

SPOTLIGHT

On Literacy and the Common Core

Editor's Note: Educators are emphasizing the use of nonfiction texts, developing literacy skills across the curriculum, and collaborating with librarians to help prepare for the common-core standards in reading. Download this Spotlight to learn how schools are meeting the English/language arts standards.

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Common Standards Drive New Reading Approaches

Schools across the country are undergoing huge shifts to satisfy the state-led literacy and math initiative

By Catherine Gewertz

The Common Core State Standards aren't exactly new; it's been two years since most states adopted them. But it took those two years for the standards to trickle down from abstraction to daily practice, from a sheaf of papers in a state capital into a lesson plan on a teacher's desk. Now they're reshaping reading instruction in significant ways.

Whether the standards are shining a bright new light on reading or casting an ominous shadow over it remains a point of debate. But without a doubt, the shifts in literacy instruction envisioned by the common core are among

the biggest in recent decades. And they're far-reaching: All but four states have adopted the literacy guidelines.

The standards paint an ambitious picture of what it means to be literate in the 21st century, said P. David Pearson, a professor of language, literacy, society, and culture at the University of California, Berkeley.

"I think these standards have the potential to lead the parade in a different direction: toward taking as evidence of your reading ability not your score on a specific skill test—or how many letter sounds you can identify or ideas you can recall from a passage—but the ability to use the information you gain from reading, the fruits of your labor, to apply to some new situation or problem or project," he said. "That's a huge change."

Just take a look at some of the ways classroom instruction is changing because of the common standards.

- **Reading instruction is no longer the sole province of the language arts teacher.** The standards call for teachers of science, social studies, and other subjects to teach literacy skills unique to their disciplines, such as analyzing primary- and secondary-source documents in history, and making sense of diagrams, charts, and technical terminology in science. A 4th grade teacher in Shell Rock, Iowa, for instance, had his students write science books for 2nd graders in a bid to fuse content understanding with domain-specific literacy skills.

- **Reading and writing are closely connected, and writing instruction is explicit.** Teaching writing has often fallen by the wayside as teachers focus on reading, but the common core demands its return. And not just any kind of writing—writing studded with citations of details and evidence from students' reading material. Even the youngest pupils are learning to do it: First graders in Vermont are listening to a Dr. Seuss tale, over and over, searching for clues that back up the central thesis of the story.

- **The scale tips toward informational text.** Teachers are under new pressure to work essays, speeches, articles, biographies, and other nonfiction texts into their students' readings. In Baltimore, middle school students are reading newspaper articles about avatars and school uniforms, along with a cluster of novels, to explore the theme of individuality.

- **There's a major press for curriculum materials that embody the common core.** Acutely aware of states' and districts' needs, the major educational publishers rushed to issue supplements to their reading programs and followed with new-from-the-ground-up programs that purport to be "common standards aligned." An examination, however, shows that a shared definition of "alignment" can prove elusive.

- **Educators are training a keen eye on ways to support students who struggle with literacy skills.** The common standards make unprecedented demands on students, such as mastering the difficult academic vocabulary of each discipline, and teachers worry that many students could be left behind. In Albuquerque, N.M., educators are building supports for their many English-learners, setting up one school as a demonstration site where teachers get immersed in the standards and learn strategies for helping students who are still learning the language. Other Albuquerque teachers are working with a national expert to write specially tailored model lessons for 1st and 8th graders.

- **Even as the new standards dominate the reading landscape, however, other literacy issues are also coming to the fore in the common-core era.** Reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade has proved a popular rallying point for states, some of which have recently enacted policies that toughen various requirements—for teachers as well as for students—in pursuit of that goal.

- **New literacy research is also exerting its influence.** Findings that have been issued since the National Reading Panel's landmark report in 2000 had a key role in shaping the common standards, including a more nuanced approach to comprehension across the disciplines and media. But in an effort to focus on the end result, critics say, the standards often leave out—or get ahead of—the research on strategies teachers can use to help students achieve these new literacy skills.

False Choice?

The swirls of activity around reading, however, have raised as many or more questions than they purport to answer.

Some teachers worry that the common standards' emphasis on reading informational text, and on writing that's grounded in evidence from that text, could leave little place for reading literature and for the kinds of personal, creative writing that can unleash students' passions.

Advocates of the informational-text approach argue that it is a powerful equalizer in building content knowledge for disadvantaged children, and that it's crucial in building the skills most needed in good jobs and in college. Still others argue that nonfiction can engage some students in ways that fiction can't and that devoting more time to it needn't displace creative writing and literature.

Some reading experts are frustrated with what they see as an unnecessarily polarized debate about the standards. It's a false choice, they argue, to say that students can't write about things they're interested in and still learn to base their ideas solidly on what

“Time will always be something we have to wrestle with. Do we have enough time to get it all in?”

DWIGHT DAVIS

Teacher, Wheatley Education Campus, District of Columbia

they've read about those topics.

It's also a false choice, those experts say, to argue that creative writing has to atrophy if expository writing expands. Or that reading great works of literature has to dwindle if students read more original historical documents. Blending all those literacy experiences into students' lives, they argue, is important for building flexible, strong minds.

How will that blend be achieved without sacrificing bulwarks of the discipline? An increasingly common element in answers: more reading.

"We have to dramatically increase the volume of reading kids are doing in English class and beyond," said Penny Kittle, an English/language arts teacher at Kennett High School in North Conway, N.H.

Where will the time come from for that additional reading?

"Time will always be something we have to wrestle with," said Dwight Davis, who is weaving more nonfiction texts, and more challenging books overall, into the poetry and novels he assigns his 5th grade students at the Wheatley Education Campus in the District of Columbia. "Do we have enough time to get it all in?"

Time isn't the only resource in scarce supply as educators put the standards into practice. There is the issue of money, as well. How will districts and states pay for the professional development teachers need to adapt their instruction to the new expectations? And will all teachers get the support they require to provide the right kinds of help to the students with the shakiest skills?

Will schools have the funding to buy instructional materials that encompass a wider variety of text types? And even if the training, materials, and pedagogy come together well, will they indeed produce the college and career readiness that the standards promise?

In the new common-core era, question marks appear to be a key feature of the landscape.

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States Target 3rd Grade Reading

At the same time that thousands of school districts nationwide are beginning to implement the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts, many also face new state reading policies for the early grades that call for the identification of struggling readers, require interventions to help them, and, in some instances, mandate the retention of 3rd graders who lack adequate reading skills. A number of states recently adopted such policies, many of which have echoes of a long-standing Florida measure for reading intervention and retention for those who lack adequate reading skills. In all, according to the Education Commission of the States, 32 states plus the District of Columbia now have statutes in place intended to improve reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

iStockphoto/Jamie Farrant



Arizona tightens up a recently adopted policy for retaining 3rd graders who score “far below” their grade level on a state reading test, closing what advocates called a “loophole” that allowed parents to override the retention. The state policy calls on districts to provide one of several options to assist both retained students and struggling readers in earlier grades, including assignment to a different teacher for reading instruction, summer school, or other “intensive” help before, during, or after the school day. PASSED: 2012

Colorado is requiring schools—in partnership with parents—to craft individual plans for struggling readers to get them on track. For 3rd graders with significant reading deficiencies, the parent and teacher must meet and consider retention as an intervention strategy, but the final decision must be jointly agreed to and approved by the district. A special per-pupil fund was created to support specific reading interventions, such as summer school and after-school tutoring. PASSED: 2012

Connecticut instructs the state education agency to develop new K-3 reading assessments for districts to use in identifying struggling readers. It also mandates that K-3 teachers pass a reading assessment each year beginning in 2013. And it compels the state to devise an intensive program that includes “scientifically based” reading instruction, intensive reading-intervention strategies, summer school, and other features that will be offered for a limited number of schools to use. PASSED: 2012

Indiana identifies 3rd grade retention as a “last resort” for struggling readers. A state board of education policy says students who fail the state reading test at that grade would be retained, though technically, the state is only requiring that they be counted as 3rd graders for purposes of state testing. The policy allows for midyear promotions and has several good-cause exemptions. Districts must provide a daily reading block of at least 90 minutes to all students in grades K-3 and additional strategies and interventions for those identified as struggling readers. PASSED: 2010

Iowa requires 3rd graders with an identified “reading deficiency” either to attend an intensive summer reading program or be retained, except for those eligible for several good-cause exemptions. The law also requires, if state funds are appropriated, for districts to provide such students in grades K-3 with intensive instructional services and support to improve reading, including a minimum of 90 minutes of “scientific, research-based” reading instruction and other strategies identified by the district, such as small-group instruction, an extended school day, or tutoring and mentoring. PASSED: 2012

North Carolina schools must retain 3rd graders not reading on grade level, based on a state assessment, unless they meet one of several exemptions, including demonstration of proficiency through an alternative assessment or portfolio. Prior to retention, students must be provided summer reading camps and have one more chance to demonstrate proficiency. The measure also stipulates regular

diagnostic assessments and early interventions for struggling readers beginning in kindergarten. PASSED: 2012 (OVERRIDING GOVERNOR'S VETO)

