

Informing and supporting parents, educators, service providers, and policymakers on topics related to special education

What New Standards Mean for Students with Disabilities California Common Core State Standards

A commitment to eliminating inequality is one of the principal rationales driving the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), according to David Coleman, a writer of the new standards and founder of Student Achievement Partners. As part of this commitment, “students with disabilities . . . must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers.”¹ The standards and their promise of equity have created a great deal of excitement in some quarters—and concern about the degree of necessary change in others.

However, according to Barbara Murchison, Administrator of the California Department of Education’s Common Core Systems Implementation Office, there is a great deal about the state’s standards and the system of education that remains familiar. Murchison sees the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as one point of stability. The IEP, which has been in place in schools nationwide since 1975, requires teachers and parents of students with disabilities—and often students themselves—to meet regularly to discuss

and agree on specific, clear educational goals for the student—what the student should know and be able to do. That, in essence, is “what establishing standards is all about,” says Murchison. “Our parents are used to the notion of setting and achieving goals” (see article page 11) so that working within a formal system of standards is hardly a new thing.

California first established educational standards in 1997. Yet, Murchison says, “the previous standards covered so much ground. These new standards are no longer a mile wide and an inch deep. Having fewer topics at each grade allows students and teachers more time to move through material thoughtfully and carefully, to read (and reread) closely, and to spend more time building conceptual understanding,” thus benefiting students who struggle to process information and students who are anxious about their ability to learn. The structure of the new standards also makes it easier to develop a coherent progression of goals. This coherence is supported, says Murchison, through “multiple opportunities for students to develop a full grasp of the material”—the cornerstone of Universal Design for Learning (see article page 3).

This issue of *The Special EDge* provides an overview of how instruction, the IEP, and assessments will change under the new CCSS—and of how these new standards promise to create a system that improves and enhances educational benefit for all students, especially for students with disabilities. ◀

1. *Application to Students with Disabilities*. <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf>

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Letter from the State Director

*The Common Core
State Standards have
changed what all
students will be
expected to learn and
how teachers will need
to teach.*



California is seeing important, simultaneous changes that will significantly influence the way students with disabilities are educated. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) represent one particularly sweeping change, as does the new assessment system that is being designed to measure student progress on the CCSS. In addition, the new federal

accountability system—specifically, the State Systemic Improvement Plan—now requires high-stakes measurement that goes beyond mere compliance with the law to account for a student's educational progress. Together, these changes serve to propel our educational system toward increased integration and fuller alignment with the original intents of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and, even more importantly, toward improved outcomes for all students.

The CCSS have changed what all students will be expected to learn and how teachers will need to teach. These changes give school administrators and teachers an opportunity to re-think—and re-emphasize—special education as that constellation of supports and services primarily designed to assist students' success in general education. This is their least restrictive environment (LRE). Fundamentally, special education was never intended to be a separate place, except for those very few students with unique needs. We are charged with implementing *one* educational system for *all* students.

To support success for students with disabilities in the LRE, we must improve general education practices and interventions by incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into classroom instruction and a Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) into school and district processes, both of which serve to successfully maintain students in the LRE and result in improved outcomes.

Efforts to implement the various components of CCSS make even clearer the importance of aligning the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with IDEA. Both of these critical pieces of federal legislation send consistent messages that all students need equal access to quality education and quality instruction, all students must be held to high standards of achievement, and all students must be measured appropriately by statewide assessments. Further, as we assess students, we must assess them on what is taught and in the way it is taught: assessment must be directly tied to instruction. The ability of teachers to determine what students need to know next is essential to the success of any assessment.

The CCSS and new statewide assessments are discussed throughout this issue, with special inserts targeting pertinent information for parents, students, teachers, and administrators. In addition, I invite you to periodically visit our Web site—<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/>—dedicated to providing Common Core resources and up-to-date information for special educators. With the numerous, ongoing changes, information sharing is critical to everyone's success.

Now is the time to come together, embrace the change, and renew our commitment, energy, and passion for serving students with disabilities. —Fred Balcom

Reflections: Universal Design for Learning and the Common Core

by David Rose, EdD, with Anne Meyer and David Gordon

Aren't the Common Core standards great for kids with disabilities? Aren't the Common Core standards inaccessible? Aren't they wholly in sync with Universal Design for Learning (UDL)? Don't they conflict with the core values of UDL?

Whenever I talk to educators these days—in Webinars and seminars, in my graduate class at Harvard, at conferences around the country—the subject of the Common Core State Standards invariably comes up. The standards always seem to get a strong reaction—some love them, others hate them, and others are bewildered by what they mean for education. Few responses are neutral.

The discussion reminds me of the one we had around No Child Left Behind (NCLB) a decade ago. Like the Common Core, the principles and aspirations of NCLB were promising for students with disabilities. For too long, these students had not been included in mainstream education. NCLB welcomed students with disabilities and other at-risk learners for the first time to attain the same standards as their peers—and vowed to hold schools accountable for achieving this. The Common Core presents a similar aspiration.

All good educational design begins with a clear purpose, and the Common Core helps define that purpose by providing a better idea of the baseline knowledge and skills we want everyone to learn. Only by clarifying our destination can we begin to map a plan.

But aspirations are not enough. With NCLB, the aspirations of the law soon ran aground in its execution, especially in the ways that large-scale standardized tests were used to “measure” and essentially punish failing schools. The same will happen with the Common Core if appropriate attention is not paid to how the standards are put into practice and how they are measured.

