

Arizona Charter Teachers' Guide to Common Core Implementation: Advice from the Classroom

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE VIVA ARIZONA CHARTER TEACHERS IDEA EXCHANGE

Prepared for: Arizona Superintendent **John Huppenthal** and State Board President **Jaime Molera**

Prepared by: Members of The VIVA Arizona Charter Teachers Idea Exchange Writing Collaborative on behalf of their peers in The VIVA Arizona Charter Teachers Idea Exchange

Delivered: June 13, 2012

Abstract & Summation: Empowered by cutting-edge technology, classroom teachers from charter schools across Arizona spent hundreds of hours sharing their experience in moving to a Common Core standard in their own classrooms. Then, a small group of their colleagues distilled those ideas into actionable recommendations for ensuring a smooth transition to the Common Core across the state.

Partner: Arizona Charter Schools Association

Dr. Ildiko Laczko-Kerr, Vice President of Academics at the Association, provided guidance and technical assistance to VIVA Teachers regarding the Common Core State Standards implementation in Arizona. The Association also donated professional development to a participating school and provided marketing and communications support.

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Introduction



The VIVA (Voice Ideas Vision Action) Arizona Charter Teachers Idea Exchange invited classroom teachers from charter schools across Arizona—the teachers who have been on the cutting edge of implementing the Common Core Standards in their classrooms—to share their experience and expertise for smoothing the transition to Common Core for all students across the state.

The online VIVA Idea Exchange uses a combination of technology operated by New Voice Strategies and powered by SocialSphere and facilitation provided by veteran journalist Cindy Richards to ensure the conversation is safe, productive and available whenever teachers are.

The VIVA Arizona Charter Teachers Idea Exchange was open from April 16, 2012–May 13, 2012. Any classroom teacher working in an Arizona Charter School was welcome to join.

The VIVA Arizona Charter Teachers Idea Exchange was conducted in three phases:

During **Phase I**, all Arizona charter teachers were invited to share their ideas in answer to the question:

“Arizona charter schools have more experience and agility in adopting change than other Arizona public schools. By the 2013-2014 school year, all Arizona classrooms will move to Common Core standards. As a charter teacher, what are you doing in your classroom and school to prepare for this transition? What more needs to be done on a classroom, school, and state level to ensure that the new Common Core Standards lead to higher student achievement?”

In response, nearly 200 teachers offered more than 54 different ideas and exchanged more than 100 comments with one another.

During **Phase II**, a group of seven teachers whose active participation in Phase 1 was clear in terms of both quantity and quality were invited to join The VIVA Arizona Charter Teachers Writing Collaborative. Their assignment: Take the ideas presented during Phase I and summarize and synthesize them into discrete, workable recommendations for implementing Common Core Standards in a way most likely to result in improved student learning.

Phase III of the process will begin on June 13, 2012, when the members of the Writing Collaborative present their ideas in a meeting with Arizona State Superintendent John Huppenthal and State Board President Jaime Molera. Over the coming months, they are expected to share their ideas with other educational leaders across the state.





At New Voice Strategies, we believe in the inspiration that grows from pragmatic experience and in the power of individual voices to make big change. VIVA Teachers is one example of that power in action. We are inspired by the teachers and grateful for their positive contribution to the strength of our schools and America's democratic process. Many thanks to the VIVA Arizona Charter School Teacher Leaders: **Cynthia Black, Jamie Bradley, Tim Eyerman, Charlene Mendoza, Marie O'Brien, Melodee Olson and Kaytie Thies**, whose bios can be found at the end of this report. The innumerable hours these teachers spent grappling with big ideas and small details made this work possible.

We at New Voice Strategies are grateful for the generous partnership and support of the Arizona Charter Schools Association as we worked on this project.

The VIVA Arizona Charter Teachers Idea Exchange would not be possible without support from the **Walton Family Foundation**. New Voice Strategies would not be possible without the support of the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**.





Executive Summary

Forging ahead on the path to implementation of the Common Core State Standards gives Arizona a unique opportunity to provide a higher level of intellectual opportunity for all students, increase professional knowledge and regard for teachers, and ensure graduates of Arizona schools are college and career ready for life in the 21st century.

In 2010, the state adopted the K-12 Common Core Standards to help ensure all students graduate from high school with the academic knowledge and skills they will need for success in college, careers and life. During the 2011-2013 school years, teachers and administrators in Arizona are engaging in Professional Development to prepare for the implementation. During the 2013–2014 school year, the Common Core Standards will be fully implemented. During the 2014–2015 school year, new assessments based on the Common Core State Standards will be used.

Teachers are significant stakeholders in the implementation of Common Core Standards and should be key players in the process. These recommendations will foster the environment necessary to ensure successful implementation of Common Core Standards, promote the development of professional knowledge and expertise of teachers, and maintain high expectations and academic achievement on the part of Arizona’s students.

Recommendations included in this report:

Accessible, affordable, effective teacher training is the key to successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Teachers will be on the front line of the battle to raise student achievement via the Common Core. But they can do that only if they feel confident in implementing the new instructional strategies. The way to make this massive undertaking affordable is for the state to create or offer access to webinars, training modules and model lessons online so teachers can access them at any point in the day or school year—whether they’re writing lessons plans at 11 p.m. or facing an instructional challenge in the middle of a school day.

Multiple training sessions on multiple tracks focused on Common Core in the classroom are required. A “train the trainer” model is the most cost-effective, efficient method of training large numbers of teachers across the state. Different training tracks must be developed to allow for specialization by position as well as responsibility and offered in multiple sessions. And there must be some accountability to ensure that “no school is left behind.”

