want to give students opportunities to practice these skills—at school, at home, or at a local public library. The development of keyboarding and computer skills can be written into an IEP and will be useful not only in school but in many postsecondary education and employment settings.

Some students may already be familiar with online tests of some sort, and practice tests in both the Smarter Balanced and the NCSC are being provided around the state—although clearly the best way to prepare students for the new assessments is to teach them well in the Common Core State Standards.
What the New Standards Are

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) describe what all students are expected to learn in each grade (kindergarten through grade twelve). Forty-five states have adopted these standards. This creates consistency in instruction, which makes it easier for students to move to different states and still do well in school. Academic standards are not new in California. The CCSS simply improve the previous standards. They focus on the skills students need to succeed as life-long learners in the twenty-first century workplace.

The Goal of the CCSS

The goal of the CCSS is to make sure that all students are prepared for college, technical education, or the workplace as well as for independent living and a quality life after high school.

Where to Find the Standards

All of the CCSS are at http://www.corestandards.org/. Here you’ll also find helpful resources.

The Role of the Standards in an IEP Team Meeting

Academic goals in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be aligned to grade-level standards. This ensures that students with disabilities receive grade-level curriculum and instruction. When you know about the standards, you can better advocate for your child. You are in a better position to know whether teachers are holding your child to the same high level of expectations that they maintain for general education students. Knowing about the standards also makes it easier for you to ask questions about where your child’s learning will occur—his or her “placement.”

Which IEP Goals Will Be Aligned to CCSS

Functional goals do not have to be aligned to a CCSS. These goals focus on behavior, social-emotional challenges, and functional skills. They are still an important part of an IEP, and they support academic access and achievement. But only academic goals must be aligned to the CCSS.

Questions to Ask an IEP Team

- What academic goal does each standard address?
- What are my child’s behavioral goals that support his or her academic achievement?
- What does my child have in place to access the standards that are being taught?
- Will there be accommodations, modifications, or assistive technology?
- If the IEP calls for “Specially Designed Instruction,” what is special about it?

How the Standards Will Affect a Child Who Is Below Grade Level in a Subject

Even if your child is performing below or even far below grade level, he or she should still be learning grade-level content. Your child should receive instruction that includes accommodations, modifications, assistive technology, and supports that allow him or her to participate with peers and make it possible to close the learning gap.

How the New Assessments Will Align with the CCSS

There will be new assessments for the new standards. An IEP must include all appropriate accommodations for both classroom learning and for these assessments. This way, a child will use the accommodations in his or her daily academic program and be prepared to use the accommodations in testing. The CDE Web site offers a list of approved accommodations; go to http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ai/caasppmatrix1.asp. For a more detailed exploration of accommodations, you’ll want to go to http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SmarterBalanced_Guidelines_091113.pdf.

While these lists include the most common accommodations, they do not include all of the possible accommodations that a student may need. Any accommodation that a student legitimately needs must be included in his or her IEP.

What Happens When a Student Is Not Familiar with Technology

All students must be given a chance to practice and get used to the technology they will be using when they are tested. If your child needs practice, you can address this need in an IEP meeting. Skill in using technology is an important part of your child’s academic program, and developing that skill can be an important goal.

What the New Standards Mean for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Each student with significant cognitive disabilities should be taught and tested in ways that align to CCSS grade-level standards, even if the student does not receive instruction in a general education classroom. The curriculum for these students may be significantly modified, but it still must be aligned to grade-level standards.
Things Students with Disabilities Need to Know: The Common Core

Who the Common Core Is For

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are for all students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in public education, which includes students with disabilities.

How IEP Goals Should Be Based on the New Standards

Your IEP has goals that focus on your special learning needs. Each of the academic goals should be based on a Common Core grade-level standard.

You also may have goals in your IEP that are not academic goals. These might be goals that address how you deal with and express your feelings. Nonacademic goals are an important part of your IEP. They support your ability to learn in school. But only academic goals—such those for English and math—need to align to a CCSS.