Ohio requires 3rd graders to meet a certain threshold on the state English/language arts test to advance to the 4th grade, but the law makes exceptions for some students. Districts must annually assess and identify students reading below grade level, and develop a reading improvement and monitoring plan for each pupil. Such students must receive at least 90 minutes of daily reading instruction and be taught by a “high-performing” teacher. PASSED: 2012

Oklahoma calls for schools to retain 3rd graders who score “unsatisfactory” on the state reading test, though they may qualify for several good-cause exemptions. The new policy calls for districts to offer a midyear promotion for 4th graders who show substantial improvement. The law also calls on districts to identify and provide extra reading support and instructional time for students in K-3 reading below grade level. PASSED: 2011

Virginia mandates that local districts provide reading-intervention services to 3rd graders who demonstrate deficiencies on a state reading test or other diagnostic assessment. The measure does not include any requirements for retention. PASSED: 2012

—ERIK W. ROBELEN



Great Books Programs: the Cure for the Common Core™

The Great Books Foundation 800-222-5870 www.greatbooks.org

Great Books programs are a great match for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Here are five key ways that Great Books programs meet CCSS:

- Text complexity
- Multiple readings and close readings of text
- Text-dependent, text-specific questions requiring responses with specific and relevant evidence
- A questioning stance that extends and scaffolds critical thinking
- Writing for argument

Schools across the nation that have adopted Great Books programs are finding that meeting the goals of the Common Core State Standards is easy: they already have a program in place that meets the criteria. Join them by contacting us today!



Carolyn Smith
Principal
Empowerment Academy
Baltimore, MD

“The Common Core Standards are rigorous. When we talk about language arts standards, Great Books aligns with Common Core because students are engaged in speaking activities, listening activities, lots of reading, and lots of writing. Plus, Junior Great Books anthologies are very high in terms of text complexity.”

Visit www.greatbooks.org/corestandards to learn more!

How Great Books K-12 Programs align with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (below and the three pages that follow in this Spotlight).

Reading

Common Core Standards

Key Ideas and Details

Students should be able to:

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences from it
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas

Great Books Programs

Great Books programs use thematically rich, diverse literature from renowned authors. Interpretive activities accompany each reading selection to build strong reading and analytic skills that can reach across all disciplines. Students learn to:

- Strategically read and annotate a text
- Generate ideas about the meaning of a text
- Infer, evaluate, and revise ideas
- Support and summarize arguments with reasoning and evidence

Great Books Programs and the Common Core State Standards, page 2

Reading, continued

Common Core Standards

Great Books Programs

Craft and Structure

Students should be able to:

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text; determine technical, connotative, and figurative meanings; and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone
- Analyze the structure of a text and understand how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole

Through multiple readings, students analyze a text to examine how key words, phrases, and passages affect meaning. The combination of high-quality literature, Shared Inquiry discussion, and interpretive activities helps students discover how parts of a text relate to the whole to create a deeper understanding of the text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Students should be able to:

- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or compare the approaches the authors take

Through Shared Inquiry students:

- Interpret the meaning of a text, taking into consideration the ideas of others to gain deeper insight
- Develop, articulate, and support their own ideas stating them clearly and fully
- Agree and disagree constructively

Cross-text activities provide students with opportunities to compare and contrast multiple texts, both thematically and stylistically.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Students should be able to read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Great Books Programs use high-quality, age-appropriate fiction and nonfiction, selected to challenge the reader and spark rigorous discussion. Great Books literary selections require multiple readings to uncover layers of meaning. These complex texts stimulate thought-provoking interpretive questions to sustain Shared Inquiry discussion.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

Students should be able to:

- Write arguments to support claims and analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content

Great Books programs integrate writing with reading and discussion. Instructional activities and materials focus on how to write well-organized expository, creative, and interpretive essays. Writing is integrated throughout the program as a tool for thinking. Activities include:

- Writing notes, responses, and questions to spark original thinking
- Taking guided notes to develop a personal response to literature
- Stating, supporting, and modifying a thesis in writing

Great Books Programs and the Common Core State Standards, page 3

Writing, continued

Common Core Standards

Great Books Programs

Production and Distribution of Writing

Students should be able to:

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

Great Books writing activities focus on the development, organization, and clear articulation of ideas consistent with purpose and audience. Writing activities rely on modeling, guided practice, and use of templates to organize thinking. Students edit and revise their writing with the help of peer reviews and rubrics.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Students should be able to:

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism

Students have opportunities to research background questions related to readings. Suggestions for related projects encourage students to use a range of print and digital sources to investigate topics and themes.

Range of Writing

Students should be able to write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Writing is integrated throughout each Great Books unit as students write questions; make notes on interpretive issues; respond to interpretive questions before and after Shared Inquiry; and write expository, creative, or evaluative essays. Writing activities take place over a range of time frames.

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

Students should be able to:

- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric

Conversation and collaboration is integral to all interpretive activities in the Great Books program. In Shared Inquiry discussion students experience the power of language to communicate complex ideas, persuade others, and provoke thought. Students learn to work confidently in a group as they:

- Develop, articulate, and support interpretations
- Explain and defend concepts and ideas
- Listen attentively
- Agree and disagree with others constructively
- Synthesize and build on others' ideas

Great Books Programs and the Common Core State Standards, page 4

Speaking and Listening, continued

Common Core Standards

Great Books Programs

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Students should be able to present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

In Shared Inquiry discussion and in other Great Books activities students learn to organize, explain, and support their ideas. The text selections and interpretive activities engage students in thoughtful exploration and exchange of complex ideas. A variety of rubrics provide criteria for personal, peer, and teacher assessments.

Language

Conventions of Standard English

Students should be able to demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Great Books programs provide students with opportunities to demonstrate command of English grammar and usage as they analyze, discuss, and write about challenging literature.

Knowledge of Language

Students should be able to apply knowledge of language to understand how it functions in different contexts, so that they can make effective choices for meaning or style and comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Students analyze texts, examining the subtleties of how language affects meaning or style. Students learn the impact of specific words and details and focus on specific sentences and passages to comprehend more fully.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Students should be able to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Vocabulary is acquired and used throughout the interpretive activities; specific vocabulary activities teach students to:

- Comprehend through context clues
- Understand word parts and multiple-meaning words
- Understand figures of speech
- Consult reference materials

Great Books Program of Professional Learning

The Great Books Program of Professional Learning offers concrete, step-by-step instruction in how to use the Shared Inquiry method with Great Books materials. Teachers develop skills to help students become critical readers, thinkers, and writers. Course participants discover how and why students learn through the Shared Inquiry method. Course participants also learn to:

- Implement the Shared Inquiry method to improve reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills
- Practice the facilitative stance of the leader in Shared Inquiry discussion
- Use questioning strategies and interpretive activities to support deeper thinking and comprehension
- Integrate writing into the reading process
- Use Shared Inquiry strategies with a variety of challenging texts across the curriculum

The Great Books Foundation also offers a variety of customized courses and consultation services.

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Scale Tips Toward Nonfiction Under Common Core

College and workplace demands are propelling the shift in text

By Catherine Gewertz

The common standards expect students to become adept at reading informational text, a shift in focus that many English/language arts teachers fear might diminish the time-honored place of literature in their classrooms.

In schools nationwide, where all but four states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, teachers are finding ways to incorporate historical documents, speeches, essays, scientific articles, and other nonfiction into classes.

The new standards envision elementary students, whose reading typically tilts toward fiction, reading equally from literature and informational text. By high school, literature should represent only 30 percent of their readings; 70 percent should be informational. The tilt reflects employers' and college professors' complaints that too many young people can't analyze or synthesize information, or document arguments.

Some passionate advocates for literature, however, see reason for alarm. In a recent paper issued by the Pioneer Institute, a Boston-based group that opposes the standards, two language arts experts argue that those distributions make it inevitable that less literature will be taught in schools. Even if social studies, science, and other teachers pick up much of the informational-text reading, co-authors Sandra Stotsky and Mark Bauerlein argue, language arts teachers will have to absorb a good chunk as well, and they will be the ones held accountable.

"It's hard to imagine that low reading scores in a school district will force grade 11 government/history and science teachers to devote more time to reading instruction," the paper says.

De-emphasizing literature in the rush to build informational-text skills is shortsighted, the study argues, because the skills required to master good, complex literature serve stu-

dents well in college and challenging jobs. The problem is worsened when teachers make "weak" choices of informational texts, such as blog posts, Mr. Bauerlein said in an interview.

"If we could ensure that the kinds of stuff they're choosing are essays by [Ralph Waldo] Emerson or Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, then that would be wonderful," said Mr. Bauerlein, a professor of English at Emory University in Atlanta. "Those are complex texts, with the literary features that make students better readers in college."

The only required readings in the standards are four foundational American writings, such as the Declaration of Independence, and one play each by Shakespeare and by an American dramatist. Students also must "demonstrate knowledge" of American literature from the 18th through early-20th centuries.

An appendix to the standards lists texts that illustrate the range of works students should read across the curriculum to acquire the skills outlined in the standards. Those titles are not required reading, but are being widely consulted as representations of what the standards seek.

