



# Building Professional Development to Support New Student Assessment Systems

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## Executive Summary

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The most powerful strategy school systems have at their disposal to improve teacher effectiveness is professional development. New assessment systems will provide teachers with significant new opportunities to guide all students toward college and career readiness. The success of these new assessment systems will rely on the ability of the educators charged with using them to improve instruction and support student learning. Professional development will be key to ensuring successful implementation.

Over the past few years, several large-scale studies have provided compelling evidence on the critical components of effective professional development. The research helps guide planning for professional development and should be considered if successful implementation of new assessments by all K-12 educators is the intended outcome. Key elements address collective responsibility, time and support, use of data, importance of collaboration, intensive classroom-based support, and access to external expertise.

Deep understanding and thoughtful planning and professional development support will be required by educators at all levels of the K-12 system if new assessment systems are to transform current instruction rather than merely supplement it. Professional development needs and issues are discussed and guiding questions provided so that substantive planning may begin. Issues range from the particular knowledge and skills that will be required of all teachers to adjustments the school systems must make to accommodate changes in classroom practice expected as a result of the new assessments.

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To benefit from new assessment systems, states will need to be more thoughtful than they have been in the past about conceiving, organizing, managing, implementing, and evaluating effective professional development. Eight recommendations are offered to help rebuild professional development infrastructure:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt common standards for professional development
2. Create a new school year and daily school schedules that provide substantive time to support ongoing school-based professional development for implementation
3. Create a master implementation plan that stages professional development, new standards, and assessments
4. Establish teacher advisory committees
5. Leverage state requirements for Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDP), School Improvement Plans, or both
6. Provide teachers appropriate resources.
7. Establish professional development academies
8. Adopt new licensure and relicensure requirements

While action will be required by individual states, most recommendations would benefit from discussion by the various consortia stakeholders for appropriateness and for sharing responsibilities associated with implementation.



The most powerful strategy school systems have at their disposal to improve teacher effectiveness is professional development. It is available to almost every educator, and—when planned and implemented correctly—it ensures that educators acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to help more students meet standards.

## Introduction

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What distinguishes the education practices of the world’s highest-performing school systems is their focus on teachers. So said Barber and Mourshed (2007): “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (p.16). Nations that want better outcomes for students are instructed to look at the strategies employed by the higher-performing nations to improve instruction. Teacher preparation, induction, and professional development are all key to this outcome. Professional development is a career-long imperative. The time and financial investment made in effective professional development impacts both educator and student performance.

The most powerful strategy school systems have at their disposal to improve teacher effectiveness is professional development. It is available to almost every educator, and—when planned and implemented correctly—it ensures that educators acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to help more students meet standards. New assessment systems and Common Core State Standards will provide teachers with powerful new resources to guide all students toward college and career readiness. The success of these new assessment systems will rely on the ability of educators charged with using them to improve instruction and support student learning. Professional development will be key to ensuring successful implementation of the new systems and thus should be factored in when assessment systems are still under construction.



## Components of Effective Professional Development

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Over the past few years, several large-scale studies have provided compelling evidence on the critical components of effective professional development. The research helps guide planning for professional development and should be consulted if successful implementation of new assessments by all K-12 educators is the intended outcome. Several highlights of these studies are discussed below.

***High expectations and supervision by leaders regarding professional development goals.*** Professional development is only as effective as the outcomes it is intended to produce. Effective professional development is planned and managed by administrators and teacher leaders working together. It is driven by what students need rather than what adults think they want. A coherent plan with measures for success puts professional development on the correct track. Left to individual planning and selection, professional development becomes fragmented and its effect is limited.