How to Advocate for Yourself in a Class Where a Teacher Has Not Seen Your IEP

It is always OK—and sometimes very important—to tell your teachers that you have a disability. You also want to tell your teachers that your IEP lists the accommodations, modifications, or assistive technology you need in order to be successful in their classes. If you are afraid or embarrassed to talk to a teacher about this, speak to one of the members of your IEP team or a family member. Ask for help in talking with the teacher to explain the supports you need.

What Questions to Ask at Your IEP Meeting

- Am I learning and performing at grade level?
- If not, what is the plan for me to catch up?
- What are my behavior goals that will help me with my learning?
- What strategies, special teaching, or technology will I have to make sure I am able to learn?
- Who should I go to for help?
- What will I need to do to get a high school diploma?

More Helpful Resources

- The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) offers resources to students seeking to succeed in the Common Core at http://www.ncld.org/learning-disability-resources/videos/video-tips-self-advocacy
- Learn about the history of the new standards and watch them applied in classrooms at https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/common-core-standards-ela
- Two videos made for students explain the field tests that will help you get ready for the new assessments. For high school students: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXXd451e580
  For junior high school students: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKerb7NsDUE
- Find additional resources and supports at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/ [select the “Parents and Students” tab].

What the California Common Core State Standards Are and Why We Have Them

The CCSS are the guidelines that all teachers and schools will follow to make sure you are taught what you need to know in each grade. All students who attend public schools are supposed to be taught their grade-level standards. Learning the standards will help you prepare for college, jobs, and life.

Where You Can See the Standards

You can find all of the CCSS at http://www.corestandards.org/. At this Web site, you can select your grade level to see what you should be learning. This site also has many resources to help you learn about and understand the standards.

How the New Standards Are Important in Your Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Knowing what you are supposed to be learning in each grade can make it easier for you to ask questions about how you are meeting your goals, where your learning will happen, and what kind of extra help you might need.
Meet the Needs of All

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were created to meet the needs of all students, regardless of ability or disability. To lay the foundation for all students to become college, career, and/or community ready, teachers will need to align academic goals in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to the CCSS and create behavioral, communicative, functional, social/emotional, and transition goals that support the academic goals. IEP team will continue to provide adaptations and supports for each student, shaping them within the context of the new standards.

Face the Challenge

Teachers of students with disabilities face real challenges when building lesson plans. For students to realize success at grade level, teachers still must give them as much of the general education curriculum as possible. Collaboration with general education teachers is essential to helping students succeed. The good news is that teaching to the new standards will bring more in-depth instruction and more practical lessons applicable to life outside of school. One way to build a lesson plan based on the CCSS, regardless of a student’s current level of achievement, is to look at the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as the instructional design, especially for a diverse range of learners. The principles of UDL involve

- providing multiple means of representation—presenting information and content in different ways;
- providing multiple means of action and expression—differentiating the way students can express what they know and can do; and
- providing multiple means of engagement—stimulating interest and motivation for learning.

Understand the New Assessments

Most students with disabilities will be taking the Smarter Balanced assessments. The current Smarter Balanced field test will help test designers refine the content and delivery of the assessments to students, including students with visual, auditory, linguistic, or physical needs. These summative assessments align directly to the new standards and will be accompanied by a Digital Library of Formative Tools and Practices, which will offer numerous helpful resources, including formative assessments.

In 2013–14, most students with significant cognitive disabilities will take the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA). However, California is also participating in the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) Phase I Pilot/Field Test in 2013–14. The NCSC is working to build an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities, based on alternate achievement standards aligned to the CCSS. The goal of the NCSC is to ensure that students with significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for postsecondary options. The NCSC supports teachers by providing quality resources that will help them design instruction that is grounded in the CCSS and deliver that instruction to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Engage Parents

When parents and family members understand—and are committed to—the CCSS, their child will have a better chance of succeeding in school. Be sure parents know that the CCSS mean that their child will learn subject matter in greater detail and depth. And engage parents in learning about the CCSS so that they have the opportunity to assist their children in truly understanding what is being taught.

