MEET THE PROMISE OF CONTENT STANDARDS:

THE PRINCIPAL

learningforward

TRANSFORMING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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Learning Forward's *Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core* is a multidimensional initiative focused on developing a comprehensive system of professional learning that spans the distance from the statehouse to the classroom. The project will reform policy and practice and apply innovative technology solutions to support and enhance professional learning. With an immediate focus on implementing Common Core State Standards and new assessments, the initiative provides resources and tools to assist states, districts, and schools in providing effective professional learning for current and future education reforms.

This work is supported by Sandler Foundation, MetLife Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Learn more at www.learningforward.org/advancing/implementingthecommoncore.cfm

S andra Jackson woke earlier than usual and thought about what was ahead for the day. It was the first districtwide professional development day of the school year and the focus was Common Core State Standards. Principals had met several times over the last three months with their leadership teams to discuss each school's needs and to plan for differentiated support to their staff.

As a school leader, Jackson has been aware of the standards since early discussions about them several years ago. She made a point to convene her math and English departments to give feedback on draft versions of the standards. When her state adopted them, she immediately pulled together teams of teachers to study the standards, examine their existing courses, and to discuss what changes they anticipated with the implementation of the standards. She realized the learning curve for her teachers was going to be huge during those conversations. She didn't wait for state or district leaders to launch curriculum revisions because she knew these efforts might be bogged down in policy and process issues for months. She planned to get teachers involved from the beginning in understanding the standards and to ground them in what they would need to learn to implement the standards in their classrooms. Jackson immersed herself in learning about the standards by reading everything available, joining national webinars, attending conference sessions about the standards, and networking with other principals.

Overall she is excited about the math and English departments' commitment to the standards, but realizes there is so much more to do to get everyone on board. Just recently, in a meeting of the school leadership team, she learned that some teachers were resentful of the focus on just two disciplines and that they were unsure what was expected

of them in relationship to the new standards. Today would be an important day to help teachers in every discipline understand how the standards affect their teaching. Teachers from across the three district high schools were coming together to consider changes needed in the district curriculum in all disciplines to deepen learning, increase the use of complex thinking, promote integration of content, and implement performance-based learning as routine practice. While she knew that this was a continuation of what she and the school leadership team have been focusing on in collaborative learning teams in her school for nearly two years, the cross-school conversations would help her staff know that these changes were purposeful and expected. She also knew that what was started today would require continued follow-up, ongoing professional learning, and classroom-focused support for many years.

One of the biggest challenges Jackson faced was with her fellow principals who were less comfortable with the new standards and who didn't yet grasp the magnitude of the changes in instruction, curriculum, assessment, professional learning, and instructional resources needed to fully implement the standards. She wasn't even sure her colleagues in central office understood the full scope of the change needed. She viewed her role as two-fold—first leading her school successfully through implementation of the new standards so that every graduate was prepared for post-secondary education or careers. She knew that she also needed to be an advocate of principal professional learning so her peers were ready to provide the essential support teachers needed for instructional reform. She met with the superintendent several times to discuss ways to engage her colleagues in learning more about the standards and how to implement them.

After reviewing her notes for the opening plenary session she was leading with the district superintendent, she paused to acknowledge that the success of the day and of the entire Common Core initiative was a significant responsibility for all school leaders. She felt ready for the work as a leader of learning and change and was grateful that she had strong teacher leaders and a dedicated school leadership team to work side-by-side with her.

"It is the biggest curriculum change I have seen in 33 years and it would be much more overwhelming if we hadn't done our preliminary work in PLCs."

—Elementary principal

P rincipals influence learning, both for students and teachers. They are key to any reform focused on teaching and learning. Reforms as significant as the implementation of Common Core State Standards demand as much from principals as they do from teachers. At the same time, they demand substantial district effort to support principals in shifting their attention to the curricular and instructional transformation the new standards require. Deep understanding of the standards, focused instructional leadership and professional learning, change management, and monitoring student learning require that all principals, even experienced and successful ones, hone their knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions to achieve the goal of college- and career-ready students.