A new model of Professional Development and teacher collaboration is needed. Common Core Standards require a new approach to professional development, one that sees teachers as active, participatory learners creating new professional knowledge and collaborating to share their knowledge and resources across grade levels, subjects, disciplines, schools and districts.





To ensure the implementation of the Common Core is affordable for all schools in the state, the Arizona Department of Education must take a leadership role in creating model curriculum maps and frameworks, and by offering extensive resources via its own website. The new interdisciplinary approach to learning required to meet Common Core Standards calls for diverse new models of teaching and learning. The most cost-effective way to provide those models and resources is via the ADE website, which needs an overhaul to be more user-friendly for teachers and parents.

Higher education teaching programs must be aligned with new instructional demands for the Common Core State Standards. It's been two years since Arizona agreed to adopt Common Core, but teachers coming out of college remain unprepared to teach to the new standards. There is an urgent need for colleges to develop curricula that demonstrate an understanding of the new approach to teaching and learning required by Common Core.

It's imperative the state ease the transition from AIMS to PARCC standardized tests. Common Core Standards do not lend themselves to fill-in-the-bubble, multiple-choice, isolated assessments. Therefore, alternative assessments must be developed and designed with significant input from teachers, and the change must be managed carefully so schools and students are not penalized for poor performance during the transition.

Parents must receive plenty of information about how the Common Core and the new assessments will affect teaching, learning and test scores. Parents are key stakeholders in this shift to the Common Core. If they see their children struggling with the new standards or test scores drop during the transition, it could easily short-circuit the implementation process.

Index of Actionable Ideas

RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop or Ensure Access to Cost-effective Teacher Training Tools in a Wide Variety of Formats to Decrease the Time Needed to Bring Administrators and Teachers to the Required Instructional Levels.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Streamline Common Core Standards training so that teachers arrive at the training already having learned the basics about Common Core on their own via webinars, so training can focus on how to teach to the new standards.
 2. Develop training modules with video and accompanying written materials that schools can access and use during in-house teacher training prior to and during the academic year.
 3. Create or ensure access to a series of videos of teachers or experts teaching lessons aligned with Common Core Standards in their classrooms.
 4. Ensure that any and all training is available on demand beginning as soon as possible and continuing through the first few years of Common Core Standards implementation.
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RECOMMENDATION 2

Provide Multiple Training Sessions and Specialized Tracks That Focus on Common Core Standards and Implementation in the Classroom.

Proposed Solutions:

5. Create an accountability system that ensures ADE's "train the trainer" program is as effective as possible.
 6. Offer multiple sessions for all training to ensure all of Arizona's teachers are comfortable engaging with and teaching curriculum using the Common Core Standards.
 7. Ensure access to the experts who can answer Common Core questions quickly.
 8. Create an accountability system to ensure all schools are completing teacher training in a timely manner.
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RECOMMENDATION 3

Reinvent Professional Development and the Role of Teachers as Active, Participatory Learners Creating New Professional Knowledge to Support a Smooth and Successful Transition to Common Core Standards.

Proposed Solutions:

9. Develop strong models of effective Professional Learning Communities that can be implemented by schools statewide.
 10. Create incentives that encourage schools to set aside time for the Professional Learning Community to meet regularly throughout the week and during regularly scheduled teacher in-service sessions all year.
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RECOMMENDATION 4

Time Must Be Dedicated to Teacher Collaboration, Particularly Across Disciplines.

Proposed Solutions:

11. Develop policies that encourage schools to provide time for teacher collaboration across grades, across subjects and across schools.
 12. Reward schools that set aside at least one day per semester for each teacher to visit and observe another classroom teacher in the school.
 13. Divert at least a portion of Proposition 301 funds or school goal funds to reward schools that achieve targeted Common Core Standards growth scores.
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RECOMMENDATION 5

Design Interdisciplinary Curriculum Maps, Frameworks and Lesson Plans that Weave in Language Arts, Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects and Mathematics Across Content Areas.

Proposed Solutions:

14. Develop model curriculum maps and frames that are aligned to the Common Core Standards and make them available to schools at no cost.
15. Ensure the model curriculum maps, frames and lesson plans reflect the shared responsibility within a school for successful implementation of the Common Core Standards.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Align Higher Education Teaching Programs with New Instructional Demands for the Common Core State Standards.

Proposed Solutions:

16. Require teacher training programs to develop curricula that demonstrate an understanding of the teaching approaches required by the Common Core.
17. Develop model higher education curricula that emphasize the professional knowledge and skills necessary to utilize literacy strategies across the curriculum and content areas that are firmly grounded in best practices, literacy learning theory and research.
18. Develop a specific timeline of implementation for higher education.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Revamp the ADE Website to Make it Easier for Teachers, Schools and Parents to Access the Resources They Need to Understand and Comply with Common Core State Standards.

Proposed Solutions:

19. Create a more streamlined ADE web page that is easy to navigate and understand.
20. All information regarding the Common Core State Standards should be accessible via one click and not mixed in with other resources.
21. Create a separate page of the ADE website devoted solely to the Common Core State Standards with separate links for teachers, administrators, parents and students.
22. Make at least a portion of the site interactive.
23. Integrate resources from other states and Common Core experts into the ADE website.
24. Post a link to an interstate database that includes the Recommended Instructional Material System (RIMS), giving all states access to a searchable database for materials.
25. Appoint committees of users, such as teachers, to review the website, offer ideas for change or improvement, and oversee the reorganization.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Ease the Transition from AIMS to PARCC Standardized Tests.