Stories, poetry, and plays share space with nonfiction books and articles. Kindergarten teachers are offered Tana Hoban's *I Read Signs*, along with P.D. Eastman's *Are You My Mother?* For 4th and 5th grades, the standards suggest Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* as well as Joy Hakim's *A History of US*. Middle school suggestions include Winston Churchill's 1940 "*Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat*" speech and an article on elementary particles from the *New Book of Popular Science* along with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. For 11th and 12th graders, T.S. Eliot's "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*" is suggested, as are Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

A New Blend

Taking a cue from the standards, many teachers are blending fiction and informational reading as they phase in the common core.

At Calvin Rodwell Elementary School in Baltimore last month, Erika Parker and her class of 4- and 5-year-olds were planning a trip to a nearby farm as part of a unit called "fall fun with friends." She read the children two versions of *The Three Little Pigs*; they joined her to shout out the famous refrain: "Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin!" They were addressing a common-core expectation that they learn to compare points of view in multiple texts, Ms. Parker said.

She also read the children books and stories about fall weather, friendship, the life cycle of pumpkins, and how to grow apples. They ventured into the schoolyard to learn about tree trunks and limbs and how trees could be grafted to produce new varieties and colors of apples.

"We are certainly still reading works of fiction," she said later. "They love their stories. But they also really get excited about something in real life that they can make a connection to."

Quinton M. Lawrence, too, is trying out a new blend with his 5th and 6th graders at the K-8 Woodhome Elementary/Middle School in Baltimore. The language arts teacher is drawing on newspaper articles, novels, and poems to explore the theme of individuality.

Children are choosing from a range of novels with a "realistic feel," Mr. Lawrence said, including *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman, and *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon Flake. They read newspaper articles about a school uniform rule and the creation of avatars—virtual alter egos—in video games.

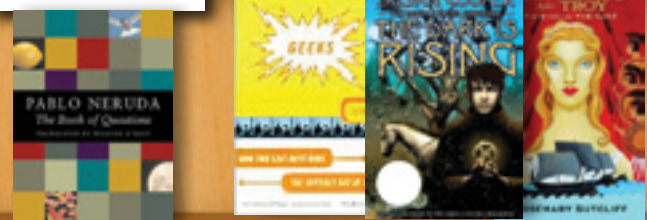
Through discussion, the students zeroed in on 10 major components of individuality, such as intelligence, beliefs, and physical appearance, and they explored them through the real and imaginary characters they read about, Mr. Lawrence said. They will write two-page essays exploring the theme further, based on additional research from other articles online, he said.

"The idea that students are exposed to informational text is somehow taken for granted," said Mr. Lawrence, whose district serves a predominantly low-income, minority

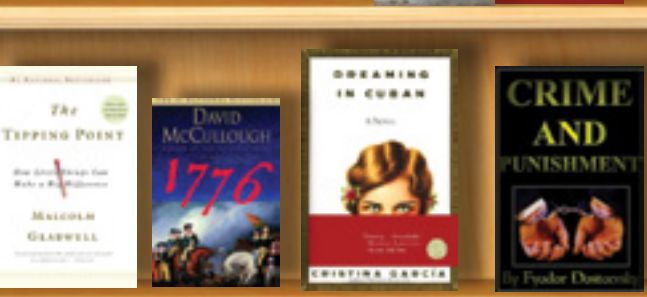
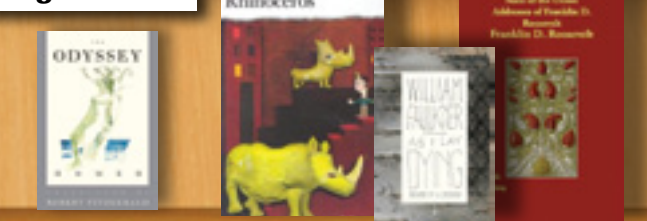
Elementary



Middle school



High school



Expanded Bookshelves

The Common Core State Standards require students to read many “informational” texts along with novels, poetry, and plays. An appendix to the standards lists dozens of titles to illustrate the range of suggested reading. Some “exemplar” texts can be found on the bookshelf.

SOURCE: Common Core State Standards, Appendix B

Anchor Standard 10 in Reading: “Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.”

population. “Most of my kids have not been exposed to newspaper articles. Their parents don’t subscribe to magazines. So it’s good for them to see these kinds of things, learn about their structure, as well as the structure of novels.”

Sonja B. Santelises, the chief academic officer of the Baltimore system, which has been working with teachers districtwide to design common-core modules and sets of texts in social studies, science, and language arts, said the emphasis on informational reading is crucial as a matter of equity for her 83,000 students.

“We’re naïve if we don’t acknowledge that it’s through nonfiction that a lot of students who’ve never been to a museum are going to read about mummies for the first time or read about the process of photosynthesis,” she said. She considers it important to use informational readings simultaneously as tools to build content knowledge and to familiarize students with a variety of types of text.

When Ms. Santelises visits classrooms, she still sees plenty of literature being enjoyed, so she isn’t worried about fiction losing its place in school, she said. “Fiction and narrative have been so overrepresented, particularly in the elementary grades, that I feel this is more of a balancing than a squeezing-out.”

In a study that painted a portrait of that imbalance, Michigan literacy researcher Nell K. Duke found in 2000 that informational text occupied only 3.6 minutes of a 1st grader’s day and 10 percent of the shelf space in their classroom libraries.

The Role of Literature

In the rush to rebalance, however, educators risk cheating literature, some experts say. “The emphasis on nonfiction is leading to the development of a whole new universe of activities that will leave less time for the ones about literature,” said Arthur N. Applebee, a professor of education at the State University of New York in Albany.

Thomas Newkirk, a professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, said he thinks the common core’s “bias against narrative” doesn’t serve students well. If teachers seek to make students ready for real life, he said, they must equip them not only to argue, interpret, and inform, but to convey emotion and tell stories.

“The world is much more narrative than the standards suggest,” said Mr. Newkirk, who teaches writing to freshmen and trains preservice teachers.

“Think about when candidates are running for office, and they have to tell the stories of their lives, the story of where we are going as a nation,” he said. “When we honor someone who has passed away, someone who is retiring, we need to tell their story.

The other skills are important, too. But in the real world, there are moments when we have to distill emotion, experience. To claim otherwise misrepresents how we operate.”

The question of which faculty are responsible for the new informational-text expectations is permeating conversation.

Colette Bennett, the chairman of the English department at Wamogo High School in Litchfield, Conn., said she believes the standards allow her to keep her focus squarely on literature, with essays and other nonfiction used to enrich that study. Recently, she had students use “The Hero’s Journey,” a narrative framework designed by American mythology scholar Joseph Campbell, to help them interpret *King Lear*, she said.

“The standards say that 30 percent of a student’s reading in [high] school should be literary, which is as it should be,” she said. “That’s my responsibility. My purview is fiction, poetry, literary nonfiction, and no other teacher is going to teach that.”

But teachers of other subjects have not been asking their students to read enough, Ms. Bennett said. “I hear them saying, ‘Oh, what am I going to drop out of my course to do more reading?’ And I say, ‘What? You haven’t been doing a lot of reading all along?’”

More Time on Reading

To avoid sacrificing literature and still give students deep experience with informational text, one thing will be required, according to Carol Jago, a former president of the National Council of Teachers of English: more time.

“Teachers don’t have to give up a single poem, play, or novel,” said Ms. Jago, who now directs the California Reading and Literature Project at the University of California, Los Angeles, which helps teachers design lesson plans. “But students are going to have to read four times as much as they are now.”

Where will the time come from? From substituting good-quality reading for “busywork,” movies shown in class, and the hours students spend daily on electronic entertainment such as texting and playing video games, Ms. Jago said.

In sorting out how to put the standards into practice, some experts caution against an either-or interpretation. It’s important for students to be steeped in all kinds of reading and writing, they say, and it’s all possible with good planning and collaboration.

“I don’t know why this dichotomy has been constructed in a way that is so divisive. It’s very unhelpful,” said Stephanie R. Jones, a professor who focuses on literacy and social class at the University of Georgia in Athens.

“We shouldn’t teach kindergartners as if they’re going to join the workforce next year. But it won’t hurt us to make sure we are emphasizing nonfiction a little more in K-5. And I don’t think fiction has to be edged out at all,” she said.

“In some college and career paths, it’s important to state a claim and justify with evidence, and in others, it’s important to be really creative and innovative and not start with an argument, but have open inquiry and move toward some kind of discovery.”

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New Research Thinking Girds Core

In the 15 years since the National Reading Panel convened, the knowledge base on literacy has grown

By Sarah D. Sparks

The truism that students “learn to read, then read to learn,” has spawned a slew of early-reading interventions and laws. But the Common Core State Standards offer a very different view of literacy, in which fluency and comprehension skills evolve together throughout every grade and subject in a student’s academic life, from the first time a toddler gums a board book to the moment a medical student reads data from a brain scan.

