



**MEET THE  
PROMISE OF  
CONTENT  
STANDARDS:  
INVESTING IN  
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.

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Students in Jessica Pham’s biology class are beginning a unit on science in the modern age. As a culminating task, students will conduct a group presentation to an invited list of local physicians, clergy, university researchers, and local elected officials and write an individual position paper in response to this assignment:

Contemporary scientific research spans numerous fault lines. Areas such as cloning, gene mapping, bioengineering, artificial insemination, and in vitro fertilization, though scientifically possible, raise moral, ethical, financial, political, and cultural issues. Essentially, students will explore and form a position about whether scientists should set aside existing parameters to advance medical research. In groups and individually, students will investigate these issues, analyze information, and take a stand on how far scientific research can go to advance the well-being of humankind. After reading informational texts and other information sources, students will develop a 20-minute presentation in teams of three and individually write an argumentative essay that addresses the question and supports their individual position with evidence from the text(s), acknowledging and responding to competing positions, and giving examples from past or current events or issues to illustrate and clarify their position.

As a teacher of students with a wide range of academic and language abilities and cultural backgrounds, Pham understands how important it is to differentiate instructional resources and tasks for her students. Fortunately she is a member of a cross-disciplinary professional learning community at her school in which she and her colleagues are studying various strategies to remodel lessons to address students’ academic, language, and family backgrounds. Together they participate in a short online course on differentiating class assignments to align them with students’ abilities and interests, observe web-streamed lessons in

which teachers model various differentiation strategies accompanied by commentary from experts in the area, and work collaboratively to remodel existing lessons to integrate strategies they learned.

She organizes students into heterogeneous groups and works with students in a whole group, in their assigned teams, and individually to review the four-week assignment, support the development of a work plan for accomplishing the assignment, and make small adjustments in the scope of the assignment with individual students. She is grateful that the district provides an online subscription service and a web-based text analyzer for all teachers and students. Through the service, she identifies articles about the implications of scientific research at various reading levels to provide background information for her students. Using the text analysis tool, Pham is able to select a wide range of texts from a variety of sources to provide background to individual students so that each is able to contribute fully to the group's final product. She is also able to scaffold the complexity of student texts to present increasingly more challenging reading to each student during and across units to advance their ability to comprehend and interact with complex text.

In an online statewide community of biology teachers in which she participates, Pham enthusiastically reports each day about her learning and application of the strategies. She describes how differentiation is making a difference particularly for students in her class who have struggled academically. A teacher in a rural district about 60 miles from Pham's district inquires if the subscription service and text analyzer are available to teachers outside Pham's district. This same teacher, acknowledging that she did not know about text complexity, asks how she could learn to analyze texts to select ones better suited for all her students. Teachers from the state's largest urban district also comment about how out-of-date some of their instructional resources are and how inadequate their own professional learning is compared to what Pham describes. They ask Pham to share what she knows about how to differentiate instruction with members of the community so they too will be able to reach all students.

New standards alone will not prepare all students for college and careers. The success of the Common Core State Standards depends on educators' capacity to make the instructional shifts the standards require. Meeting the promise of content standards cannot be achieved merely by agreeing on and publishing the new standards. Effective teaching of the standards, not the standards themselves, prepares students for college and careers. The need for ensuring effective professional learning has never been more important. Hayes Mizell, distinguished senior fellow for Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council), remarked, "The Common Core State Standards are not self-implementing... To have a significant impact, implementation cannot be left to chance" (2010).

As the scenario above illustrates (jointly developed by Lois Easton, Joellen Killion, Judi Mosby, Karen Soule, and Cheryl Vance), the standards will require that teachers in 46 states and the District of Columbia remodel instruction, assessments, and assignments to meet the expectation of the new standards. The standards require students to achieve more rigorous content outcomes, apply their content knowledge in authentic situations, solve problems, engage in critical and creative thinking, work collaboratively with their peers, and demonstrate or present their learning. To achieve this vision, allocation and application of professional learning resources must change.



## NEEDS CONTINUE TO INCREASE

Nearly every conversation about the Common Core includes the topic of professional learning. National consensus of policy makers and educators acknowledges the tremendous need for it. The standards require more of students and educators alike. Fundamental to the success of the core standards are educators knowing what the standards call for in terms of student learning, how to design learning experiences for students to meet the expectations, how to transform their existing classrooms and schools to achieve the standards; and how to access classroom resources that support personalizing instruction to meet the unique learning needs of each student. Educators welcome the standards and are eager to undertake significant effort to prepare all students for college and careers.