Successful principals shape the culture of schools, set clear expectations, and share leadership with others to create productive learning environments for students and staff. For nearly a decade, The Wallace Foundation has coordinated studies of principal effectiveness and has concluded that principals are second only to teachers as the most influential school-based factor in student achievement. "Drawing on both detailed case studies and large-scale quantitative analysis, the research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal. Indeed, leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning" (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 3-4). Timothy Waters, Robert Marzano, and Brian McNulty (2003) found that average schools led by highly effective principals performed 10 percentage points higher than if the same school was led by an average principal. Gregory Branch, Eric Hanushek, and Steven Rivkin (2009) concluded that schools with highly effective principals, based on value-added scores, improve student achievement from the 50th percentile to between the 54th and 58th percentile in just one year, although the authors do acknowledge that many other factors influence the results. Primary among the reasons for the strong influence of principals on student achievement is their role in orchestrating multiple factors that contribute to student success. Other studies confirm the importance of the school principal.

As states, districts, and schools strive to prepare all students for college and careers through full implementation of Common Core State Standards, transformed instruction, and new assessments, attention to the significant role of principals in this work is long overdue. Many report feeling overlooked in the Common Core movement and unprepared to guide teachers in implementation of the standards (Gewertz, 2012). Focused attention on the specific principal practices that support student achievement, transformation in instruction, and implementation of new standards will be a welcome relief to principals.

The Wallace Foundation research identified five essential principal practices associated with increasing student achievement:

- "Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based in high standards;

- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations for fruitful interaction prevail;

- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;

- Improving instruction to enable teacher to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and

- Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement" (2012, p. 4).

Other researchers confirm these practices as essential. Of the 21 behaviors Waters, Marzano, and McNulty cite as most highly correlated with student learning, the highest correlates include fostering shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation (culture); demonstrating deep knowledge of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment; engaging staff in building awareness of research-based practices and theories related to instruction and promoting ongoing conversations about these as routine practice (intellectual stimulation); understanding the nuances of managing a school and using the information to address existing and potential problems (situational analysis); and challenging the status quo (change agent).

This brief, drawn from research and first-hand experiences of principals in schools across the country, examines specific practices in each category listed above that are likely to support implementation of Common Core standards and parallel, necessary changes. It also suggests how states, districts, and principals themselves can contribute to strengthening principal leadership for full implementation of Common Core State Standards.

SHAPING A VISION OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

In schools where all students are successful, strong coherence exists among curriculum, assessment, instruction, and learning environment. This coherence is expressed in a vision of academic success. Clear, compelling visions promote action among members of the community who hold the vision. A vision of academic success creates an image and common understanding among members of the learning community about success. A shared vision of academic success has multiple components, according to researchers. Strong visions describe expectations, goals, and roles of staff members. Chief among the elements are high expectations for every student regardless of past academic performance or family background or circumstance.

When new standards are introduced, it is more important than ever for principals to engage all staff in understanding the vision for student and teacher success. Common Core standards call for review and likely revision of current visions of academic success because they call for not only different outcomes for students, but also for different forms of instruction and assessment of learning.

Principals' everyday actions may be the most significant way they convey their personal and professional commitment to the shared vi-

sion for academic success—from helping teachers acquire the necessary non-fiction resources to support the use of more complex text to co-teaching with a teacher who is testing her ability to probe student thinking and reasoning in mathematics. Through their actions and words, principals communicate the importance of the standards to students, staff, and their community.

Before revising a current or creating a new vision of academic success, principals must develop staff members' understanding of the standards and the shifts they require in instruction. To develop this foundational understanding of the Common Core standards, principals may engage their staff in book studies, dialogue, instructional rounds in schools already implementing the standards, study of video-based exemplary classroom, or other forms of professional learning. With a baseline understanding of what the Common Core expects of students and how the teaching and learning process must change, principals can facilitate vision building among their staff and engage students, families, and community members as appropriate.

Principal actions

The responsibilities of principals in shaping and achieving a vision are multi-faceted; however, principals undertake specific actions to communicate and nurture the vision for academic success aligned with the Common Core standards. They:

- Deepen their own understanding of the Common Core standards and engage faculty, students, parents, and community members to understand the standards and the vision of academic success aligned to college- and career-readiness;

- Meet one-on-one, in teams, and as a whole faculty to reinforce high expectations for students and staff, develop plans to achieve the vision and new standards, review with evidence progress toward the goals, and identify exemplars of the vision in action and barriers to it;

- Establish and communicate non-negotiables related to teaching and learning in intellectually stimulating ways that promote application of learning;

- Challenge beliefs and practices that interfere with achieving the vision;

- Demonstrate through daily decisions and actions that the school's priority is academic success for every student; and

- Serve as the cheerleader, coach, and standard bearer for the vision.