Any effort to meet the needs of struggling learners by simplifying the curriculum or lowering expectations would be misguided in three ways. First, lowered expectations are rarely positive for anyone (because they usually lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of lowered achievement), and the history of lowered expectations for students with disabilities has been especially diminishing. Second, research has sometimes shown that “simplified” curricula or language are often not actually simplified, because much of the meaning and the helpful context have been diluted. Lastly, there is a problematic underlying assumption: that the difficulties a student faces in a standards-based curriculum are the result of something broken or disabled in the student. UDL turns this assumption on its head by taking the position that it may be the curriculum that is broken or disabled. Through poor design, many curricular methods and materials are not adequate to the task of helping and guiding all students to reach high standards. Worse,

many impose unnecessary difficulties or outright barriers for some or all students, interfering with their opportunities for success.



While the Common Core can shape our expectations for the curriculum, it cannot answer the complex question facing classroom educators each day: how to guide students to reach those standards. Indeed, as the CCSS Web site clearly states, “The standards establish what students need to learn but they do not dictate how teachers should teach.”¹ They shouldn't.

That's not to say that efforts won't be made to dictate teaching and learning methods. In fact, most of the controversy around the standards has to do not with the standards themselves but with the testing, rating, and ranking of teachers that often accompanies the implementation of those standards. But such uses of the standards only threaten to undermine the aspirational purpose of the Common Core. A different approach is needed, one that is “tight on goals, loose on means,” as U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has put it.

So while the Common Core literature itself admits that an intended effect of the standards is “guiding educators toward curricula and teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subject and the skills they need to apply

(UDL continued on page 4)

1. Frequently Asked Questions. Common Core State Standards. <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>

(UDL continued from page 3)

their knowledge,”² the Common Core does not, for the most part, prescribe the means of achieving the standards.

This is where UDL can help. In developing the UDL principles and guidelines,³ we at CAST [the Center for Applied Special Technology] have defined curriculum as having four essential parts: goals, assessments, methods, and materials. Let’s consider these four components.

Goals

The standards simply provide a jumping off point. Clarifying what we want to accomplish—in the next 10 minutes, in the next lesson, in the next year—is where the challenging work of practice really begins. Goals are not the same as standards.

Well-designed standards articulate what the community values, but they also leave room for teachers to shape classroom goals and to individualize the means for achieving them. Deriving clear goals from standards requires understanding the core purpose of a standard and thinking flexibly about the means for attaining the standards.

As we write in our new book, *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*, (free with registration at <http://udltheorypractice.cast.org>), when applying the UDL framework, goals are unlinked from the means to achieve them so that teachers can effectively plan to provide multiple pathways to success.

For example, students may be asked to read *The Old Man and the Sea* and write a book report to demonstrate what they know about the novel. If the goal is not “writing” per se but rather demonstrating knowledge about the book, then a learning goal that explicitly calls for writing a book report is limiting the ways students can share what they know—and giving a leg up to those who are better at writing.

A tighter setting of that goal would allow learners to use different ways to “compose” a report, using different media that would allow them equal opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of the plot, characterization, setting, and so forth. Artwork, video, dramatic performance, or the traditional book report format may all be effective means of achieving that learning goal—while maintaining a high expectation for what is learned. Obviously, if the goal is the improvement of written expression, then every student should have the same challenge to practice writing. Here there are also many options and alternative pathways that would allow all students to focus on the right goal (high-level expression). Allowing students with dyslexia to use word-prediction and a spell-checker, for example, loosens the means (and broadens the opportunities) without lowering expectations.

Assessments

While state-mandated summative assessments get the most attention, a UDL approach pays more attention to well-crafted formative assessments—ones employed during instruction to gauge a learner’s progress. These are important because they tell us how to improve the methods and materials to meet our

objectives. And when intentionally included in instruction, they do so in a timely way.

In other words, the best assessments tell us how well the curriculum itself is performing, not just how a particular student is doing. Where students seem to be struggling or even failing, the first place to look for a disability is in the curriculum. Is the content or the presentation somehow limiting learning? Is a student needlessly constrained in the approaches she can take to complete a task? Are there reasons why a learner is losing interest or not persisting in the lesson?

Formative assessment gives teachers a concrete means of getting the data they need to inform their instructional decision making. They might use the results of a formative assessment to coach students in next steps, or to make them more aware of patterns or approaches in their learning that are unproductive. By modeling continuous reflection and monitoring, teachers can help students develop self-regulating strategies so that the students learn to do this for themselves.

Such assessments may be formal (quizzes) or informal (“How are you doing?”). Either way, formative assessments provide opportunities to identify places where the curriculum is failing a student—and to make appropriate adjustments before the student himself “fails.”

Methods

Likewise, appropriate instructional methods and materials are flexible and varied enough to accommodate the needs and quite-natural differences of individual learners. Learning environments that are not flexible in this way are themselves disabled: they cannot successfully provide

2. Frequently Asked Questions. Common Core State Standards. <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>

3. See the Universal Design for Learning Guidelines at <http://www.udlcenter.org/sites/udlcenter.org/files/updateguidelines2.0.pdf>

4. All of these learning tools are available free on the CAST Web site at www.cast.org/learningtools

students with the equal access to learning that those students rightly and legally deserve. One size never fits all. While all students deserve the same opportunities to meet high standards, they do not all have to reach those high standards in standardized ways. Multiple approaches, paths, and supports are needed to reach the highest standards for all students.

