

Introduction

In the spring and early summer of 2013, Teach Plus and the Massachusetts Teachers Association administered a survey in order to elicit teachers' perspectives on the Common Core and new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Almost 3,000 teachers participated. The results indicate both optimism about the standards and a sense of urgency about what is required to implement the new standards effectively. It is our hope that district and state policymakers can use this important transitional moment to build off of that optimism and provide the supports that teachers need.

The results of the survey indicate what a remarkable difference formal training makes in teachers' level of support for the Common Core. Fifty-five percent of teachers indicated that they had received training on the Common Core standards.

Teachers who have participated in training also report that they are more likely to agree that implementation of the Common Core standards will help them become better teachers and that the Common Core will benefit their students. Clearly, more training increases teacher buy-in during this critical transition.

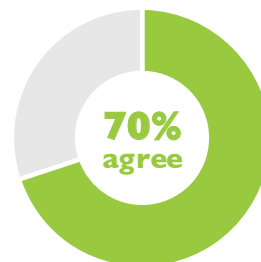
When my students enter kindergarten, there is already a significant achievement gap. Teaching to the Common Core State Standards allows me to push all students to excellence. It provides all students an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations about the world around them. It's no longer about a checklist. It's now about young children talking and writing about their experiences and understanding of content that is developmentally appropriate and focused on children's natural inquiry. These skills prepare all students for a life of collaborating, negotiating, and understanding.

—Catherine Tighe, kindergarten teacher,
Somerville

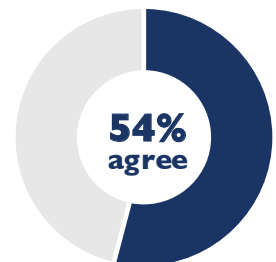
The more teachers know about the
Common Core
the more they support it.

“ Learning the Common Core will help my students succeed. ”

Teachers who have received common core training:



Teachers who have not received common core training:



We recognize the stakes involved with the successful rollout of the Common Core, and believe that a full implementation of the new standards is a step in the right direction for students as well as teachers, administrators, and students. With that in mind, we have mined the survey results for insight into how best to support teachers in the rollout in the new standards, and we offer the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Provide more formal training on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards to both administrators and teachers.

One of the starkest results of our survey reveals that, despite the fact that the new Common Core-aligned Massachusetts Frameworks were adopted two years ago, teachers have received very little, if any, formal training in the implementation of these new standards. Nearly half of teachers (45 percent) indicated that they had not received any training at all, and of the 55 percent who said they had received training, more than half (55 percent) said that this training had totaled four hours or less.

It does not make sense, yet it is often the case, that teachers are told to change their practice without being supported to do so successfully. This seems to be the case with an overwhelming number of Massachusetts teachers two years into the rollout of the new standards. We recommend that state and district policy makers increase their efforts to provide formal training to both teachers and administrators in how best to implement the new standards.

From my experience, the Common Core standards raised the level of discussion in my classroom. The standards forced me to plan more rigorous lessons and my students to think at a higher level. By the end of the year, they were able to form opinions about texts and use evidence to support those opinions. Instead of just identifying an author's choice, they started to form opinions about it. They have a long way to go, but they are already learning a better way to think.

—Meaghan Durgin, 4th grade teacher, Boston

Without consistent formal training, and without teacher buy-in, the new standards will not take root fully across all schools and districts, exacerbating inequalities for students rather than eliminating them. State and district policy makers should seize this opportunity to get teachers to support and understand the new standards by increasing training and support for teachers on how best to teach to the new standards.

2. Make teachers the leaders of professional development learning opportunities on the Common Core State Standards.

Much of this formal training should be led by teachers already experienced with teaching the new standards. The shift in instruction required by the Common Core State Standards provides a perfect opportunity for policy makers to assert or reassert that the *experts in the field of teaching should be those who are currently practicing the craft and getting results for students.*

While there are many dedicated professionals who play an important role in training teachers to teach the new standards, teacher leaders are positioned to make a unique contribution to this project. Teacher-led training is important because those teachers who are already using the Common Core State Standards in their instruction have special insight into what strategies work well and what challenges teachers will face. In addition, teachers might be more inclined to embrace the new standards should they have the chance to learn from, and share best practices with, their most effective peers.



Common Core | Massachusetts

Promising Practices: Teacher-Led Professional Development on the Common Core

Opportunities for teacher leadership in Common Core implementation are already underway, and state and district officials should work to ensure that more are available. This fall, Teach Plus, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, and University of Massachusetts Boston held a Common Core conference titled **Core in the Classroom: From Standards to Practice**. The conference was attended by almost 500 teachers from 103 districts eager to spend a Saturday learning best practices from their teacher peers. Teachers experienced with the Common Core State Standards led high-quality trainings that ranged from close reading to using data trackers to ensure all students master the Common Core standards.

Other programs offer teachers more opportunities to learn from each other and become teacher leaders themselves. The **MTA Core Collaborative** is a high-quality ongoing professional development experience led by teacher leaders with expertise in the Common Core. Launched by Teach Plus and the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the Core Collaborative engages teacher leaders to facilitate semester-long courses in specific elements of the Common Core State Standards. The teacher leaders, as well as Core Collaborative participants, will become experts in their schools who can help move the implementation of the standards forward.

3. Provide more Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exemplars in order to ensure a successful rollout of the new exams.