District support

To support principals in developing strong visions of academic success aligned with Common Core standards, some districts provide principals with frameworks for school-based planning for implementation of standards and clear expectations for grade level and course curricula. Central office staff also make clear what degree of freedom schools have to develop their own vision of academic success or whether a single common vision will exist across all schools within the district.

In addition, district leaders set clear expectations for academic success for all students, model this commitment by providing the resources required to achieve those goals, and provide direct support to principals and school leadership staff. For example, district staff may facilitate staff learning about the new standards or provide resources for principals to use. They might facilitate vision-building processes or provide processes and protocols for schools to use. District leaders might share exemplars of school visions and provide feedback to principals as their new vision is emerging. Regardless of how much support they provide, district leaders maintain coherence and alignment across schools by reviewing and accepting each school's vision.

CREATING A HOSPITABLE CLIMATE

"The power is in together."
　　　—Elementary school principal

Principals who promote high levels of student and staff learning and create conditions to support both are creating a productive learning environment. Educators operating in healthy school climates nurture implementation of Common Core standards by acknowledging and respecting educators' professionalism, expecting continuous professional learning, making practice transparent, accessing expertise within and beyond the school, and using routine processes to identify and resolve barriers to educator and student success in expedient ways.

Principal actions create conditions for learning within their schools. They use their routine communication with staff to seek out challenges teachers are experiencing and intervene to address those challenges. They are visible frequently in classrooms, modeling teaching, meeting with teachers in individual, team, and whole-school meetings on instruction and student learning, and juggling responsibilities

to communicate clearly that effective instruction is their top priority.

Building a climate that promotes teacher and student learning to support Common Core standards includes ensuring continuous professional learning for individuals, teams, and the whole faculty that moves teachers from knowing about the standards to revamping their daily classroom instruction, assessment, and student assignments to integrate the standards. Principals provide, facilitate, and coordinate classroom support to ensure that new learning translates into classroom practices. Nearly every principal interviewed for this report sets frequent classroom visits as a high priority. Their visits support teachers to use research-based instructional practices, provide opportunities for positive encouragement and constructive feedback, and note problems that need to be addressed immediately because they interfere with effective teaching and learning. Their visits also convey to students that they sanction and expect new ways of learning.

Principals create a climate conducive to effective teaching and learning by building a school-day schedule that incorporates time for professional learning and collaboration. The degree of change required in classrooms and schools to fully achieve college- and career-readiness for all students simply cannot be accomplished in schools where teachers work in isolation from one another and where they lack trust among their peers since the work they need to undertake is complex and substantive. Only when teachers, school and district resource staff, and principals work collaboratively will the needed changes be possible. As Seashore Louis et al. state, "Leadership effects on student achievement occur largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community—a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning. Professional community, in turn, is a strong predictor of instructional practices that are strongly associated with student achievement" (2010, p. 37). Engagement in collaborative learning communities focused on teaching and learning minimizes variation in student learning across

Nurturing collaboration

Principals who contributed to this report acknowledge that they invested significant effort in cultivating learning-focused collaboration among teachers. Several state that they work continuously on building a strong sense of team among their faculty and celebrate successes that occur. They describe different ways in which they structured collaboration among teachers, from unpacking standards to designing instructional units to implement the standards. All report the importance of creating and monitoring learning communities to maintain the focus on learning, to provide resources to extend teachers' learning, and to support implementation of standards and new instructional practices.

classrooms, encourages ongoing professional learning that taps the unique talents of staff and their desire for continuous learning and improvement, and promotes the positive effects of peer success (Jackson and Bruegmann, 2009).

Principals extend climate-building efforts to enroll parents and community members in prioritizing academic success as a communitywide goal. They assess school and community climate and monitor staff, parent, and student understanding of the new standards and respond to concerns or challenges.

Principals hold at bay competing initiatives in order to focus the greatest attention and effort of student achievement of the new standards. They help teachers sustain change efforts by providing resources needed to be successful. As one principal acknowledges, "It is my job to anticipate the challenges, to work collaboratively with staff to address problems when they emerge, and to be ready with resources and solutions when necessary."

Principal actions

Principals' everyday actions shape the climate within their schools. To cultivate a climate for learning that aligns with college- and career-readiness principals:

- Create time within the school day for professional learning and collaboration among teachers and resource staff and facilitate and lead professional learning focused on content, instruction, and pedagogical content knowledge;

- Are present in classrooms and learning communities frequently to lend support to teachers and keep abreast of their professional learning and instructional needs;

- Create schoolwide and team norms and expectations for collective responsibility for student success;

- Develop staff's capacity to collaborate effectively about standards and effective instruction;

- Celebrate successes as well as opportunities for growth; and

- Eliminate barriers and distractions that interfere with effective teaching and learning.

