

# Where We Are *and* Where We're Going

## Educators explain what it will take to get college- and career-ready standards right

### In Essence...

Success never occurs because of just one element. Success is the result of deliberately determining what is needed and committing to meet that need. It comes from developing a plan and seeing it through, adapting it as necessary.

However, in public education, a sense of urgency and desire to make an immediate impact means that this proven formula often falls to the wayside. Such was the case with the implementation of college- and career-ready standards in some places, where it was approached as a box to check or at best a one- or two-year project. But as a group of education practitioners from around the country—including teachers, principals, parent leaders, researchers, superintendents, school board members, counselors, technology educators and state-level officials—told the Learning First Alliance (LFA) in the spring of 2016, it will take much more to move the needle on college and career readiness for all.

“ What failed with Common Core was that we wanted great change in no time. ”

### Success will require something far different.

LFA convened these practitioners to reflect on what it will take to move schools forward in their work to graduate all students college and career ready. While these professionals support the high expectations that new college- and career-ready standards set, they clearly articulated the need for continued support to ensure successful implementation.

Discussing where they see us today, they spoke of the fact that in communities with sufficient resources, the curriculum is changing to meet the needs of individual students, schools and districts. They shared that this

change is being supported with significant professional development for teachers, parents and principals. And, they are seeing positive effects.

However, they report that in districts without resources the rate of change is frustratingly slow and the standards present a daunting challenge. They also point out that in all schools there is a need for school counselors and other professionals to reach all students, as well as programs that engage struggling students in school and help them understand its connection to their future.

In addition to systemic issues surrounding public education in general, the practitioners also identified a number of specific challenges that need to be addressed in the move towards college and career readiness for all. Much of their conversation revolved around the need to improve the professional learning continuum—from pre-service teacher preparation through learning opportunities for those in the classroom and other school and district leaders.

“ A benefit of the Common Core is that states are producing quality resources and curricular materials that can be shared across states. The other side of that sword is that there are also a lot of low-quality resources out there. ”

They spoke to the need for the political and policy sectors to stop confusing the standards with outside issues, including student assessment, educator evaluation and federal intrusion into instruction. As one member of the group said, referencing a common misconception

about new standards, “If I had two cents for every time I explained the difference between curriculum and standards, I would not be working.”

**“To me, assessment means a portfolio. It is more than one test. It is many different tests—many different demonstrations of knowledge by students.”**

The practitioners discussed concerns involving curriculum and the lack of high-quality materials aligned to the standards that are available. They talked about issues related to educational technology, including challenges with and concerns about the move to on-line assessment as well as how educators use technology in the classroom.

They also discussed accountability, questioning the appropriateness of systems in which one test has many consequences. They prefer instead a multi-metric approach to measuring not only student but also school and educator growth. As professionals they want information to help them to do a better job, not to simply get a grade.

These conversations made clear that there are major differences among states and districts in how implementation of college- and career-ready standards is progressing. But common recommendations emerged.

**“I think in the big scheme of things, this is the direction we want education to be going.”**

#### WHAT IS THE ‘FAR DIFFERENT’ THAT THESE PRACTITIONERS ARE CALLING FOR?

It is time to stop changing educational direction with each election. It is time to make the sustained investment of time and other scarce resources that it will take to link teacher education to the needs of PK-12, as well as to create the professional development programs that will no longer be measured in hours or days but weeks.

It is time to engage the entire educational community in this endeavor, raising awareness that the success of any one school or district is directly related to it having the resources it needs, including: well-prepared teacher leaders; parents who are well-informed and ready to help their children; school principals who create a positive school culture and support their staff in making a difference; and superintendents and school board leaders who can bring new resources to meet the needs of their students and adapt their programs to make a difference. Finally, success requires assessments that accurately gauge a student’s performance and progress and can be used to make instructional decisions.