***Collective responsibility for student success and ensuring best practices move from classroom to classroom and school to school.*** The collaborative learning community movement has committed to ensuring all students experience consistently high-quality teaching and that students' fate is no longer determined by the number over a classroom door. Shared responsibility for student success is a hallmark of professional learning communities. Common goals for adult learning are established, and support is provided to all educators to implement evidence-based practices that increase student success. The key measure of success is the transfer of effective practices from classroom to classroom and, in some school systems, from school to school. Recent studies by Wei (2009) and Saunders, Goldenberg, and Gallimore (2009) offer compelling evidence of the impact of such efforts. According to the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2009), more than two-thirds of teachers believed that greater col-

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***Time set aside for consistent and ongoing learning, collaboration, and problem solving with colleagues.*** The number one challenge to effective professional development, identified by school systems and teachers, is time. Teachers need time for collaboration, problem solving, and learning, as well as common lesson and assessment design work. They need on-the-job professional support as close as possible to when they experience the challenges and opportunities, as opposed to during the summer or one evening a month. Countless schools have found ways to reorganize schedules to ensure that teachers have time for team learning either through a second free period each day or substantive time once a week. And still others make arrangements with communities to build support for changes to the traditional school calendar. Time is key to success; used inefficiently, however, it will derail any new improvement effort. Well-prepared and supported learning facilitators are crucial to successful use of this time. Careful attention must be given to how additional time is introduced and how its impact is reported to the public.

***Clear and measurable goals for student and educator learning identified from an analysis of data.*** Planning begins with an examination of students' performance in relation to what they are expected to know and be able to do. Professional development focuses on the knowledge and skills educators require to close the gap between students' current performance and intended outcomes. Professional development is assessed according to how well it improves results for students. All forms of available data inform this process and contribute to better results.

***Research-based content as a focus for educator learning.*** Not all content is created equal. Over the years, school systems have purchased many professional development programs and been disappointed by the lack of impact on classroom instruction or student learning. School districts must be taught to evaluate programs for the results they have delivered and to ask for evidence from program facilitators to demonstrate that their promises can be kept.

***Intensive, sustained, and, when appropriate, individualized opportunities to develop deeper content or pedagogical skills.*** Wei et. al (2009) documented once again that any substantive change in an individual's practice requires intensive and sustained development opportunities. While one-shot workshops are helpful for building awareness, classroom-based support is critical to changing practice. The comprehensive research conducted on attributes of professional development that change teacher practices has identified coherence, duration, active learning, collective participation, reform approaches, and content-focused as characteristics of professional development that produce results (Education Northwest, n.d.).

***Classroom-based follow-up and support for implementation of new knowledge and skills.*** A preponderance of research shows that while educators are exposed to new ideas and practices in workshop settings and team meetings, they still need on-the-job support to make the new ideas part of their daily practices (Joyce and Calhoun, 1996; Joyce and Shower, 2002). Failing to provide for the "at-the-elbow" support reduces implementation success rates significantly and does a disservice to teachers who are held accountable for making changes. In evaluating this evidence, Odden et al. (2007) conclude that states reap greater benefits in terms of student achievement when they invest

in classroom-based coaches as opposed to more costly and less effective innovations, including smaller class size or full-day kindergarten.

***New roles for teacher leaders as facilitators, coaches, mentors, and more.*** Related research has documented the impact of peer and coaching relationships on teacher practice. The Benwood Plan (Silva, 2008) includes professional development as a core strategy for turning around low-performing schools and highlights the role of teacher coaches. In the “peer effect study,” Jackson and Bruegmann (2009) report that when the quality of teaching by a teacher’s colleagues improves, the students of that teacher benefit. Organizational effectiveness experts Dorothy Leonard and Walter Swap (2005) refer to the ability of the most successful employees to solve problems that challenge many others as “deep smarts.” If organizations continue to treat deep smarts as personal traits rather than skills developed through experience, Leonard and Swap (2005) say, those organizations run the risk of expertise disappearing as professionals leave or take new and different roles. To prevent this brain drain, organizations must implement approaches to professional development that focus on coaching, guided practice, guided observation, guided problem solving, and guided experimentation.

***External expertise tapped from universities, agencies, and other organizations when expertise does not reside within the school.*** Educators guided by data analysis on their students are in the best position to identify the help the students need to address their most important challenges. On occasion, answers are not available inside the school and must be sought from outside experts. In those cases, it is critical that the system or school know what questions to ask to ensure that any selection of an external partner serves the needs of the school as opposed to matching the expertise of the partner. Teacher Performance Assessment reforms led by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers ensure that the external partners are in alignment with the needs of the schools. In addition to external assistance partners, systems and schools get data to assess their performance against other schools or ideas for improvement through networks, online communities, attendance at conferences, and other events that engage them in deep conversations about their students and their performance. King and Newmann (2000) found that continuous interaction of great ideas from inside and outside schools promoted improvement efforts.