Essential Resources

Learn the Common Core
http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/tl/whatareccss.asp

Create CCSS-based IEPs

Understand UDL
http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl/3principles
http://www.cast.org

Modify Curriculum and Instruction
http://cde.videossc.com/archives/120213/

Align Lesson Plans
http://cc.betterlesson.com/

Know the New Assessments

Smarter Balanced
http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/

NCSC
https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/mediawiki/index.php/Instructional_Resources
http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/[select “Alternate Assessment” tab]

Learn About Accommodations
http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ai/caaspmmatrix1.asp

Engage Parents
Transitioning to the Common Core

Implementing the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for students with disabilities will require changes in organization and attitude as well as in curriculum and instruction. “Ten Steps for Migrating Your Curriculum to the Common Core” explores key questions you’ll want to ask when making these changes, such as:

- What methods or approaches can best address the challenges of stepping up to more rigorous standards?
- Where the standards describe new skills and content for students to learn (and teachers to teach), will funds be allocated for new curriculum and materials?
- What kinds of professional development will teachers need, especially when it comes to helping them lead students to the higher-order thinking and independence the Common Core standards demand?
- Who will pay for the training, and how will time be carved out for educators to participate in it?

For the full paper, go to http://www.achieve3000.com/resources/white-papers.

Professional Development

Professional development related to the CCSS should include both general and special education teachers. The National Education Association Common Core State Standards Toolkit examines six critical areas for understanding and preparing to implement the CCSS, including a section devoted entirely to students with disabilities: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/14047-CommonCore_Toolkit_14.pdf. You’ll also want to explore California Department of Education (CDE) resources at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/.

Involving Parents

Students succeed when their parents and family members support and assist them in their learning. The CDE Web site features resources to help administrators directly engage parents in appropriate aspects of the new standards: http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/ (select the “Parents and Students” tab). The Achieve the Core Web site provides additional resources to share with parents: http://www.achievethecore.org/common-core-intro-for-parents.

Aligning IEPs to the CCSS

Academic goals in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) will need to align to the CCSS; and behavioral, communicative, functional, social/emotional, and transition goals should support academic goals. To meet the needs of all learners and to address the rigor and challenges of the CCSS, IEP teams should thoughtfully consider the tasks required by each standard and provide adaptations and support for each student. For information on aligning the IEP to the CCSS, see http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/.

Aligning Systems and Processes

A multitiered system of supports (MTSS) coordinates interventions, supports, and opportunities to improve access and achievement for all students. Grounded in quality general education instruction, MTSS is designed to help students with disabilities succeed in the least restrictive environment.

While the CCSS articulates the “what” in teaching, MTSS provides a framework for “how” and “when” to provide it. The professional development modules on the Brokers of Expertise Web site will guide you and your staff in developing an MTSS: http://www.myboe.org/portal/default/Content/Viewer/Content?action=2&cld=509627.

Getting Ready for the New Assessment Systems

As the CCSS are introduced and taught, the majority of students in California, including most students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), will take Smarter Balanced assessments. These summative assessments were created to align directly to the new standards and will be accompanied by a Digital Library of Formative Tools and Practices. The library will offer numerous educational tools and resources, including formative assessments. For more about the Smarter Balanced tests, go to http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/index.asp.

Also see http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/ (select the “General Education” tab). For a detailed account of the accommodations available in the new assessments, go to http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ai/caasppmatrix1.asp.

In 2013–14, most students with significant cognitive disabilities will take the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA). However, California is also participating in the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) Phase I Pilot/Field Test in 2013–2014. The NCSC is an alternate assessment aligned with the CCSS and created for students with significant cognitive disabilities. For more details, visit http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/ (select the “Alternate Assessment” tab). Guidance for IEP teams on participation decisions for the NCSC alternate assessment is available at http://www.ncscpartners.org/resources.
The advent of the Common Core State Standards promises all of California’s students—including those with disabilities—high-quality, standards-based instruction that will prepare them for college, career, and/or community life. For this promise to be realized, all teachers, including special educators, must receive training to understand these new standards and to incorporate them into their teaching. In fact, insufficient professional development is being cited as one of the primary reasons for the challenges the state of New York is currently facing in its rollout of the Common Core.