It is time to make the changes that will make a difference. ■

## Recommendations

- 1 CONTINUE MOVING FORWARD WITH COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION.** Rather than changing standards out of frustration that there have not been more immediate results or out of political concerns, make such decisions based on the needs of students. Continue efforts to ensure that assessments, curriculum, professional learning and the other materials needed to implement high standards are aligned to them. Provide time and resources to support the continuing instructional changes required each year as students bring additional background in the standards.
- 2 EMPHASIZE EACH INDIVIDUAL CHILD IN INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS.** Adapt the new college- and career-ready standards and locally-implemented curriculums to meet the distinct needs of all learners.
- 3 EXPAND EFFORTS TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS ABOUT HOW CCRS ARE IMPROVING THE NUMBER AND QUALITY OF GRADUATES AND PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF HOW STUDENTS AT ALL LEVELS ARE BENEFITING FROM HIGHER STANDARDS.** Communications plans must be forward-looking and student-centered, and they should engage the media. They should emphasize the standards alone, making clear what such standards are and are not, distancing them from assessments, curriculum, instruction and accountability. They must also make clear why these changes are important. Parents and families in particular should be targeted to ensure they understand the benefit the standards offer to each student and feel ownership over the educational process.
- 4 CONTINUE EXPANDING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN TEACHER EDUCATION AND PK-12 PROGRAMS THAT ALLOW FOR INTENSIVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE TWO.** Ensure preparation programs—including the English, math and science department faculty—are aware of their state’s K-12 education standards and that their candidates know how to teach to them. Provide new funding to create the curriculum alignments and support needed for better in-service student-teacher practicum, mentoring, and residency programs (including funds for the mentoring teacher). Work to distribute top candidates equitably to ensure that high-poverty schools have access to fully qualified new teachers.
- 5 EXPAND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.** Teachers and other school leaders need more time and support to sharpen their instructional skills, deconstruct the standards, learn new technologies, and integrate those technologies into regular use. Learning opportunities should be ongoing, differentiated and collaborative. These opportunities must be distributed equitably, so that educators at historically under-resourced schools have the same opportunities as their peers working at more advantaged schools to develop the skills they need to help students succeed under more rigorous standards.
- 6 REDESIGN ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS TO MAKE THEM USEFUL FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS AND TO ENSURE THEY ACCURATELY REFLECT THE PROGRESS THAT STUDENTS, SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS ARE MAKING.** The importance of formative assessments should be acknowledged and respected. Accountability programs must include multiple measures and only offer a small role for standardized tests. Data must be available quickly so changes in instructional programs can be made to help each student and so families can support their children at home. In addition, the same tool should be used for assessment and instruction (if a pencil is the tool for instruction, it should be the tool for assessment). Assessment is not the time to introduce new techniques.

## Methodology

This project followed a very specific model to explore the issues around implementation of college- and career-ready standards. The model made use of several different types of communications and allowed for an ongoing review of ideas and concepts to evaluate their usefulness.

To ensure that the discussion group included a cross-section of education practitioners, each member organization of the Learning First Alliance was asked to nominate two of its own members to serve on it. Thirty individuals were nominated; 22 actively participated.

The process included an **online survey** to generate an initial list of discussion topics; an **internal website** for online discussions and the sharing of resources; an **email distribution list** allowing for peer-to-peer interactions; a **commencement webinar** providing background information from recent research on standards implementation; a **series of phone calls** conducted over three weeks during which practitioners shared their thoughts and experiences; the **circulation of call notes** to request clarifications and additional details; a **summary document** revised by the participants; an **in-person meeting** bringing together representatives from the practitioner community and representatives from the policy community to discuss the findings; and a **final report** shared with the group and revised based on their feedback.

## Members of the Learning First Alliance

- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- AASA, The School Superintendents Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- American School Counselor Association
- Consortium for School Networking
- International Society for Technology in Education
- Learning Forward
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Education Association
- National PTA
- National School Boards Association
- National School Public Relations Association
- Phi Delta Kappa International

## About the Learning First Alliance

The Learning First Alliance is a partnership of leading education organizations representing more than 10 million members dedicated to improving student learning in America's public schools. We share examples of success, encourage collaboration at every level, and work toward the continual and long-term improvement of public education based on solid research. Learn more at <http://www.learningfirst.org>.

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Read the full report at <http://www.learningfirst.org/whereweareandwhereweregoing>.

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