



## Create learning that unlocks the potential of Common Core standards

We have a rare opportunity. The U.S. Department of Education heard practitioners' concerns and offered educators a reprieve from the high stakes attached to the new assessments (see p. 9). Educators have more time to get Common Core implementation right so that students are better prepared to demonstrate what they know and can do on forthcoming assessments. How educators use the next year could well be a determining factor for the future of professional learning.

In the most recent *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*, 93% of teachers reported they already possessed the knowledge and skills to implement the new Common Core standards (MetLife, 2012). At the same time, only two in 10 are "very confident" the Common Core standards will prepare more students to be career- and college-ready. Another finding is telling, however. Teachers with the deepest knowledge of Common Core have the highest confidence in the standards. This leads to the question: Can teachers really understand the standards' potential unless they have experienced professional learning that promotes deeper understanding?

With more time for implementation, we must be intentional about how we reach more educators.

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**Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward.**

The challenge is how to reach key educators with the substantive learning essential for transforming practice and beliefs. Here are four suggestions for accelerating this agenda:

### OPEN YOUR DOORS.

Reducing teacher isolation has long been a goal for improving professional learning. In many places, communities and trusting cultures help to advance a collaborative improvement environment. However, many schools have a long way to go. Implementing Common Core gives us a chance to examine our practices because so many educators are facing the same situation. Let's lay out the challenges, engage colleagues, practice new strategies openly, and make mutual commitments to better teaching and learning.

### LEARN LIKE YOU WANT YOUR STUDENTS TO LEARN.

Launch professional learning like you would approach a second-language immersion school experience. Ensure that all practices replicate the kinds of experiences you expect educators to implement. Engage teacher leaders, instructional coaches, principals, and supervisors in designing, implementing, supervising, coaching, and assessing the learning experiences we expect teachers to implement in classrooms. Invest in leadership and build ownership and commitment to the conditions, processes, and assessment of results of professional learning.

### THINK SYSTEMIC.

Be thoughtful in planning how to reach key stakeholders ultimately responsible for successful schoolwide or systemwide implementation. Identify a theory of action and state your reasons for adopting it. Avoid one-shot workshops or large statewide conferences. Instead, consider ongoing facilitated networks, virtual and face-to-face academies, and facilitated learning teams engaged in continuous improvement cycles.

### TELL THE STORY.

Report the results. How have teachers' attitudes changed? How have practices improved? What are examples of system and school accomplishments as a result of the investment in professional learning? Develop accountability measures for additional investments in professional learning and report on the results. If the positive story does not get out, a negative story will capture the public's attention.

With Common Core in the spotlight, key stakeholders have the perfect opportunity to demonstrate the impact professional learning can make on educator practice and results for students. Let's make the best of it.

### REFERENCE

**MetLife. (2012).** *MetLife survey of the American teacher: Challenges for school leadership*. New York, NY: Author. ■