In particular, special educators need guidance in the best ways to modify goals for their students, while aligning those goals to the new standards. This knowledge does not just happen, nor does it trickle down from training that general educators receive. In addition to participating fully in their school district’s professional development events, special educators will want to contact their local County Offices of Education and their regional Diagnostic Centers to learn about other opportunities that can help them prepare to incorporate the new standards into their work with students with disabilities—from developing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to teaching in the classroom to creating an effective transition plan.

A wealth of professional development opportunities is also available at the click of a computer key. The list below features a small but critical sampling of the information and training available online and designed to help educators understand and prepare to successfully implement the Common Core.

- **The California Department of Education** lists dozens of resources on its Web site to support teachers, administrators, and parents as the state transitions to the new standards. [http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/)

- **California Common Core State Standards Professional Learning Modules** on the Brokers of Expertise Web site represent a collaborative effort between the California Department of Education and content and professional learning experts throughout California. The online modules are designed to help educators transition to the Common Core State Standards. Topics include standards for mathematics; reading informational texts; writing to inform, argue, and analyze; content literacy in history/social studies; Multitiered System of Supports for implementing the new standards; and more. [http://myboe.org/portal/default/Group/Viewer/GroupView?action=2&gid=2996](http://myboe.org/portal/default/Group/Viewer/GroupView?action=2&gid=2996)

- **The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium** is designing the assessments that most students will take once the Common Core State Standards are implemented. The Smarter Balanced Digital Library will include professional learning and instructional materials. Its Web site provides an overview of the new assessments and allows teachers to sign up for the Smarter Balanced e-mail newsletter, which provides information on the development of the Digital Library. [http://www.smarterbalanced.org/k-12-education/teachers/](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/k-12-education/teachers/)

- **Common Core Implementation Video Series**, created by the Council of Chief State School Officers with the James B. Hunt Institute, describes important aspects of the new standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics. [http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Digital_Resources/Common_Core_Implementation_Video_Series.html](http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Digital_Resources/Common_Core_Implementation_Video_Series.html)

- **A database of The California Common Core State Standards on the Sacramento County Office of Education Web site—eStandards—provides quick and easy access to the new content standards for teachers, administrators, students, and parents. The site makes the standards available in multiple formats (Smartphone, iPhone, and iPad) and also features numerous resources in specific content areas for educators who are transitioning to the standards. [http://scoecurriculum.net/estandards/](http://scoecurriculum.net/estandards/)

- **Common Core State Standards for Mathematics: Shifts and Implications for Mathematics Instruction**, from Student Achievement Partners, examines the ways in which mathematics instruction will change with the Common Core State Standards to include real-world applications and conceptual understanding. [https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/common-core-state-standards/id522706351](https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/common-core-state-standards/id522706351)
For Special Educators

- Common Core State Standards Symposium for Special Educators, on the California Department of Education Web site, is an archived Webcast of a symposium designed to give special educators training in the Common Core State Standards and how they influence the goals written into an IEP and students’ assessments. http://cde.videoscc.com/archives/120213/


- The National Center and State Collaborative hosts a Web site of materials for special educators to ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes, leave high school ready for postsecondary options, and receive instruction that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The materials on this site are grouped into three categories: Curricular Resources: What to Teach (reference materials created to reinforce educators’ understanding of curriculum content); Instructional Resources: How to Teach (reference materials created to support classroom teaching); and Classroom Solutions (solutions or accommodations created by educators and shared here). https://wiki.nceppartners.org/mediawiki/index.php/Main_Page