Experts in any field certainly don't all take the same path to success. The Rubik's Cube masters who have learned to solve the puzzle in record time all have the same goal: to arrange all six colors in solid blocks, one color to a side. Yet the different puzzlers employ different strategies to achieve their common goal. Some rely more on memory; others on physical dexterity to achieve record times. What these masters have in common is a commitment to continually evaluate their performance (in formative ways) and make adjustments in their methods and approaches that point them closer to the goal (solving the Cube fast!). They also share their strategies and findings, their successes and frustrations. In short, the community of Cube solvers is strong; mentoring and cooperation are givens.

In classrooms, too, educators can encourage collaboration as a way of enabling all learners to reach the same high standards. Peer-to-peer support gives mentors opportunities to reinforce their skills and knowledge by teaching others, while those who are mentored benefit from individualized coaching. Technology tools can enhance this approach, sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, we have seen students who are reluctant to speak up in a face-to-face setting become powerful leaders in a blogging environment.

Good teachers know that we need uniformly high standards, but not highly standardized methods, and especially not highly standardized students.

Materials

The deeper into the digital age we go, the more difficult it will become to remember when fixed media, especially print, shaped (some might say "warped") our understanding of what an effective learner is. Those who were "book smart"—who could function well in a print environment—succeeded. Those who struggled with print were shut out. Educational materials limited who could achieve the goals of learning.

New digital media provide many opportunities for teachers to reach and engage learners. And learners in the postprint age have direct access to high-quality audio and video, 3-D animations, digital graphic organizers and glossaries, instant links to background information and source material, and just-in-time supports such as text-to-speech—materials that previously were dispensed through textbooks or through teachers.

The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) requires that publishers provide flexible alternatives to print for qualifying students with "print disabilities." These alternatives provide a variety of paths to the same high standards for students who cannot see or successfully decode traditional textbooks. Such alternatives are essential for students with disabilities to reach the same high standards as their peers.

Teachers and students are not limited to even these many materials that publishers provide. They can now create their own digital books, videos, audio, and other materials easily and cheaply.

At CAST, we provide free tools to accomplish much of this, including UDL Book Builder, UDL Studio, and UDL Exchange.⁴ Providing multiple means of engagement, of action and expression, and of representation—the three principles of UDL—are all much more possible today.



The Common Core presents new challenges—and new opportunities—to improve education for all students, including those with disabilities. Changes in education policy in recent decades have guaranteed students with disabilities the right to participate and progress in the same standards-based curriculum as their nondisabled peers. That's a good thing. What we need to do now is find a way of dismantling the primary barrier to success: the one-size-fits-all curriculum, the disabled curriculum.

Students with disabilities and their peers and teachers need flexibility in the way learners are motivated and engaged, how standards-based content is presented, and the opportunities students have to approach learning tasks and express what they know. This flexibility—or, in a worst case, lack of it—will determine how successful we are in educating all students under the Common Core. ◀

About the author

David Rose is a developmental neuropsychologist and educator. In 1984, Dr. Rose co-founded CAST, a not-for-profit research and development organization. CAST's mission is to improve education for all learners through innovative uses of modern multimedia technology and contemporary research in the cognitive neurosciences. That work has grown into a new field called Universal Design for Learning. Dr. Rose has taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Education for nearly three decades.

The New Assessments

Standards, curriculum, and assessments: what to teach, how to teach it, and how to know if the teaching worked. For years, research has shown the important of coherence and alignment among the three.¹ The new California Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the accompanying assessments will go far toward advancing this kind of educational coherence.

The new standards themselves are internally coherent. They have been developed around a series of “progressions” that build upon each other as students move from one grade to the next.

Specifically, students in kindergarten will begin to learn a set of essential concepts and skills that they then deepen and refine through every subsequent grade, with close attention paid to what is developmentally appropriate at each level. David Steiner, founding director of the Institute for Education Policy at City University of New York, sees in this structure a “potential to bolster both skills and knowledge by encouraging sequenced, spiraled, content-rich curricula in the classroom.”² By the time students graduate from high school, they will have learned to their fullest potential those important problem-solving and critical-thinking skills that they will need in college, the workplace, and community life.

As the CCSS are introduced and taught, the majority of students in California, including most students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs),

will take Smarter Balanced assessments. These summative assessments were created to align directly to the new standards and will be accompanied by a Digital Library of Formative Tools and Practices. The library will offer numerous educational tools and resources, including formative assessments. The Smarter Balanced Consortium designed these resources with the belief that “putting good information about student performance in the hands of teachers can have a profound impact on instruction and—as a result—on student learning.”³

The new tests are able to provide information beyond a single grade level—both above and below—and report on the exact level of a student’s performance.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities may take an alternate assessment similar to the one created by the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), a multistate project that has based its assessment on alternate achievement standards that are aligned with the CCSS. The NCSC assessment, while not yet formally adopted by California, is currently being field tested in the state.

The goal of a new alternate assessment will be to ensure that students are achieving

1. *Ensuring What Is Tested Is Taught: Curriculum Coherence and Alignment*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Services, 2003.
2. David Steiner. “The New Common Core: How They Could Stop Patronizing Our Students.” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-m-steiner/the-new-common-core-asses_b_4809973.html
3. Andy Smarmick. May 2013. “By the Company It Keeps: Smarter Balanced.” Fordham University. <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-daily/common-core-watch/2013/by-the-company-it-keeps-smarter-balanced.html>
4. Smarter Balanced. <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/computer-adaptive-testing/>
- For more information about the NCSC, go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/cc/> and click on the “Alternate Assessment” tab.

increasingly higher academic outcomes and leaving high school ready for postsecondary options and community life. (See NCSC resources on page 10).