Although the majority of teachers agree that mastering the Common Core State Standards will help their students succeed, our survey data suggest that nearly half of Massachusetts teachers feel unprepared to effectively implement the Common Core in their classrooms. (Forty-two percent of teachers report that they are very or somewhat unprepared to implement the standards, and another 40 percent report that they are only somewhat prepared.) Many teachers feel that the resources available to guide instruction aligned with the Common Core State Standards are unavailable or insufficient.

- More than 63 percent of teachers agree that they need new formative and summative assessments that measure how well students are learning the standards.
- Sixty-four percent of teachers feel that the most pressing information they'd like to know about the Common Core is either what the Common Core standards are, or the format and content of the PARCC assessments.

We recommend that PARCC make more sample assessment items easily available. With access to a variety of PARCC exemplars, including formative and summative assessments that provide a preview for the PARCC assessments, teachers will be able to align their instruction with the Common Core with the assurance that they are setting their students up for success on the assessments. The availability of PARCC exemplars will increase teacher readiness and decrease teacher resistance to implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

In order to maximize the usefulness of teacher resources, PARCC should fast-track efforts to publish additional exemplars. Exemplars should include:

- Sample assessment items for every relevant subject area in every grade level.
- A wide variety of sample assessment items that reflect the range of application that will be expected of students on the PARCC assessments.

All teachers should be able to teach the Common Core State Standards with the knowledge that their instruction is aligned with the PARCC assessments. The simplest and most helpful way to give teachers a clear idea of what the PARCC assessments will look like is to provide exemplars that reflect the format and content of the assessments.

We believe that once teachers are familiar with the new PARCC assessments, they will embrace them. Understandably, many teachers have concerns about the unknown nature of the test, especially when such high-stakes (for both students and teachers) will be attached to it. Yet, many teachers who have explored existing exam exemplars have praised the higher-level thinking skills required in them and think that the new exams are much improved upon the current MCAS ones.

Once teachers feel more prepared for the PARCC assessments through their exposure to test exemplars, we support the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s recommended timeline for the rollout of the new exams over the next three school years. We believe this timeline, which includes some districts piloting the end-of-year exam with no accountability in Spring 2014, and continues with implementation in all districts by Spring 2017, to be a reasonable and smooth plan for a timely transition. We are excited about this grand opportunity to move towards a high-quality, more meaningful assessment which clearly aligns to the new Common Core State Standards, and which will guide teachers’ instruction for years to come.

4. Provide more student-centered technology and resources to help students best master the new standards.

One of the most significant aspects of the Common Core State Standards is that they were designed to help schools meet the needs of our 21st-Century society. Teachers are focused on providing students with the skills that are necessary for career and college readiness. It is essential in a 21st-Century classroom that teachers and students be provided with the technology necessary to master these skills.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents to the survey felt that further student-centered technological resources are necessary to help students best master the standards.

Many districts now use online software primarily for credit-recovery. However, as the world becomes increasingly digitized, more learning will happen through online resources.

When these resources are aligned with rigorous standards and allow students to learn and practice skills at their own pace, it creates greater student independence. Online learning also provides the opportunity for teachers to more easily get real-time data that can be used to assess student learning and adjust instruction.

Since the PARCC exams are going to be computer based, it is important that schools make an investment in both their technological infrastructure and the resources to ensure both teachers and students are trained in using the technology.

The students in my math classes love going to the computer lab. Not only is it a break from our daily routine, but it also gives the students an opportunity to build connections between the content that they’re learning in our classroom and the world of technology in which they live and spend much of their time. The individualized and self-paced nature of learning through technology allows students to develop better problem solving skills in order to tackle more rigorous, real-world problems. This leads to a deeper understanding for the students.

—Nick Lippman, high school math teacher, Malden

A Closer Look at the Data

Teach Plus and the Massachusetts Teachers Association administered a survey to teachers in Massachusetts asking for their perspectives on the Common Core and Massachusetts Frameworks. 2,984 teachers responded to the survey.

% of teachers

36%

32%

30%

23%

20%

19%

13%

12%

9%

9%

5%

26%

Which, if any, of the following activities/ resources have been made available to you?

Collaborative planning time dedicated to aligning curriculum to the Common Core State Standards

District-provided professional development opportunities

Collaborative planning time dedicated to understanding and deconstructing the Common Core State Standards

School-provided professional development opportunities

Content-focused trainings on the Common Core

Lesson plans aligned to the Common Core

Professional learning community focused on Common Core implementation

Resources on research/best practices in Common Core implementation

Job-embedded training or coaching focused on Common Core implementation

Outside vendor-provided professional development opportunities

State-provided professional development opportunities

None of the above

Teachers need more resources to implement the Common Core

When we asked teachers what kinds of resources they need to effectively implement the Common Core in their classrooms, they responded (rounded to the nearest percentage point):

	No further resources are needed	Further resources would be helpful, but not necessary.	Further resources are needed
Student-centered technology and resources to help students best learn to these new standards.	7%	27%	67%
Professional development focused on the requirements of the standards.	9%	28%	64%
New curricula and learning tools aligned to the new standards.	10%	35%	56%
New formative assessments that measure how well students are learning the standards.	9%	28%	63%
New summative assessments that measure how well students are learning the standards.	10%	26%	64%
Professional development on how to teach parts of the standards that are new to me.	12%	30%	59%

Teach Plus Greater Boston Teaching Policy Fellows, 2013-2014

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