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# THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS:

## WHAT DO THEY MEAN FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME?

The Common Core State Standards are front and center on the national stage as states, districts, schools and teachers prepare for their rollout over the coming two to three years. Not surprisingly, pundits, policymakers and education experts across the blogosphere are weighing in with opinions about the potential success or failure of these implementation efforts.

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Although it may be several years before the Common Core deeply affects instruction in many schools, the developers of the standards and those tasked with assessing them are confident they can drive shifts in both what and how students learn – shifts that will make students more college and career ready than ever before.

Out-of-school time (OST) programs are among those speculating about the impact of the Common Core on everyday practice. Growing momentum around the idea of expanded learning opportunities and the recognition that quality learning experiences can occur anywhere, anytime, has heightened that interest. Many OST programs, especially those that focus on academics, are trying to figure out what exactly the standards cover, and whether and how they can support schools and districts in implementing the standards.

With that in mind, the Forum for Youth Investment partnered with Youth Development Executives of King County – a new coalition in the Seattle area interested in exploring this topic – to develop this brief about what the Common Core means for the youth development and OST field. In the pages that follow we provide an overview of the standards, discuss where things stand in terms of implementation and assessment, give examples of how OST systems are beginning to respond, and reflect on specific challenges and opportunities facing the OST field.

<sup>1</sup> Though the Common Core is focused on math and ELA, similar efforts are afoot within the science and social studies realms.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

The Common Core is the result of a two-year process, facilitated by the National Governor’s Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), to develop a set of common standards for math and English Language Arts (ELA).<sup>1</sup> The Common Core represents what students in grades K-12 should master in order to be college and career ready, and the hope is that the standards will increase the rigor and coherence of curriculum and assessment as well as increase alignment across states.

Content standards are broken out by grade, highlighting specific competencies students in each grade level must achieve in the two main subject areas. The Common Core focuses on fewer standards at a deeper level than do many of the models used in the past. The standards also emphasize higher order thinking skills; that is, they focus more on demonstrating understanding of content and analyzing written materials rather than on memorizing specific content. The math standards put greater emphasis on understanding how to get to the right answer than simply answering a question correctly, and the ELA standards shift toward increasingly complex informational text.

The standards have been adopted by 46 states<sup>2</sup>. Most have begun some level of implementation, with the primary emphasis on teacher training and preparation. Recent research suggests that the magnitude of change that will be required to teach the Common Core is significant.<sup>3</sup> States are taking a variety of approaches to implementation, from rolling the standards out slowly by grade levels to focusing on one subject area at a time. Most states intend to have the new standards fully implemented by the 2014-15 school year, at which point new assessments, described below, will be piloted across the country.

## WHAT ARE HABITS OF MIND?

If you are following discussions of the Common Core, you may have heard references to habits of mind.<sup>4</sup> CCSSO describes them as “knowledge, skills, and dispositions that operate in tandem with the academic content in

the standards ... and offer a portrait of students who, upon graduation, are prepared for college, career, and citizenship.”<sup>5</sup>

In the Common Core math standards, habits of mind are reflected in the “standards of mathematical practice.” In the ELA area, they are reflected in an introductory discussion of “the capacities of a literate individual.” Habits of mind encompass a range of skills that are critical both to academics but also to success in work and life. They also include skills that many youth-serving organizations have long focused on. According to Sandra Alberti of Student Achievement Partners, a new nonprofit created to support implementation of the Common Core, “You can teach these skills across courses – in a health education class, in an afterschool program – not just in the math classroom. These are overarching skills students need to be successful.”

### HABITS OF MIND AND THE COMMON CORE

#### THE STANDARDS FOR MATHEMATICAL PRACTICE

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

#### CAPACITIES OF A LITERATE INDIVIDUAL

1. They demonstrate independence.
2. They build strong content knowledge.
3. They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline.
4. They comprehend as well as critique.
5. They value evidence.
6. They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
7. They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

<sup>2</sup> To date, Minnesota has adopted the ELA standards only. Alaska, Nebraska, Texas and Virginia have not adopted the standards.

<sup>3</sup> McConnell, M. (May 5, 2012). Implementing the common core: Back to the tortoise and the hare. *Desert News*. Accessed May 22 at: <http://educatingourselves.blogs.deseretnews.com>.

