Where We Are *and* Where We're Going

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

Leaders Establish Conditions for Success	Teachers Inspire Learning and Build Knowledge	Communities Advocate for Every Student	Specialized Educators Provide Needed Supports

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"Give us the tools and the space to make college- and career- ready standards work."

That is the call of teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, school board members and specialized educators as they look at both the challenges of implementing such standards and the successes that are unfolding in schools and districts across the country.

Educators believe that the high expectations these standards set are met when implementation of the standards is effectively managed. They are frustrated by the political noise and lack of support that surround their work and hinder their ability to help students succeed. And they want to maintain momentum and move forward. They believe that constantly changing demands on students, teachers and schools are distracting from the important work that they are doing.

What needs to be done to help schools move forward in their work to make all students college and career ready?

Over four weeks this spring, the Learning First Alliance convened a "Practitioner Think Tank" to answer this question. The Think Tank consisted of a cross-section of education practitioners: teachers, principals, school counselors, parents, technology directors, superintendents, teacher educators, school board members and other ground-level educators nominated by the organizations that make up the Alliance. Each offered what they believe it will take to ensure that the promise of college- and career-ready standards is met. Thirty practitioners from across the United States were nominated; approximately 20 participated in a series of conference calls exploring specific issues related to standards implementation—as well as more generally

> 66 As principal of a K-5 building, I see the difference in students. I see the difference in teachers. There is a different level of language used.
>
> I believe that if we just give it time, we will see a huge difference. But we need the media on our side. I believe that we are being vilified by the media and politicians, and that has to stop. 99

what is working, what should change, and the policies needed for the 2016–2017 school year. A summary of their discussions was then presented to a group of government relations specialists representing Alliance member organizations, who considered it in the context of the current political environment and shared their thoughts on specific issues that could be targeted to help move work forward.

This report represents the outcome of that process. It is organized in three sections:

- **BACKGROUND:** the contextual factors that educators recognize have led us to where we are now.

- **STATE OF PLAY:** the status of schools and districts regarding key issues identified by the discussants as necessary for successful implementation of college- and career-ready standards.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** actions needed to position educators for success in the coming school year.

Background

Over the past six years, the majority of states and districts have moved from developing and adopting the Common Core State Standards and other college- and career-ready standards (CCRS) to implementing them in hopes of increasing the number of high school graduates who are considered college and career ready.

This did not occur in a vacuum. As the standards progressed from an idea to a draft to their final form, the federal government provided funds to develop testing consortia to build assessments aligned to the new standards. It then decided to make adoption of these (or similar) state standards a requirement for accessing Race to the Top grants and a form of relief from the increasingly difficult requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In some states, other rules and regulations, such as teacher and principal evaluation systems based on standardized assessment results (demanded by the U.S. Department of Education for relief from NCLB), were being rolled out at the same time.

The result, our discussants realize, is that the public and the political world (and in some places educators themselves) have conflated the standards, assessments, educator evaluation and what some consider federal intrusion into education into one moniker: the Common Core. In some places, this is a misunderstanding; in other places, it is a reality.

To further complicate the situation, in many communities the public's opinion about the Common Core is also confounded by poor curricular choices, a lack of the professional learning needed to ensure that educators understand the changes that the standards require, and other implementation difficulties. Combined with poor communications with the general public about all of these issues and the standards themselves, it is easy to see why our discussants are frustrated despite the promise they believe the standards hold. The execution of an idea that seems to be in everyone's best interest—graduating students who are ready to go to college or participate in the advanced training that most careers require—is mired in misunderstanding, obstruction and a lack of support.

More recently, the political nature of the "Common Core" has led some states to repeal, revise or rebrand their standards. Other states have changed assessments multiple times in recent years, creating new challenges for students and teachers, as well as for the system as a whole.

> **Several discussants pointed to New York State as an important example of standards implementation gone wrong. There, state-level decisions regarding standards, assessments and teacher evaluations led many in the general public and in the education community to see them as being one and the same—they are all "the Common Core." As a result, teachers are questioning whether the standards are in their best interests—or even useful. And many parents are opting their children out of standardized tests (over 70% of students have opted out in some districts) because of the Common Core, emphasizing their discontent with the assessment process and staying silent on the standards themselves.**

> **One administrator shared the story of a parent whose curiosity about (and possible support for) the standards turned to concern about their relevance after receiving a report that their fourth grade child was not "college or career ready"—a report that triggered a number of questions as to whether the assessment and the standards were in the child's best interest.**

Now, a new layer has been added to this cake. In late 2015, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act replaced NCLB with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA gives more autonomy to states and districts and makes it clear that the federal government cannot require adoption of the Common Core or any education standards, while also putting additional demands on states, districts, schools and students.

The Need for Sustained Effort

The educators we spoke with are particularly concerned about the perception in some places that the Common Core standards are "the problem" and that adoption of new standards will solve it. They understand that the adoption of standards is only one aspect of the education change process. To improve student learning, educators must also make the instructional, cultural and other school- and district-level changes that need to accompany any new standards. Policymakers, parents and community members must provide the additional supports that students need to come to school ready to learn.

> 66 **What failed with Common Core was that we wanted great change in no time.** 99

Regardless of what the standards are called, it is critical that stakeholders understand that standards implementation is not a one or two year "thing." Successful implementation requires years of sustained effort—and there are several core investments of time, money and other resources that are needed to make any change work.