- The Council for Exceptional Children hosts on its Web site a number of Webinar recordings that address such topics as “Using the Common Core State Standards in Special Education”; “Alternate Assessments”; “Common Core Writing Standards: Implications for Students With Learning Disabilities and Their Teachers”; “Speech-Language Pathologists and Special Education Teachers: Partners in Implementing the Common Core State Standards”; and more. http://www.ccc.sped.org/Professional-Development/Webinars/Recorded-Webinars/Common-Core-State-Standards?sc_lang=en


- Implementing the CCSS for Students with Learning Disabilities, a Webinar from May 2013 with Louisa Moats, Margaret McLaughlin, and George Batsche on the RTI Network Web site, explores both the opportunities and challenges inherent in implementing the CCSS for students with learning disabilities. These educational leaders also present practical strategies for establishing systems to support the work of administrators and teachers for successful CCSS implementation. http://www.rtinetwork.org/professional-forums-and-webinars/forums/rti-webinar-implementing-common-core-state-standards-students-learning-disabilities

For Administrators

- Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core is an initiative to develop a comprehensive system of professional learning, with an immediate focus on implementing Common Core State Standards and new assessments. The initiative provides resources and tools to assist states, districts, and schools in providing effective professional learning for current and future education reforms. http://learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core#.Uv6uAf2Di1t

- The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Web site provides numerous tools for elementary school administrators. Resources include several Webinars: Technology and the Common Core, which addresses integrating technology to support and enhance teaching and learning as schools transition to the new standards, and Leadership for the Common Core: Synthesize, Strategize, Maximize!, which includes tips on how principals can prepare teachers and their schools to integrate the Common Core State Standards. The site also features tools, articles and research, and resources for students and teachers. http://www.naesp.org/common-core-state-standards-resources#webinars

Getting Ready for the Common Core: Individualized Education Programs

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) challenge students with disabilities “to excel within the general curriculum.” This is a good thing: higher levels of achievement and more promising postschool opportunities. But challenges can also be frightening, and the state’s transition to the new standards has raised numerous questions and concerns about how the Individualized Education Program (IEP) might change. Will the individual nature of the IEP be lost in the need to meet common standards? Will functional training and behavioral goals be diminished? Will too much be asked of students? Are special and general educators adequately prepared to write and assess goals based on the new standards?

With the IEP as the backbone of special education, teachers and parents of students with disabilities are smart to question anything that might change it. But the answer to the first three questions above is “no.” And while everyone is working on the fourth, the short answer to the most important question is that the IEP fundamentally stays the same.

Standards-based IEPs

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates the IEP. The CCSS changes nothing about this legal requirement. And Californians have been developing and using standards-based IEPs since 1997, when state standards were established. According to Kevin Schaefer, assistant director of special projects at WestEd and former lead program specialist in the Elk Grove Unified School District, the process starts with the IEP team developing an in-depth understanding of the standards (now the Common Core) at each grade level. With this understanding, the team assesses what each student knows and how he or she is functioning relative to grade level. “We’re still using [formal and informal] assessments and teachers’ observations, as well as formative data to develop IEPs and align instruction. We’re still looking at the present levels of performance and identified individual needs,” says Schaefer.

The team then determines the gap between what the student has been able to achieve and what is expected for all students. From there, the team develops meaningful and measurable goals for what the student needs to accomplish in the coming school year. Each student’s individualized program of special education and related services is crafted to help the student reach those expressed goals.

After an IEP team identifies goals, it regularly monitors student progress through numerous assessment measures—as IEP teams have done for years. If the student is not making progress toward a goal, the team reconvenes and revises the IEP. Conversely, if a student’s progress exceeds the goal trajectory, the team can recalculate the IEP to move the student ahead.

The New

Educators will notice fewer standards in the CCSS, which allow for more in-depth instruction and give students more time with material. The new standards emphasize depth and quality in both content and learning—the ability to think critically, to

(IEPs continued on page 13)
Writing IEPS with the Common Core

Critical Questions

- What is the relationship between the proposed goals and the goals written in the previous IEP? Were previous goals met, increased, discontinued, etc.?

- Is the assessment information comprehensive? Does it provide a clear profile of the student’s academic/functional levels? Does it include information from all environments; home, general education, leisure, special education? Does it reflect present levels of academic achievement and functional performance?