In doing so, the common-core literacy standards reflect the research world’s changing evidence on expectations of student competence in an increasingly interconnected and digitized world. But critics say the standards also neglect emerging evidence on cognitive and reading strategies that could guide teachers on how to help students develop those literacy skills.

“In our knowledge-based economy, students are not only going to have to read, but develop knowledge-based capital. We need to help children use literacy to develop critical-thinking skills, problem-solving skills, making distinctions among different types of evidence,” said Susan B. Neuman, a professor in educational studies specializing in early-literacy development at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. “The Common Core State

Standards is privileging knowledge for the first time. To ensure they are career-and-college ready, we have to see students as lifelong learners and help them develop the knowledge-gathering skills they will use for the rest of their lives. That’s the reality.”

Response to Findings

It’s been 15 years since Congress convened the National Reading Panel to distill knowledge about how students learn to read. That group, in the heat of the so-called “reading wars” between whole-language and phonics approaches to instruction, focused on five fundamental literacy skills: the word-decoding skills of phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. The panel’s seminal 2000 report, “Teaching Children to Read,” was used as the touchstone of the \$1 billion-a-year federal Reading First grant program, established under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Eight years later, the U.S. Department of Education’s research arm found that schools using Reading First did devote significantly more time to teaching the basic skills outlined by the panel, but ultimately “reduced the percentage of students engaged with print,” both fiction and nonfiction. The study by the Institute of Education Sciences found students in Reading First schools were no better at drawing meaning from what they read than students at other schools, and the program eventually was scrapped.

“One of the things we’re seeing with the common core is, there was general disappointment with the

NRP report's five critical skills as part of the Reading First initiative," said Ms. Neuman, who was an assistant secretary of education during the first term of President George W. Bush, when the federal reading program was rolled out. "When the evaluation came out and the results were very modest, people said, 'Well, what's next, what do we do?' We have not seen the emergence of a new model, and now, that's on the verge of happening."

Peggy McCardle, the chief of the child development and behavior branch—which includes literacy research—at the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development, said comprehension became the "next great frontier of reading research" after the National Reading Panel. There have been other, narrowly focused panels on early reading and English-language learners, but the National Reading Panel still stands as the last comprehensive, Congressional task force on reading.

"What the National Reading Panel had to say about comprehension was, we do need to teach kids strategies, and it's better if you teach them in combination—and we've taken that much further," Ms. McCardle said. "While we don't have reading comprehension completely figured out in every way, ... we have it much more figured out than we did in 2000."

The common core's emphasis on more complex text with higher-level vocabulary at younger ages—and particularly the use of informational, non-narrative texts as opposed to overwhelmingly narrative texts—also puts into practice research showing that there is no bright line for when students start to read to learn, Ms. McCardle said. Setting one would be "an artificial distinction," she said, "because the ramp up to learning from reading starts earlier and is just that, a ramp-up, not a quick switch or a dichotomy."

Viewing comprehension as a sequential skill rather than a continuously evolving one "also implies they don't need ongoing instruction after 3rd grade, and we clearly know they do," she said.

The Alliance for Excellent Education's 2006 report "Reading Next" helped spark the common core's approach. Education professor Catherine A. Snow and then-doctoral student Gina Biancarosa of the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that explicit comprehension instruction, intensive writing, and the use of texts in a wide array of difficulty levels, subjects, and disciplines all helped improve literacy for struggling adolescent readers.

"There are two really big ideas underlying the common core," said P. David Pearson, a professor of language and literacy, society,

and culture at the University of California, Berkeley. The standards first set out that children build knowledge through their close reading of texts, a concept "consistent with the last 20-30 years of research," Mr. Pearson said.

"But the second big idea is its grounding in the disciplines," Mr. Pearson added. "If you think of science and history and even literature as disciplines, you can see why they have separate standards in reading for literature, informational text, science, and technical areas. You're not just learning to read; you're learning to read within a rich content area. This reflects a huge refocusing of reading research in the last 10 to 15 years on reading in the disciplines. It's been timely; they've hit a theme in the realm of education policy and practice."

Content and Complexity

Mr. Pearson pointed to research by Cynthia L. Greenleaf, a co-director of the Strategic Literacy Initiative at the San Francisco-based research group WestEd, which identified specific literacy skills required in science and history classes.

Timothy Shanahan, the director of the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a member of the common-core literacy-standards committee, likewise has found differences not just in the content knowledge but the approach to reading and getting information from text by professional scientists and historians.

While "reading across the curriculum" research in the mid-1990s also stressed text in different content areas, Dorothy Strickland, a reading professor and education professor emeritus at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., said the common core leverages emerging research on how students analyze and verify what they read in different types of text, from literature to a lab report or an Internet blog.

"One of the key elements of executive function is holding more than one thing at a time" in mind, she said. "Kids have to read across texts, evaluate them, respond to them all at the same time. In office work of any sort, people are doing this sort of thing all the time."

The "Reading Next" report also highlights labor studies that show the 25 fastest-growing professions from 2000-2010—computer software engineers, database administrators, and medical assistants, among them—require higher-than-average literacy skills, particularly in informational texts.

In a series of experiments across several grades beginning in 2000, Nell K. Duke,

a professor of language, literacy, and culture at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, found elementary classrooms spend on average only 3.6 minutes a day reading non-story-based informational, as opposed to narrative texts. In classrooms with high numbers of poor children, informational reading occupies less than two minutes a day.

"Even if there hadn't been one stitch of research on informational text with young children, it's still conceivable the common core would have had an incredible emphasis on informational text because that was what colleges and employers were saying students needed to be able to read," Ms. Duke said. "Fortunately, there was a nice alignment between the concerns of researchers and the concerns of the college and business community."

The fundamentals discussed in the National Reading Panel are still there, too, but have been given different weight. For example, vocabulary gets much more attention in the common core, not just individual words, but their meanings in different contexts and the nuances in families of related words. In part, that's because a student's depth and complexity of vocabulary knowledge predicts his or her academic achievement better than other early-reading indicators, such as phonemic awareness.

"There was a big push on academic vocabulary and the discourse of the disciplines. It's likely come from that whole tradition of making sure kids not only have general academic language but deep vocabulary of history, social studies, science," Mr. Pearson of UC-Berkeley said.

The common core also marks a sea change in the way researchers and teachers think about a child's reading level. For example, in a 2010 study in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, researchers assigned two groups of poor readers in grades 2 and 4 to practice reading aloud text either at or above their reading level; a third group, the control, had no additional practice. They found students who practiced reading, even when it was difficult, were significantly better 20 weeks later at reading rate, word recognition, and comprehension, in comparison with the control group.

"It flies in the face of everything we'd been doing. Since the 1940s, the biggest idiots in the field—like me—were arguing that you couldn't teach kids out of books they couldn't read," Mr. Shanahan said. "We were setting expectations of such a modest level of learning being possible. We were unintentionally holding them back, and the common core called us on that."

Ms. Strickland and Mr. Pearson said the common core's strength comes from integrating many factors that have been identified as vital to adult literacy—such as facility with complex text or academic vocabulary—across all grades and academic subjects. “I think the idea of 10 standards that play themselves out grade after grade across different disciplines is a powerful thing,” Mr. Pearson said.

Standards and Grades

Still, researchers said, while individual standards are backed by evidence that students' level of mastery of them can predict their eventual literacy in college and work, there is much less research supporting the grade-level descriptors of how those skills look through the years, or the most effective instructional strategies at each grade. Mr. Pearson said descriptors at transition grades, such as in upper elementary and middle school, may become the “Achilles heel of the standards.”

“As you move through the grades, it changes in funny ways, and I don't think the changes are based on any actual research, but on professional consensus,” Mr. Pearson said. “We may end up in the strange position of having a standard in 8th grade easier than one in 6th grade.”

Mr. Shanahan agreed that “some of the targets are a little goofy,” noting, for example, that the common core requires children to compare two texts in kindergarten, but there is no specific evidence that this skill should develop in that grade versus, say, grades 1 or 2. On the other hand, Mr. Shanahan said, “I think what the learning progressions tell us is a 4th grade teacher can no longer be a 4th grade teacher, or even a grades 3-4-5 teacher. They need to be a teacher of literacy and understand the precedents and antecedents of what a student needs to know.”

Getting There From Here

Much of the criticism of the common core's research base comes from what it leaves out rather than what it includes.

In the years since the National Reading Panel, reading researchers have made significant advances in the development of strategies for reading and comprehension, as well as metacognitive factors that contribute to reading success, such as attention and motivation.

In its preface, the literacy standards bluntly limit their scope to “required achievements”—the outcomes of reading, as opposed to strategies for comprehension.

“The standards do not mandate such

COMPREHENSION AND THE STANDARDS

The Common Core State Standards take a holistic view of comprehension, asking students to derive meaning from a mix of texts, illustrations, and digital media at the same time.

“Our knowledge of comprehension is changing. We used to teach strategies, on the assumption that those strategies would translate to any text. Now we recognize that transferability has real problems; we need to teach in the context of the text,” said Susan B. Neuman, a professor of educational studies specializing in early-literacy development at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

This is one area in which the standards have staked a position on the bleeding edge of research on learning, said Nell K. Duke, a professor of language, literacy, and culture at the University of Michigan School of Education in Ann Arbor. “How do you teach kids to read a diagram, how do you teach kids to read a time line? What typically goes wrong with reading a graphic?”