Proposed Solutions:

26. Appoint a committee of Arizona educational leaders and teachers to participate in designing the new standardized state tests.
27. Build Professional Development modules focusing on creating different types of assessments for different purposes.
28. Develop examples of high-quality assessments that use a variety of performance tasks.
29. Explore other ways to assess student learning.
30. Forge strong collaborative relationships with the organizations that are developing the new “Technology Readiness Tools” to support the transition to new assessments.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Launch a Public Awareness Campaign Now to Foster Parent Support of the New Standards.

Proposed Solutions:

31. Develop literature that explains the differences in standards and how it will affect daily instruction.
 32. Create strong online content that allows parents to interact with the new standards.
 33. Encourage schools to use teachers as Common Core ambassadors.
 34. Develop comparison guidelines to allow parents and students to understand how scores on AIMS and PARCC relate.
 35. Encourage schools to schedule open house presentations.
 36. Prepare parents for the possibility of a drop in test scores as we transition from AIMS to PARCC.
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Overview

As Arizona grapples with ways to implement the Common Core Standards throughout all Arizona schools, we believe there are a number of ways to smooth the transition and ensure academic achievement, parental involvement, easily accessible information, and the participation of teachers. This report includes recommendations from classroom teachers to help implement the Common Core State Standards successfully in Arizona.

What are the Common Core Standards

The Common Core Standards were created through the collaboration of the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, Achieve, Inc., the American College Testing Program, a variety of publishing and testing corporations and 16 education associations. Additionally, a number of professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators, ASCD, and others support the adoption of the Common Core Standards and their implementation. After much discussion, 45 of 50 states and three U.S. territories adopted the Common Core Standards and have begun to move toward providing resources, training and supporting implementation.

The Common Core State Standards recognize the importance of teachers and the absolute necessity of meeting accountability standards while fulfilling the needs of diverse student populations. It is important to recognize that the Common Core Standards do not mandate a particular curriculum or require particular works or sets of texts to be used. Furthermore, the Common Core Standards do not favor one curricular framework, instructional strategy or learning theory over any other. Instead, the Common Core Standards rely on all stakeholders, particularly teachers and administrators, to participate in developing relevant curricular frames and maps, selecting engaging and appropriate instructional strategies and working to move the Common Core Standards from theory to practice within the context of their particular learning environment.

Common Core Standards are designed to be taught within a content-rich curriculum in a variety of diverse learning environments. As such, it is imperative for districts, schools, administrators and teachers to become deeply engaged with the Common Core Standards as they develop the curricular frames, maps and materials necessary for implementation that make sense within their particular school or learning environment.

Implementing the Common Core

This is a potentially expensive endeavor. As we lay out in this report, successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards will require a full-court press—training of current teachers while ensuring new teacher graduates arrive ready to engage at the new higher level, creating new tests that accurately measure student achievement without penalizing schools for a gap between the new and old standards, and communicating effectively with parents who are likely to be alarmed at the level of change required by this move to Common Core.

The key to making this huge transition affordable for everyone is for the Arizona Department of Education to take a central role in providing the resources and models that individual schools and districts will need, as well as setting policies that encourage schools to find more ways for teachers to work together and learn from one another. In addition to holding down costs across the board, this will increase the likelihood that schools across the state will be working toward the same state goals without infringing upon local school and district flexibility to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of the local school community. In addition, creating opportunities for teachers to work together to share their professional expertise and classroom judgment could potentially save the state and local schools the cost of outside consultants and experts who are not stakeholders in the process but would be hired as we grapple with this curricular shift to the Common Core.

At the heart of the Common Core Standards is a call for increased accountability on the part of students, teachers and schools. A full implementation will raise the standards of professional knowledge and expertise required of teachers in order to engage students successfully in a creative, innovative curriculum that will lead to a successful demonstration of mastery on a number of assessments. Teachers, schools, districts and the Department of Education will need to create opportunities for professional development and support that are ongoing, meaningful and put into use in the classroom quickly and effectively.

The new Common Core measurements may include end-of-course testing, testing at several different points during the school year, state and/or national assessments such as PARCC, SBAC, AIMS, PSAT, SAT or ACT. It is likely that the assessments developed will go beyond the multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank bubble tests of the past. Students may be asked to write essays, solve problems while explaining their thinking process, craft arguments, develop hypotheses, identify where a procedure begins to break down, or other similar performance-related tasks. It is expected some of these assessments will be taken on a computer, while others will be more pen-and-paper based. Students, teachers, schools, parents and other community members will need to prepare for this transition.

What Successful Implementation of Common Core Standards Will Look Like

A successful implementation of the Common Core Standards in Arizona will result in:

- Students who are skilled and capable readers, writers, thinkers, inquirers and citizens able to successfully pursue a career at a post-secondary institution or in the workforce. These students will be prepared to live and work using the skills they have developed in 21st century learning areas including life and career skills, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, technology and information/media literacy, flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, financial literacy, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity, accountability, leadership and responsibility. These students will be ready to compete in the global society of the 21st century.

- Teachers and other educational leaders who are collaborative, knowledgeable and engaged with each other and the Common Core Standards. These teachers will engage in ongoing, job-embedded professional development through Professional Learning Communities (DuFour & DuFour) to support their adoption of content area literacy strategies across the curriculum and other best practices that have sound theoretical and research bases.
- Increased communication, availability of information and resources among the Arizona Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, districts, schools, teachers, students, parents, and other community and business leaders. These stakeholders will, through their involvement and understanding, be able to support the implementation process resulting in increased rigor, higher expectations and schools that will not resemble those of the past.



RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop or Ensure Access to Cost-effective Teacher Training Tools in a Wide Variety of Formats to Decrease the Time Needed to Bring Administrators and Teachers to the Required Instructional Levels.

