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# COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

The Common Core State Standards create consistent expectations for what students should learn in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level from kindergarten through high school. Developed jointly by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association for Best Practices, the Standards are intended to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and career. Washington State adopted the Common Core in 2011; there are currently 46 states that have begun to implement the Common Core.

## COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOs) AND THE COMMON CORE

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are well positioned to support student success during the transition to the Common Core and beyond. The Forum for Youth Investment has proposed seven key strategies for CBO partners:

1. Become knowledgeable about Common Core, including the Habits of Mind
2. Get up to speed on state and district implementation plans
3. Focus on alignment with the habits of mind rather than individual content standards
4. Communicate with school staff about academic alignment
5. Consider joint training and planning time
6. Model engaging instruction
7. Help schools with communication: essentially, serve as a bridge to parents

### 1. BECOME KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT COMMON CORE, INCLUDING THE HABITS OF MIND

Common Core content standards are intended to establish a consistent and clear expectation for student learning at each grade level. English language arts standards define key skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and media and technology. The mathematics standards pair procedural skill with conceptual understanding.

“Habits of mind” are the skills and dispositions that develop alongside academic content knowledge in the Common Core framework. The habits of mind are:

#### **English Language Arts: Capacities of a Literate Individual**

- Demonstrate independence.
- Build strong content knowledge.
- Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.
- Comprehend as well as critique.
- Value evidence.
- Use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
- Come to understand other perspectives and cultures.



**Mathematics:** Practices to Master Grade-Level Standards

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

Detailed descriptions of the Common Core content standards are available on the Common Core website at <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

## 2. GET UP TO SPEED ON STATE AND DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Washington State began a phased implementation of the Common Core State Standards during the 2011-2012 school year. Key points along Washington’s implementation timeline are:

- **2011-2012:** Build awareness of the Standards and begin to build statewide capacity
- **2012-2014:** Build statewide capacity and classroom transitions
- **2014-2015:** Statewide application and assessment

Capacity-building strategies included statewide dissemination of training materials and professional development for district and school staff and leadership. In 2014, Washington began its transition to the Common Core-aligned assessments developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. More details about Washington’s implementation of the Common Core are posted at <http://www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/CCSS/default.aspx>.

## 3. FOCUS ON ALIGNMENT WITH THE HABITS OF MIND RATHER THAN CONTENT

Since many OST programs serve students across a range of ages and subjects, alignment with specific content standards may prove challenging. Furthermore, an attempt to do so could divert programs’ focus from what they do best: improve students’ motivation and engagement by involving them in “active learning experiences in a safe environment with high expectations and supportive adults” (Devaney and Yohalem, 2012, p. 6).

Many of the skills and dispositions that underlie the Common Core habits of mind are strongly aligned to fundamental youth development outcomes that OST providers work toward: namely, perseverance, critical thinking, problem solving, and cultural competence. Afterschool and summer programs are well positioned to serve as “an extended platform on which students can build their expertise in these habits” (p.60). The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills has developed a toolkit that aligns Common Core standards to the “4 Cs” – critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity and innovation (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills, 2011).

## 4. COMMUNICATE WITH SCHOOL STAFF ABOUT ACADEMIC ALIGNMENT

For programs that focus heavily on academic alignment, it may be necessary to become familiar with the Common Core content standards and to tailor instruction accordingly. Programs will be most successful if they establish partnerships with schools that have several key features:

- Regular, consistent communication between school and CBO staff
- Timely data sharing between schools and CBOs



- Common understanding of instructional goals and practices

## 5. CONSIDER JOINT TRAINING AND PLANNING TIME

Joint professional development and planning can help to ensure that school and CBO staffs approach Common Core adoption in a coherent way. Some partnerships already have mechanisms in place for shared learning. For those that do not, the adoption of new curriculum may provide a strong impetus to establish them.

Several afterschool intermediary organizations around the country have developed training for afterschool providers in Common Core alignment. The New Jersey State Afterschool Network (NJSACC), in cooperation with the New Jersey State Department of Education, completed a statewide pilot training program on the Common Core for afterschool program leaders. School's Out Washington regularly provides Common Core training to the afterschool field locally.

## 6. MODEL ENGAGING INSTRUCTION

In addition to participating in joint learning, CBOs have the potential to provide leadership in the area of engaging instruction. Since many CBOs have long focused on building skills like perseverance and critical thinking, they can model high-quality instructional practices that build these skills.

One possible approach is to explicitly align program quality frameworks to the Common Core. The Georgia Afterschool Investment Council published their revised "afterschool quality standards" to include intentional alignment to the Common Core (Georgia Afterschool Investment Council, 2011). Similarly, School's Out Washington has developed quality standards for family, school, and community connections specifies that "staff understand the Common Core State Standards and provide youth with opportunities to develop the skills they need to achieve them" (School's Out Washington, 2014, p. 27).

## 7. HELP SCHOOLS WITH COMMUNICATION: ESSENTIALLY, SERVE AS A BRIDGE TO PARENTS

According to the National Council of La Raza, "CBOs can play a critical role in supplementing school efforts to raise student academic achievement and in disseminating information to parents and other community members" (p. 24). Afterschool providers in particular may have frequent communication with parents about students' academic needs, and can help orient parents to the structure and function of the Common Core. Parent resources on the Common Core include:

- Council on Great City Schools. Parent roadmaps to Common Core Standards. <http://www.cgcs.org/Domain/36>
- National PTA. Parents' guides to student success. <http://pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR COMMON CORE SUCCESS

All of the strategies above are based on the premise that strong cross-sector partnerships can help with a successful Common Core implementation. While educators work to develop curriculum and adapt to new instruction and assessment approaches, partners in out-of-school time programs can help by providing students opportunities for deeper engagement and learning. As well, they can help to ensure consistent support of student learning by engaging parents.

## REFERENCES



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