It is also critical that stakeholders recognize that in many places, the initial implementation of college- and career-ready standards was conducted in a manner many educators agree was unwise: they were all rolled out simultaneously. This has many implications for practice. For example, when a school started using the new standards, fifth grade students were expected to learn the new fifth-grade standards—despite having started their educational career under the old standards. Given the imperfect alignment between old and new standards, teachers had to make specific curricular choices to ensure students both caught up to where the standards expected them to be and also moved ahead. The next year, the rising fifth graders entered the classroom

with some background from the new standards, having learned under them in fourth grade, but they were still not where the standards expected them to be based on prior experiences. The teacher had to adapt yet again.

For these standards to be effective given the way that they were rolled out, schools and the public need to appreciate that over the next decade or so, students each year will be coming to the classroom with ever-increasing exposure to a college- and career-ready curriculum. Therefore, instruction will need to change annually. This is a good thing. However, it speaks to the need for a continuous eye towards implementation. The discussants make clear that there are certain fundamental tools—including ongoing professional development, support from leadership at the district level and more—that will need constant attention.

Current State of Play in Implementation

In general, there is a clearly articulated need for continued support to ensure successful standards implementation. What does that mean? Where are we now? What is going well and can be built upon? What has been ignored or poorly addressed?

> 66 **Students who struggle have a tendency to act out more in class. Students who struggle have a tendency to not come to school as often. What are we doing to provide systems of support? Because that, to me, is another important piece that we have to marry with the Common Core to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all of our students.** 99

Our discussants repeatedly emphasized that this change is significant in scope and that implementation has highlighted many long-standing structural issues. Many issues that were challenges before—including student poverty, over-emphasis on standardized assessments and under-investment in high-quality professional learning for teachers and other school leaders—are now even more significant because of the need to make deep and rapid changes.

One example: funding. These educators made clear that resources matter and that funding inequalities contribute to lower achievement levels. Some schools have resources to allow teachers and principals to attend conferences, to engage their faculty in comprehensive school redesign, to purchase new materials and to change school personnel to reflect the need for new skills and knowledge to implement the standards. Other schools are still trying to shake off the effects of the 2008 recession, using out-of-date textbooks and other materials. They may have little or no money for professional development. Given the magnitude of the changes that the standards require (for example, the focus in English/language arts has shifted from simply passing a reading assessment to reading content and writing both descriptively and persuasively), schools with scant resources face a daunting challenge.

Another example: meeting every student's needs. One of the key challenges that all educators face, regardless of their state standards, is how to make a difference in the learning outcomes of high-needs children, including children who are living in poverty, disabled and/or have a first language that is not English, as well as those suffering from emotional turmoil caused by mental health issues or from changes in their environment. While one of the most promising elements of CCRS is the focus on challenging students with interesting and demanding materials, there is concern that students who are struggling are not being served effectively. At the same time, programs that can be a bridge to engage struggling students in school and help them understand the connection to their future (for example, through the arts or career internships) are being cut in many places.

In addition to the systemic issues that educators continue to face, discussants also identified several key areas specific to standards implementation where challenges exist.

Teacher Professional Learning

Much of the practitioners' conversation revolved around the need for teachers to have ongoing access to the education and learning opportunities they need. Our discussants especially want to bring down the walls that separate PK-12 systems from colleges of teacher education and to reinforce a continuous learning system for educators. For example, one educator cited the challenges her district faced with elementary math instruction under the Common Core and suggested that the colleges that produce her district's teachers offer more courses in both math and how to teach it.

Another suggested requiring teaching candidates to have more extensive experience in the classroom from the beginning of their programs and ensuring that candidates' in-classroom experience weighs heavily in their performance. A third called for designing student teaching programs that reflect the medical model, with internships and paid residencies. Discussants agreed that early education and PK-12 systems need resources to partner with teacher education programs in support of mentoring and in-service activities, so that current teachers and teacher educators can continually learn from each other.

Given the considerable changes in instruction required by the standards, discussants also agreed that significant

> 66 Nothing is going to help us reach the standards except a change of instruction in the classroom. And the only way we can do that is to educate the teachers in the classroom. 99

> 66 I've been in the classroom for 27 years, and what we are expecting people to do in the classroom…I am thinking right now outside of my realm. We need to know the standards, we need to know what to do with the standards, we need the technology base. There are so many changes in so many areas, and I can say the level of support we give the people in the classroom is minimal. It really is an overwhelming task. 99

> 66 With high quality and consistent professional development and support, educators are becoming more professional and—without a doubt—better teachers. 99

professional learning opportunities for those already in the classroom (in addition to pre-service preparation) are critical to successful implementation—and are currently missing in a number of states and districts across the country. This thread wove throughout the conversations, arising in later discussions on technology, curriculum and other issues. The group agreed that these opportunities need to be ongoing (not "drive-by PD") and differentiated to meet educators where they are. They should also be collaborative, with educators working together and sharing resources. And schools need the resources to support this learning.

Misunderstanding

Another area of high concern is the lack of public understanding of what standards are and are not, which discussants believe is hurting their work. They believe standards are seen as a bogeyman, which creates a massive reluctance to make the investments needed for successful implementation.

