

These verbs should guide our initial conversations about the current state of our educational system, but they should not inhibit our ability to think beyond what already exists to the desired state of what public education can become. This is what the dynamics of change and CCSS demand of us.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT WITH CCSS REFORM?

If we agree that teachers are the key players in ensuring that any change initiative enters the classroom, how do we create the conditions necessary for them to share their enthusiasm and concerns for how CCSS will impact their work with students? How do we encourage open and honest dialogue about the challenges and the opportunities of viewing CCSS as the starting point for educational reform? Consider the following recommendations:

- Be proactive and take ownership for the process of designing a focused CCSS transition plan and a comprehensive implementation plan that address the scope of the work, realistic timelines, key deliverables, and ongoing quality measurements to monitor both plans.
- Make CCSS the focus of any future discussions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions.
- Build awareness and understanding of the tenets of CCSS to identify which instructional practices will remain the same and which will need modification.
- Create a gap analysis process that compares existing standards, curriculum, and assessments with CCSS.
- Take inventory of what professional learning will be necessary to build the instructional capacity of teachers to meet the challenges of CCSS.
- Evaluate the targets of “fewer, clearer, and higher” standards in your current context.
- Discuss the CCSS benefits of efficiency of scale, equity, and uniformity.
- Begin to look at resources and materials that align with cross-disciplinary and project-based learning.
- Develop authentic performance tasks that engage learners with the new standards.
- Emphasize informational writing as a thinking tool in all content areas.
- Create common formative assessments to provide ongoing monitoring of student progress in English language arts and mathematics at each level.

- Acknowledge CCSS as an opportunity to renew professionalism and regain respect for teaching and learning.

FROM COMMON SENSE TO COMMON PRACTICE IN TEACHER LEADERSHIP

If “knowing how” were enough to motivate us to make positive change in our practices, then we would all be rich and thin, right? For example, everyone “knows” that it is unhealthy to be overweight, and yet 64% of Americans are, and an amazing 30% are technically obese according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.org>). Ask any group of savvy adults for suggestions on how to lose a few pounds and they will respond with some insightful and obvious dieting advice like “Eat less and exercise more.” Typically, sound ideas are not profound or complicated. They always represent common sense, but they do not necessarily invoke common practice. If it were common practice to eat less and exercise more, then we would not be dealing with the health risks and costs associated with an overweight society.

Notice that the last statement contains an “if . . . then” relationship or hypothesis, which is a prediction about what you might expect to see happen as a result of a decision, a behavior, or a belief. With colleagues at the Leadership and Learning Center, the heart of many of our conversations involves a powerful concept called antecedents of excellence. It is an educational “if . . . then” exercise to explain the success of school improvement and systemic reform efforts. Douglas Reeves proposes in part that antecedents are structures and conditions that precede, anticipate, or predict excellence in performance. They are precursors to high student achievement, success in implementing a new program or strategy, or completing authentic tasks with focus and precision. They are predictors of positive results that associate a cause with an effect (Reeves, 2006).

Why don’t we, as educators, consistently do what we know makes good sense? If we identify our goal and understand through knowledge and experience how to reach the goal, why do we sometimes waver in our pursuit of it? Oftentimes, the challenge is difficult, like dieting, and requires participants to modify their behavior through the hard work of changing habits. Sometimes the idea is controversial and untested and requires new thinking about the way we currently behave. Other times the decision is politically divisive and polarizes people’s belief about the larger issues. Common Core State Standards is a commonsense reform initiative, but without focused energy and diligent effort on the part of educators, parents, community leaders, and policy makers, its potential to become common practice is in constant jeopardy.