Adaptive Technology

The Smarter Balanced assessments will take advantage of new testing technology that does a number of things that are not possible with paper-and-pencil tests, with the intent to better serve students with disabilities. The new technology gives the tests the capacity to deliver information about student progress quickly to help teachers make decisions about instruction and supports. Probably the most innovative aspect of these new assessments involves the way they use computer-adaptive technology, which makes it possible for the tests to adjust questions throughout the testing process in direct response

to a student’s answers, individually tailoring sets of questions for each student. An additional advantage to adaptive testing is the way it is able to provide information beyond a single grade level—both above and below—and report on the exact level at which a student is performing. Adaptive technology makes it possible to provide the kind of specific information that is critical to determining student ability and progress. In short, the new assessments will deliver more accurate and useful scores for all students.⁴

Accommodations

The new tests and the technologies they employ will give traditionally low-performing students and students with disabilities an unprecedented opportunity to show what they know

(*Assessments* continued on page 8)



What Stays the Same

In Both Old and New Assessment Systems . . .

Tests are not timed.

Accommodations for testing must be listed in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The nature and names of the accommodations generally remain the same.

What Changes Will Be Made to California’s System of Student Assessments

Old System

Paper and pencil

One-dimensional

Based on California-only standards

Not coordinated between or among grade levels

Not aligned to college or work expectations

Used some technology in accommodations

Used few tools of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

New System

Computer based:

Requires

- Software, hardware, and sufficient bandwidth
- Keyboarding and basic word processing skills
- Computer literacy among teachers

Computer adaptive:

- Adjusts to the level of a student’s answers
- Registers what the student knows and doesn’t know

Based on nationally aligned standards

Designed like building blocks, grade by grade (progressions)

Aligned to college and work expectations

Most accommodations are built into the technology; accessibility features are integral, not “add-ons.”

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) tools are integral.

5. Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines. http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SmarterBalancedGuidelines_091113.pdf. See also a review of the research on testing accommodations for students with disabilities at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Smarter-Balanced-Students-with-Disabilities-Literature-Review.pdf>
- ▶ All of the Common Core State Standards are available at <http://www.corestandards.org>
 - ▶ Learn about the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) at https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/mediawiki/index.php/Instructional_Resources
 - ▶ A Matrix of Testing Accommodations is at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ai/caasppmatrix1.asp>
 - ▶ The California Online Field Test Administration Manual is at <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/CAASPP-Field-Test-Administration-Manual.pdf>
 - ▶ Accessibility and Accommodations Training Module is at <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/ca/field-tes-ca/resources/>
 - ▶ The system that gives administrators the tools they need to add and manage users and students participating in the Smarter Balanced test is called *TIDE: Information Distribution Engine*. Information about TIDE is at http://sbac.portal.airast.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Smarter_TIDE_UserGuide_Spring2014.pdf. An introductory online TIDE training is at <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/wp-content/uploads/presentations/TIDE/>

(Assessments continued from page 7)

and can do through various universal tools, supports, and accommodations, most of which are directly built into the assessment interface. Such universal tools as digital notepaper or scratch paper will be available for all students. Designated resources and supports—such as a translated pop-up glossary or a dictionary—will be available to students when appropriate; teachers and school personnel who know each child and the purpose of each assessment will be able to select the appropriate testing support. And for any student who has an accommodation (distinct from a designated support) listed in an IEP or 504 plan, that accommodation will be available to the student in the assessment. These tools include braille and closed captioning, among others.⁵

Shared Resources

In the development of the new standards and assessments, states have joined together in unprecedented numbers to pool resources and talents for the good of all students. As new resources and strategies are developed, participating states will continue to share them to enhance both instruction and assessments.

Preparation

To take the Smarter Balanced assessments, students will need to know basic computer and word-processing skills. Parents and teachers both will want to give students opportunities to practice these skills—at school,

at home, or at a local public library. The development of keyboarding and computer skills can be written into an IEP and will be useful not only in school but in many postsecondary education and employment settings.

Some students may already be familiar with online tests of some sort, and practice tests in both the Smarter Balanced and the NCSC are being provided around the state—although clearly the best way to prepare students for the new assessments is to teach them well in the Common Core State Standards.



Results

Rolling out anything in a state as large as California and in a system as multilayered as the public schools is challenging. But as the state grows into this more sophisticated—and more coherent—system of standards and assessments, California’s students with disabilities can be assured that “what is tested is taught,” and that what is tested and taught is what students actually need to know and be able to do in order to succeed as adults. ◀

Getting Ready for the Common Core:

Professional Development

The advent of the Common Core State Standards promises all of California's students—including those with disabilities—high-quality, standards-based instruction that will prepare them for college, career, and/or community life. For this promise to be realized, all teachers, including special educators, must receive training to understand these new standards and to incorporate them into their teaching. In fact, insufficient professional development is being cited as one of the primary reasons for the challenges the state of New York is currently facing in its rollout of the Common Core.

In particular, special educators need guidance in the best ways to modify goals for their students, while aligning those goals to the new standards. This knowledge does not just happen, nor does it trickle down from training that general

educators receive. In addition to participating fully in their school district's professional development events, special educators will want to contact their local County Offices of Education and their regional Diagnostic Centers to learn about other opportunities that can help them prepare to incorporate the new standards into their work with students with disabilities—from developing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to teaching in the classroom to creating an effective transition plan.