Participants cited a number of key areas of misinformation. One is the conflation of standards with testing, which causes many people to disregard the standards. That relationship needs to be clarified. Another is math, with parents questioning why math is being taught differently from the way they learned it. Educators need to provide accessible insight into the rationale for this approach and its effectiveness. A third is creativity. Many believe that the standards have killed creativity; the education community needs to highlight how creativity for students and teachers is addressed in the standards and is, in fact, flourishing under them.

> 66 **If I had two cents for every time I explained the difference between standards and curriculum, I wouldn't be working.** 99

Discussants also noted that parents and teachers are concerned about children struggling to meet the standards. However, these educators emphasize that struggle is a positive sign; it indicates we are encouraging rigor and empowering students to work through it.

An example cited as a replicable communications initiative is ReadyKentucky, which is sponsored by a nonprofit advocacy group to help educators, parents,

civic leaders and other Kentuckians understand the state's public school standards. ReadyKentucky also provides insight into the tests that are given to measure student performance on those standards and offers ways to use test scores to help students, schools and districts improve.

> 66 **In the past, there was a mentality that there was one right way to do a math problem. Now, I see children attacking a problem in different ways, and being able to explain to one another how they got their answer, which may be different from how someone else got their answer, and that's okay.** 99

School and District Leadership

Effective school building leadership is seen as critical for the successful implementation of new standards. Participants shared examples of what happens when schools have effective leadership, and what happens when they do not. One area in which leadership is seen as particularly important is in establishing a school's culture, especially given the need for a new focus on the transferable skills that college- and career-ready standards emphasize, rather than memorizing facts.

> 66 **It's new to administrators to even use the language.** 99

Discussants also mentioned the impact of leadership transitions. Most participants were aware of frequent shifts in school board members, superintendents and principals, and several cited examples of how programs get off track during those times. A few were also aware that this turmoil is increasing as both school and district leaders are turning over more frequently than they have in the past.

One solution to the challenges in this arena is ensuring that school- and district-level leaders have the professional learning opportunities that they need to lead this change. In many places, professional learning has

been offered only to teachers, but there are significant changes that administrators must work through to ensure successful implementation.

> ❝ One of the big questions that my teachers are struggling with is, "What more can I do?" I need to be able to answer that question. ❞

Assessment and Accountability

Another important and multi-dimensional issue is the role of assessment in standards implementation. As mentioned previously, assessments are linked to the evaluation of teachers and administrators in many states. In addition, federally required assessments are used to determine which schools are doing well and which schools are deemed "failing."

Educators and parents have long questioned not only the consequences associated with these assessments, but the usefulness of them. Of high concern is that it has historically taken months for a school system and individual students to get test results. This means that there is no effective link between students' test scores and the resulting consequences that impact a school or teacher long after those students have left. It also means that there is no way to use information gleaned from these assessments to improve a particular student's learning. Many discussants believe that formative assessments, which provide more accurate and useful information to educators at various points throughout the year, have a greater value than the end-of-year summative assessments that receive much more attention.

> ❝ To me, assessment means a portfolio. It is more than one test. It is many different tests—many different demonstrations of knowledge by students. ❞

With Common Core, the federal government supported the creation of two major testing services, Smarter Balanced and PARCC. Both assessments are designed to be given online, and there have been many challenges in implementing them as intended. One possible benefit to each is the potential to process results faster. One concern, though, is that given the politics surrounding the standards and these tests, states

are dropping these assessments. The continual shift in testing makes it impossible for states and schools to accurately measure progress.

> ❝ Our kids are more than a test. We should be about a multi-metric, research-based approach to readiness and accountability. ❞

There is also a greater concern that these assessments are part of an accountability system in which one test has many consequences—where one score inappropriately serves as a school report card and an indicator of teacher quality to families and the public despite not telling the whole story of a student's (or school's) knowledge, skills, growth and performance. Discussants unanimously agreed that standardized assessments are just one data point and preferred a multi-metric approach to measuring student success. Several also cited the importance of portfolios, especially when it comes to writing. One participant noted Kentucky's accountability system as a model—it has, for many years, included multiple components across different subjects (including program reviews in the arts and vocational studies), as well as student growth, graduation rates and college and career readiness.

Another practitioner shared a different approach to gauging student success: Redefining Ready. This set of indicators was developed after a comprehensive review of existing research on what it means to be college or career ready and offers a way to measure readiness that has much greater validity and utility than one standardized test score. The discussants thought it was an example that could be used by other schools and districts. While the model currently focuses on high school students, they agreed that the readiness conversation applies at the elementary level as well, where students are currently placed in classrooms based on chronological age rather than the skills they've mastered.

Curriculum

Significantly, members of the Practitioner Think Tank emphasized that curriculum is a local decision and that the new standards required significant changes to it. They also said that the work fell mainly on them—teachers and administrators—and that they need time to make the right decisions about how to change

> **Some of the resources that we're given by the district are not good resources, and it is almost like we reinvent the wheel every single day.**

curriculum to best meet the needs of their students. They noted that what is useful in one setting is frequently not in another. They also pointed out that even curriculum purchased by a district often needs to be adapted to align with college- and career-ready standards.

In addition, teachers are increasingly using materials they find online to supplement or supplant the curriculum purchased by their districts. Several cited the resources produced through New York State's EngageNY initiative as particularly useful.

