



## Charlotte meets the challenge of Common Core by building capacity

*As told to Valerie von Frank*

**T**he Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District started professional development around the Common Core last school year. We chose to take a capacity-building approach, providing training at all levels of the organization — executive staff, school board, principals, assistant principals, literacy facilitators, coaches, and teachers — so that we built a common understanding across all leadership levels.

We chose to focus specifically on Writing Standard 1, argumentation, realizing that argumentation cut across all grade levels and content areas, all disciplines. Everyone read the same texts and used those as foundational pieces as we talked about argumentation.

A cross-functional steering committee of zone superintendents, the deputy superintendent, curriculum specialists, a teacher in residence, principals from all levels and types of schools, and a staff member from the accountability division planned the district professional development. That was a key piece of our success in implementation. We came back together after each segment to ask, “What worked well? What didn’t?”

The state provided every district with five dedicated days to facilitate training on the Common Core. That gave us the gift of time, which is often the enemy in a districtwide implementation of this scope and scale. We taught unpacking one standard so that process could be replicated by teacher

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and school teams.

We positioned our principals to lead teacher professional development and surrounded them with a support team at their school that had had the same training and could do side-by-side teaching with them. Our biggest challenge was getting our principals to a level of comfort to lead the professional development and be the instructional leaders. We did not want a program where we pulled out teachers. With 9,000 teachers, it’s impractical to take that approach.

We were fortunate to have in place professional learning communities for principals, assistant principals, facilitators, coaches, and teachers for four years. We used that infrastructure and comfort level to organize our professional development and have everyone work in learning communities.

Every teacher in the district had to implement a writing standard performance task and submit a student sample that was below the standard on the rubric, at the standard, and above. We created an internal shared website where teachers can upload their teacher tasks, so we now have an amazing bank of 5,000 student performance tasks that have been developed by teachers from kindergarten through 12th grades in a variety of subjects and

elective areas which we can build on in this school year. If a kindergarten teacher submitted a writing task, every kindergarten teacher in the district can see that task.

We spent all summer in every discipline and content area working on the Common Core, unpacking the standards, designing curriculum guides to go with each grade level and subject area. We started the summer with a teacher conference with more than 2,000 teachers.

We had two STEM institutes for K-12 math, science, technology, and engineering teachers. We had a weeklong summer leadership conference for all principals and assistant principals, and we had groups of teachers in all content areas write curriculum guides under the guidance of a curriculum specialist.

Now we are focusing on another writing standard and reading standards. We will provide ongoing professional development throughout the year through job-like meetings, all day or a half-day, once a month so that we continue to build the capacity of lead teachers and coaches to deliver the professional development as we go deeper into the standards.

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