

# Staff Development Modifications Necessary to Increase Teacher Readiness for Change to Common Core State Standards

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## Abstract

Staff development is a crucial piece for successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). A complete plan must be developed that focuses on implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The focus for this plan should be on teacher needs with an aim to improve student learning. If teacher needs are considered and they see the value for their students, teachers will be more likely to not only accept this change but become actively involved in planning for implementation of CCSS.

## Introduction

Staff development is a crucial piece for successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). School districts can no longer have eclectic staff development—a little bit of this and a little bit of that. A complete plan must be developed that focuses on implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The focus for this plan should be on teacher needs with an aim to improve student learning. To determine how this can be accomplished, PreK-12 teachers need to be engaged in the process. If teacher needs are considered and they see the value for their students, teachers will be more likely to not only accept this change but become actively involved in planning for implementation of CCSS.

## Critical Features of Teacher Professional Development

The literature on quality teacher professional development may be a good starting point to determine modifications necessary for successful implementation of CCSS. The following chart lists six features as crucial in the design and evaluation of teacher professional development that were identified by Hawley & Valli, Kenedy, Wilson & Berne, and the National Center for Educational Statistics (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).  
 (insert Table 1 here)

## Format for Common Core State Standards Staff Development

A format that could be followed in creating staff development for CCSS is:

1. The plan for engaging staff in the process both before and during the use of CCSS
  - a. Create outcomes
  - b. Determine resources
  - c. Decide policies
  - d. Preparation of teachers for planning and teaching the CCSS
  - e. Academic Leadership from Principals
  - f. Ongoing communication PreK-12—teachers and administrators
2. Focus on Implementation for several years
  - a. Tasks are defined
  - b. Curriculum is developed
  - c. Professional Development is focused on implementation
  - d. Ample time is allowed for application
  - e. Time is arranged for faculty and administrators to meet regularly
3. Establish evaluation criteria and processes
4. Reflection and adaptation

### **The Plan**

School districts need to determine what plan will work best for them. Teacher, parent, and administrator representatives from each grade level should form a PreK-12 team to create outcomes and develop a plan of action. (See Chapter 2 for directions on organizing the structure.) Through brainstorming, a draft of the outcomes should be created and taken back to each building for input from faculty and administration. The plan is a crucial step to make sure there are adequate resources and policies are in place. When time is allowed for input from faculty, administration and parents and the plan is revised, a solid plan of action will be developed. The key factor is ample time to allow as many revisions as needed. Throughout this planning period, meetings need to be scheduled for ongoing communication. The success of this plan requires coordination of PreK-12 teaching so courses can build on previous ones without redundancies or omissions. Teachers not only need training time but also need professional days to create materials for teaching CCSS.

The Principal's role as an instructional leader is to guide the professional growth of the staff. The Principal serves as the academic leader in carrying out the plan and providing teachers with time to plan units that align with CCSS. This becomes a crucial role to keep teachers focused on the benefits of curriculum change and to encourage teachers' use of multiple instructional methods while implementing the new standards.

### **Implementation**

Once the plan has the approval of the stake holders, professional development sessions that are selected to implement the plan begin. Successful implementation re-

quires that solid groundwork was laid in the planning stage; tasks are defined and teams created for curriculum development. Schools must provide professional development to support teachers' efforts for implementation. Jenkins and Agamba (2013) feel that, "The missing link in the CCSS initiative is professional development to support implementation." If adequate time is allowed for teachers to learn and work in teams to write curriculum there will be a successful outcome. All professional development is focused on implementation of CCSS so staff and administration are not pulled in different directions. Rothman (2012) feels that the training for teachers will be the most significant aspect for successful implementation. Perhaps the best plan of action is to concentrate on K-12 math and language arts since those are the areas where the Common Core State Standards are developed. Working with one or two subject areas gives the school a chance to implement their plan without involving a large number of teachers.

Meeting the Common Core State Standards will require new teaching methods so teachers need adequate time to develop multiple instructional strategies. Hirsh (2012) writes, "While we are promoting radical change in creating a coherent national framework for what students should know and the way they learn, we have not yet committed to offering teachers the deep learning they will need to transform the way they work." (page 1). To provide teachers with this "deep learning", the process will take several years to bring all staff on board and allow adequate time for implementation. Others like Rothman (2012) acknowledge that the significant aspect for successful implementation is the training of teachers with appropriate professional development and Smith and Wilhelm (2013) indicate that meeting the CCSS will take new teaching methods.