> **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.**

While the discussants encourage educator autonomy and the idea of exploring other resources, they also recognize that not all resources purporting to be CCRS-aligned are of high quality. They want to ensure that teachers are able to critically evaluate whether the materials they find are truly aligned to their state standards—a skill that will come if educators have the deep professional learning opportunities advocated by this group. They also called for a rating system—for both materials available online and those available for purchase—that will allow educators to quickly determine whether they are truly aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.

In addition, discussants noted that there seems to be more standards-appropriate curriculum for language arts. They have found it harder to obtain the materials they need in mathematics, particularly at the elementary level.

> **The internet is flooded with materials targeted at classroom teachers and claiming to be aligned to the Common Core.**

Technology

The practitioners raised a number of key issues around technology and standards implementation. The first regards online testing and technical challenges. While there are a few reports of entire states having to cancel or reschedule testing, or make last-minute migrations back to paper and pencil testing for a variety of reasons, there are also several reports of online testing failing in specific buildings because local systems couldn't (and in some places, still can't) handle the bandwidth requirements and for other reasons related to a lack of technical capacity. Given the differing access to technology that districts and schools have, discussants suggested that rolling out future online assessments more slowly would be beneficial.

The second area of concern regards online testing and technology instruction in the classroom. When students do not regularly use technology in their learning, they are not as aware of how it works and should be used during a test. This means that online testing may be measuring their technical prowess rather than what they've learned or can do.

Both of these concerns could be mitigated if schools had more access to the technology they need for instruction. Discussants agreed that online testing, when implemented well, is desirable for a number of reasons—one of which is that teachers, students and families can get results more quickly than they have in the past.

A third major issue regards educator use of technology. While teachers are increasingly leveraging technology to support instruction, including through web-based

> **It's not just about folks having the content or the pedagogy knowledge to find a resource and implement it well, it's also about educating our teaching staff about online safety and the real need to be very vigilant to protect student privacy.**

instructional resources, many states and districts are providing insufficient professional development to teachers in this arena. Issues of particular concern include ensuring that educators understand the standards themselves, can accurately judge whether a material labeled Common Core-aligned actually is, and grasp student privacy, which is a constantly evolving challenge for both vendors and districts.

> 66 **We don't want teachers to use technology to replace what they were already doing. We want them to use technology to get deeper learning out of kids.** 99

Additional technology-related issues that were touched on include the digital divide (the lack of devices and/or internet access that less-advantaged and rural students may face at school and at home) and the low technical capacity of some school staff, which disadvantages their students in the learning opportunities that technology presents.

Discussion of Recommendations

Implementing changes to curriculum and instruction is very different from the adoption of college- and career-ready standards. Standards are goals that are used to guide the development of curriculum, and curriculum is used to guide instruction. As our discussants made clear, the standards set worthy goals—but their implementation will take constant adjustments.

The successful implementation of college- and career-ready standards will not happen quickly or without significant deliberate effort. As previously discussed, in most places the standards have been rolled out so that all students, regardless of grade level and prior exposure to the concepts covered by the standards, are working with the more demanding curriculum that their school has adopted. It will take 12 years for a system to graduate students who have had full exposure to a curriculum based on college- and career-ready standards. During that time, there needs to be continued changes in professional development, curriculum and the additional components of standards implementation. This is not a single variable change.

For many students, there will be additional challenges. Some do not know when their next meal is coming, do not have a permanent home, or are dealing with other severe stresses to their physical and mental health. Over seven million students are identified as having a disability that requires an individualized education plan. Children whose home language is not English frequently need three years or more to make a transition. How does a highly rigorous curriculum fit into a classroom with students who need a different approach or require more time to master the expanded challenges reflected in college- and career-ready standards?

Additionally, educators face an ongoing challenge of how to balance the high demands of CCRS with the needs of those students who are far behind. When there is a significant deficit, the first impulse of many is to use a remedial approach. Yet, we also know that learning is more interesting when it is challenging. All too often, as our discussants pointed out, the kids who need the most engagement and support get the dullest of lessons. How will educators find the balance of demanding and interesting, while also providing access to an education based on mastery of specific standards?

This work is and will continue to be hard. The purpose of CCRS is to give each child access to the education they need to be effective after their time in school. It can be done, but only if the needed tools are a part of each school's repertoire of responses. It will take more than a focus on assessment and accountability. More than anything, it requires providing schools with the ongoing resources and supports needed to change.

As evidenced by the conversations during this process, there are major differences among states and districts regarding the regulations and requirements that dictate how higher standards (and the components of the education system that support them, including assessments, accountability systems, professional development, teacher preparation and more) are implemented. From the variety of experiences as this process has begun, much has been learned. Some of this learning points to the need for continued change and provides a useful starting point for moving forward.

> 66 **I think in the big scheme of things, this is the direction we want education to be going.** 99

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.

Successful implementation of college- and career-ready standards will require sustained investments of time and other scarce resources into professional development and curriculum development. It will require refining use of assessments, focusing on each student, and maintaining our state-based goals. This will not be easy, and it will require political courage. Over the last 50 years, the nation has seen education goals change with each national, state and local election. It is time to turn away from the easy distraction of establishing new goals. It is time to make the changes that will make a difference.

Appendix

Process

The Practitioner Think Tank project was designed to gather information from the education community regarding the state of implementation of Common Core and other college- and career-ready standards as of spring 2016. It followed a very specific model that 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 Think Tank included a cross-section of education practitioners, each of the then-15 member organizations that make up the Learning First Alliance, which together represent the local stakeholders working with and on behalf of students every day, was asked to nominate two of its own members to participate. The criteria for the nominees were that they be:

- Constituents of the organization nominating them (such as principals, teachers, school counselors, superintendents, etc.)