District support

Districts support principals in building climates that foster educator and student learning by prioritizing time and other resources for collaboration among teachers. Districts must communicate to families and community members the value of teacher collaboration and work directly with principals and school communities to construct viable schedules that include collaboration time. In addition, districts support principals in establishing climates hospitable to learning by providing professional learning, tools, protocols, processes, and coaching for teams of educators and providing specialized professional learning for teachers who are responsible for facilitating collaborative teams and for principals on how to monitor and support collaboration within their schools.

CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP IN OTHERS

"Teacher leadership builds a collaborative structure and strong partnership so that teachers are supported in the transition."
        —K-8 principal

The role of a principal is too large to accomplish alone. Given the already complex and challenging leadership role principals have and add on top substantive changes resulting from initiatives such as implementing Common Core standards, new educator effectiveness systems, new accountability measures, and new assessment systems, principals can quickly become overwhelmed and lose sight of what is most important in their daily practice. Savvy principals enlist others to share in the leadership role alongside them. Shared leadership taps the expertise that resides within a school as well as engages others in collective responsibility for the success of each student. Teacher leadership, in either formal or informal roles, contributes to a culture of

How principals shape teacher leader roles

Two principals redefined the role of department chairs to shift it away from management tasks such as inventorying books to focus it on instructional leadership. One principal selected teachers who were ready to facilitate instructional improvements within their departments to fulfill the role. Both meet regularly with the new leaders to prepare them to use protocols and strategies in team meetings each week. Part of their responsibility as chief instructional leaders, one principal notes, is to develop other leaders.

One increased daily time available for members of the instructional council and expects that this time is spent providing instructional support to teachers. This principal acknowledges, "It is hard for them to take on these new responsibilities; however we have expertise in this school and we have to use it. They realize they will have a greater impact with their colleagues than any outside expert will or sending teachers to some website to watch a video."

Another principal works closely with his coaches and grade-level leaders to support their leadership work. Another works alongside his school's coaches to be sure they are conveying a consistent vision of effective instruction aligned with the school's vision of academic success. A K-8 principal remarks, "Teachers are willing to try things when have a voice and an opportunity to give input and feedback. We are implementing a new approach to literacy instruction because one teacher brought it forward. I encourage an entrepreneurial approach to teaching."

collaboration, empowerment of educators, and uses the talents within. Principals who understand how to work effectively in a structure of shared leadership broaden the base of support for change and engage teachers purposefully in contributing to the well being of the school, colleagues, and all students.

How principals select, deploy, and support teacher leaders as partners in instructional leadership is critical to their success in improving teaching and learning. The nature of the changes required by the new standards requires a specific kind of leadership among teachers. Bradley Portin et al. (2009) find, "Learning-focused teacher leaders are unique in at least two ways: first, the focus of their work is primarily or solely instructional improvement at the classroom level—their primary connection is to teachers. Therefore, they are unlikely to take on the expanded, quasi-administrative roles that have been noted in the "redesign" of teachers' work (Smylie, 1994). Second, they differ from principals and other supervisory administrators in terms of their authority and scope of responsibility. They do not work from traditional supervisory positions, but instead use their own expertise and relational trust to gain entry to classrooms and to influence instructional change" (p. 78).

Tapping the expertise of teacher leaders to support the implementation of Common Core standards and the requisite instructional shifts requires thoughtful leadership from the principal to maximize the potential of this valuable resource.

Principal actions

Principals have multiple responsibilities to develop and sustain leadership in others. Specifically, principals who develop leadership in others to support implementation of Common Core standards:

- Focus the administrative and school leadership teams' work on implementation of Common Core standards and reformed instruction;

- Advocate, select, develop, and support teacher leaders to expand instructional leadership and job-embedded professional learning in the school;

- Provide professional learning for teacher leaders to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to fulfill their responsibilities as facilitators of learning among peers, have deep understanding of content and Common Core standards, instructional credibility, and professional respect and trust;

- Set expectations for staff for engaging with teacher leaders in ongoing efforts to improve instruction and student learning;

- Coordinate and narrow teacher leaders' work on learning-focused behaviors and tasks; and

- Provide ongoing coaching with constructive feedback to teacher leaders.

