

Common Core

Achieving Success with Common Core

Change and Challenge are Opportunities

As a school district we are working to implement Common Core State Standards in our curriculum. We view these changes and challenges as an opportunity because we are certain that Common Core standards-based instruction will lead our students to attain even higher levels of achievement and deeper understanding of the content. Among the steps of implementing Common Core are selecting high-quality resources to support the instruction of the standards, providing effective professional development for teachers and providing sufficient communication to parents about our transition.

Alignment of Instruction to Common Core Standards

Alignment of the District's learning goals with the Common Core and involving our teachers in the process is another key to building instructional capacity and achieving success with Common Core. Teachers need to be involved with learning the standards and determining how to best implement the standards into daily instruction.

How can we design better learning tasks for Common Core Success? Butler 53 participated in a special training in the summer of 2014 led by Drs. Jay McTighe and Jessica Hockett. With a large number of District 53 teachers attending, we learned how the Common Core State Standards call for a deeper, more complex understanding of material than many schools required before. "The assignments and assessments that educators give their students will need to change as well" to better prepare students for Common Core success, says best-selling author, researcher and education expert McTighe said. Staff who attended this three-day workshop learned how to design more rigorous, authentic learning tasks and assessments. With the PARCC test, schools are beginning to see that large-scale accountability tests are becoming more demanding, "underscoring the value of building and using rich, conceptually and cognitively demanding tasks with kids," he says, "so they become increasingly able to think and apply their learning to new and more challenging scenarios."

Depth of Knowledge

In McTighe's training he referred to the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) framework developed by Norman Webb to illustrate what he means by rich performance tasks. In Webb's DOK framework, there are four levels for defining the complexity of a task:

- Level 1: Recall and Reproduction (requires only basic recall information)
- Level 2: Skills and Concepts (includes some mental processing beyond recall; usually involves more than one step)
- Level 3: Short-Term Strategic Thinking (requires planning, reasoning, using evidence, analysis)
- Level 4: Extended Thinking (complex tasks undertaken over time; requires sophisticated thinking and creativity)

We know that prior to Common Core, most state assessment questions used mostly Level 1 with some Level 2 questions. Now students are expected to complete mostly Level 2 and Level 3 items. The daily tasks and assessments given to students should reflect this level of complexity as well.

A framework for designing performance tasks: GRASPS

McTighe offers a framework for designing rich, authentic performance tasks that better prepare students for Common Core success. His framework is called GRASPS, which is an acronym for:

GOAL

What is the student's goal in the scenario you've designed?

ROLE

What is the student's role in the task or project?

AUDIENCE

Who is the intended audience for the task or performance?

SITUATION

What is the situation you've designed?

PRODUCTS/PERFORMANCES

What are the students expected to produce?

STANDARDS

What standards are you assessing with the task?

Professional Development

Teachers need professional development and training to become proficient with Common Core aligned instruction. In a national survey by the GATES Foundation, teachers indicated the following needs:

1. Common Core-aligned instructional materials (86 percent),
2. High quality professional development (84 percent),
3. Additional team planning time to prepare lessons (78 percent),
4. Opportunities to collaborate with other teachers on best practices for implementing Common Core (78 percent),
5. Ideas on how to teach in an inquiry-based way that promotes deep thinking among students (69 percent).

Butler 53 administrators, working side-by-side with teachers, recognize these needs and have found ways to build teacher proficiency and to meet teacher needs to better fulfill the promise of Common Core aligned instruction. To meet the desire for increased time to prepare and collaborate, more collaborative time has been added to the teachers' monthly schedules through the collective bargaining agreement and to the weekly instructional schedules. Teacher teams have received release time to work with consultants to improve alignment and enhance instructional practices. Professional development has been targeted towards Common Core instruction beginning with the summer of 2014. The board has authorized ongoing professional development to help teachers learn best practices and grow as instructional teams. The budget has been altered to include Common Core resources to ensure teachers have the materials that enable their students to have the highest quality instructional experiences.

To transition to Common Core, we know that continued collaboration will require organizational creativity to achieve our highest instructional impact for the resources (time and money) allotted. To get to this goal, we intend to pursue school-wide communities of support, so that each teacher reaches the goal of Common Core proficiency and demonstrates instruction aligned to research-based best practices. Will this happen overnight? No, but after nearly a year into our implementation, improvements are visible.

With dedication and focus, we can achieve great things together. Through effective communication, optimizing alignment and providing robust support, I believe that Butler 53 schools will continue to achieve remarkable success in implementing Common Core.