- Able to speak to best practices in college- and career-ready standards implementation at the school, district or state level

Thirty individuals were nominated and contacted. Of that group, 22 actively participated.

The process included:

- **Conducting an online survey** to generate an initial list of discussion topics.

- **Developing an internal website** to provide a platform for online discussions and the sharing of reports, articles and information on locally developed programs. All members of the group were encouraged to use and to post on the worksite.

- **Creating an email distribution list** to allow for peer-to-peer interactions.

- **Holding a commencement webinar** to share survey findings, provide background information gleaned from recent research and answer questions about the Think Tank purpose and process.

- **Conducting a series of phone calls over three weeks.** Since the group was large, geographically dispersed, and representing a wide range of professional responsibilities that could interfere with participation, phone calls were scheduled with two options per week, one during the business day and one in the evening. The subject matter was the same for each call for the week. The calls moved from being highly structured in questions and expected responses in the first week to being more open-ended in the following sessions. On each, the moderator tested summative statements and got feedback from the group.

  - **Week One:** Calls were designed to allow each participant to introduce themselves and respond to questions generated by the initial survey.

  - **Week Two:** While there were initial core questions, the moderator intentionally remained silent to invite new questions and observations from the practitioners, allowing for ideas to be challenged by participants. At the conclusion of the discussion, the moderator introduced ideas from the research to gauge the Think Tank's view of those offerings.

  - **Week Three:** Calls allowed the group to discuss observations shared through emails, web postings and previous telephone conversations. Other than for clarifications, the moderator introduced little new information.

- **Circulating notes** after each call, with questions included in the text to request clarifications and additional details or to generate different perspectives.

- **Summarizing the group's discussions.** A draft of this summary was shared with participants, who offered revisions ranging from minor editorial comments to significant changes to the text.

- **Convening an in-person meeting,** bringing four of the practitioners to Washington, DC, to meet with a group of policy professionals representing Alliance member organizations to discuss the findings from the field and how their recommendations for action should be presented.

- **Drafting a final report,** which was shared with the entire Think Tank and the Learning First Alliance Board of Directors and revised based on their feedback.

- **Finalizing the report,** with recommendations summarized into a four-page brief and an appendix added to provide further information on the process, background material and other resources.

Nominees

Several individuals nominated to participate in the Think Tank were uncomfortable with being publicly associated with a process designed to improve implementation of the Common Core and other college- and career-ready standards, given the political climates in their communities. Therefore, participation was anonymous. No comments are attributed to any individual. Participants are not identified by name, but by role and school district or (in cases where that affiliation could lead to easy identification) state. They include:

- **Curriculum and practice coordinator from a Missouri school district**
- **Elementary school principal from a Maryland school district**
- **School board member from a New York school district**
- **Education professor at a Kentucky university**
- **Middle school teacher from a South Dakota school district**
- **High school teacher from a Missouri school district**
- **Teachers union president from an Ohio school district**
- **Education technology director from a Pennsylvania school district**
- **High school principal from a Florida school district**
- **Elementary school principal from a Maryland school district**
- **Association executive from Tennessee**
- **PTA leader from Florida**
- **School counselor from a Missouri school district**
- **General manager from a Texas school district**
- **Elementary school principal from a New York school district**
- **Superintendent from a South Dakota school district**
- **Elementary school teacher from a California school district**
- **Title I director from a North Carolina school district**
- **Middle school principal from an Arizona school district**
- **Elementary reading specialist from a New York school district**
- **State official from Missouri**
- **Instructional coach from a Colorado school district**
- **Superintendent from an Illinois school district**
- **High school principal from a Rhode Island school district**
- **PTA leader from Ohio**
- **School counselor from a North Carolina school district**
- **Superintendent from a Montana school district**
- **Elementary school teacher from a New York school district**

In-Person Participants

Jacki Ball, Director of Government Affairs, National PTA

Anne Byrne, Past-President, National School Boards Association; Member, Nanuet Union Free School District, New York

Dorie Combs, Retired Professor of Education, Eastern Kentucky University

Jayne Ellspermann, President-Elect, National Association of Secondary School Principals; Principal, Westport High School, Ocala, Florida

Amanda Fitzgerald, Director of Public Policy, American School Counselor Association (ASCA)

Heidi Glidden, Manager, Educational Issues Department, American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

MaryAnn Jobe, Director, Leadership Development, AASA, The School Superintendents Association

Melissa Mayville, Ph.D., Senior Policy/Program Analyst, Literacy/Standards, National Education Association (NEA)

Kelly Pollitt, Chief Strategist, Policy & Alliances, National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

Debra Wright, Elementary Teacher, Middle Country School District, New York

Resources Cited

EngageNY, a website developed and maintained by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to support implementation of key aspects of the New York State Board of Regents Reform Agenda, including the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The site provides educators with real-time, professional learning tools and resources to support them in reaching the State's vision for a college- and career-ready education for all students. https://www.engageny.org/.

ReadyKentucky, an information initiative to help educators, parents, civic leaders and other Kentuckians understand the state's public school standards, the tests given to measure student performance on those standards and ways to use test scores to help students, schools and districts improve. http://prichardcommittee.org/our-advocacy-focus/collegecareer-ready/readykentucky/.