District support

District staff have multiple ways for supporting principals in developing shared leadership within their schools. Chief among those strategies is to formalize a structure of teacher leadership that identifies designated roles and provides professional learning and support for teachers who are selected as or volunteer to serve as teacher leaders. In addition to teacher support, principals benefit from learning how to engage teacher leaders effectively within their schools and how to provide feedback, guidance, and other forms of support to ensure their success.

Along with preparation and support for shifting leadership roles for teachers and principals, district staff might revise existing policies, agreements, contract language, or norms to sanction teacher leadership. District staff may also consider how to reward and compensate teacher leaders for their responsibilities, especially if those responsibilities are added on to regular instructional responsibilities.

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

"Teachers experience discomfort when they need to shift from believing 'kids need to change because they don't get what I am teaching them to I need to change because kids aren't learning.'"

—High school principal

Principals support continuous improvement of instruction. While some scholars emphasize the importance of principals' deep understanding of content and standards, others pay more attention to principals' support for improved instruction. In examining what school leaders do that most closely correlates with student achievement, Karen Seashore Louis and her colleagues concluded, "Leadership practices targeted directly at improving instruction have significant effects on teachers' working relationships and, indirectly, on student achievement (Seashore Louis, et al., 2010, p. 37). This team of researchers also notes that many leaders fail to implement those practices. They note, "The main underlying assumption is that instruction will improve if leaders provide detailed feedback to teachers, including suggestions for change. It follows that leaders must have the time, the knowledge, and the consultative skills needed to provide teachers—in all the relevant grade levels and subject areas—with valid, useful advice about their instructional practices. While these assumptions have an attractive ring to them, they rest on shaky ground, at best; the evidence to date suggests that few principals have made the time and demonstrated the ability to provide high-quality instructional feedback to teachers" (Seashore Louis, et al., 2010 p. 11).

Sometimes effective principals and ineffective principals, according to Seashore Louis, et al., used similar practices of instructional leadership, yet their form and frequency vary. For example, both effective and ineffective principals give feedback and observe teachers. Effective principals give more frequent feedback to teachers in informal interactions and make more frequent and spontaneous visits to teachers' classrooms. Less effective principals tended to wait until formal evaluations to give feedback or make more scheduled visits to classroom and often fail to provide feedback to teachers afterwards. When

teachers are implementing new instructional practices to teach new standards, more frequent feedback will guide them toward continuous improvement of their teaching practices, seem less evaluative, and help them more quickly to make small and frequent adjustments to refine their practice.

Principals cannot abdicate responsibility for instructional leadership to others, even if there are strong adjunct instructional leaders in the school. They can share the responsibility with designated teacher leaders, provided that principals trust that they have a solid grounding in quality instruction, particularly the kind associated with active engagement; critical, constructive, and creative thinking; ongoing formative assessment; and rigorous personalized, student-centered, inquiry-, project- and problem-based learning. The principal also must have sufficient knowledge about the standards to engage teachers in deconstructing the standards, sequencing and articulating learning vertically

Instructional focus

How principals approach implementing the instructional shifts required by the new standards matters. Most principals agree, "If we are going to teach the Common Core State Standards, we can't teach them as we have been through stand-and-deliver methods." One principal recognizes that one of the first steps to shifting instruction is changing teachers' perspectives.

To make these instructional shifts, principals acknowledge that they need to be more intentionally focused on effective instruction. As one principal states, "I must be the best teacher in the school." Another principal states, "If teachers know how to teach effectively, they can teach anything well. The new standards require a much greater attention on instruction than many are giving them." Other principals disagree and say that their role is best focused on creating the conditions for effective teaching and learning.

and horizontally, aligning assignments and assessments to the standards, and distinguishing effective from ineffective student learning tasks. In the school building, the principal must confront ineffective teaching and learning with constructive support that is sustained until appropriate changes are made.

Principal actions

Principals have multiple responsibilities to support effective teaching and learning. To promote and support improvements in instruction needed to implement Common Core standards, they specifically:

- Develop their own deep understanding of Common Core standards and requisite classroom curriculum and instruction to achieve the standards;

- Set clear goals with individuals, teams, and whole faculty for student achievement and effective instruction aligned with the vision for academic success aligned to the new standards;

- Provide intellectually stimulating individual, team, and school-wide professional learning focused on meeting the vision for academic success aligned with Common Core standards as a routine part of teachers' workday;

- Engage teachers in visiting one another's classrooms to promote transparency and shared expertise and to increase consistency in expectations and learning opportunities across classrooms, subjects, and grade levels;

- Address quickly and proactively problems in instruction and student learning; and

- Visit classrooms to support and monitor instruction and provide frequent constructive feedback to individuals, teams, and whole faculty on progress toward those goals.