<sup>4</sup> Costa, A. L. and Kallick, B. (2008). *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Marzano, R.J. (1992). *A Different Kind of Classroom: Teaching with Dimensions of Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

<sup>5</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers. (2011). *Connecting High-Quality Expanded Learning Opportunities and the Common Core State Standards to Advance Student Success*.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN THE COMMON CORE?

Because it is often the case that what gets measured gets done, there is a great deal of interest in the role that assessment will play in driving implementation of the Common Core. Two consortia – the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers – were awarded a collective \$330 million from the U.S. Department of Education to develop assessments aligned with the Common Core, along with online resource banks that will include lesson plans, materials and resources related to implementation. Each consortium is made up of a collection of states that have signed on to use the resulting assessments.

**Many believe the use of these new assessments will provide better and more consistent measures of student achievement than current standardized tests.**

Each consortium is developing a system of formative, interim and summative assessments. Formative assessment will help teachers and schools identify students that need support and group students appropriately, interim assessment will measure progress throughout the year and summative assessment will measure student progress at the end of the year. The expectation is that states will replace current achievement tests with these new assessments and use the same scoring system. Many believe the use of these new assessments will provide better and more consistent measures of student achievement than current standardized tests.

**ASSESSING HABITS OF MIND.** The consortia are primarily focused on developing assessments to measure the math and ELA content standards. That said, there are plans to incorporate at least some of the standards of practice or habits of mind into content-based assessments, especially in the case of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Sue Gendron, policy advisor for the Consortium and former education commissioner in Maine, said they are developing a number of extended response questions and performance tasks designed to get at the standards of mathematical practice. These will be longer problems that require students to demonstrate their work. Problems will be scenario-based around specific themes and will require abstract reasoning, modeling or precision to solve, therefore requiring demonstration of several “mathematical practices.”

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The Consortium sees the combination of tests it is developing as useful for tracking student progress on the content standards as well as habits of mind, and is working closely with David Conley of the University of Oregon and Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University on how to incorporate key learning skills such as persistence and motivation into the assessments. According to Darling-Hammond, it is yet to be seen how much the Common Core will push on the habits of mind. “Those skills absolutely have value. They are the most important skills; the ability to frame a problem and persevere in solving it, for example. You’ll get a glimmer of that in the assessments, but resource constraints and requirements restrict what the assessments can cover.”

Although representatives from each consortium are quick to express how important they are in academic success and other areas of life, it appears that in the Common Core, the habits of mind will be assessed only in the context of content standards. For example, perseverance is not considered a goal in and of itself, but rather is important in terms of how it can help a student stick to a math problem until he gets it. Similarly, independence is considered relevant as it relates to students being able to read independently.

**OTHER ASSESSMENT OPTIONS.** Beyond the two consortia charged with developing official assessments, others are exploring how to assess aspects of the Common Core. CCSSO, according to Expanded Learning Program Director Taliah Givens, has identified college and career readiness as a major focus in the coming years and is prioritizing work on assessment of relevant skills and dispositions. Other organizations are developing tools to help teachers and schools better incorporate the habits of mind into formative assessment and instruction. For example, the Strategic Education Research Partnership (SERP) is working with principals in San Francisco and Oakland to develop a simple assessment tool (it fits on 5 x 8 card) they can use to observe the mathematical practices in classrooms and talk with teachers about how to foster those practices among their students.

The Common Core aside, education stakeholders increasingly recognize the importance of habits of mind (often using different language) in supporting student learning. In recent years, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning; the Broader, Bolder Approach Campaign; ASCD; the American Association of School Administrators; Corporate Voices for Working Families; the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and our own Ready by 21 initiative – to name a few – have all called for broad definitions of readiness and increased opportunities for students to develop cross-cutting skills that will help them succeed in college, work and life.

School districts and networks like the New Tech Schools are beginning to draw explicit attention to such skills and habits of mind by incorporating them – independent of content knowledge – into grading procedures and adding them to report cards. Among out-of-school time providers, interest in assessing non-academic outcomes is growing, with organizations and systems using a number of measures to determine whether and how programs contribute to skill development in areas such as self-regulation, critical thinking and collaboration.<sup>6</sup>

## HOW IS THE OST FIELD RESPONDING?

Already, OST organizations have begun responding to the Common Core in a variety of ways. While it's still early, the examples below illustrate the kinds of action some in the field are pursuing.