The common core's vision of how students ought to learn, grade by grade, to comprehend meaning differently across different media is sketched out in one strand of the reading standards—part of “integrating knowledge and ideas.”

KINDERGARTEN: With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g., what moment in a story an illustration depicts).

GRADE 1: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

GRADE 2: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

GRADE 3: Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

GRADE 4: Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

GRADE 5: Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve

a problem efficiently.

GRADE 6: Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

GRADE 7: Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).

GRADE 8: Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

GRADES 9-10: Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

GRADES 11-12: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

—S.D.S

things as a particular writing process or the full range of metacognitive strategies that students may need to monitor and direct their thinking and learning,” the common core states.

Rather, it says, teachers should use their professional judgment and experience to decide how to help students meet the standards.

“It's not because [the common-core design-ers] rejected that research,” Mr. Shanahan

said. “The notion was that you wanted to focus on outcomes, not the inputs. It might be helpful to teach a student whether he's paying attention or not, and if not, to do something. The common core isn't saying you shouldn't do that kind of thing, but that's not an outcome.”

Maureen McLaughlin, the president-elect of the Newark, Del.-based International Reading Association, sees the lack of reading-strategy research in the curriculum as tan-



tamount to having no research base where it counts most. “I see a gap between the standards and school curriculums, because typically when [previous] state standards were developed, they basically became the curriculum,” said Ms. McLaughlin, who also chairs the reading department at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. “If the states that adopted the common core say to their school districts, ‘This is the curriculum,’ and teachers feel they must teach to the test, the curriculum as it exists would not include the metacognitive strategies, the writing-process strategies... and that’s a problem.”

Ms. Neuman, the former assistant education secretary, disagrees. “I like the idea of focusing on outcomes,” she said. “Comprehension strategies and metacognitive techniques have often been talked about as repair strategies, but you have to actually know you are not reading well to use those. So it’s a little bit of a Catch-22 here. What this new approach is saying is focus on the text, because many remedial readers rely too much on their background knowledge and think they understand what they are reading when they actually do not.”

The University of Michigan’s Ms. Duke echoed the researchers’ general concern that there has not been enough study of what good comprehension looks like and how to teach it in new contexts required by the common core, such as Internet articles, data tables, and texts that also include graphics.

“When a standard calls for us to get kids proficient at something we don’t yet know how to get students proficient at, we really have to scramble a little bit,” she said. “Hopefully, in a decade, we’ll have really nice research on effective ways to go about this.”

Mr. Shanahan agreed.

“I don’t know of any studies or lines of research that might make us decide three or five years from now, let’s take out these items or put these in,” he said. “In many ways, the common core is silent on that. They’re taking it on trust that we’ll either know how to do it or we’ll figure it out, and, as a field, I’m not sure we do know how to do it.”

Coverage of “deeper learning” that will prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world is supported in part by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, at www.hewlett.org.

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Rid of Memorization, History Lessons Build Analytical Skills

Common standards could drive approach

By Catherine Gewertz

For years, bands of educators have been trying to free history instruction from the mire of memorization and propel it instead with the kinds of inquiry that drive historians themselves. Now, the common-core standards may offer more impetus for districts and schools to adopt that brand of instruction.

A study of one such approach suggests that it can yield a triple academic benefit: It can deepen students’ content knowledge, help them think like historians, and also build their reading comprehension.

The Reading Like a Historian program, a set of 75 free secondary school lessons in U.S. history, is getting a new wave of attention as teachers adapt to the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts. Those guidelines, adopted by all but four states, demand that teachers of all subjects help students learn to master challenging nonfiction and build strong arguments based on evidence.

Searching for ways to teach those literacy skills across the curriculum, while building students’ content knowledge and thinking skills, some educators have turned to that program. Designed under the tutelage of history educator Sam Wineburg, it has been downloaded from the website of the research project he directs, the Stanford History Education Group, more than 330,000 times in the past 2½ years.

“It completely changed the way I teach history, and my students are getting so much more out of it,” said Terri Camajani, who teaches U.S. history and government at Washington High School in San Francisco. “They get really into it. And their reading level just jumps; you can see it in their writing,” she said.

Ms. Camajani was one of the teachers involved in a 2008 experiment that gauged the impact of Reading Like a Historian lessons on 11th graders in 10 San Francisco high school classes. Teachers in half the classrooms had been trained to use the lessons; those in the other half did not use them. After six months, students using the program outperformed those in the control group in factual knowledge, reading comprehension, and a suite of analytical and strategic skills dubbed “historical thinking.”

Avishag Reisman, who led the curriculum development and the study as part of her doctoral work at Stanford University under Mr. Wineburg, said the program “seems to hit a number of important goals. Literacy skills: got that. Higher-level thinking and domain-specific reading: got that. And basic facts: got that, too. Students did better on the nuts and bolts because they were embedded in meaningful instruction.”

And they did better even though their teachers “didn’t always implement the lessons with the highest level of fidelity,” said Ms. Reisman, who published her findings last fall and winter in two journals, the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* and *Cognition and Instruction*. That suggests, she said, that improved professional development could produce even stronger results.

The program takes primary-source documents as its centerpiece and shifts textbooks into a supporting role. Each lesson begins with a question, such as, “How should we remember the dropping of the atomic bomb?” or “Did Pocahontas save John Smith’s life?” Students must dig into letters, articles, speeches, and other documents to understand events and develop interpretations buttressed by evidence from what they read.

Four Key Skills

Teachers trained in the approach focus heavily on four key skills: “sourcing,” to gauge how authors’ viewpoints and reasons

for writing affect their accounts of events; “contextualization,” to get a full picture of what was happening at the time; “corroboration,” to help students sort out contradictory anecdotes and facts; and “close reading,” to help them absorb text slowly and deeply, parsing words and sentences for meaning.

One lesson begins by asking whether Abraham Lincoln was a racist. Students are always intrigued by the question, said Valerie Ziegler, a teacher at Lincoln High School in San Francisco, because they learned as children that he freed the slaves.

But as they read a group of documents the lesson provides for them, it becomes clear that they can yield multiple interpretations, she said. For instance, Mr. Lincoln said in 1858, while debating Stephen A. Douglas for a seat in the U.S. Senate, that he viewed “negroes” as morally and intellectually inferior to Caucasians, but believed they were still entitled to equal rights under the law.

The roots of Reading Like a Historian reach back to Mr. Wineburg’s own doctoral work in the late 1980s. A cognitive psychologist, he compared the way historians read documents with the way students in Advanced Placement history courses read them, in an attempt to distill the types of thinking necessary for successful study of history. Following that trail in the ensuing decades solidified his conviction that history education must be fueled by teaching students modes of thinking that are specific to the discipline, a view he explored in his 2001 book *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*.

Fritz Fischer, the director of history education at the University of Northern Colorado, in Greeley, sees Reading Like a Historian as a valuable step toward turning key strains of thought in history education into a curricular program.

Many scholars, such as Peter Seixas of the University of British Columbia and Bob Bain of the University of Michigan, have long pressed for historical thinking and use of primary-source documents in K-12 education, and programs such as the Evanston, Ill.-based “DBQ Project,” which offers writing resources for history teachers, and Brown University’s “Choices” series, draw on that thinking, as well, he said.

Collectively, such efforts help push history education in an important direction: They encourage students to see history as a rich trove of stories and interpretations, rather than a staggering assemblage of facts, said Mr. Fischer, a past chairman of the National Council for History Education.

The approach, however, requires a type of preparation that isn’t common in programs for aspiring teachers, Mr. Fischer said. And for classroom teachers, it requires time to delve with students, and “time is what is being cut

from social studies classrooms,” he said.

Mr. Wineburg said that the lessons were designed specifically to fit within the 50-minute class period. Teachers can choose from among them, or use them all. But for teachers accustomed to a traditional, textbook-focused classroom, he said, making optimum use of the lessons will require “a deep content-knowledge base to understand the methodology of historical thinking.”

Shifts in Materials

A central aim in creating the program, he said, is to “break the stranglehold of the textbook,” which typically plays such a large role in instruction that it reduces primary-source documents to “decorations.” A textbook author himself, Mr. Wineburg said he grew frustrated that most textbooks’ focus on facts obscured “the grand narrative of history.” Students need the chance to experience history as a weave of questions and interpretations, but such a shift can be uncomfortable, he said.

“It’s disconcerting to teachers and students who have been housebroken to think there are right answers in history,” he said.

The common standards echo key themes in Reading Like a Historian. Issued in 2010, the standards place a premium on students’ abilities to carefully read and re-read a complex text until they’ve mastered its meaning and to use evidence in that text to build arguments.

Many educators fear that students with weaker academic skills could struggle under such expectations unless appropriate supports are provided. Recognizing that urban classrooms have high proportions of students reading below grade level or learning English, Mr. Wineburg and Ms. Reisman adapted the documents used in the lessons. They shortened them, simplified syntax and vocabulary, and added word definitions.