Statement of the Problem:

Arizona's students will be competing with students from other states on the standardized PARCC assessment. Comparing results initially could highlight a wide achievement gap between students in Arizona and elsewhere. As efforts are increased to close the achievement gap it will fall to classroom teachers to provide additional intervention to close this gap as quickly as possible. Training for teachers needs to be provided quickly and cost-effectively in order to improve teacher understanding of new standards and ensure they feel confident in implementing instructional strategies.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Streamline Common Core Standards training so that teachers arrive at the training already having learned the basics on their own via webinars that provide the background on Common Core. That will free up more time during training meetings to focus on applications of the new instructional methods required by the new standards.
2. Develop training modules with video and accompanying written materials that schools can access and use during in-house teacher training prior to and during the academic year. Schools and districts cannot afford, nor should they be expected, to create these materials on their own. Providing them on a statewide basis as an Arizona Department of Education (ADE) resource is the most efficient and effective way to ensure all schools are working toward the same goals.
3. Create or ensure access to a series of videos of teachers or experts teaching lessons aligned with Common Core Standards in their classrooms. These videos should show a diverse range of instructional strategies and curricular frames being used while implementing the Common Core Standards.
4. Any and all training must be available on demand beginning as soon as possible and continuing through the first few years of Common Core Standards implementation. This will ensure resources are available whenever a teacher might need them—whether planning a lesson at 2 a.m. or in the middle of a challenging school day.

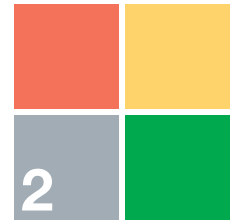




Why We Believe This Will Work

The biggest impediment to the quick implementation of Common Core Standards will be the cost of training for teachers. Cost-effective, easily accessible training will ensure that all schools are able to provide training without cutting costs for programs. By making training available on the ADE website, through online distance learning, or by video with accompanying written materials, teachers will be able to seek additional information and training on their own. With so many states moving to Common Core at the same time, we believe ADE should be able to partner with other entities to easily and affordably provide the resources teachers will need to ensure their students will not be left behind.





RECOMMENDATION 2

Provide Multiple Training Sessions and Specialized Tracks That Focus on Common Core Standards and Implementation in the Classroom.

Statement of the Problem:

It's been two years since Arizona agreed to implement the Common Core Standards and there still is no real understanding of the problems that Arizona teachers are experiencing. Arizona is now approaching a state of emergency. An extreme sense of urgency is needed to get all teachers ready to design curriculum using the new standards. It is imperative that all parties involved spend the next two years wisely focused on communicating, collaborating, and committing to the adoption of the Common Core Standards.

As Arizona transitions to the Common Core, teachers are faced with the “what” and “how” of the situation. Simply put, there is not enough easily accessible information that teachers can draw upon and learn from in order to feel at ease with implementing the Common Core Standards. Currently there is inadequate training and professional development, and a lack of resources for teachers and administrators statewide. Many are still unsure and uneasy about changes in the topics they will teach and how to effectively align with the new standards.

Proposed Solutions:

5. Create an accountability system that ensures ADE's “train the trainer” program is as effective as possible. This could involve a requirement that each trainer be responsible for training a certain number of teachers or schools, or it could involve the state setting up a training calendar to ensure all teachers have access to the training in a timely manner.
6. Offer multiple sessions for all training. Effective teacher training takes both time and commitment. Multiple training sessions are needed in order to ensure all of Arizona's teachers are comfortable engaging with and teaching curriculum using the Common Core Standards. The training sessions must provide details on implementation timelines and multiple models of curricular frames and maps that demonstrate the effective implementation of Common Core Standards using a variety of instructional strategies in diverse settings.
7. Ensure access to the experts who can answer Common Core questions quickly. Effective training must provide interaction with experts to help districts, schools and teachers with transitioning to the Common Core.
8. Create an accountability system to ensure all schools are completing teacher training in a timely manner. This will require guidelines with specific dates for implementation at the training level. The current guideline available on the ADE website is too general





and no one is held directly accountable for whether stages of implementation are being completed. State-sponsored incentives for the completion of timeline milestones may be necessary, as may penalties for failure to comply. Each school should be required to submit to the District Administrator a monthly accountability report identifying personnel who have attended training sessions and those who need to attend sessions. Then, the District Administrator should report regularly to the State Superintendent on the status of the training. The resulting feedback loop will help identify which schools may be lagging, which will help ensure that “no school is left behind.”

Why We Believe This Will Work

Every teacher wants to do the very best job for the students they teach. All teachers need the opportunity to learn about and engage with the Common Core Standards. Effective training will involve “digging” into the standards in order to take away curricular maps and lesson plans that can be used in their classrooms. The transition to the Common Core can be smooth if all stakeholders are well-informed and prepared. The implementation process requires constant and consistent communication and collaboration among the states, districts, and schools, and most importantly the commitment to forge ahead and follow through all steps needed for full implementation. When teachers feel adequately prepared, they will be able to proceed confidently in implementing the Common Core Standards.

Much of the resistance and hesitation among teachers is due to lack of training and understanding of the “what” and “how” of the Common Core Standards. Give teachers the opportunity to explore and fully comprehend the task at hand well in advance of implementation. Provide teachers with adequate and easily accessible resources. The state, districts, administrators and teachers need to be held accountable for every step of the transition. Educators expect students to be well-informed and prepared when taking an assessment. Now educators must take on the role of being students and be well-informed and prepared. Can Arizona educators transition to a new set of standards smoothly? Of course they can, with the proper support from the state.





RECOMMENDATION 3

Reinvent Professional Development and the Role of Teachers as Active, Participatory Learners Creating New Professional Knowledge to Support a Smooth and Successful Transition to Common Core Standards.