A wealth of professional development opportunities is also available at the click of a computer key. The list below features a small but critical sampling of the information and training available online and designed to help educators understand and prepare to successfully implement the Common Core. ◀

For Everyone

🔗 The California Department of Education lists dozens of resources on its Web site to support teachers, administrators, and parents as the state transitions to the new standards.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>

🔗 California Common Core State Standards Professional Learning Modules on the Brokers of Expertise Web site represent a collaborative effort between the California Department of Education and content and professional learning experts throughout California. The online modules are designed to help educators transition to the Common Core State Standards. Topics include standards for mathematics; reading informational texts; writing to inform, argue, and analyze; content literacy in history/social studies; Multitiered System of Supports for implementing the new standards; and more.

<http://myboe.org/portal/default/Group/Viewer/GroupView?action=2&gid=2996>

🔗 The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is designing the assessments that most students will take once the Common Core State Standards are implemented. The Smarter Balanced Digital Library will include professional learning and instructional materials. Its Web site provides an overview of the new assessments and allows teachers to sign up for the Smarter Balanced e-mail newsletter, which provides information on the development of the Digital Library.

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/k-12-education/teachers/>

🔗 Common Core Implementation Video Series, created by the Council of Chief State School Officers with the James B. Hunt Institute, describes important aspects of the new standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics.

http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Digital_Resources/Common_Core_Implementation_Video_Series.html

🔗 A database of The California Common Core State Standards on the Sacramento County Office of Education Web site—*eStandards*—provides quick and easy access to the new content standards for teachers, administrators, students, and parents. The site makes the standards available in multiple formats (Smartphone, iPhone, and iPad) and also features numerous resources in specific content areas for educators who are transitioning to the standards.

<http://scoecurriculum.net/estandards/>

🔗 Common Core State Standards for Mathematics: Shifts and Implications for Mathematics Instruction, from Student Achievement Partners, examines the ways in which mathematics instruction will change with the Common Core State Standards to include real-world applications and conceptual understanding.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/common-core-state-standards/id522706351>

For Special Educators

Common Core State Standards

Symposium for Special Educators, on the California Department of Education Web site, is an archived Webcast of a symposium designed to give special educators training in the Common Core State Standards and how they influence the goals written into an IEP and students' assessments.

<http://cde.videoss.com/archives/120213/>

Common Core State Standards: Where Does Differentiation Fit In? is a Webinar with Carol Ann Tomlinson on the ASCD (formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) Web site that addresses differentiated instruction in light of the new standards.

<http://www.ascd.org/professional-development/webinars/tomlinson-and-britt-webinar.aspx>

The National Center and State Collaborative hosts a Web site of materials for special educators to ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes, leave high school ready for postsecondary options, and receive instruction that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The materials on this site are grouped into three categories:

Curriculum Resources: What to Teach (reference materials created to reinforce educators' understanding of curriculum content);

Instructional Resources: How to Teach (reference materials created to support classroom teaching; and

Classroom Solutions (solutions or accommodations created by educators and shared here).

https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/mediawiki/index.php/Main_Page

The Council for Exceptional Children hosts on its Web site a number of Webinar recordings that address such topics as "Using the Common Core State Standards in Special Education"; "Alternate Assessments"; "Common Core Writing Standards: Implications for Students With Learning Disabilities and Their Teachers"; "Speech-Language Pathologists and Special Education Teachers: Partners in Implementing the Common Core State Standards"; and more.

http://www.cec.sped.org/Professional-Development/Webinars/Recorded-Webinars/Common-Core-State-Standards?sc_lang=en

NICHCY, The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, has compiled a list of helpful resources for special educators, including "Nine Ways the Common Core Will Change Classroom Practice"; "Educator's Guide to Standards Insight: Common Core Standards Unpacked"; "Share My Lesson . . . By Teachers, for Teachers"; and more.

<http://nichcy.org/schools-administrators/commoncore#educators>

Implementing the CCSS for Students with Learning Disabilities, a Webinar from May 2013 with Louisa Moats, Margaret McLaughlin, and George Batsche on the RTI Network Web site, explores both the opportunities and challenges inherent in implementing the CCSS for students with learning disabilities. These educational leaders also present practical strategies for establishing systems to support the work of administrators and teachers for successful CCSS implementation.

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/professional/forums-and-webinars/forums/rti-webinar-implementing-common-core-state-standards-students-learning-disabilities>

For Administrators

Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core is an initiative to develop a comprehensive system of professional learning, with an immediate focus on implementing Common Core State Standards and new assessments. The initiative provides resources and tools to assist states, districts, and schools in providing effective professional learning for current and future education reforms.

<http://learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core#Uv0uAf2DT0t>

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Web site provides numerous tools for elementary school administrators. Resources include several Webinars: **Technology and the Common Core**, which addresses integrating technology to support and enhance teaching and learning as schools transition to the new standards, and **Leadership for the Common Core: Synthesize, Strategize, Maximize!**, which includes tips on how principals can prepare teachers and their schools to integrate the Common Core State Standards. The site also features tools, articles and research, and resources for students and teachers.

<http://www.naesp.org/common-core-state-standards-resources#webinars>

Implementing the Common Core State Standards: The Role of the Secondary School Leader, developed by Achieve, is designed to give school leaders a deeper understanding of the standards themselves and the role of school leaders in implementing them.