Ms. Camajani, who began her teaching career as a paraprofessional in a reading lab for students with weak literacy skills, said she found the adaptations “brilliant,” and just what she needed to help her most reading-challenged students access the material.

One of her former students said he was put off at first by having to read historical documents.

“To be honest, I don’t like reading,” said Erick Osorio, who graduated this past spring. “And when I saw the stuff Ms. Camajani wanted us to read, I was like, ‘We gotta read this?’ But it was more interesting than stuff in other history classes. We learned how to look for information very deeply. And it really helped me in English class, too.”

Ms. Ziegler said that her students seem to enjoy, in particular, challenging the orthodoxies they’ve learned as children. A civil rights unit on Rosa Parks, for instance, takes on the

popular story that she sat initially at the front of the bus. The students read documents that raise the possibility that she sat in the middle, Ms. Ziegler said.

“What all the lessons have in common is that you’re trying to solve a mystery, and for kids, that’s the exciting part,” Ms. Ziegler said. “It really changes their thinking about history. They’re so into the investigation that they don’t even realize they’re learning some really important skills.”

She leads students in comparisons of their textbook with others, too, so they can see the variations. “They begin to see textbooks differently, too,” she said. “They see that they can’t rely on just one source.”

Something Ms. Camajani likes in particular about the approach is how it “empowers” her most marginalized students. Some of the quietest, or least engaged, students have been hooked by the assumption-challenging exercises, she said.

“I’ve got a really edgy kid in baggy jeans, who used to not say much of anything, and in the middle of discussion, he says to another kid, ‘Can you source that for me?’ He is really engaged, really challenging things. He’s getting a chance to experience himself as intellectual.”

But to enable that in students, teachers have to resituate themselves in the process, Ms. Camajani said. Typically, she has students pair up to examine documents, then sit in a big circle to discuss their interpretations. At first, they do what they’re accustomed to: look to the teacher for the right answer.

“I had to learn to redirect them: ‘Don’t tell me, tell him,’” she said. “They quit looking to me for the answer and began to engage in academic, intellectual discourse with one another. I was absolutely stunned. It’s difficult, because there is some real zing in being the star of the show. You are the final word on everything. But you have to learn to push the ball down the hill and get out of the way.”

Catching On

The approach is drawing notice. Dana Chibbaro, the social studies director in the 39,000-student Newark, N.J., school system, said it is one of a handful of programs the district has recommended to principals as they implement the cross-disciplinary literacy expectations of the common standards.

The methodology, more than the content, is what she hopes teachers can take from the program, she said. The questioning and analyzing skills it demands of students are important for their futures as informed citizens who are “critical consumers of information,” Ms. Chibbaro said. She thinks it does a better job than does Advanced Placement—which also emphasizes “DBQs,” or document-based

questions—in teaching students how to engage in deep analysis of text.

The Lincoln, Neb., school district has been working to incorporate the approach into its K-12 curriculum.

Randy Ernst, the social studies director in the 36,000-student district, said the program addresses gaps that district officials found between their standards and their teaching.

“We were supposed to be teaching history from multiple perspectives, but we weren’t doing that,” he said. “We weren’t asking kids to corroborate.”

Led by dozens of teachers in a master’s degree program funded with a federal Teaching American History grant, educators in Lincoln are drawing on Reading Like a Historian to revise their own instruction for students from 12th grade all the way down to kindergarten, Mr. Ernst said.

The work blends instruction and assessment. The district has been field-testing new types of tests created by Mr. Wineburg and his team, which are slated to be available for free in the fall on a new website, beyondthebubble.stanford.edu. Educators in Lincoln have been trying out what the Stanford team calls HATs, or “historical assessments of thinking.”

Students analyze documents to answer a question, and teachers use those short essays to gauge how well students are absorbing the lessons, said Rob McEntarffer, an assessment specialist who has been working on that project. The ultimate aim is to use the approach to create districtwide social studies tests, to be used for formative purposes and to help the district improve its program, he said.

The hope is to extend the assessment work into summative tests, as well, he said. Document-based analysis and writing would be embedded into lessons, with teachers using the results to adjust instruction, while students learn skills like backing up their claims with evidence. Students would later engage in the same kind of exercise as a final assessment, Mr. McEntarffer said.

He believes such tests are doubly valuable, because they are activities that engage students and they can reflect more accurately the skills teachers most want them to develop.

“I hope it will enable a more focused attention and honoring of student thinking,” he said. “There has been great critical-thinking instruction in the classroom, but it’s always been a real challenge to get that honored on the assessment side.”

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Common Core Thrusts Librarians Into Leadership Role

Educators help teachers acquire inquiry-based skills integral to standards

By Catherine Gewertz

It’s the second week of the school year, and middle school librarian Kristen Hearne is pulling outdated nonfiction books from the shelves. She is showing one teacher how to track down primary-source documents from the Vietnam War and helping a group of other teachers design a project that uses folk tales to draw students into cross-cultural comparisons.

With the common standards on her doorstep, Ms. Hearne has a lot to do. Her library at Wren Middle School in Piedmont, S.C., is a nerve center in her school’s work to arm both teachers and students for a focus on new kinds of study. She’s working to build not only students’ skills in writing, reading, research, and analysis, but also teachers’ skills in teaching them. She and other librarians say they view the common core, with its emphasis on explanation, complex text, and cross-disciplinary synthesis, as an unprecedented opportunity for them to really strut their stuff.

“When it comes to the common core, librarians can be a school’s secret weapon,” said Ms. Hearne, who blogs as “The Librarian in the Middle.”

Like most school librarians, Ms. Hearne has been trained both as a teacher and a librarian, a combination she thinks is perfectly suited to helping students and teachers as the Common Core State Standards presses them into inquiry-based modes of learning and teaching. She helps them find a range of reading materials in printed or online form and collaborates to develop challenging cross-disciplinary projects. And like colleagues around the country, Ms. Hearne also plays important instructional roles often unrecognized by the public: as co-in-

structor alongside classroom teachers, and as professional-development provider for those teachers.

“The common standards are the best opportunity we’ve had to take an instructional-leadership role in the schools and really to support every classroom teacher substantively,” said Barbara Stripling, the president-elect of the American Library Association, and a professor of practice in library science at Syracuse University.

Ms. Stripling’s work to implement the common core in the New York City schools illustrates the central role school librarians are playing as the standards move from ideas on a page to instruction in the classroom. Overseeing that district’s 1,200 school librarians, Ms. Stripling and her staff analyzed the standards’ expectations for inquiry and information-literacy, developed sample lessons and formative-assessment tools around key common-core skills, and shared those and other resources during four-day development sessions with the district’s librarians.

Guiding Teachers

Adopted by all but four states, the standards have prompted coordinating discussions among the library-association divisions that represent librarians in public schools, city libraries, and higher education, said Susan Ballard, the president of the American Association of School Librarians, one of those divisions. All librarians are affected by the new expectations, she said: those who help at K-12 schools, at city libraries during the after-school and weekend hours, and those on college campuses, who have had to support students unequipped for college-level research and inquiry.

“[The common standards] drove us to look at ourselves as an ecosystem, all working together,” Ms. Ballard said. “Students have a false sense of security that they can find anything online, but that’s mostly quick

facts. They don't know how to ask good, researchable questions, assess information critically. So much of the core is based in inquiry, and that is what librarians do on a daily basis. It speaks our language."

A comparison of the AASL's own standards for learning with the new standards showed similar expectations for students' skills and "habits of mind," she said.

As lead librarian for the New Hanover County schools in Wilmington, N.C., Jennifer LaGarde has been focusing intently on "beefing up" her role as an instructional support to teachers, she said.

"The common core is so much about how we teach," said Ms. LaGarde, a national-board-certified librarian, winner of the ALA's 2011 "I Love My Librarian" award, and the author of the "Adventures of Library Girl" blog. "We've been looking at support materials, but we're more focused on shifting to inquiry-based instruction.

"Materials are almost secondary; it's really about helping teachers think about new ways to provide instruction and helping them see that there is someone in the building who already knows how to do that," said Ms. LaGarde, noting that North Carolina, like many states, requires librarians also to be certified teachers.

As part of her district's common-core implementation team, Ms. LaGarde spends a lot of time providing staff development on the standards. As the teacher-librarian for Myrtle Grove Middle School, she attends teachers' planning and departmental meetings and works one-on-one with them to design projects and to scour new books, journals, and subscription databases for interesting and challenging reading material.

In her school in South Carolina recently, Ms. Hearne guided one social studies teacher in preparing for a cross-disciplinary unit on the Vietnam War. In language arts classes, students read the novel *Cracker!*, about a bomb-sniffing dog and its handler during that war. The social studies teacher wanted primary-source materials to pair with the novel. Working with Ms. Hearne, she found photographs of dog-handlers from that war, along with videos and transcripts of interviews with them.

Ms. Hearne and the other two middle school librarians also recently trained science and social studies teachers, who are now expected to teach their students literacy skills specific to those disciplines. That kind of staff-development work is especially important in tight budget times, Ms. Hearne said.