## Professional Development Needs and Issues

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K-12 school systems committed to high levels of performance and learning for all students and staff members adhere to the qualities of effective professional development outlined above. They consider how they organize schools and adults to support systemwide learning, how they deliver and evaluate the impact of professional development efforts, and how they choose their instructional programs and focus areas for classroom improvement. When school systems attend to these qualities simultaneously, they achieve successful results. When they are addressed in piecemeal format, success is harder to achieve. This level of concurrent systemic change will be required if new assessment systems are to have a transformational impact. Deep understanding and thoughtful implementation planning and support will be required by educators at all levels of the K-12 system if new assessment systems are to transform current practice rather than merely supplement it.

Consider the following professional development needs and begin conversations by using the guiding questions to determine by whom and how the issues can be addressed.

***All educators require basic assessment literacy training.*** The introduction of new assessments makes the assumption that administrators and teachers understand the distinctions between formative, interim, and summative assessments. This is not the case. Plans are necessary for helping educators develop this understanding. New assessment skills can be practiced in the context of educators' current work. Fullan (Sparks, 2003) remarked that if he could recommend only one evidence-based strategy to transform teaching, he would choose helping all teachers learn to prepare and use common assessments.

- What is the current status of K-12 educators' assessment literacy?
- Who will determine the assessment literacy fundamentals?

Transition to the new standards and assessments provides a critical opportunity to alter current norms of the teaching profession. The stakes will be higher.

- How will assessment literacy become a requirement for all K–12 educators?

***Many educators lack the technology skills they will need to use the new assessments.***

Teachers and administrators will need to understand the technology associated with the new assessments. Teachers, specifically, will need to know what knowledge and skills they are required to possess to access and use the new assessment systems in their classrooms. Administrators will need to know what teachers must know and be able to support school-wide and classroom-based applications of the new assessments. Everyone will need specific skills to effectively administer, understand, and generally work with computer-adaptive and computer-based testing. They will need assistance with acquiring and interpreting results. They will need to know how to get support with the management of the new systems.

- What is the current status of K–12 educators’ technology literacy?
- What are the fundamental technology skills all educators will require?
- How will these capacities be developed in K–12 systems?
- Where will educators go for support?

***Administrative leadership is key to the success of this effort.*** Ten years of leadership research funded by the Wallace Foundation concluded that school leadership is second to classroom teaching in influencing student learning (Louis et. al, 2010). Teachers support effective leaders, and leaders will be essential to support successful system and school-wide implementation of new assessments and Common Core State Standards. Careful attention to administrative

needs prior to introduction of new assessments will be key to ensuring that administrators are prepared to be advocates for their use. While principals and central office administrators may accompany teachers to some orientation and training sessions, they will require additional support addressing their roles and responsibilities. They will also benefit from peer networks and other support outlined for teachers.

- What roles and responsibilities are anticipated for school administrators?
- What roles and responsibilities are anticipated for central office administrators, including curriculum and instruction specialists, principal supervisors, and planning/evaluation specialists?
- What is essential to prepare these individuals for these new responsibilities?
- How will a plan get prepared and implemented?

***Teachers need practical but intensive learning experiences oriented toward the Common Core State Standards and new assessments.*** States, consortia, and K–20 systems can collaborate in the development of orientation sessions that can be economically and efficiently delivered to educators. However, the important work begins when teachers integrate the new expectations to their own classrooms. These experiences must be introduced over several months and followed by ongoing support for a minimum of one year. The experiences must include teacher oral, written, and collaborative engagement in teaching, learning, and evaluating the knowledge, skills, and dispositions and practices related to implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the assessments.

- Whose responsibility is it to provide the intensive support?
- What common elements must characterize this support?
- What solutions and strategies can be guided by the consortia to expedite the success of the work?

***Resources, in many formats, will be essential to efforts to transition to the new standards and assessments.*** Teachers will rely on resources to assist them in making transitions to new assessments and curricula. These includes curricula guides, resources, pacing guides, strategies, student work, and anchor lessons that align with the assessments and standards. Teachers rely on resources to provide direction for their instruction. The quality of the experience in developing the resources or being trained to use the resources will determine the effectiveness of the teachers' actions. Contributing to the development of resources is one form of valuable professional development. States and local districts will be well served by asking:

- What are the core resources for supporting all teachers?
- How can the largest number of teachers be included in the development of resources?
- What are solutions and strategies that can be guided by the consortia to expedite the success of the work?