<http://www.achieve.org/publications/implementing-common-core-state-standards-role-secondary-school-leader-action-brief>

Getting Ready for the Common Core: Individualized Education Programs

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) challenge students with disabilities “to excel within the general curriculum.” This is a good thing: higher levels of achievement and more promising postschool opportunities. But challenges can also be frightening, and the state’s transition to the new standards has raised numerous questions and concerns about how the Individualized Education Program (IEP) might change. Will the individual nature of the IEP be lost in the need to meet common standards? Will functional training and behavioral goals be diminished? Will too much be asked of students? Are special and general educators adequately prepared to write and assess goals based on the new standards?

With the IEP as the backbone of special education, teachers and parents of students with disabilities are smart to question anything that might change it. But the answer to the first three questions above is “no.” And while everyone is working on the fourth, the short answer to the most important question is that the IEP fundamentally stays the same.

Standards-based IEPs

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates the IEP. The CCSS changes nothing about this legal requirement. And Californians have been developing and using standards-based IEPs since 1997, when state standards were established. According to Kevin Schaefer, assistant director of special projects at WestEd and former lead program specialist in the Elk Grove Unified School

District, the process starts with the IEP team developing an in-depth understanding of the standards (now the Common Core) at each grade level. With this understanding, the team assesses what each student knows and how he or she is functioning relative to grade level. “We’re still using [formal and informal] assessments and teachers’ observations, as well as formative data to develop IEPs and align instruction. We’re still looking at the present levels of performance and identified individual needs,” says Schaefer.

The team then determines the gap between what the student has been able to achieve and what is expected for all students. From there, the team develops meaningful and measurable goals for what the student needs to accomplish in the coming school year. Each student’s individualized program of special education and related services is crafted to help the student reach those expressed goals.

After an IEP team identifies goals, it regularly monitors student progress through numerous assessment measures—as IEP teams have done for years. If the student is not making progress toward a goal, the team reconvenes and revises the IEP. Conversely, if a student’s progress exceeds the goal trajectory, the team can recalculate the IEP to move the student ahead.

The New

Educators will notice fewer standards in the CCSS, which allow for more in-depth instruction and give students more time with material. The new standards emphasize depth and quality in both content and learning—the ability to think critically, to

(IEPs continued on page 13)

▶ *A Seven-step Process to Creating a Standards-based IEP* is at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/mas/sevenstepprocess.pdf

▶ For an explanation of how *Bloom’s taxonomy* informs the CCSS, go to <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acrel/standards/>

▶ *Understanding the Standards-based IEP* is at <http://www.nclld.org/learning-disability-resources/ebooks-guides-toolkits/understanding-standards-based-iep>

▶ Videos, worksheets, and tools for writing measurable IEP goals are at <http://www.azed.gov/special-education/program-support-monitoring/measurable-goals-training/>

▶ Resources from the *California Common Core State Standards Symposium* on aligning IEPs to the new standards are at <http://cde.videoss.com/archives/120213/>

▶ Resources from the *California Common Core State Standards Symposium for Special Educators* are at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ccl>

▶ *What Does College and Career Ready Mean for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities* is at <http://www.naacpartners.org/publications/careercollegereadiness.pdf>

Writing IEPs with the Common Core

Critical Questions

- What is the relationship between the proposed goals and the goals written in the previous IEP? Were previous goals met, increased, discontinued, etc.?
- Is the assessment information comprehensive? Does it provide a clear profile of the student's academic/functional levels? Does it include information from all environments; home, general education, leisure, special education? Does it reflect present levels of academic achievement and functional performance?
- Based on the identified need, how was the grade-level standard chosen? Are goals aligned to that standard? (Remember, the student's age-appropriate, grade-level standards are the starting point in goal development.)
- Do benchmarks create a pathway from the baseline to the goal? Do they reflect growing independence and progress toward the grade-level standard?
- Is the student communicatively competent (does the student understand what is being said, and does the student have a way to express himself)? If there are concerns about the student's communicative competence, is this concern addressed with accommodations (the "given what/under what conditions" component of the goal/benchmarks; see below). Is a communication goal needed?
- Is the student motivated/engaged? If there are concerns that she may not be, is this addressed with an accommodation and/or the "given what/under what conditions" component of the goal/benchmarks?
- Have executive function skills been considered and accounted for? If there are concerns, are executive function skills addressed with an accommodation and/or the "given what/under what conditions" component of the goal/benchmarks?
- Are there behavioral concerns that need to be addressed with an accommodation? Is a behavior goal needed?
- Is there a progression toward independence, through decreasing supports or increasing the student's level of mastery or depth of knowledge?
- Do functional goals contain elements of self-determination and self-advocacy; do they result in self-efficacy? Are parents on board and aligned with this process?
- Does the student understand what is being expected of him? Does the student understand how the expectations (and his behavior/learning/accomplishments) are connected to the benchmarks? Are parents on board and aligned with this process?
- Are all components of a well-written goal present? These components, when determined, create a solid foundation for an IEP goal. They read as follows:
 - By when** [will the goal be accomplished]?
 - Who** [name of student] **does what** [name of behavior or activity] **given what or under what conditions**?
 - [Progress will be] **measured by** [what]?
 - What **level of mastery** [is expected]?
 - Is this a **SMART** goal? Is it **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result-oriented, and Time-bound**?