District support

District leadership in instruction supports principals' efforts to improve teaching effectiveness. Among the supports is a strong human capital system that emphasizes hiring, placement, mentoring and induction, growth-oriented evaluation, personalized growth opportunities, and continuous professional learning. System leaders provide district-supported or -developed instructional frameworks that define routine components of the instructional process expected in all classrooms. District staff can facilitate feedback processes such as coordinating and leading instructional rounds within and across school and districts. District staff can also provide professional learning for principals on leading instructional improvement and provide coaching to individuals and teams of principals to support their individual and collective efforts to improve instruction. District leaders may also emphasize instructional improvement by visibly prioritizing it as a component of district leadership meetings, school board meetings, and other internal and external communication.

MANAGING PEOPLE, DATA, AND PROCESSES

How leaders manage the change process influences the success of the change (Hall & Hord, 2011). Change is primarily about people, data, and processes. Shifting focus from management to instruction frequently leads to 10- to 12-hour days for principals. In terms of managing people, principals report that accountability for college- and career-ready standards increases the significance of their personnel decisions. They indicate that they pay closer attention to teachers' content knowledge than in the past. Principals report that getting the best teachers on board and mentoring them so that they catch up with what the staff has already accomplished with deconstructing the standards, scaffolding learning necessary for mastering the standards, and understanding and implementing the school's instructional expectations from day one is a more significant responsibility now. They also must muster the courage to confront teachers in constructive, productive ways when they are not contributing to student learning and be ready to take appropriate actions when efforts to support them fail.

Data are a valuable tool to support teacher development and student learning. By analyzing, displaying, and engaging others in using data about teacher performance, student learning, and the school, principals and teachers have information to make better decisions. Principals support teachers in using data from formative assessments to make adjustments in instruction to accelerate student learning. They use data to inform conversations with teachers about professional learning and other support needed to focus instruction and improve student results. Principals also use data to monitor their overall progress toward school

goals and particularly to measure individual students' progress toward mastery of standards. To use data effectively as a source of information, principals create a no-fault, risk-free environment that encourages transparency, shared expertise, and collective responsibility.

In addition to managing people and using data, principals who are engaged in implementing new standards, assessments, accountability systems, and teacher evaluation are managing change efforts. Individually each of these innovations is a significant change. Collectively they are game changers. How leaders choose appropriate leadership practices to lead change in their schools will influence the degree of change that occurs. In their meta-analysis of the effects of school leadership on student achievement, Timothy Waters, Robert Marzano, and Brian McNulty (2003) studied how school leaders, through their leadership practices, influence, either positively or negatively, student achievement. "We have concluded there are two primary variables that determine whether or not leadership will have a positive or a negative impact on achievement. The first is the focus of change—that is, whether leaders properly identify and focus on improving the school and classroom practices that are most likely to have a positive impact on student achievement in their school. The second variable is whether leaders properly understand the magnitude or 'order' of change they are leading and adjust their leadership practices accordingly" (p. 5).

The complexity of implementation of Common Core standards in any school depends on factors existing in the school including the existing practices related to teaching and learning. In some schools, implementation of new standards may be a smaller change than in others. However, it is important to note that, over the last decade, high-stakes accountability has caused many schools, particularly those serving economically disadvantaged students and high populations of limited English-speaking students, to abandon the instructional practices and curricular outcomes that are more closely aligned with the new standards in favor of higher levels of achievement on more discrete, less cognitively demanding learning outcomes. In these schools especially, implementation of Common Core standards is more likely a second order change, and principals' responsibility to approach their leadership practices appropriately will be even more significant.

Principal actions

Balancing management and instructional responsibilities continually challenges principals. Principals who manage people, data, and processes to implement Common Core standards:

- Hire teachers with deep content knowledge, competence in pedagogy, and understanding of pedagogical content knowledge and provide intensive mentoring to new staff members to bring them up-to-date with other staff to prevent gaps in student learning;

- Tap the expertise of teachers who have solved persistent instructional problems and support sharing of these practices and ongoing inquiry among staff;

- Use data to inform decisions about instruction, professional learning; performance, and student learning;

- Analyze the scope of change required within their school and classrooms to select and implement appropriate leadership practices to improve instruction and student learning;

- Reflect on competing priorities and focus attention on those that will have the greatest leverage in improving instruction and learning while simultaneously working with colleagues and supervisors to eliminate or diminish those that interfere with instructional leadership; and

- Collaborate with peers, staff, and supervisors to clarify priorities for student and staff learning.