Statement of the Problem:

Teachers know that professional development days often mean sitting in a room while an expert explains what you need to start doing in your classroom as soon as possible. Veteran teachers often feel that professional development is just “same thing, new name.” Traditionally, these experiences treat teachers as passive learners with deficiencies that can be addressed through episodic and fragmented training. However, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards makes it necessary to create a new approach to professional development, one that sees teachers as active, participatory learners creating new professional knowledge.

Proposed Solutions:

9. Develop strong models of effective Professional Learning Communities that can be implemented by schools statewide. These educational groups allow teachers and administrators to work together on an ongoing basis to share learning and create action plans to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the benefit of their students. This new model of teacher collaboration and training needs to be structured and organized with a goal of effectively implementing Common Core Standards. The Professional Learning Communities will engage in professional reading, peer mentoring, and provide opportunities to create, practice, reflect upon, debrief and revise lesson plans using the Common Core Standards.
10. Create incentives that encourage schools to set aside time for the Professional Learning Communities to meet regularly throughout the week and during regularly scheduled teacher in-service throughout the year.

Why We Believe This Will Work

Teachers know that teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. Job-embedded professional development in the form of teachers working together for a sustained period of time in Professional Learning Communities or other similar groups is an important factor in changing teacher practices and increasing willingness to use innovative materials and methods. (DuFour). Professional Learning Communities allow teachers to learn together and create an environment of trust and respect. Some districts and schools, however, have not used this model of teacher collaboration effectively. Strong leadership from ADE that offers training in how to create and sustain PLCs, and incentives that encourage administrators to adopt this new approach, is needed to bring all schools on board. This new approach to professional collaboration will situate teachers as active learners who are empowered to use their knowledge of what works with students in their learning environment and apply that to engaging the Common Core Standards. Implementation of the Common Core Standards at a statewide level will require such a learning environment.





RECOMMENDATION 4

Time Must Be Dedicated to Teacher Collaboration, Particularly Across Disciplines.

Statement of the Problem:

With the advent and implementation of the Common Core, collaboration among teachers at grade level and across disciplines is imperative. Traditionally, schedules for teachers are set by school administrators prior to the beginning of the school year in such a way that special area subjects such as P.E., music, and art can be accommodated within the school day. To this end, it is often difficult for teacher schedules to be structured to allow for common prep periods at individual grade levels. This creates an environment where instruction is often provided in isolation of other teachers preventing them from sharing knowledge about what they feel is working well and brainstorming how to fix what is not working well. A lack of opportunity for teachers to collaborate and work together toward achieving common goals could mean the difference between a school that successfully transitions to Common Core and one that does not.

Proposed Solutions:

11. Develop policies that encourage schools to provide time for teacher collaboration across grades, across subjects and across schools. This could be done via a reward system for schools and districts that show they have adopted a strong collaborative culture, as measured by attendance and participation at these meetings. We believe this type of educator collaboration will allow the state to save money on hiring outside consultants and trainers.
12. Reward schools that set aside at least one day per semester for each teacher to visit and observe another classroom teacher in the school. This will allow teachers to learn from one another and help cement the understanding that for schools to succeed, all teachers, academic and vocational, must work together in the development and integration of goals and objectives. Schools need to provide time for all teachers to observe and experience other classes.
13. The state should divert at least a portion of Proposition 301 funds or school goal funds to reward schools that achieve targeted Common Core Standards growth scores.

Why We Believe This Will Work

When teachers and schools work together as a whole unit, student test scores rise and behaviors and attitudes of students improve. This is due at least in part to revisions in curriculum that result from teacher collaboration meetings. In addition, the collaborative approach means that all students and teachers are more aware of school and classroom goals. More collaboration time means beginning and experienced teachers work more closely together, which increases career rewards and daily satisfaction. In short, schools and teachers are better equipped for classroom work. This is due to teachers being given the time and materials to plan, collaborate and deliver effective units and lessons.





Teachers who have opportunities to collaborate on a regular basis are better prepared to support each other in building upon their strengths and addressing areas in need of improvement. This is true because teachers are able to watch and model effective lessons for each other while giving constructive suggestions. The pool of ideas is much larger when teachers collaborate. There are so many more teachers with that many more ideas and resources to help the schools, teachers and students of Arizona grow. This, in turn, helps schools be better prepared to try out new materials, ideas and methods.





RECOMMENDATION 5

Design Interdisciplinary Curriculum Maps, Frameworks and Lesson Plans that Weave in Language Arts, Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects and Mathematics Across Content Areas.

Statement of the Problem:

Students do not learn isolated capsules of knowledge. Instead, students learn through building connections between their prior or background knowledge and experiences and exposure to new material and experiences. The Common Core Standards were developed to combat curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep.” Students, in order to be ready to live and work in a 21st century world, will need the ability to gather information, understand it, evaluate it, synthesize it with other information and then use that information, conduct research, and communicate their learning.

Proposed Solutions:

14. Develop model curriculum maps and frames that are aligned to the Common Core Standards and make them available to schools at no cost. These models must demonstrate the type of interdisciplinary approach to learning required to meet Common Core Standards but still allow for the diversity of curricular materials and selection of instructional strategies used.
15. Ensure the model curriculum maps, frames and lesson plans reflect the shared responsibility within a school for successful implementation of the Common Core Standards. To succeed at Common Core, schools must be able to work across disciplines to integrate literacy instruction and mathematical understanding across subject areas.