(IEPs continued from page 11)

solve problems, to evaluate information on the basis of facts. This focus, in Schaefer's opinion, creates a perfect opportunity for general educators and special educators to collaborate, with the goal of integrating content and instructional strategies to ensure that all students develop the higher-order thinking skills they will need to take advantage of postschool opportunities, to manage independent living, and to succeed in adult life. The CCSS also give IEP teams a chance to shift their focus away from a deficit model—one that is intent on minimal progress, remediation, and strict compliance—and toward improved student learning.

Aligning Goals

Academic IEP goals for students with disabilities—including students with significant cognitive disabilities—must be aligned to the new standards. Research supports this effort, as access to the general education curriculum is one of the predictors of postschool success. The work of Rachel Quenemoen from the National Center and State Collaborative and numerous others further demonstrates that students with significant cognitive disabilities are “able to master and apply in meaningful ways the academic skills and knowledge that we never before had tried to teach them.”¹

Functional goals, which address behavior, social-emotional challenges, and certain life skills, remain a very important part of the IEP; and they are central to supporting academic access and achievement. However these goals

do not have to be aligned to the CCSS.

As part of his work helping educators prepare for the Common Core, Schaefer has been collaborating with Sharen Bertrando from the Center for Prevention and Early Intervention at WestEd. Together they have developed a set of 12 goal-writing considerations for IEPs based on the CCSS (see page 12).

Question nine is the one Schaefer believes is most important: Is there a progression toward independence? “We’re looking for independence for students across time with an appropriate decrease of support. Everything goes back to how we are preparing students to be college and career ready—to be integral participants in the twenty-first century workforce.”

Integrated Supports

Schaefer encourages educators to determine “under what conditions the student will demonstrate mastery” and independence. He offers the example of a student who “blows out” behaviorally when facing a certain kind of reading task. “There are support plans that list the type of preventive strategies that, when taught and implemented, allow the student to handle the stress and overcome past experiences of failure—so he can be successful at approaching and comprehending text.” Yet in many IEPs, a student’s “developmental skills are frequently unrelated to the academic, behavioral, or functional learning expectations for other students of the same grade level. This produces two parallel curricula for the child—one in special education and one in regular education.” Schaefer sees the importance of integrating both. This integration is critical if the student is going to learn—

especially when the behavior shows up in an academic setting. Whatever the support, academics and behavior “are not separate things. You sometimes see IEP teams talking about them as silos. They have to be combined.” The IEP, he says, needs to be a picture of the whole student.

The Role of Parents

Parents are important members of the IEP team. “Parents know their kids better than anyone,” Schaefer says. “They bring their concerns [and an understanding of] their child’s strengths and challenges. A great way to start IEP meetings is to talk about and document a student’s strengths. Parents can lead that conversation.”

Yet some parents of students with disabilities may feel that their child shouldn’t struggle. “We need to change that thinking,” says Bertrando, “to help parents understand that the struggle is part of learning. Our desire is to scaffold instruction and create a system of temporary assistance that encourages the student towards mastery of new skills, concepts, and levels of understanding through instruction and practice.”

Bertrando urges special educators, general educators, and parents to “embrace the changes; this is an opportunity for us to do a better job for our students. Be proactive, collaborate; it’s not business as usual anymore.”

While the business of public education has always been to prepare students for advanced learning and adult life, the Common Core challenges everyone—teachers, parents, administrators, and students—to higher levels of achievement. And “everyone” includes students with disabilities. ◀

1. Ensuring All Students with Disabilities Progress. <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/research/highlights/NCEO/>

- ▶ *The Kansas Multi-Tiered System of Supports Research Base*: http://www.kansasmtss.org/pdf/mtssdocs/Kansas_MTSS_Research_Base.pdf
- ▶ Resources for structuring and implementing an MTSS are at <http://www.kansasmtss.org/resources.html>
- ▶ *Multi-Tier System of Supports*, an Issues Brief from the National Center for Learning Disabilities, is at <http://www.nclld.org/images/content/files/hill-briefs/mtss-brief-template.pdf>
- ▶ Resources on co-teaching and differentiated instruction: <https://www.kansasprojectsuccess.org/strategies/co-teaching-differentiated-instruction>
- ▶ Find extensive MTSS resources from Florida at <http://www.florida-rti.org/>
- ▶ Watch Colleen Riley explain MTSS at http://rtinetwork.org/professional/videos/podcasts?utm_source=newsletter_march_19_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_content=title&utm_campaign=rtiactionupdate

MTSS *continued from page 16)*

Riley has been at the forefront of efforts to implement MTSS in the majority of schools and districts in Kansas. And while she says, “Creating MTSS is not easy—it’s a multiyear effort and not a quick fix,” she also says that ultimately “it’s not more work. It’s simply changing the way we do our work.” Riley believes that the advent of the Common Core “gives districts a perfect opportunity to create the system that is needed to align resources to support the success of all students—and the effectiveness of teachers: a Multitiered System of Supports.”

The MTSS-CCSS combination is a way to advance instruction and improve learning . . . all teachers are in agreement . . . all resources are aligned to meet the needs of all students.

She acknowledges the additional challenges that accompany the new standards. “Any time people are faced with something new, they have concerns. They think they don’t have the foundation to deal with something new. But we’ve always had standards. And we have always updated standards.” What’s different is that “these new standards are now just ‘common’ among most of the states. And the good news is that these new standards will support student success as students transition from one school to another within a district, to a new district, to a new state. They will allow students to know where exactly they are [and where they

should be academically] and help students be successful. It is about making the system support the students, not making the students fit into the system.”