Redefining Ready!, a national campaign launched by the AASA, The School Superintendents Association, to introduce new research-based metrics (including Advanced Placement coursework, Algebra II, early college credits, industry credentials, attendance and community service, among others) to more appropriately assess that students are college-ready, career-ready and life-ready than a single test score can. http://www.redefiningready.org/.

Unbridled Learning Accountability Model, an approach to assessment and accountability that incorporates many aspects of school and district work and is organized around the Kentucky Board of Education's four strategic priorities: next-generation learners, next-generation professionals, next-generation support systems and next-generation schools/districts. http://education.ky.gov/comm/UL/Pages/default.aspx.

Background Material

Achieve (2014). Voter Perceptions: Common Core Standards & Tests. Washington, DC: Achieve. Retrieved from http://www.achieve.org/publications/voter-perceptions-common-core-state-standards-tests.

> This poll shows that in 2014, solid majorities of voters supported common standards, common assessments, and allowing teacher and students time to adjust to these new expectations.

Doorey, N. & Polikoff, M. (2016). Evaluating the Content and Quality of Next Generation Assessments. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved from https://edexcellence.net/publications/evaluating-the-content-and-quality-of-next-generation-assessments.

> This report examines previously unreleased items from three multi-state tests (ACT Aspire, PARCC and Smarter Balanced) and one best-in-class state assessment (Massachusetts' state exam, MCAS) to determine whether the tests reflect strong content and are rigorous, as well as to identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Hamilton, L.S., Kaufman, J.H., Stecher, B.M., Naftel, S., Robbins, M., Thompson, L.E., Garber, C., Faxon-Mills, S., & Opfer, V.D. (2016). What Supports Do Teachers Need to Help Students Meet Common Core State Standards for Mathematics? Findings from the American Teacher and American School Leader Panels. Santa

Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1404.html.

> This report documents the extent to which teachers are expected to address new mathematics standards in their instruction, teachers' familiarity with these standards, the professional development (PD) opportunities they report receiving, and the PD opportunities they think they need to help them implement standards effectively.

Kane, T.J., Owens, A.M., Marinell, D.R., Thal, D.R.C, & Staiger, D.O. (2016). Teaching Higher: Educators' Perspectives on Common Core Implementation. Cambridge, MA: Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University. Retrieved from http://cepr.harvard.edu/teaching-higher.

> The Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University surveyed a representative sample of teachers in five states as they prepared their students to take new Common Core-aligned assessments in the spring of 2015, asking teachers and principals about the types and amounts of professional development they received; the textbooks they were using; the online resources they found most helpful; and the alignment between Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and teacher evaluations. The report also examines how each of the above is related to students' performance on the new assessments.

Kaufman, J.H., Hamilton, L.S., Stecher, B.M., Naftel, S., Robbins, M., Thompson, L.E., Garber, C., Faxon-Mills, S., & Opfer, V.D. (2016). What Supports Do Teachers Need to Help Students Meet Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy? Findings from the American Teacher and American School Leader Panels. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1374.html.

> This report provides educators' perspectives on their readiness and needs for support to help students meet state standards. Among other things, the surveys asked about teachers' preparedness to help their students meet the standards, the focus of their current professional development, and additional teacher professional development needs related to state English language arts and literacy standards.

Loveless, T. (2016). 2016 Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning? Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/research/2016-brown-center-report-on-american-education-how-well-are-american-students-learning/.

> Part one of the report assesses the relationship between the strength of Common Core implementation and NAEP scores in grades four and eight.

Martin, C., Marchitello, M., & Lazarín, M. (2016). Roadmap for a Successful Transition to the Common Core in States and Districts. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2014/06/25/92545/roadmap-for-a-successful-transition-to-the-common-core-in-states-and-districts/.

> The Center for American Progress recommends that states and districts focus on nine critical steps to effectively translate college- and career-ready standards into high-quality instruction. The report also provides examples of states or districts tackling each of the actions outlined by these recommendations.

Perry, R., Finkelstein, N., Seago, N., Heredia, A., Sobolew-Shubin, S., & Carroll, C. (2015). Taking Stock of Common Core Math Implementation: Supporting Teachers to Shift Instruction – Insights from the Math in Common 2015 Baseline Survey of Teachers and Administrators. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. Retrieved from https://www.wested.org/resources/taking-stock-common-core-math-implementation/.

> WestEd surveyed more than 1,000 teachers and administrators in eight California school districts participating in the Math in Common (MiC) initiative (a five-year initiative that supports a formal network of 10 California school districts as they implement the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics across grades K–8) to learn their perspectives on implementation of the math standards.

Phillips, G. (2016). National Benchmarks for State Achievement Standards. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.air.org/resource/national-benchmarks-state-achievement-standards.

> This report uses national benchmarking as a common metric to examine state achievement

standards and compare how high these standards are compared to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) achievement levels. The study also benchmarks the achievement standards of Smarter Balanced, PARCC and ACT Aspire.

Rentor, D.S. & Kober, N. (2014). Common Core State Standards in 2014: Curriculum and Professional Development at the District Level. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy. Retrieved from http://www.cep-dc. org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=441.

> This report, based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of school districts in Common Core-adopting states, examines districts' efforts to develop and implement CCSS-aligned curricula and to provide professional development to teachers and principals.