District support

District leaders support principals in managing people, data, and processes by employing technology-enabled systems that automate and facilitate information access, analysis, and use. Student and educator data systems; instructional support systems; assessment systems; comprehensive professional learning systems; and human capital systems

provide information and resources to ensure effective teaching in every classroom. Ongoing analysis and improvement of existing systems allow principals to concentrate their efforts on instructional leadership and to have easy access to the information and resources needed to accelerate educator effectiveness and student learning. In addition, districts are creating and supporting professional learning communities among principals to learn about the new standards and to focus instructional leadership on pedagogical and curricular changes to support achievement of Common Core standards.

Districts are also formalizing professional learning for principals on how to read, deconstruct, and use the standards to support teachers in planning lessons, designing learning tasks, creating formative assessments, and aligning student learning with standards. Districts are refocusing commitment to professional learning communities and supporting principals in creating school-day schedules to provide collaboration time for teachers. Districts are developing principal evaluations that place greater emphasis of instructional leadership and student achievement than previous systems have.

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CHALLENGES PRINCIPALS FACE

To date, efforts to implement Common Core standards have focused on preparing and supporting teachers for changes in classrooms. In reality, those changes are unlikely to happen if principals are ill-prepared to facilitate and lead the changes within their schools. Too little attention and effort have been devoted to preparing principals for their responsibilities associated with implementing new standards.

Some of the challenges principals face are similar to those teachers face such as understanding what the new standards ask students to do to demonstrate their learning and how best to help students learn what is needed to achieve the standards. Principals' challenges, however, have an added layer of complexity. Among the challenges they report are eliminating teachers' stress and keeping them focused on the steps to move forward. Changes of the magnitude schools face can create a debilitating or toxic atmosphere. Principals believe it is their responsibility to keep teachers upbeat by helping them understand that it is a team effort and that principals will stand beside teachers with their sleeves rolled up and digging in to make sense of the changes they face.

Learning about the standards. Principals report a dearth of opportunities for them to learn about the standards and the new instructional methodologies the standards require. They are forced to seek out their own learning about the standards and to remain current about the standards through professional reading, membership in professional associations, and informal networking. They report resenting that opportunities for teacher professional learning were available yet were not formal opportunities for them. Yet they continued to seek information about the standards to understand their implications for teaching and learning. When their states did adopt standards, the principals who developed their own knowledge about the standards eagerly became leaders among their peers within their districts, and even be-

yond. They see networking and leadership opportunities as ways to keep on the cutting edge, something that is continually a challenge from principals.

Balancing multiple priorities. Balancing multiple priorities is a typical challenge principals face, and in this era of so many significant changes, principals are feeling more overwhelmed than ever. They are clear that instructional leadership is their primary responsibility, yet other competing responsibilities continue to pull at their energy and time. They strive to keep teachers from feeling overwhelmed by the changes in teaching and curriculum, to minimize distractions, and sufficient support to help teachers feel confident in new instructional practices. Very often, though, principals do not feel that district leaders understand the complexities of the changes occurring in schools. Keeping focused on instructional quality and learning continues to challenge principals.

Providing support with fewer resources. At exactly the same time they would benefit from added resources to support implementation of Common Core standards and other new initiatives, schools have fewer resources than ever. Larger classes, fewer resource staff, less funding for professional learning, and smaller overall school budgets force principals to make difficult decisions about how to use staff, funding, time, and other resources. They struggle with finding innovative ways to provide the ongoing professional learning and classroom-based support necessary to provide teachers with the assistance and feedback they need. In addition, principals acknowledge that teachers are clamoring for new instructional resources that align with the new standards. Because many existing textbooks are inadequate to support new standards and school districts are unable to invest in new instructional resources, principals are supporting teachers to create and locate new instructional materials. The lack of easily available instructional resources aligned to Common Core places an added burden on teachers and principals.