"There isn't a lot of money to bring people in from the outside, so we have filled those shoes for our district," she said.

Even as they play that role, however, librarians themselves are drawing on a leaner set of resources because of cutbacks in recent years.

Between the 2004-05 and 2010-11 school years, 32 states lost library positions, according to an analysis by Keith Curry Lance, a consultant with RSL Research Group in Louisville, Colo. Those losses averaged 161 positions, or 16 percent, per state, but went as high as 48 percent in Michigan.

Ms. LaGarde said she has had no dedicated library budget in Wilmington for four years and instead must resort to "begging the principal" for what she needs. The common core's emphasis on complex texts, and in particular on rich nonfiction, has given her "great ammunition" to expand her collection, as teachers demand new kinds of reading materials, she said.

In some places, the common core appears to be driving restorations of those budget cuts. Ms. Hearne reports that although this is her third year without an assistant, her book budget has doubled this year. That came in the wake of her superintendent's request for a report on the percentage of fiction and nonfiction, and the age of the nonfiction materials, in the district's school libraries, she said.

Revamping Collections

The common standards have prompted school librarians to "take a hard look" at their collections to weed out dated material and bolster challenging fiction and nonfiction resources, said the AASL's Ms. Ballard. In doing so, they are looking especially closely at the rigor of the readings they offer, since the standards emphasize assigning students "on-grade-level" texts, even if that means extra supports are needed to help them. Librarians are also looking to better balance their collections with high-quality nonfiction, she said, since the standards use such texts as content-builders and vehicles for the teaching of discipline-specific literacy skills.

Paige Jaeger, who oversees 84 school libraries in the Saratoga Springs, N.Y., area, counted more than 700 "power verbs" in the standards, such as "analyze," "integrate," and "formulate," that press students toward more rigor and inquiry-based learning. That has implications both for a library's collection of resources and for the way teachers teach, said Ms. Jaeger, who conducted a recent common-core training for the AASL and posted those resources on her blog. She is preaching a three-part gospel to her colleagues: rich text, raising rigor, and repackaging research.

Ms. Jaeger helps teachers rework their curricula into research-driven activities that require students to put those power verbs into action. "If your assignment can be answered on Google, it's void of higher-level thought," she quipped.

Case in point: the typical report on a country, which is often little more than an



If your assignment can be answered on Google, it's void of higher-level thought."

PAIGE JAEGER

Coordinator of School Library Services, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

assemblage of facts. Ms. Jaeger and her colleagues have reshaped it around a question. Students might be asked what it means to live in a globally interdependent world. They could be sent home with an assignment to examine the labels on their clothing and food and note their countries of origin. As a class, they can graph those nations and examine the emerging portrait of importers and exporters. Each student could dive into his or her country's place in that system and write about the perils and promises of that role. Then, imagining themselves as ambassadors at the United Nations, they would have to figure out what issues are most pressing for their country and how best to plead for funding.

That kind of repackaging, Ms. Jaeger said, necessitates bolstering the rigor and richness of materials students use across the disciplines. Even as leisure reading at all levels of difficulty must still be well represented, more-challenging readings for core assignments are a must, she said. "If you have a core novel for a language arts class that's off by four or five grade levels, you've got to re-evaluate that," she said.

For instance, the immensely popular *Hunger Games* books are often read in 8th grade classes, Ms. Jaeger said, even though the widely used Lexile framework for text difficulty rates them as easy enough for late-elementary-level students. She suggests teachers consider as more-challenging replacements *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, about a woman whose cancer was instrumental to later scientific research, or *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World*, an account of British explorers whose ship was trapped in ice in Antarctica in 1914.

Many 9th and 10th graders read Agatha Christie's mystery *And Then There Were None*, which Lexile rates as appropriate for 2nd and 3rd graders. Ms. Jaeger is encouraging teachers to consider instead

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, about an autistic boy's attempt to solve a dog's murder. Instead of *The Catcher in the Rye*, which Lexile pegs to the 4th grade level, she suggests sophomores could read *The Stone Diaries*, which Lexile places at the 11th and 12th grades.

A Place for Literature

Librarians report having to work to allay two strains of worry among teachers: that the standards' emphasis on nonfiction will reduce the role of literature in the curriculum and that every text assigned must be a complex text.

"I think those things have been misinterpreted, and people have freaked out a little bit, thinking literature won't have a place" in classrooms anymore, said Ms. Stripling, the ALA's president-elect. As common-core authors have noted, the recommended balance of nonfiction to fiction—half and half in elementary school, rising to a 70-30 split by high school—takes all subjects into account, not just language arts classrooms, she said. Teachers can meet the "complex text" expectations of the standards, she said, by "sprinkling" such readings into their assignments, surrounded by a variety of other materials.

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COMMENTARY

Four Myths About the ELA Common-Core Standards

DINA STRASSER is a 7th grade English educator in upstate New York and a member of the Teacher Leaders Network. She is a former Fulbright Scholar, a National Writing Project Fellow, and writes *The Line*, cited by *The Washington Post* as one of the best education blogs of 2010.

CHERYL DOBBERTIN is the Director of NYS Common Core Curriculum and Professional Development for Expeditionary Learning, a national school reform organization. In addition, she consults with schools and teachers regarding implementation of differentiated instruction, adolescent literacy, and the Common Core Learning Standards. Cheryl is also an instructor in the teacher education program at Nazareth College of Rochester.

Dina: Let me admit this up front: I can be a professional developer's nightmare. I am a skeptical, informed, judgmental know-it-all, and can typically be found sitting in the back with my elbows perched on my knees, listening with unnerving intensity, and asking questions incessantly.

Professional development consultant Cheryl Dobbertin has graciously, even eagerly, put up with me over the past few years, and in May, she visited my school for a session on the English/language arts Common Core State Standards. I've written (skeptically—surprise!) about the common core before, and came fully armed to Cheryl's session: I trusted her to take my skepticism head on.

She did. And we realized together that there are some critical aspects of implementing the ELA standards that have been obscured by polarizing debates.

Cheryl: No matter what Dina says, don't believe that all professional developers and coaches find engaged, thoughtful, questioning teachers to be a nightmare! In fact, they are a constant source of energy for me.

Recently I've had lots of opportunities to help teachers think about the changes that the common core is bringing their way. I notice that there hasn't been a lot of time or attention devoted to teasing out the subtleties of the standards or accompanying instructional shifts.

Dina and I have identified four myths. These statements often appear to be accepted as fact (and are sometimes delivered to teachers that way) but are not actually aligned with the spirit and intention of the ELA common-core standards. Dina tackles 1 and 4, and I tackle 2 and 3.

Myth #1: Text complexity is a fixed number.

Dina: Let's be honest: The ELA teacher in me shivers with intuitive horror at the idea of pinning a complexity number on my beloved, earth-moving texts: novels, plays, poems. Like others, I worry about the overzealous use of arbitrary quantitative measures (such as Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid) to mark texts' difficulty.

Imagine my delight, then, to find this statement buried deep in Appendix A:

"In the meantime, the Standards recommend that multiple quantitative measures be used whenever possible and that their results be confirmed or overruled by a qualitative analysis of the text in question."

And there it is: All things being equal, qualitative measures of text complexity trump quantity. Qualitative measurement is where we find the breathing room to make considered, nuanced choices about what is "complex" for our students—collectively and individually. Cheryl shared an instrument of qualitative measurement with us, in fact, and it made my heart sing.

It's important to have this arrow in your quiver. In an educational landscape laced with high-stakes testing, budget cuts, and stress, it's going to be very, very tempting for all of us to fall back on "the numbers"

rather than taking the time to make sure that we have nuanced and accurate arguments about what is “complex” for our students.

Recently, faced with eight reading assessments to create within two hours, I was tempted to go straight to the numbers, relying solely upon them. But I didn’t—because I don’t trust them entirely, nor do the standards expect me to.

I hope you’ll join me in making well-informed decisions about text complexity despite pressures from administrators or parents. If anyone questions you, point to page 8 of Appendix A of the common core.

Myth #2: All prereading activities are inappropriate.

Cheryl: Common-core training materials (like this exemplar, for instance) include some not-so-subtle suggestions that “prereading” activities and discussions are a bad idea. Over the years, many of us have developed a host of methods to invite students to challenging texts and stimulate the “need to read.” Frankly, the idea that we would say “just start reading” to a roomful of students made me a little crazy.

In my professional circle, we began referring to the “just start reading” strategy as a “cold read,” and we struggled with whether cold reading was always an effective instructional approach.

But then I tried to understand the meaning behind this message about prereading activities. Ultimately, it was about making sure students built comprehension by actually reading a text rather than listening attentively to what others are saying about that text.

Consider a middle school teacher who says, “We are going to start reading Frederick Douglass’ memoir, *Narrative of the Life of a Slave*. This book begins with Douglass telling about his early years, including that he doesn’t know how old he really is. He was born in Maryland ...”

That’s really different from a teacher who says, “We’ve read memoirs before. What are some of the rhetorical devices we might find in a memoir? Ok, now let’s read the first two pages of this memoir together. When you see one of these devices, put a checkmark beside it. Then we will stop to discuss what is going on in this text. Be ready to discuss at least one spot you’ve marked.”