Learning First Alliance Resources

Since 2014, the Learning First Alliance has been highlighting best practices in college- and career-ready standards implementation while engaging the greater education community and the general public in discussions on what it will take to get it right. Resources include:

"Get It Right" Podcast Series, which features interviews with teachers, principals, superintendents, PTA leaders, state officials and others sharing their stories of standards implementation. http://www.learningfirst.org/commoncore/podcast.

Local Perspectives, written Q&As with education practitioners and parent leaders across the country on how the Common Core and other college- and career-ready standards are impacting schools and communities. http://www.learningfirst.org/CommonCoreLocalPerspectives.

Virtual Convenings, including webinars, live conversations and Twitter Town Halls, that engage educators, administrators, parents and other stakeholders in discussions about specific aspects of standards implementation. http://www.learningfirst.org/CommonCoreVirtualConvenings.

Getting Common Core Right: What We've Learned, a January 2015 report detailing key lessons learned on standards implementation from our conversations with the education community and the general public. http://www.learningfirst.org/sites/default/files/assets/WhatWe%27veLearnedFINAL.pdf.

Learning First Alliance Member Organization Resources

Members of the Learning First Alliance have developed a number of resources to aide in the implementation of college- and career-ready standards, including those listed below. Unless otherwise noted, these resources are free and available to the general public.

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

Common Core State Standards (ongoing). http://aacte. org/resources/common-core-state-standards. AACTE has developed resources, including webinars, for colleges of education to support curriculum and programmatic changes to align with new state standards.

EdPrep Matters: Common Core (ongoing). http://edprepmatters.net/?s=Common+core. These blog posts highlight connections between college- and career-ready standards and colleges of teacher education, including the role of teacher educators in standards implementation.

Panel Discussion on College- and Career-Ready Standards and ESSA (June 2016). https://secure.aacte. org/apps/rl/res_get.php?fid=2690&ref=res. This session at AACTE's State Leaders Institute examines the intersection of college- and career-ready standards and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), with emphasis on how colleges of education can prepare future teachers to work in standards-based environments.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

School Administrator magazine (June 2015). http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=37332. This issue of the award-winning magazine focuses on assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards, addressing issues such as the anticipated drops in test scores and sharing stories of how districts are moving forward with new assessments.

Common Core and Other State Standards (June 2014). http://aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/AASA_CCSS_Report.pdf. A survey of the nation's superintendents finds that they are optimistic about the new standards but believe they need more support to implement them well.

School Administrator magazine (May 2014). http://aasa.org/content.aspx?id=33106. This issue of the award-winning magazine focuses on the Common Core, addressing topics such as communicating about the standards and finding aligned curricula.

American Federation of Teachers

Literacy: The Keys to Success (2016). These resources help explain to parents the standards (or expectations) for what children should know and be able to do while reading literature and nonfiction (informational) texts, and then writing about and discussing what they have read. They are available for:

• **Elementary School Parents** (grades K-2): http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/literacytips_k-2.pdf

• **Elementary School Parents** (grades 3-5): http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/literacytips_3-5.pdf

• **Middle School Parents**: http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/literacytips_middle.pdf

A Teachers' Guide to the Common Core (2015). http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ccss_resource_guide.pdf. A resource guide for success in English Language Arts for teachers who work with English learners and students with disabilities.

Module Descriptions for the Common Core Resource Kit (2014). http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ccss_catalog.pdf. AFT Professional Development designed to provide teachers with a deeper understanding to meet the needs of students in reaching the new state standards.

American School Counselor Association

Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student (2015). http://schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/about-asca/mindsets-behaviors. The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness and social/emotional development.

Consortium for School Networking

Raising The BAR: Becoming Assessment Ready: Case Studies (2014). Available with creation of free online account at https://netforum.avectra.com/eweb/shopping/shopping.aspx?site=cosn&webcode=shopping&cart=0&shopsearchCat=Merchandise&productCat=Assessment&sort=name. These case studies detail how three school districts are preparing for high-stakes online assessments.

Digital Equity Action Toolkit (2016). Available with creation of free online account at http://www.cosn.org/digital-equity-action-toolkit-february-2016. This toolkit offers historical context and addresses broader implications of household connectivity while sharing actions and approaches school districts can take to pursue digital equity.

International Society for Technology in Education

Meeting the Common Core Technology Standards, K-2 (2016). Available for purchase at https://www.iste.org/resources/product?id=3759. The authors show teachers in grades K-2 how to integrate the tech-related language found within the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) into their everyday curriculum.

7 Ways to Address Common Core Tech Standards (2016). https://www.iste.org/explore/articleDetail?articleid=720. This article offers seven tips to help teachers start meeting Common Core technology standards.

Tech Out Your Class: 6 Projects to Meet Common Core & ISTE Standards (2016). Available for purchase at https://www.iste.org/resources/product?id=3785. The author walks educators through six technology-rich, customizable projects aligned to Common Core and ISTE Standards. One, on using screencasting to help students show what they know, is highlighted in a free blog post at https://www.iste.org/explore/articleDetail?articleid=663.

Learning Forward

Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core (ongoing). https://learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core#.V7YvWY-cGUn. This multidimensional initiative is focused on developing a comprehensive system of professional learning, providing resources and tools to assist states, districts and schools in providing effective professional learning for current and future education reforms.