Why We Believe This Will Work

Interdisciplinary connections facilitate learning and understanding while making education meaningful. By making all teachers responsible for the implementation of Common Core Standards in an interdisciplinary way, teachers will use instructional time more effectively and reinforce standards continuously. This type of integration reflects the skills that students will be expected to use in college or work after graduation. However, this is a new approach to education for many administrators, schools and teachers. Strong models will give district and school leaders the foundation they need to build a strong curriculum tied to the Common Core.





RECOMMENDATION 6

Align Higher Education Teaching Programs with New Instructional Demands for the Common Core State Standards.

Statement of the Problem:

Both current teachers and those still in college will be expected to implement the Common Core Standards. It is likely that teachers will teach at more than one school or in more than one district over the course of their teaching careers. Since the Common Core State Standards do not mandate or insist upon particular texts, instructional strategies or models of teaching, teachers will need to learn to use diverse methods, texts, strategies and frameworks to meet the needs of diverse learners in a variety of settings. Our experience with student teachers coming out of college this year—a full two years after Arizona signed on to the Common Core—shows that colleges need to do more to shift instruction to Common Core implementation. Colleges and universities should have begun the process of adjusting teacher education as soon as Common Core State Standards were announced, working in conjunction with the Department of Education timeline for implementation. As it stands, institutes of higher learning remain far behind in the process.

Proposed Solutions:

16. Require teacher training programs to develop curricula that demonstrate an understanding of the teaching approaches required by the Common Core. The new approach to teaching and learning will rely heavily on inter-disciplinary teaching and teacher collaboration, skills not previously emphasized in teacher education.
17. Develop model higher education curricula that emphasize the professional knowledge and skills necessary to utilize literacy strategies across the curriculum and content areas that are firmly grounded in best practices, literacy learning theory and research. This should begin by focusing on the college and career ready anchor standards so post-secondary course content increases to ensure new teachers are prepared to instruct at the highest levels.
18. Develop a specific timeline of implementation for higher education. This is urgently needed to inform districts and charters so school officials will know when prepared candidates will be ready for hire. In addition to working with the ADE, colleges and universities must actively coordinate with districts and charters to ensure that the desired level of instruction and depth of content is delivered.





Why We Believe This Will Work

There is a critical need to increase the number of teachers who are comfortable working with Common Core Standards. College students need to learn now what they will be expected to do once they are in the workforce. It does not make sense to wait until they are employed and responsible for implementation to begin developing these skills. We will be able to meet the higher demands for learning included in Common Core if recently graduated teachers arrive on the job ready to teach to the new standards.





RECOMMENDATION 7

Revamp the ADE Website to Make it Easier for Teachers, Schools and Parents to Access the Resources They Need to Understand and Comply with Common Core State Standards.

Statement of the Problem:

The current Arizona Department of Education website offers links and pages of information, but the set-up of the website is often confusing for teachers who are looking for answers to their questions and access to usable resources. It is hard to dig through all of the information looking for the right solution to a problem or even to access the Common Core Standards.

Proposed Solutions:

19. Create a more streamlined web page that is easy to navigate and understand. Teachers need information quickly, and the need for quality, easily accessible information will grow more intense as Common Core implementation grows closer.
20. All information regarding the Common Core State Standards should be accessible via one click on the ADE website and not mixed in with other resources.
21. Create a separate page of the ADE website devoted solely to the Common Core State Standards with separate links for teachers, administrators, parents and students. Each separate page should include the information and resources relevant to that group. Keep the links to a minimum so that each page offers a “one stop” look at the necessary information.
22. Make at least a portion of the site interactive. This can be in the form of a message board that will allow educators to ask and answer questions and share those tools and methods they use to align with the Common Core Standards, including what worked and what did not.
23. Integrate resources from other states and Common Core experts into the ADE website. This will allow educators to coordinate and share resources and references efficiently.
24. Post a link to an interstate database that includes the Recommended Instructional Material System (RIMS), giving all states access to a searchable database for materials.
25. Appoint committees of users to review the website, offer ideas for change or improvement, and oversee the reorganization. This will ensure the people who use the site—teachers, administrators, parents and others—have a say in making the ADE website as user-friendly and worthwhile as possible.





Why We Believe This Will Work:

If the resources are presented in a fashion that makes it easy to understand, it will be a positive guide for teachers, parents and schools. Teachers will be able to access the information they need, and in turn will not be so frustrated with the process of finding information. Therefore, they will be much more open to focusing on actual implementation in the classroom. By allowing teachers and parents to help revamp the website, the site will be more useful to both groups. They should be able to offer suggestions on where information should be put, what pages should be on the website, and what kind of information should be included.





RECOMMENDATION 8

Ease the Transition from AIMS to PARCC Standardized Tests.

Statement of the Problem:

The PARCC assessments and other teacher-created assessments that will be used to measure student learning under Common Core must, by necessity, be less content-focused and more open-ended to measure the students' ability to use the skills they are being taught. The tests will need to be closely connected to and reflective of the high expectations set by the Common Core Standards. Because the Common Core Standards do not lend themselves to a fill-in-the-bubble, multiple-choice, isolated assessment, alternative assessments must be developed. Also, the PARCC assessments are likely to involve multiple tasks including computer-based assessments and performance-based assessments like writing an essay, solving a problem while explaining your thinking process and creating an argument. Assessment of student learning is a critical component of understanding student needs and selecting the most effective instructional approach for reaching each student. At the same time, it is important to avoid the common pitfall of trying to "teach to the test."