- ✓ The Georgia Afterschool Investment Council recently led a process to develop statewide quality afterschool standards. The state Department of Education and local school districts were included in that process alongside community organizations in an explicit attempt to connect the quality standards with the priorities of the schools. The resulting standards include a specific set focused on how a quality afterschool program can connect to schools and the Common Core, with an emphasis on how programs can address the habits of mind described above.
- ✓ The Utah Afterschool Network and Utah State Office of Education partnered to host a Leadership Institute in April 2012 aimed at helping program providers better align curriculum, training and resources with the Common Core. The institute was designed to provide practical resources to participants from a variety of program settings, including school-based, community-based, government/recreation and private OST providers.
- ✓ The New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition has taken on the role of training staff from youth programs in the Common Core so they are knowledgeable and ready to be informed partners to their schools and districts. As part of their Supporting Student Success project, the coalition developed a series of trainings on how OST programs can support in-school learning, using the Common Core as a base. It wasn't easy to get programs up to speed on the standards. "We invited programs to apply for the training program that were high-quality and were already using academic standards in their program," says Sarah Cruz, director of expanded learning opportunities. "Even so, it was a steep learning curve for programs."
- ✓ The Providence After School Alliance in Rhode Island has taken a stab at aligning its expanded learning opportunities initiative with the Common Core standards. This past year, the alliance piloted an initiative whereby students in one high school were awarded course credit for rigorous work conducted in OST experiences. Community educators leading these experiences aligned the content of their curriculum with the standards, then worked with a partnering teacher to assign students grades and award credit.
- ✓ The San Francisco Afterschool for All Advisory Council is exploring how local OST providers can best integrate and support the school district's transition to the Common Core math standards. The Council recently organized a middle school math learning circle with five local OST providers to learn about the new math practices, share best practices in integrating STEM

<sup>6</sup>Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., Yohalem, N., Dubois, D., and Ji, P. (2011). *From Soft Skills to Hard Data: Measuring Youth Program Outcomes*. Washington, DC: Forum for Youth Investment.  
 4 Silva, E. (2008). *Measuring Skills for the 21st Century*. Education Sector: Washington, DC.

learning into applied and project-based learning, and begin exploring how OST providers can support the district's transition to the new math standards. Going forward, the Council plans to expand the learning circle to include front-line OST and school staff and test new approaches to ensure greater coherence between school-day and OST programming related to the Common Core, such as joint professional development and information-sharing mechanisms.

- ✓ TASC, through its ExpandedED Schools initiative in New York City, is engaging community educators and youth workers in professional development opportunities aimed at introducing the Common Core and demonstrating activities and shared strategies for successful alignment with school-day lessons. TASC is also developing learning modules or bundles of lessons that correspond to the Common Core and provide community educators with a framework for offering inquiry-based activities and improving the quality of instruction.
- ✓ To assist in Common Core implementation, Partnership for Children and Youth, a policy-development and advocacy intermediary in Oakland, Calif., is building a knowledge base of promising approaches to partnerships between schools and OST providers around Common Core implementation. As part of this work the partnership is developing state and local recommendations to share with policymakers, education leaders and OST professionals.

## WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE OST FIELD?

The good news is that the Common Core defines college and career readiness in a way that pushes beyond traditional academic competence and reflects some skills that youth organizations have long championed (e.g., problem-solving, perseverance, independence, understanding other cultures). This reinforces the importance of developing these kinds of skills and creates more room for recognizing the value that out-of-school learning experiences can have.

The primary risk for the OST field – which pre-dates the emergence of the Common Core – lies in overpromising. Although some OST programs have successfully focused on academic achievement (see sidebar for examples), some leaders in the OST field argue that programs have strayed too far from what they do best: nurturing what Robert Halpern calls “capacities and dimensions of self such as creativity, aesthetic sense, growing skill in specific domains, self-expression, interpersonal skill, sense of agency and voice, identification with home and community culture, individuality and relatedness, compassion and physical vitality.”<sup>7</sup> Halpern argues that many afterschool programs are not equipped to deliver academic content and that for some, doing so represents a departure from their “core.”