- Based on the identified need, how was the grade-level standard chosen? Are goals aligned to that standard? (Remember, the student’s age-appropriate, grade-level standards are the starting point in goal development.)

- Do benchmarks create a pathway from the baseline to the goal? Do they reflect growing independence and progress toward the grade-level standard?

- Is the student communicatively competent (does the student understand what is being said, and does the student have a way to express himself)? If there are concerns about the student’s communicative competence, is this concern addressed with accommodations (the “given what/under what conditions” component of the goal/benchmarks; see below). Is a communication goal needed?

- Is the student motivated/engaged? If there are concerns that she may not be, is this addressed with an accommodation and/or the “given what/under what conditions” component of the goal/benchmarks?

- Have executive function skills been considered and accounted for? If there are concerns, are executive function skills addressed with an accommodation and/or the “given what/under what conditions” component of the goal/benchmarks?

- Are there behavioral concerns that need to be addressed with an accommodation? Is a behavior goal needed?

- Is there a progression toward independence, through decreasing supports or increasing the student’s level of mastery or depth of knowledge?

- Do functional goals contain elements of self-determination and self-advocacy; do they result in self-efficacy? Are parents on board and aligned with this process?

- Does the student understand what is being expected of him? Does the student understand how the expectations (and his behavior/learning/accomplishments) are connected to the benchmarks? Are parents on board and aligned with this process?

- Are all components of a well-written goal present? These components, when determined, create a solid foundation for an IEP goal. They read as follows:
  
  **By when** [will the goal be accomplished]?
  
  **Who** [name of student] **does what** [name of behavior or activity] **given what or under what conditions**? [Progress will be] **measured by** [what]?
  
  **What level of mastery** [is expected]?
  
  Is this a SMART goal? Is it **Specific**, **Measurable**, **Achievable**, **Result-oriented**, and **Time-bound**?
solve problems, to evaluate information on the basis of facts. This focus, in Schaefer’s opinion, creates a perfect opportunity for general educators and special educators to collaborate, with the goal of integrating content and instructional strategies to ensure that all students develop the higher-order thinking skills they will need to take advantage of postschool opportunities, to manage independent living, and to succeed in adult life. The CCSS also give IEP teams a chance to shift their focus away from a deficit model—one that is intent on minimal progress, remediation, and strict compliance—and toward improved student learning.

**Aligning Goals**

Academic IEP goals for students with disabilities—including students with significant cognitive disabilities—must be aligned to the new standards. Research supports this effort, as access to the general education curriculum is one of the predictors of postschool success. The work of Rachel Quenemoen from the National Center and State Collaborative and numerous others further demonstrates that students with significant cognitive disabilities are “able to master and apply in meaningful ways the academic skills and knowledge that we never before had tried to teach.”

Functional goals, which address behavior, social-emotional challenges, and certain life skills, remain a very important part of the IEP; and they are central to supporting academic access and achievement. However these goals do not have to be aligned to the CCSS.

As part of his work helping educators prepare for the Common Core, Schaefer has been collaborating with Sharen Bertrando from the Center for Prevention and Early Intervention at WestEd. Together they have developed a set of 12 goal-writing considerations for IEPs based on the CCSS (see page 12).

Question nine is the one Schaefer believes is most important: Is there a progression toward independence? “We’re looking for independence for students across time with an appropriate decrease of support. Everything goes back to how we are preparing students to be college and career ready—to be integral participants in the twenty-first century workforce.”

**Integrated Supports**

Schaefer encourages educators to determine “under what conditions the student will demonstrate mastery” and independence. He offers the example of a student who “blows out” behaviorally when facing a certain kind of reading task. “There are support plans that list the type of preventive strategies that, when taught and implemented, allow the student to handle the stress and overcome past experiences of failure—so he can be successful at approaching and comprehending text.” Yet in many IEPs, a student’s “developmental skills are frequently unrelated to the academic, behavioral, or functional learning expectations for other students of the same grade level. This produces two parallel curricula for the child—one in special education and one in regular education.” Schaefer sees the importance of integrating both. This integration is critical if the student is going to learn—especially when the behavior shows up in an academic setting. Whatever the support, academics and behavior “are not separate things. You sometimes see IEP teams talking about them as silos. They have to be combined.” The IEP, he says, needs to be a picture of the whole student.