Managing multiple, significant changes simultaneously. If Common Core were the only innovation occurring in schools, principals agree that it would be a manageable change. Coupling Common Core standards with changes in accountability programs requiring higher standards of performance from students and teachers, new assessment

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A teacher's view

A teacher leader summarizes what teachers value most from principals as they implement the classroom changes Common Core standards require, "What we value in [the principal's] leadership is his belief that the Common Core. He stresses that the Common Core is an opportunity for more rigorous standards that require a greater depth of knowledge than former standards and that these standards will help our community by improving student achievement. He makes it clear that the standards do not take away teachers' freedom, but rather provide a focus for expectations and instruction. He provides time for collaboration within and across curricular areas to develop and revise instructional units. He emphasizes that teachers are essential to leading the changes in schools and classrooms with district support rather than the process being top-down."

systems, data systems, learning management, and instructional support systems places principals in the role of helping their staff and communities understand the purpose and value of the changes, how the changes relate to improving student achievement, and how the school will implement the changes simultaneously. Principals have inadequate guidance from their districts or states so they are often on their own to explain the changes and to build coherence among the innovations. With the responsibilities of managing multiple, major innovations, principals struggle to not lose sight of their vision for academic success and of the students for whom these changes are being made.

Maintaining momentum. Any change initiative has its ups and downs. Particularly challenging for principals in the implementation of Common Core is the juxtaposition of implementing new standards as they are holding teachers and students accountable for achieving old ones. Principals are grappling with how to prepare their staff and community for the inevitable drop in student achievement that accompanies changes in assessments and implementation of new initiatives following the decade-long pressure and sanctions for increasingly higher student achievement. These declines can be disheartening to staff who have worked so hard to meet Adequate Yearly Progress goals. Principals must be ready to build understanding of the change process, hold firm to the vision and goals, and provide moral, emotional, and intellectual support to staff to maintain their commitment to the desired outcome of every student college- and career-ready.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Supporting principals in their daily leadership responsibilities requires commitment from multiple agencies. With adequate support, principals will be successful in implementing Common Core standards and ensuring that all students are college- and career-ready at the end of 12th grade. Without support, not all students will have the same high-level learning experiences to meet this goal.

State boards of education

- Establish standards for principal certification and performance that include leading professional learning and change within schools and school communities to strengthen teaching and learning.

- Establish flexibility in regulations that allow principals to create conditions and structures to implement Common Core standards to meet unique needs within their schools.

- Direct sufficient resources toward implementation of Common Core standards.

- Recognize exemplary principals who lead successful implementation of Common Core standards.

State departments of education

- Establish expectations that principal preparation programs and ongoing professional learning for licensed principals prepare and support them to implement Common Core standards.

- Support flexibility in regulations that allow principals to create conditions and structures to meet unique needs within their schools.

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- Recognize exemplary principals who lead successful implementation of Common Core standards and disseminate effective practices they use.

- Provide communication tools for principals to use within their school communities about the Common Core standards and related changes.

- Build support for Common Core standards among leaders of private and public organizations, businesses, and agencies.

- Provide and/or coordinate technical assistance for school and district leaders to support implementation of Common Core standards including technology-based resources, networking, access to research and other information.

School districts

- Engage the school district community in understanding the purpose and value of Common Core standards.

- Establish a districtwide plan with clear goals and expectations and adequate resources for implementing Common Core standards.

- Provide and/or support access to professional learning that includes coaching and other forms of school-based support for principals to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills, practices and dispositions to lead change and implement Common Core standards and related changes in instruction and assessment.

- Minimize distractions to principals' instructional leadership responsibilities.

- Provide and/or support access to leadership development for teacher leaders.

- Facilitate intra- and inter-district opportunities for principals to network with other principals.

- Create collaborative learning teams of principals to support their continuous improvement.

Principals

- Collaborate with staff, students, and members of the school community to establish a vision of academic success.

- Participate in collaborative learning teams within and beyond the school focused on implementing Common Core standards.

- Access, analyze, and share information and resources about Common Core standards and instructional transformation.

- Develop the staff's understanding about change and change management.

- Visit classrooms, co-teach, or teach lessons to deepen understanding about the standards and instructional changes.

- Coordinate instructional resource staff within the school to focus on ensuring high levels of learning for all students.

- Celebrate successes, both large and small.

Common Core standards require principals to review their assumptions about leading change and the strategies they use. Regardless of their years of experience or prior engagement with change, most principals will find the new standards ask more of them than previous changes. They must be ready to focus their energy and leadership efforts, provide positive and sustained support to staff, muster courage to challenge ineffective practices, and hold constant the vision and goals. With opportunities to engage in collaborative professional learning with peers and ongoing support from their district and state leaders, principals will meet the challenge and succeed.

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