### EFFECTIVE OST PROGRAMS WITH AN EXPLICIT ACADEMIC FOCUS

**Citizen Schools** forms innovative partnerships with middle schools where a “second shift” of staff join school faculty to focus on building academic, college and career readiness and 21st century skills during the afternoon hours. Students participate twice weekly in a semester-long apprenticeship project. Four times per week students receive homework help, support for college and career readiness, as well as targeted coaching in math and ELA, study habits and time management. **External evaluation results** showed effects on student engagement and achievement.

**Higher Achievement** is a year-round program for 5th through 8th graders focused on improving academic success and culminating in enrollment in a selective college-preparatory high school. Participants spend 650 hours a year outside of school learning an advanced curriculum that is aligned to state standards. During the school year, students participate in an Afterschool Academy, where they receive intensive mentoring in math, literature and other subjects. During the Summer Academy students are involved in math, science, social studies, literature, and an elective. The Summer Academy also includes overnight college trip. At the end of their 8th grade year, scholars are supported in the application and transition process for the most selective college-preparatory high school programs in their community. An **external evaluation** showed significant effects on math and reading.

<sup>7</sup> Halpern, R. (2005). *Confronting the Big Lie: The Need to Reframe Expectations of Afterschool Programs*. New York, NY: Partnership for Afterschool Education.

In fact, several rigorous evaluations suggest that high-quality OST programs can support academic achievement without an explicit focus on academic instruction.<sup>8</sup> While this might seem counter-intuitive, social and cognitive development are intertwined, and participating in active learning experiences in a safe environment with high expectations and supportive adults can contribute to increased engagement in learning, improved behavior and increased grades.

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Cautions aside, youth organizations can play several roles to support the implementation of the Common Core. In exploring these or other strategies, it is important to keep in mind that states, districts and individual schools may be overwhelmed by the volume of resources being released and the number of vendors offering “aligned” products. “Everyone tells me they are aligned with the standards,” said Greta Bornemann of the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. “It’s a miracle! There is no such thing as a guarantee of alignment at this point. It is too new.” Most states are singularly focused on building awareness and understanding among teachers about the standards in preparation for the rollout of new assessments in 2014; they might not have the time or inclination to take on anything else right now.

It is therefore particularly important that OST partners offer support in a meaningful and informed way that does not add burden to already overtaxed districts. Specific steps for intermediaries and programs to consider include:

- ✓ **BECOME KNOWLEDGEABLE.** An important step that OST programs, systems and intermediaries can take now is to become knowledgeable about the structure and format of the Common Core, including the habits of mind. As Elena Silva of the Carnegie Corporation of New York noted, “Out-of-school educators are the link between school-based curriculum and the rest of a student’s world. Being that link means understanding the school’s goals, understanding the kids’ worlds and making those connections.”
- ✓ **GET UP TO SPEED ON IMPLEMENTATION.** In addition to understanding the standards themselves and the habits of mind embedded within them, programs should become knowledgeable about how states and districts are implementing the Common Core. Find out what your state is tackling first, the timeline for rollout and how it is conducting training. OST programs should be knowledgeable and supportive partners.
- ✓ **FOCUS ON ALIGNING ACTIVITIES WITH HABITS OF MIND RATHER THAN INDIVIDUAL CONTENT STANDARDS.** The multi-age and multi-subject nature of many OST programs makes alignment with specific standards difficult. Sue Gendron of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium commented, “I would hate to see programs focus in too deeply on the individual content standards. Afterschool programs should be fostering high levels of interest in learning rather than focusing too deeply on individual standards.”
- ✓ **COMMUNICATE WITH SCHOOL STAFF ABOUT ACADEMIC ALIGNMENT.** If academic support is a primary goal of your program, efforts to align with content standards might make good sense. Rather than pore over the standards to identify specific content to cover, create mechanisms for ongoing communication and data sharing with schools you work with. Understanding what teachers are teaching and when, will make it easier for your program to complement school-day instruction and support students in achieving the standards.
- ✓ **CONSIDER JOINT TRAINING AND PLANNING TIME.** The time is ripe for joint professional development and planning opportunities that bring together school-day and afterschool staff to build skills and share promising practices. If some precedent already exists for joint training, the Common Core is a natural subject. If not, the standards provide a new opportunity to bring different actors committed to student success to a common table.
- ✓ **MODEL ENGAGING INSTRUCTION.** The Common Core is as much about shifting instruction as it is about curriculum, so showing schools how you teach rather than what you teach may be powerful. By creating opportunities for students to practice skills they are