Meet the Promise of Content Standards: Developing a Comprehensive Professional Learning System (2013). https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/commoncore/compsystembrief.pdf?sfvrsn=2. Introduce stakeholders at any level to the concept of a comprehensive professional learning system with this brief, which outlines an infrastructure for developing individual, school, team and school system capacities needed to ensure success for all educators and their students.

Meet the Promise of Content Standards: Professional Learning Required (2011). https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/read-the-brief-(pdf).pdf.

This brief details the critical attributes of professional learning necessary to achieve the vision of college- and career-ready standards, and it addresses the need for long-term commitment and resource investments from the nation and each state to achieve that vision.

National Association of Elementary School Principals

Common Core State Standards Resources (ongoing). http://www.naesp.org/common-core-state-standards-resources. NAESP's resource page includes tools—such as webinars, checklists and supports for teachers—to help principals successfully implement college- and career-ready standards.

Principal magazine (September/October 2015). https://www.naesp.org/principal-septemberoctober-2015-managing-teacher-talent/principal-septemberoctober-2015-managing-tea. This issue of the award-winning magazine features two articles on Common Core implementation, one highlighting the importance of a culture of reflection for staff and one discussing support for students on the autism spectrum.

Principal magazine (January/February 2014). https://www.naesp.org/principal-januaryfebruary-2014-assessments-evaluations-and-data/principal-januaryfebruary-2014-asses. This issue addresses topics related to new college- and career-ready standards-aligned assessments.

Twelve Key Common Core Shifts: Action Steps for Principals (January 2013). https://www.naesp.org/communicator-january-2013-final/twelve-key-common-core-shifts-action-steps-principals. An action brief offers a primer on the Common Core standards and twelve key schoolwide changes that must occur with implementation.

Principal magazine (September/October 2012). https://www.naesp.org/principal-septoct-2012-common-core/principal-septoct-2012-common-core. This issue of the award-winning magazine is dedicated to Common Core, featuring solutions, tips and top resources for school-level standards implementation, including principles to consider when working with students with disabilities and research-based ideas for implementing new English language arts standards.

National Association of Secondary School Principals

College- and Career-Ready Standards (ongoing). https://www.nassp.org/advocacy/learn-the-issues/college-and-career-ready-standards. NASSP resources help principals to understand and implement college- and career-ready standards.

National Education Association

Common Core State Standards (ongoing). http://www.nea.org/commoncore. This collection of resources includes both NEA materials (including factsheets, articles, guides for working with families and more) and links to external sites that include resources to help implement college- and career-ready standards in the classroom.

National PTA

Common Core State Standards webpage (ongoing). http://www.pta.org/commoncore. This page collects the National PTA's resources on Common Core and other college- and career-ready standards, including videos, webinars, state assessment guides, articles of interest, position statements and more.

5 Pillars of Successful Implementation (2015). http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-pta/files/production/public/Advocacy/CCSSIToolkit/Standards%20-%205%20Pillars%20of%20Successful%20Implementation.pdf. This report outlines five areas where states must focus to ensure higher standards have the supports needed for successful implementation.

Moving Beyond the Bubble (2014). http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-pta/files/production/public/PTA%20Assessment%20Factsheet%20FINAL.pdf. This two-page factsheet explains why assessments are changing, how they are used and what parents should ask about them.

Video & Webinar Series (2013-2014). http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4158. http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3894. As part of their effort to provide accurate information about the Common Core, PTA designed this series of videos and webinars to educate parents on the standards and empower them to support the transition at school and at home.

Parents' Guides to Student Success (2013). http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583&navItemNumber=3363. Developed by teachers, parents and education experts in response to the Common Core, these guides provide clear, consistent expectations for what students should be learning at each grade K-8 and high school English, language arts/literacy and mathematics to be prepared for college and career.

National School Boards Association

Understanding the Common Core (ongoing). http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Policies/Understanding-the-Common-Core/Understanding-the-Common-Core-Standards-PDF.pdf NSBA's Center for Public Education has developed a compendium of resources to help explain what the standards are – and are not – and what states are doing to ensure all students graduate college and career ready.

On the Same Page, 2.0: Field Guide for Implementing College- and Career-Ready Standards through Labor-Management Collaboration (2015). http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Libraries/Document-Library/Common-Core/On-the-Same-Page-Effective-Implementation-of-College-and-Career-ready-Standards-Through-Labor-Mana.pdf Produced with AASA, AFT, CCSSO, Council of Great City Schools and NEA, this document provides a guide for educational stakeholders to work at a district, school and/or classroom level to implement higher standards systematically and systemically.

Out of Sync (2013). http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Policies/Understanding-the-Common-Core/Out-of-Sync-Many-Common-Core-states-have-yet-to-define-a-Common-Core-worthy-diploma. This report, co-produced by Change the Equation, highlights the misalignment between Common Core standards and state graduation requirements.

National School Public Relations Association

Common Core Communication Network (ongoing). http://www.nspra.org/commoncore/index. NSPRA organizes Common Core communication resources by topic and by resource type, offering both content for and ways to deliver messages about the standards.

Phi Delta Kappa International

Kappan's Common Core Writing Project (ongoing). http://www.kappancommoncore.org/. This forum allows educators to share their expertise on what it will take to implement the Common Core and other college- and career-ready standards well.

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/.

This report is available online at http://www.learningfirst.org/whereweareandwhereweregoing.

Learning First Alliance