Proposed Solutions:

26. Redouble efforts to create new assessments with key input from Arizona teachers and administrators and communicate more effectively what the transition to the new assessments will require of schools, teachers and students.
27. Build Professional Development modules focusing on creating different types of assessments for different purposes. For example, some assessments should measure student progress and be used to direct instruction (formative assessments). Other assessments should help teachers and students know where they stand in relation to a particular set of skills or standards (summative assessments).
28. Develop examples of high-quality assessments that use a variety of performance tasks. Assessments should measure students' skills related to writing essays, synthesizing diverse texts and explaining the thought process of solving a math equation. These examples should be posted on the ADE's website. This is important because not all assessments will be multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank. Teachers, parents and students need to understand that performance tasks will be a part of the PARCC and other assessments.
29. Explore other ways to assess student learning. In addition to more traditional standardized tests, the committee should develop assessments such as portfolios. Portfolios are collections of student work and reflection that demonstrate student growth and progress over the year. While the portfolios themselves may not be standardized, it is generally accepted that work samples and artifacts within the portfolio can adequately represent and document student learning and progress.





30. Forge strong collaborative relationships with the organizations that are developing the new “Technology Readiness Tools” to support the transition to new assessments. In January 2012, the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium announced that its new contract with Pearson will develop open source tools. Such tools are to be developed in association with state and local education agencies. Arizona needs to be at the forefront of this initiative.

Why We Believe This Will Work:

The Common Core Standards recognize that teachers and their professional knowledge and expertise are essential to making sure implementation is successful. By creating opportunities to participate at a variety of levels, this important voice is brought to the table. Furthermore, Common Core Standards recognize that it is possible to hold high standards and expectations without standardizing the delivery or the content. As assessment drives instruction, it is critical to develop standardized tests that can be used on an ongoing basis to help teachers, administrators and schools make instructional decisions leading to success on the tests. The faster testing and preparation tools become available to administrators and teachers, the more prepared students will be when they face their first PARCC assessment.





RECOMMENDATION 9

Launch a Public Awareness Campaign Now to Foster Parent Support of the New Standards.

Statement of the Problem:

The implementation of the Common Core Standards will require altering the assessments for the state of Arizona and slowly transitioning away from the AIMS test in favor of the PARCC. New assessments will drastically alter the content and method of instruction in classrooms across the state. As the new standards are introduced, instruction at the classroom level will be altered dramatically. Parents will be concerned that students are being taught old and new ideas within the same classroom. This perception of inconsistency in instruction will naturally alarm parents and cause many to question the validity of instruction.

Proposed Solutions:

31. Develop literature that explains the differences in standards and how it will affect daily instruction. Successfully implementing the Common Core Standards will require continual parent communication before, during and after the transition. Literature that explains the differences in standards and how it will affect daily instruction for their students will help inform parents who may be apprehensive.
32. Create strong online content that allows parents to interact with the new standards. This can help give families ownership of the changes within the standards. The ADE website should include a Common Core page dedicated to parents that includes a message board where parents can post questions and get answers quickly.
33. Encourage schools to use teachers as Common Core ambassadors. As the frontline professionals who will work daily with the new standards and their students, teachers are the best people to explain to parents how the Common Core will affect their children.
34. Develop comparison guidelines to allow parents and students to understand how scores on AIMS and PARCC relate. This might include showing how the scaled scores relate to grade level equivalencies and student growth. These guidelines should be produced by the Arizona Department of Education, posted to the website and created in pamphlet form to be disseminated to all public schools for distribution to parents as part of school mailings.
35. Encourage schools to schedule open house presentations. These will allow the parties responsible for integration, mostly teachers, to inform parents how the new standards will affect daily instruction.





36. Prepare parents for the possibility of a drop in test scores as we transition from AIMS to PARCC. Parents and guardians will be upset if previously high-achieving students are now struggling with the new content. Addressing this potential discrepancy by displaying achievement in terms of growth and adherence to the new standards will inform parents and make the data more digestible to concerned parties unfamiliar with educational terminology.

Why We Believe This Will Work:

Parents and guardians represent one of the most crucial stakeholder groups in this academic transition. Providing them with clear communication about the details of the new standards and achievement tests will help parents feel more secure and confident in this change. Parents and students will appreciate knowing why the standards have been adopted and how this benefits all parties in the long term.





Sources

Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Communities at Work, Richard DuFour, et al

Common Core Curriculum Maps: English Language Arts K-5, 6-8, 9-12. Published by Jossey-Bass 2012, website featuring these maps can be found at www.commoncore.org.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) website www.p21.org

The state of Arizona has developed a toolkit aligned with Common Core Standards—<http://tinyurl.com/P21CommonToolKit>

www.ncte.org The National Council of Teachers of English

www.nctm.org The National Council of Teachers of Math

[Comoncore.org](http://www.comoncore.org) Nonprofit organization that provides professional development, revisions to curriculum and lesson plans for a nominal fee.

Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards—NCTE

Teaching to Exceed the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: A Literacy Practices Approach for 6-12 Classrooms, Richard Beach et al

<http://www.parcconline.org/achieving-common-core> Website for the Partnership for Assessment for College and Careers



THE VIVA PROJECT

Arizona Charter Teachers Writing Collaborative

Bios



CYNTHIA BLACK is a charter school educator at Sonoran Science Academy, where she currently heads up a team of lower elementary teachers in Structured English Immersion classrooms. She comes from a family of educators who have devoted many years of service to the children of the state of Arizona. She draws on her fourteen years of classroom and administration experience to make learning more accessible to at-risk students and to help her colleagues enhance their mission as teachers. Her goal as an educator is to endow her students with a lifelong love of learning and with the skills necessary for success.