***Teachers need schools where collaboration is required and time is provided.*** Transition to the new standards and assessments provides a critical opportunity to alter current norms of the teaching profession. New standards and assess-

ments are intended to improve the quality of teaching in all classrooms. The pace of change for many teachers will be faster than previously experienced. The stakes will be higher. All educators will require time to gain the knowledge and skills and apply the new tools in real work settings. Their success will be accelerated when the work is conducted in collaboration with peers. Principals and other school leaders can use this transition to establish new governing norms for collaborative work cultures and expectations for shared responsibility within their schools. Love (2010) challenges schools to enable teachers to share their collective knowledge for the benefit of every teacher and every student. This type of work culture provides the framework and support for the work that needs to be accomplished.

- Which elements of collaboration will support implementation?
- How will administrators and teacher leaders gain the skills to facilitate collaboration?
- How can collaboration be promoted or incentivized?

***Teachers need ready access to one or more teacher leaders in their buildings who are broadly expert on Common Core State Standards and related curricula and assessments.*** Early in the transition process, it will be important to identify and support teacher leaders who can become early adopters and serve as champions and models for implementation by coaching other teachers. States and districts will be well-served by beginning the process early of identifying these potential champions and piloting with them the training they expect to use with teachers. In addition to professional development regarding the new standards and assessments, these early adopters will require professional development

to support their roles as coach and facilitator to other teachers. Teachers must view these colleagues as sources of expertise, support, and inspiration for them to have the impact identified by the strategy.

- What are basic requirements for these teacher leaders?
- How will they be identified, supported, prepared, and rewarded?
- What are potential roles for the states or consortia in advancing this strategy?

***Teachers require networking with peers in the same grade level or course for support with implementation.*** While teacher leaders who can provide occasional support, expertise, and inspiration are essential, teachers will require a network of peers in the same situation with whom they share responsibility for changing their day-to-day teaching practices. Ideally, these colleagues are found within the same school or school system. Otherwise, they are organized across school systems and facilitated through technology. Regular time should be set aside, and a well-prepared facilitator can guide these teams of teachers as they study the standards at a deeper level (unpacking the standards), plan for integrating the new assessments, interpret assessment results, problem solve, construct new lessons in response to assessment findings, and more.

- What are the critical components of these networks?

- What will promote teacher participation?
- What are potential solutions and strategies that can be guided by the consortia to expedite the success of the work?

***Teachers need critical but constructive feedback on their performance.*** Few teachers report that the feedback they receive on their performance promotes reflection or propels more powerful practices. Concurrent to the work on new assessments and Common Core State Standards is the effort to improve teacher evaluation systems. Finding ways to align teacher feedback on new evaluation systems with information available through new assessments will be key to building better individual improvement plans that can focus teachers in areas where they can make substantive improvements.

- What is the relationship between the teacher evaluation and new assessment systems?
- How will new systems for professional development, teacher evaluation, and state assessments be integrated to support full implementation of Common Core State Standards to realize student achievement?
- Are there parts of this effort that would benefit from involvement of other stakeholders?



## Recommendations for Action

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While there is more than enough knowledge about what constitutes highly effective professional development and how to engage educators in it, too few states and school districts act consistently on what is known. States will need to be more thoughtful about conceiving, organizing, managing, implementing, and evaluating professional development for new assessment systems. States will benefit from the projected release of new national standards for professional development scheduled for summer 2011. With support from the MetLife Foundation, Learning Forward has launched a revision of the standards currently guiding state policy in more than 30 states. The new standards based on the most recent and compelling research will provide states with direction to guide professional development planning. Follow-up tools scheduled for release a year later will enable states to monitor and ultimately assess the impact of their efforts to support educators with the implementation of the assessments and Common Core Standards.

What follows are actions and steps to address many of the needs and issues described in this paper and to strengthen the current professional development infrastructure at the state and district levels. While action may ultimately be required by individual states, most recommendations would benefit from discussion by the various consortia stakeholders to determine how implementation responsibilities might be distributed or shared.