Kansas was inspired more than 10 years ago to invest in its MTSS overhaul for reasons that are familiar to educators everywhere: Programs and resources lacked coordination. Existing systems were not meeting the needs of all students. And student achievement was generally poor in overall outcomes, benchmark tests, graduation rates, and transition. State educators and leaders were ready for a change, and MTSS gave them just that. “MTSS requires the system to change so that it can support all students,” says Riley. “And that’s our job—to help all students.”

James Baker taught elementary and middle school in Kansas for 23 years, and he spent eight years as an elementary school principal implementing MTSS when it was a new idea infrequently applied. His experience shaped his belief in the MTSS-CCSS combination as “a way to advance instruction and improve learning by making sure all teachers are in agreement and that all resources are aligned to meet the needs of students.” Baker is currently a member of the Kansas Multi-Tiered System of Supports Core Team, which works at the state level to support MTSS efforts. He sees MTSS and the CCSS as having “the same purpose” and that the new standards are actually easier to implement “if you’re doing an MTSS.”

MTSS and CCSS

MTSS and the CCSS share four central features that promote effective instruction:

- Clear academic and behavioral goals
- Curriculum and instruction that are universally designed (UDL)

- Alignment of what is taught, studied, and learned with what is tested
- Regular progress monitoring through formative assessments (formal and informal) that direct decisions about instruction and interventions

What is particularly important—and helpful—for students with disabilities is that a well-executed tiered system of supports ensures that students with disabilities

1. receive their instruction in the regular education classroom to the greatest degree possible,
2. receive strong core instruction with embedded strategies that enhance their instruction,
3. are provided with interventions that are based on assessment data and that are what the students need in order to master the curriculum,
4. are being taught to the same standards as their general education peers, and
5. are given supports and services based on their need, not label.

These five features are critical if students with disabilities are to benefit from the new standards.

Collaboration

Baker views collaboration—between general and special educators—as central to an effective MTSS and critical to implementing the new standards. “In our system, all services, supports, and instruction are based on need. All students receive core instruction, and any student can receive support in tier two or three. Special education teachers are not just working with special education students.” While the state is mindful of

the ways in which federal funding restricts the work of certain personnel, it also takes full advantage of the “incidental benefit” ruling, ensuring that any students who face an instructional standard they find daunting also find the expertise of special educators ready to support them.

General education-special education collaboration within an MTSS also “makes it possible for us to ensure that special education is a set of special services that are given to a student as long as they are needed.” The system is fluid, and no student is given a label and a placement—and then left there.



Baker explains that collaborative teams of teachers operate at every grade level, evaluating their work in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, “empowering culture and leadership.” Team members often practice co-teaching (Kansas is currently delivering statewide training in co-teaching to its public educators), and every teacher is trained in problem-solving protocols and in using data.

Data

“Using data to make decisions is part of what an educator does,” says Riley. “But when a school is implementing an MTSS, all educators are looking at the data and making those decisions. MTSS supports

this collaborative process. It’s a team effort.”

Riley sees isolation as “a tremendous burden on teachers.” In her experience, “MTSS, with its focus on data and collaborative decision making by school teams, removes some of the solitary burden of the decisions teachers have to make. And that data is improving instruction.”

Riley emphasizes that MTSS is more than a system for improving students’ grades. “MTSS provides the structure for success by addressing the whole student. Our framework is designed to

help adults use data so they can respond consistently [to issues of both academics and behavior] and so the system has the supports and interventions in place to meet the needs of all students.”

As a coordinated system, MTSS is complex—and now probably a little more so, as “the standards must run through all of the pieces of the MTSS system,” says Baker. “There has to be a marriage of the instruction, curriculum, and assessment in both academics and behavior. They must fit together, work together, make sense together; and all of the staff [must] work together to be on board and make the system cohesive. Integration and coherence are critical,” he says.

But MTSS and CCSS are designed to promote this kind of coherence—MTSS through its coordinated system of services, CCSS through its coordinated progression of skills. Implementing both, in Riley’s words, is “not an easy thing; but it is a good thing.” ◀

New Standards and Tiered Systems:

A Perfect Fit

As California educators take on the task of adapting their teaching and curriculum to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), they are also developing lesson plans that, by design, will target a wider range of learners in their classrooms. In order for all students, including students with disabilities, to realize success with these new standards, California has embraced a coordinated approach to organizing school services: Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS is one way the state is supporting the use of data and evidence-based practices to drive the instruction and instructional supports that all students need in order to learn.

Generally speaking, MTSS consists of a three-tiered, integrated approach to supporting all students with research-based instructional strategies, clear content and behavioral standards, collaboration, and problem solving, all of which are guided and informed by multiple sources of student data. Both research and practice show that a well-executed MTSS leads to higher student achievement.

Explanations and descriptions of MTSS are not new to readers of this publication. In fact, there is not much about MTSS that is new; all of its component parts represent what research and experience have for years shown to be the most effective ways for teachers and administrators to succeed in their primary goal: helping students learn. What is new about MTSS is that California has recognized a need for this “whole system” approach to supporting all students, a system that begins in general

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education. The California Department of Education has developed a new Professional Learning Module designed to help districts move toward a tiered system of supports at all levels—district, school, and student; and MTSS can be found in the latest version of the English Language Arts Framework.

Thanks to some trailblazers, MTSS has been defined, tried, and refined. California is benefiting from the lessons learned by these early adapters. In Kansas, Colleen Riley, Director of Early Childhood, Title One, and Special Education services for the state, agrees that MTSS and CCSS are the right match. And she should know.

(MTSS, continued on page 14)

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