JAMIE BRADLEY hails from Wisconsin. She moved to Arizona in 1999 after graduating from college and has been teaching at Dobson Academy, a Ball Charter School, for 12 years. She taught two years in fifth grade and 10 years in sixth grade. She is the adviser for Dobson Academy's chapter of the National Junior Honor Society. She also is part of Dobson Academy's Leadership Team. When she isn't teaching, Bradley and her husband enjoy watching their two children, Tanner, 9, and Isabella, 6, play sports, go on bike rides together, read, and enjoy the outdoors.



TIMOTHY EYERAN is a sixth grade Latin and Classics teacher at BASIS Phoenix in Phoenix. This is his sixth year teaching in Arizona and his first year at BASIS. Timothy enjoys teaching because of the ability to have a direct impact on the well-being and prosperity of future generations. Knowing that the progress made with his students can some day impact the future of our nation as a whole helps motivate Timothy in the classroom.



CHARLENE MENDOZA, a native of Tucson, has worked in charter schools since 1996. After finishing her degree at Johns Hopkins University, she returned to Tucson and began working at the Children's Academy of Arizona. She is the founding principal and a teacher at Amerischools College Prep Academy. Currently, Charlene is opening her own charter school, Arizona College Prep Academy, in August 2012 and completing her PhD at the University of Arizona in Language, Reading and Culture. Charlene has two children, loves to cook and is attempting an urban garden for the first time.

THE VIVA PROJECT

Arizona Charter Teachers Writing Collaborative

Bios



MARIE O'BRIEN has been a teacher for 25 years. In Connecticut, she taught mathematics and computer science for grades 8-12 and served on the Curriculum Development Board. She currently teaches Advanced Math at Sonoran Science Academy – Tucson Elementary. She has a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from Southern Connecticut State University and a Master of Arts in Computer Education from Fairfield University. Completing the Arizona Educator Proficiency Assessment makes her a “highly qualified” teacher for grades K–6 and she is certified for grades 7–12. She knew she wanted to be a teacher when she was just 5 years old. She remains passionate about educating children, who represent our future.



MELODEE OLSON currently teaches middle school science. She teaches at an accelerated charter school that promotes rigorous academics and good citizenship. She previously taught second, fifth, and sixth grades. Olson has always worked within the charter school community. Prior to becoming a teacher, she was a member of a charter school board of directors for four years. Additionally, she served on the board of governors for three years at a large primary school in London. She has a degree in marketing communications and extensive, multinational experience in the telecommunications and oil and gas industries.



KAYTIE THIES has been part of the education community for more than six years. She started her career in education as the Registrar of a charter school, and while working, went back to school to earn her Elementary Education degree from the University of Arizona. She taught sixth grade for two years at La Paloma before moving to Williams, and taught a sixth/seventh grade class at Heritage Elementary. She will be changing positions for the 2012/2013 school year, and serve as Principal at Heritage Elementary. Outside of school, she loves to snowboard and spend time with her horse, Beta.

New Voice Strategies

New Voice Strategies operates VIVA (Voice Ideas Vision Action) Teachers, which uses cutting-edge technology* to amplify the voices of classroom teachers. We ask those teachers to draw from their professional wisdom and classroom experience and collaborate on proposed solutions to big-picture education policy challenges. They then share their ideas directly with high-level policymakers. Already, VIVA Teachers have delivered their ideas to public officials and policymakers in Washington, DC; Albany, NY; Chicago, IL; and St. Paul MN. New Voice Strategies is the creation of a group of seasoned, passionate advocacy professionals who believe in the power and wisdom of individual citizens in the public arena. VIVA Idea Exchanges give classroom teachers a direct role in one of the most important discussions in America today: How can public education provide all students with an equal chance to gain the skills and knowledge they need for a fruitful life in the 21st century?

* The VIVA Idea Exchange is powered by SocialSphere proprietary collaboration technology, ARENA™.

Board of Directors

JILL BASS taught in the Chicago and New York City public schools for 14 years. She has a master's in instructional leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been a professional developer, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and instructional coach. She is currently director of the Mikva Challenge's National Center for Action Civics, overseeing curriculum development and teacher training.

MATTHEW BREWER is an associate with the law firm of Bartlit, Beck, Herman, Palanhar & Scott, LLC. He is a graduate of Stanford University, where he served as student body president, earned his JD from Yale University and MBA from Harvard University.

ELIZABETH EVANS, founding CEO, is a recognized national leader in building unconventional alliances and bringing innovative approaches to solving difficult policy problems. For the last decade, her work has focused on education reform, and she has spent her career promoting the interests of children. She was executive director of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS), where she was the chief architect of a successful statewide campaign that culminated with Illinois being the first state in the nation to enact comprehensive charter law reforms in 2009. Before joining INCS,

Elizabeth was part of the Illinois Facilities Fund leadership team, where her responsibilities focused on Illinois government relations, communications, and advocacy. Elizabeth also worked at the Civic Committee of The Commercial Club of Chicago and was a political organizer in Washington, DC, and Michigan. She practiced law from 1990 to 1998 for the US Securities and Exchange Commission Enforcement Division and was a staff attorney in the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

KIPLUND "KIP" KOLKMEIER is of counsel to the Political Law and Government Relations practice groups of Perkins, Coie, LLC & Kolkmeier Consulting. His legal practice focuses on state legislative lobbying in Illinois, corporate and governmental ethics issues, administrative rulemaking and executive agency lobbying, PAC management, state and federal campaign finance issues, and association management. He previously was a partner at the following law firms: Sidley & Austin, Altheimer & Gray, and Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon.

ASHLEY WARLICK teaches elementary school in the Cambridge, MA Public Schools. She has a concentration in teaching students with special needs and brings a strong interest in the arts to her work. She serves on the Board of Directors of her school's affiliated nonprofit organization, which brings urgently needed resources to the students at the school.