**1. *Adopt common standards for professional development.*** Members of the consortia should agree to adopt the new standards for professional development when they are released in July 2011. The same benefits touted for adopting Common Core Standards and consortia-developed assessments will apply to adoption of state standards for professional development. All the same players will be involved in the process, and the adoption process will expedite any problems associated with different expectations for professional development. Already 39 states have the standards in state policy, and they will be provided with guidance on how to substitute the revised standards. Having

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common professional development standards should expedite many of the other challenges associated with recommended changes to policy and practice.

#### **Next Steps to Consider:**

- Determine current status of standards for professional development
- Convene task force to review new standards and make recommendations
- Adopt newly revised standards for professional development

**2. Create new school year and daily school schedules that provide substantive time to support ongoing school-based professional development for implementation.** Teachers need designated time to implement and use the assessments effectively. New curricula, resources, and assessments will fail to make measurable changes in teaching and student performance if time is not set aside to support the transition, implementation, and ongoing support necessary for success. Professional development activities, including team meetings, classroom support, school-wide assessment conversations, and scoring sessions, require time not currently available to most teachers. School schedules, teacher of record designations, teacher career paths, new teacher support, class size, and teacher assignments must be explored for options to provide teachers with the time they need for collaborative work. Finding and designating the time for the transition will substantially influence success.

#### **Next Steps to Consider:**

- Determine options eligible to schools to design new schedules
- Identify schools with effective time structures

- Incentivize schools to create new schedules

**3. Create a master implementation plan that stages implementation of professional development, new core content standards, and assessments.** Teachers need lead time of at least an additional year before the assessment results are made public. Teachers' attention regarding new assessments will increase when a date is set for implementation. While the new assessment consortia continue with their work, consideration should be given to identifying core concepts and skills that can be transferred to the teacher champions—and, later, all teachers—before the assessments are ready for full-scale implementation. Then teachers need the opportunity to administer the assessments, analyze results, and learn whatever is necessary to increase their effectiveness in enabling students to improve their performance. Tying high stakes to the initial implementation may produce unintended outcomes that damage efforts for long-term success. In addition, attention to a well-defined plan for transitions can prevent systems and schools from resorting to strategies that promise immediate results at the expense of long-term change. Giving systems, schools, and, most important, teachers time to transition to new assessments will promote deep and reflective application.

#### **Next Steps to Consider:**

- Convene planning team with cross-functional representatives
- Conduct initiative mapping activity to locate all needs and interests
- Provide all stakeholders with vision and plan including schedule for implementation and support

**4. Establish teacher advisory committee.** Teachers need a representative group of peers to be their advocates. It is important to acknowledge that new standards and assessments will not be implemented in a vacuum. Continued reform strategies will occur simultaneously and put increasing pressures on teachers in classrooms. One major reform effort that will impact a large number of teachers is the new teacher evaluation systems. These systems will purportedly be based on better definitions of what constitutes effective teaching. The introduction of new teacher evaluation systems and instruments can either be aligned to support the implementation of new standards and assessments, or the new systems and instruments could potentially derail those efforts by asking teachers to change what has previously worked for them. State and districts must again be cautious about parallel expectations tied to new evaluation systems and expectations tied to implementation of new standards and assessments. While seemingly all of the new systems will be aligned and supportive of each other, how teachers view them will influence the degree to which they are successfully implemented. For this reason, states and systems could benefit from an advisory group of teacher leaders who can be their advocates in providing frequent, candid, unencumbered feedback to state and local education officials.

**Next Steps to Consider:**

- Establish charge statement for committee
- Determine criteria for participation
- Appoint chair and design process for implementation

**5. Leverage state requirements for individual professional development plans (IPDP), school improvements plans, or both.** Typical school improvement and teacher improvement plans

have focused on myriad items. Whole faculties as well as individual teachers typically choose from a variety of potentially high-leverage strategies promised to improve student performance. Several activities are prioritized and plans are finalized for the school year. In some schools, everyone works on the same two or three priorities. In others, teachers are left to their own devices to establish their priorities, and across the school the teachers work on different things. Imagine if, for a period of time, principals and teachers agreed that all school improvement and professional growth plans were focused solely on new assessments or Common Core State Standards. Principals and teacher leader classroom visits would concentrate on the same priorities, and teachers could receive the ongoing feedback necessary to continue to improve their performance. All the benefits of a singular focus for improvement could accelerate the transition and potentially relieve some of the stress associated with intervention overload or being asked to implement too many things at one time and not being successful at any of them (Reeves, 2009).