**The Role of Parents**

Parents are important members of the IEP team. “Parents know their kids better than anyone,” Schaefer says. “They bring their concerns [and an understanding of] their child’s strengths and challenges. A great way to start IEP meetings is to talk about and document a student’s strengths. Parents can lead that conversation.”

Yet some parents of students with disabilities may feel that their child shouldn’t struggle. “We need to change that thinking,” says Bertrando, “to help parents understand that the struggle is part of learning. Our desire is to scaffold instruction and create a system of temporary assistance that encourages the student towards mastery of new skills, concepts, and levels of understanding through instruction and practice.”

Bertrando urges special educators, general educators, and parents to “embrace the changes; this is an opportunity for us to do a better job for our students. Be proactive, collaborate; it’s not business as usual anymore.”

While the business of public education has always been to prepare students for advanced learning and adult life, the Common Core challenges everyone—teachers, parents, administrators, and students—to higher levels of achievement. And “everyone” includes students with disabilities.
Riley has been at the forefront of efforts to implement MTSS in the majority of schools and districts in Kansas. And while she says, “Creating MTSS is not easy—it’s a multiyear effort and not a quick fix,” she also says that ultimately “it’s not more work. It’s simply changing the way we do our work.” Riley believes that the advent of the Common Core “gives districts a perfect opportunity to create the system that is needed to align resources to support the success of all students—and the effectiveness of teachers: a Multitiered System of Supports.”

The MTSS-CCSS combination is a way to advance instruction and improve learning . . . all teachers are in agreement . . . all resources are aligned to meet the needs of all students.

She acknowledges the additional challenges that accompany the new standards. “Any time people are faced with something new, they have concerns. They think they don’t have the foundation to deal with something new. But we’ve always had standards. And we have always updated standards.” What’s different is that “these new standards are now just ‘common’ among most of the states. And the good news is that these new standards will support student success as students transition from one school to another within a district, to a new district, to a new state. They will allow students to know where exactly they are [and where they should be academically] and help students be successful. It is about making the system support the students, not making the students fit into the system.”

Kansas was inspired more than 10 years ago to invest in its MTSS overhaul for reasons that are familiar to educators everywhere: Programs and resources lacked coordination. Existing systems were not meeting the needs of all students. And student achievement was generally poor in overall outcomes, benchmark tests, graduation rates, and transition. State educators and leaders were ready for a change, and MTSS gave them just that. “MTSS requires the system to change so that it can support all students,” says Riley. “And that’s our job—to help all students.”

James Baker taught elementary and middle school in Kansas for 23 years, and he spent eight years as an elementary school principal implementing MTSS when it was a new idea infrequently applied. His experience shaped his belief in the MTSS-CCSS combination as “a way to advance instruction and improve learning by making sure all teachers are in agreement and that all resources are aligned to meet the needs of students.” Baker is currently a member of the Kansas Multi-Tiered System of Supports Core Team, which works at the state level to support MTSS efforts. He sees MTSS and the CCSS as having “the same purpose” and that the new standards are actually easier to implement “if you’re doing an MTSS.”

MTSS and CCSS

MTSS and the CCSS share four central features that promote effective instruction:

- Clear academic and behavioral goals
- Curriculum and instruction that are universally designed (UDL)
• Alignment of what is taught, studied, and learned with what is tested
• Regular progress monitoring through formative assessments (formal and informal) that direct decisions about instruction and interventions

What is particularly important—and helpful—for students with disabilities is that a well-executed tiered system of supports ensures that students with disabilities
1. receive their instruction in the regular education classroom to the greatest degree possible,
2. receive strong core instruction with embedded strategies that enhance their instruction,
3. are provided with interventions that are based on assessment data and that are what the students need in order to master the curriculum,
4. are being taught to the same standards as their general education peers, and
5. are given supports and services based on their need, not label.