Meetings of faculty and administration must continue throughout the implementation stage to make sure everyone is on the same page and so adjustments can be made as needed. Schmidt and Burroughs (2013) add these cautions, "Inadequate teacher preparation, lack of parent involvement, and insufficient resources and planning could all derail implementation efforts."

## **Evaluation**

At some point in the planning, evaluation criteria and processes are established. Without periodic evaluations that allow change and improvement, successful implementation of CCSS would be difficult. No plan can be designed perfectly and revisions are to be expected. The meetings set up during the planning stage should be continued throughout the implementation and evaluation stages. This gives teachers and administrators the opportunity to fine tune the plan and change what does not work. Evaluation should include other stake holders—parents, students, and community members. If school districts welcome feedback from constituents and staff, they will be able to improve and make the curriculum more meaningful.

## **Adaptation**

When feedback has been obtained and evaluated, the teams that were established need to meet and discuss possible adaptations. Making adaptations is a very important step to make sure the plan is workable and suited for students in the school district. The same process of team meetings used the planning stage should be continued. The teams need to take this information back to all those who teach the subject and get their feedback on recommended adaptations. If the plan is viewed as something that will be adapted as needed, teachers would be more willing to make suggestions for improvement. Once the original plan has been implemented, evaluated, and adapted, it should continue to be the curriculum taught. Principals and/or Curriculum Directors need to oversee this process with classroom visitations and meetings with the teachers involved. Each subject area should be put on a review cycle so every 3-5 years the curriculum is revisited and readjusted.

## **Conclusion**

Jenkins and Agamba (2012) feel that the missing link in the Common Core State Standards initiative is professional development to support implementation. A teacher expressed his concern about the transition to CCSS. He sees several facets that are difficult: (1) no proven materials for teaching the new standards, (2) difficulty in communicating to parents the challenges related to a transition to new standards, (3) the extra work from having to create new materials, and (4) a general ambiguity with regard to how the new standards will be tested on state tests. This teacher is concerned with all the extra work that comes with the change and feels everything is an experiment at this point. He said, "Some things work, and some things don't, but I don't know until after the lesson has been taught." His comments emphasize the need to have adequate time for development of curriculum so teachers will not be pressured to make quick changes and that they will have time to reflect and adapt units of study. Jenkins and Agamba (2012) write, "The stakes are high." (p.78) which they are. Other curriculum experts agree about the importance of professional development to insure successful implementation. Without a solid plan, focused staff development, ample time for implementation, along with evaluation and adaptations, CCSS will fail and the biggest losers will be the students.

<b>Critical Features of Teacher Professional Development</b> The following table contains the six research-based features identified in the literature as crucial in the design and evaluation of teacher professional development.	
Hawley & Valli, 1999; Kennedy, 1998; Wilson & Berne, 1999 (as cited by Desimone, 2009)	National Center for Educational Statistics (2005)
<b><u>Content Focus:</u></b> What teachers learn that can improve instructional practice and increase student achievement	<b><u>Focus on content and focus on methods:</u></b> Subject matter content and/or teaching methods employed
<b><u>Active Learning:</u></b> Engagement in interactive activities that apply to instructional practice (e.g., observations, interactive feedback, discussion)	<b><u>Active Learning Opportunities:</u></b> Activities including observation, planning, practicing, and presenting
<b><u>Duration:</u></b> Length and time span of an activity, as well as contact	<b><u>Duration:</u></b> Number of hours, weeks, or months of training
<b><u>Collective Participation:</u></b> Participation on grade level, department, building, or school district teams	<b><u>Collective Participation:</u></b> Peer collaboration focused on instructional practices
<b><u>Coherence:</u></b> Connection and continuity between existing or previous knowledge and new knowledge or teacher learning	<b><u>Format:</u></b> Activities integrated into daily instructional practice
(no proposed feature)	<b><u>Alignment:</u></b> Alignment of PD with standards, other initiatives, professional goals of teachers, and assessments

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