**Next Steps to Consider:**

- Weigh advantages and disadvantages of singularly focused IPDP, school, and district improvement requirements
- Determine steps necessary to implement successfully
- Explore other incentives that might be offered to encourage this action

**6. Provide teachers with appropriate resources.** If teachers are expected to replace old standards with new ones, they must have the resources that make the transition easier for them. Engaging the largest number of teachers in this aspect of implementation will be key to ensuring its success. Resource development is

considered one of the most valued professional development experiences of teachers. National, state, and local databases can be organized to make resources (i.e., pacing guides, curriculum documents, lesson plans, school improvement and individual improvement planning templates, formative assessment strategies, interim benchmarks, and summative assessment items) accessible to educators to facilitate the transition. Most important, teachers need assurances and confidence that if they transition to the new standards and teaching resources, they will be teaching the correct content to ensure that their students achieve the standards, and the assessments will accurately determine the extent to which students perform at standard.

#### **Next Steps to Consider:**

- Determine which resources are of highest priority
- Determine who is to be involved in developing resources
- Determine how technology may be utilized in development and implementation

#### **7. Establish professional development academies.**

Professional development academies can be established to support various goals for implementation. Among these goals can be included:

- Sessions to introduce new assessments organized by grade level, subject area, or assignment
- Sessions to promote deeper understanding and use of assessments organized by grade level, subject area, or team assignment
- Sessions to build assessment literacy and technological expertise

- Programs to support certification of team assessment specialists or other teacher leadership roles
- Facilitated networks to support job-alike conversations regarding implementation
- Networking opportunities for university partners working with systems and schools

Some of these programs can be delivered online and stored for consistent and multiple uses, while others require face-to-face interaction. They offer important beginnings to a long-term substantive reform project and demonstrate that the issue is of high priority among the states. They also offer venues for principal and teacher involvement and cross-state sharing of expertise and leadership.

#### **Next Steps to Consider**

- Determine whether a professional development academy is a viable structure
- Determine areas for cross-state collaboration via the consortia
- Establish outcomes, plan, and evaluation strategy for consortia-based academy and individual state academies

#### **8. Adopt new licensure and relicensure requirements.**

State licensing requirements should be revised to institutionalize a system that ensures that all teachers and administrators have the expertise to implement assessments in the future. Examining current requirements for program approval, early teaching assessments, and initial teacher licensure may identify areas where the new requirements may be inserted. Adopting the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support



Consortium (INTASC) Model Core Teaching Standards is one way to ensure that all essential skills for 21st-century teaching are a part of a teacher repertoire. Relicensure requirements maybe modified for a period of time to require all teachers to demonstrate assessment and technological literacy skills for eligibility. Other states may award weighted credit for completion of professional development or documentation of skills that align with the new assessment agenda. States may need to work with collective bargaining units or with professional standards boards to see what other options may exist to accelerate the pace at which all teachers develop the necessary competencies.

**Next steps to consider:**

- Examine current licensure and relicensure requirements and determine if opportunities exist for modifications
- Weigh adoption of the Model Core Teaching Standards
- Use this opportunity to reform seat time credits and replace with learning

from authentic work and demonstration of performance

- Look for opportunities to reward changes through collective bargaining agreements or other requirements

**Conclusion**

The new Common Core State Standards and assessment systems offer an exciting vision for public education and accelerating the nation's ability to meet the goal of achieving college and work readiness for every student. However, as this paper demonstrates, there is a significant distance between introducing standards and assessments and integrating them into the real fabric of schools. Mizell (2010) writes, "As laudable as the common core state standards (and the assessments to follow) are, their development, dissemination, and adoption are only the first steps to raise levels of student performance. Everything depends on the effectiveness of implementation at the classroom level and that, in turn, depends on the quality, intensity, and frequency of appropriate professional learning."

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