These five features are critical if students with disabilities are to benefit from the new standards.

Collaboration

Baker views collaboration—between general and special educators—as central to an effective MTSS and critical to implementing the new standards. “In our system, all services, supports, and instruction are based on need. All students receive core instruction, and any student can receive support in tier two or three. Special education teachers are not just working with special education students.” While the state is mindful of the ways in which federal funding restricts the work of certain personnel, it also takes full advantage of the “incidental benefit” ruling, ensuring that any students who face an instructional standard they find daunting also find the expertise of special educators ready to support them.

General education-special education collaboration within an MTSS also “makes it possible for us to ensure that special education is a set of special services that are given to a student as long as they are needed.” The system is fluid, and no student is given a label and a placement—and then left there.

Baker explains that collaborative teams of teachers operate at every grade level, evaluating their work in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, “empowering culture and leadership.” Team members often practice co-teaching (Kansas is currently delivering statewide training in co-teaching to its public educators), and every teacher is trained in problem-solving protocols and in using data.

Data

“Using data to make decisions is part of what an educator does,” says Riley. “But when a school is implementing an MTSS, all educators are looking at the data and making those decisions. MTSS supports this collaborative process. It’s a team effort.”

Riley sees isolation as “a tremendous burden on teachers.” In her experience, “MTSS, with its focus on data and collaborative decision making by school teams, removes some of the solitary burden of the decisions teachers have to make. And that data is improving instruction.”

Riley emphasizes that MTSS is more than a system for improving students’ grades. “MTSS provides the structure for success by addressing the whole student. Our framework is designed to help adults use data so they can respond consistently to issues of both academics and behavior] and so the system has the supports and interventions in place to meet the needs of all students.”

As a coordinated system, MTSS is complex—and now probably a little more so, as “the standards must run through all of the pieces of the MTSS system,” says Baker. “There has to be a marriage of the instruction, curriculum, and assessment in both academics and behavior. They must fit together, work together, make sense together; and all of the staff [must] work together to be on board and make the system cohesive. Integration and coherence are critical,” he says.

But MTSS and CCSS are designed to promote this kind of coherence—MTSS through its coordinated system of services, CCSS through its coordinated progression of skills. Implementing both, in Riley’s words, is “not an easy thing; but it is a good thing.”
New Standards and Tiered Systems: A Perfect Fit

As California educators take on the task of adapting their teaching and curriculum to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), they are also developing lesson plans that, by design, will target a wider range of learners in their classrooms. In order for all students, including students with disabilities, to realize success with these new standards, California has embraced a coordinated approach to organizing school services: Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS is one way the state is supporting the use of data and evidence-based practices to drive the instruction and instructional supports that all students need in order to learn.

Generally speaking, MTSS consists of a three-tiered, integrated approach to supporting all students with research-based instructional strategies, clear content and behavioral standards, collaboration, and problem solving, all of which are guided and informed by multiple sources of student data. Both research and practice show that a well-executed MTSS leads to higher student achievement.

Explanations and descriptions of MTSS are not new to readers of this publication. In fact, there is not much about MTSS that is new; all of its component parts represent what research and experience have for years shown to be the most effective ways for teachers and administrators to succeed in their primary goal: helping students learn. What is new about MTSS is that California has recognized a need for this “whole system” approach to supporting all students, a system that begins in general education. The California Department of Education has developed a new Professional Learning Module designed to help districts move toward a tiered system of supports at all levels—district, school, and student; and MTSS can be found in the latest version of the English Language Arts Framework.

Thanks to some trailblazers, MTSS has been defined, tried, and refined. California is benefiting from the lessons learned by these early adapters. In Kansas, Colleen Riley, Director of Early Childhood, Title One, and Special Education services for the state, agrees that MTSS and CCSS are the right match. And she should know.

(MTSS, continued on page 14)