<sup>8</sup> Durlak, J. and Weissberg, R. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and life skills*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning.;Kauh, T. (2011) *AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providence’s Citywide After-School System*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Hall, G., Yohalem, N., Tolman, J., and Wilson, A. (2003). *How Afterschool Programs Can Most Effectively Promote Positive Youth Development as a Support to Academic Achievement*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time.

learning in school in the context of engaging activities, Gendron said, high-quality programs can “model best practices to help school districts see what is happening and what this can look like.”

- ✓ **HELP SCHOOLS WITH COMMUNICATION.** Youth development programs are sometimes more connected to young people’s families and communities than schools are. Offering to help your partnering schools communicate with families about the Common Core might be an important role your program can play and a door to a deeper relationship with the school.

In addition to the above strategies, it is important for OST programs and systems to shore up their own “core” of effective youth development practices. Consider how existing program development and quality improvement efforts you are involved in can connect with and support the Common Core, in particular the habits of mind.

High-quality youth development and OST programs already foster many of these practices, and in recent years, many programs have begun codifying those practices through quality standards, frameworks and assessment tools.

[\(See this comparison between Common Core habits of mind and the Youth Program Quality Assessment and its STEM supplement.\)](#) By emphasizing the implementation

of high-quality instructional practices that reflect what we know about youth development and learning, OST programs can support college and career readiness and, in the process, provide schools and districts with creative examples of helping youth develop and practice the habits of mind they need to succeed.

Many OST leaders and practitioners are grappling with the question of how academically focused their programs should be. Some programs are structured and staffed to directly support academic success, and in such cases looking for ways to align with Common Core content standards makes sense. For the field more generally, focusing on the habits of mind and other cross-cutting learning skills that are now considered instrumental competencies for college and career readiness should increase the relevance of programs and demonstrate their value to school partners.

Timing is everything. The Common Core is emerging just as calls for expanded learning opportunities and expanded learning time are growing. The OST field has a window to assert itself as a necessary part of children’s development and education. In doing so, the goal need not be to replicate the core work of schools but rather to complement, support and expand it.

## TO LEARN MORE

Common Core Standards Website: [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

### COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

General information about CCSSO’s common core initiative:

[http://ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/The\\_Common\\_Core\\_State\\_Standards\\_Initiative.html](http://ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/The_Common_Core_State_Standards_Initiative.html)

Common Core State Standards: Implementation Tools and Resources: [http://ccsso.org/Documents/2012/Common\\_Core\\_Resources.pdf](http://ccsso.org/Documents/2012/Common_Core_Resources.pdf)

Connecting High-Quality Expanded Learning Opportunities and the Common Core State Standards to Advance Student Success:

<http://ccsso.org/Documents/Connecting%20Expanded%20Learning%20Opportunities%20and%20the%20Common%20Core%20State%20Standards%20to%20Advance%20Student%20Success.pdf>

### HABITS OF MIND

[www.habitsofmind.org](http://www.habitsofmind.org)

[www.ascd.org/publications/books/108014/chapters/Related-ASCD-Resources@-Habits-of-Mind.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108014/chapters/Related-ASCD-Resources@-Habits-of-Mind.aspx)

### PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

P21 Common Core Toolkit: A Guide to Aligning the Common Core State Standards with the Framework for 21st Century Skills:

[www.p21.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1005&Itemid=236](http://www.p21.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1005&Itemid=236)

### ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers: [www.parcconline.org/](http://www.parcconline.org/)

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: [www.smarterbalanced.org](http://www.smarterbalanced.org)

SERP Observational Assessment looking at Standards of Mathematical Practice: [http://math.serpmedia.org/tools\\_5x8.html](http://math.serpmedia.org/tools_5x8.html)

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OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME POLICY COMMENTARY

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