Both of these teachers think they are setting students up to read. But the first teacher’s preview of the plot doesn’t create a need to read, and actually makes it easy for students not to read. That teacher is also missing an opportunity to set up the expectation that students should read closely, to analyze the text.

On the other hand, the second teacher activates students’ background knowledge and

provides students with a beginning framework to help them read closely and analyze the structure of the text. Neither of these teachers is choosing to do a “cold read,” but only one of them is setting students up to do a “close read.” Over time, the second teacher’s approach is much more likely to develop students with the capacity to “just start reading.”

The bottom line: “Cold reading” is an instructional approach, not a standard. Experiment with cold reading for the sake of building independence in your students, but there’s no need to toss out all your prereading activities that guide students in reading and analyzing complex texts.

Myth #3: Answering text-dependent questions is what teaches students to be analytical readers.

Cheryl: There’s lots of buzz right now about “text-dependent questioning” to help students meet ELA standards. Obviously, we want students to be able to demonstrate their comprehension by responding to questions that drive them back to the text for answers. But let’s not forget the steps that teach students how to answer text-dependent questions.

In many classrooms, teachers assign reading (“Read chapter 3 ...”) and assess reading (“and answer these questions”). The focus on text-dependent questions in the instructional shifts documents that accompany the core seems to affirm that approach. But these documents omit modeling and processing, which should come in between assigning and assessing.

We can invite students to the reading through purpose and show students how to read for that purpose through a think-aloud or other modeling strategy. Students read. They complete activities that demand they think about the text (graphic organizer, think-pair-share, or about a million other activities). And then, they demonstrate their understanding by answering text-dependent questions.

It’s the middle—the modeling and processing—where students actually get a clue as to how to be better readers. The questions tell us that they got there (or not).

Myth #4: The common core abandons fiction.

Dina: This is the myth most frequently circulating about the core. Here’s just one of the remarks I’ve heard: “Why do we have to shove nonfiction down their throats all of sudden?”

The heart of the complaint is understandable. It was voiced loud and clear by the National Council of Teachers of English in their comments on drafts of the common core and continues to be addressed elsewhere. However, the whole of the complaint as voiced above is not accurate.

To begin with, long before the common-core standards came on the scene, reading specialists like Harvey and Goudvis were already arguing that we have wandered too far from analytic, nonfiction reading and writing. And true, the core’s emphasis on rhetoric and logic was once standard in our schools.

Secondly, the common core does value creative and fictional reading and writing, no matter what provocateur and core author David Coleman says. It’s right there, a stand-alone, fully written standard, all the way through grade 12. The standards even recommend a full 50/50 split between fiction and nonfiction in the elementary grades, giving way to an 80/20 proportion in the secondary grades.

Bear in mind, as well, that the common core is clear that its recommendations span the reading expectations for all core subjects. As a result, it is not advocating for us ELA teachers to dump poetry and novels except for, say, two months out of the 10 in our school year. Rather, we’re encouraged to partner with our colleagues in a substantive way, and work together to help kids approach nonfiction texts with critical and active minds.

Admittedly, the common core does make some mystifying genre distinctions. All creative reading and writing is lumped under the “narrative” umbrella, implying it is always a description of logical, sequential events, usually personal. This is not only inaccurate (T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” anyone?), but arguably preferences a pragmatic, linear view of writing. Teachers will need to approach this particular facet of the core with the same critical thinking that the core itself advocates.

Dina and Cheryl: We believe it’s important for educators to embrace the common-core standards, but to do so in a way that honors students’ needs and the wisdom of great teachers.

The standards are pushing us to examine our practices, and examine them we must. We must push ourselves in the same way we are being expected to push our students. We educators must thoughtfully read the complex common-core documents in their entirety, write rigorous lesson plans, and listen critically to those who are trying to help us learn and change.

Just as important is speaking up to question and clarify our own understanding of the standards and what they mean for our practice. We must keep “mythbusting” our own practices and what we are hearing so that the common-core standards can live up to their full potential. After all, the intention behind these rigorous standards—to prepare all students for careers and college—is at the heart of our work.

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COMMENTARY

Quick Guide to the Common Core: Key Expectations Explained

How the Common Core Will Change the Way Teachers Teach and Students Learn

By Adam Berkin

Since the Common Core State Standards were introduced, there has been much discussion about what they mean for educators and students and how they will impact teaching and learning. While the standards have been adopted by 45 states and 3 territories so far, there is a lot of concern, anxiety, and debate around what is best for students, potential challenges for teachers, and what implementation should and can look like. While many educators, parents, and concerned citizens have delved deep into the world of Common Core and understand the detail and complexity, most people have only a cursory understanding of the changes that are taking place, and some only know that changes are coming but don't know what they mean.

The new standards are focused on two categories: English/language arts and mathematics. The following are some of the key differences between the new ELA Common Core State Standards and many of the current educational standards in place around the country.

The text is more complex.

Since the 1960s, text difficulty in textbooks has been declining. This, in part, has created a significant gap between what students are reading in twelfth grade and what is expected of them when they arrive at college. As you might imagine, this gap is hurting students' chances of success in college: the CCSS cites an ACT report called *Reading Between the Line* that says that the ability to answer questions about complex text is a key predictor of college success.

The text covers a wider range of genres and formats.

In order to be college-, career-, and life-ready, students need to be familiar and comfortable with texts from a broad range of genres and formats. The Common Core State Standards focus on a broader range and place a much greater emphasis on informational text. Colleges and workplaces demand analysis of informational or expository texts. Currently, in many elementary programs, only 15 percent of text is considered expository. The Common Core sets an expectation that, in grades three through eight, 50 percent of the text be expository. Specifically, in grades three through five, there is a call for more scientific, technical, and historic texts, and in grades six through eight, more literary nonfiction including essays, speeches, opinion pieces, literary essays, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, and economic accounts.

In addition, students are expected to understand the presentation of texts in a variety of multimedia formats, such as video. For example, students might be required to observe different productions of the same play to assess how each production interprets evidence from the script.

There is a greater emphasis on evidence-based questioning.

The standards have shifted away from cookie-cutter questions like, "What is the main idea?" and moved toward questions that require a closer reading of the text. Students are asked to use evidence from what lies within the four corners of the text and make valid claims that can be proven with the text. The questions are more specific, and so the students must be more adept at drawing evidence from the text and explaining that evidence orally and in writing.

Students are exposed to more authentic text.

In order to ensure that students can read and understand texts that they will experience outside of the classroom, it is impor-

tant that they are exposed to real texts in school. *The Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards*, developed by two of the lead authors of the standards, emphasize a shift away from text that is adapted, watered down, or edited, and instead, focus on text in its true form. While scaffolding is still considered an important element when introducing students to new topics, it should not pre-empt or replace the original text. The scaffolding should be used to help children grasp the actual text, not avoid it.

The standards have a higher level of specificity.

There is a great amount of flexibility for educators to determine how they want to implement the new standards and the materials they choose to use and/or create; however, the standards themselves are quite specific. This helps to ensure fidelity in implementation and common understanding of expectations. Examples include:

- RL 4.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Hercules).
- RL 5.2 - Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic.
- RI 5.6 - Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

Additional Expectations

• **Shared responsibility for students' literacy development.** In grades six through twelve, there are specific standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. The message here is that content area teachers must have a shared role in developing students' literacy skills.

• **Compare and synthesize multiple sources.** Students are expected to integrate their understanding of what they are cur-

rently reading with texts that they have previously read. They need to answer how what they have just read compares to what they have learned before.

- **Focus on academic vocabulary.** One of the biggest gaps between students, starting in the earliest grades, is their vocabulary knowledge. The new standards require a focus on academic vocabulary, presenting vocabulary in context, and using the same vocabulary across various types of complex texts from different disciplines.

The Common Core State Standards are not “test prep” standards. They aim to teach students how to think and raise the bar on their level of comprehension and their ability to articulate their knowledge. Many educators are already teaching in ways that align with the new standards, and the standards themselves allow the flexibility for educators to do what works best for their students. However, the depth of the standards and the significant differences between the CCSS and current standards in most states require a whole new way of teaching, so even the most experienced teachers will need to make great changes and require support in doing so.

A lot of publishers are repurposing old materials and saying that they are “aligned” with the Common Core. Many of us at Curriculum Associates are former teachers, and our team has been dedicated to learning everything we possibly can about the standards so that we can build products from the ground up that work for first-year and veteran teachers alike - and help students learn. We believe in the potential of the Common Core to help close the achievement gap in this country, and make our students more competitive on an international scale. We hope to faithfully do our part by making the transition easier for students and teachers.

Adam Berkin is vice president of product development at Curriculum Associates and has a diverse background in education. In addition to his current position in educational publishing, he has taught at the elementary school and graduate school level, has written about education for publications including Children’s Literature in Education and Instructor, and is the co-author of a professional book for teachers called Good Habits, Great Readers. Curriculum Associates is a Getting Smart Advocacy Partner.

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