Two years after new standards were introduced and the majority of states adopted them, teachers report that they need tools and support to effectively implement these standards into their classrooms:

- 64% of teachers want student-centered technology and resources to help students achieve the new standards;
- 63% need professional learning focused on the requirements of the standards;
- 61% need formative assessments that measure how well students are learning the standards and opportunities to analyze and use the assessment data to improve instruction;
- 60% need professional learning on how to teach aspects of the standards that are new to them; and
- 59% need new curricula and learning tools aligned to the new standards in English and math. (Scholastic & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012).





Teachers' needs are growing exponentially with the advent of the new standards and the assessments that follow. The following challenges to effective professional learning have existed within schools for years:

- Teacher requests for time to study, plan, collaborate, and problem solve with colleagues continue to go unanswered in many systems (MetLife, 2009). Yet most countries that have introduced major curricular reforms including Germany, Finland, England, Singapore, and South Korea have coupled the reforms with substantial investments in teacher professional development (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, Barber & Mourshed, 2007).
- State leaders charge ahead with expectations for full implementation without consideration for the different needs of teachers serving different populations of students. Nearly every state has established a plan with expected dates for implementation, yet they acknowledge that they have insufficient resources to meet the challenges implementation presents (Kober & Rentner, 2012).
- Despite the enormous attention to the challenges of implementing the new standards and assessments, few innovations to meet the requirements are proposed or exist. The approaches to professional learning, including its design and rigor, continue to reflect a “educator as miracle worker” belief. Essentially the default approach to implementation is this: Tell teachers the standards are adopted and they can transform all aspects of their work overnight and produce tremendous results with even with students who are academically disadvantaged.

The work ahead requires a long-term commitment to intensive professional learning for all educators and innovative, rich, and flexible classroom instructional resources that fill the gaps in learning for many of America's students. To undertake the efforts necessary so that every student leaves high school ready for college and careers, schools, districts, states, regional and national education agencies, and education vendors need to make thoughtful and deliberate decisions regarding resources, particularly resources for professional learning. Inequitable and inconsistent implementation of standards will persist if insufficient resources are available for educators, particularly teachers and their principals, to engage in the requisite preparation, professional learning, and extended support to make the transitions in their classrooms and schools called for by the new standards.

# TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING WILL FAIL

**T**raditional professional development is inadequate to meet the curricular, assessment, instructional, and leadership changes the new standards demand. Over a decade ago, the introduction of standards-based education held great promise. Today more schools than ever fall short of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress. In recent years with shrinking budgets, report Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011), schools, districts, and states have cut resources for professional learning and the positions that support it, “because of the perception that doing so does not compromise the basic operation of the school: teaching and learning. However, if the teaching in some classrooms is not at a level that allows students to achieve at least one year of growth, this perception is false, and resources need to be reallocated accordingly so that they are directly linked to improving teaching and learning (p. 10).” The decline in the past five years in the percentage of schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress provides evidence that more must be done to improve student learning (Usher, 2011).

The urgency is high for implementation of the new standards, yet resorting to comfortable and familiar approaches to professional learning such as short-term awareness building information sessions on what the new standards are and how they compare to previous ones will fall short of the intense, practical, content-focused professional learning needed to realize the promise of all students college- and career-ready at the end of high school. Effective professional learning – that which leads to changes in educator practice and student learning – is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness by extending their content knowledge, instructional and leadership practices, and understanding of how students learn. It combines educators learning from experts as well as with colleagues to apply their learning directly to their classrooms and schools.

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS DEFINE RESOURCES

The Standards for Professional Learning (see box on p. 8) define the critical attributes of effective professional learning that emerge from research and evidence-based practice. Among the seven is one on resources. Resources for professional learning include staff, time, funding, technology, and materials. Professional learning staff include coaches, instructional facilitators, curriculum leaders, program leaders and managers who oversee professional learning, and principal time devoted to leading learning of their staff. Time includes the school day and school year schedules that provide concentrated and ongoing time for educator learning and collaboration. Funding supports registrations for conferences, programs, and courses; professional journals and books; and programs and services that extend the local expertise of school and district staff. Technology includes the connectivity, programs, resources, maintenance, and support for personalized, continuous, and differentiated learning needs. Materials include sample instructional and leadership tools, professional journals, books, sample lessons, and other print or electronic resources to facilitate implementation of Common Core. For professional learning to build educator effectiveness and increase results for students, those leading, offering, or facilitating it, including schools, school systems, state departments of education, institutes of higher education, or third-party providers must be clear on the outcomes of professional learning, have a long-term plan for supporting implementation of new learning, and the committed resources the plan demands.

There is no way around it. To achieve the vision of Common Core standards, the nation and each state need to not only change its approach to professional learning, but invest more in it. In a recent analysis of the costs associated with implementation of Common Core State Standards, Murphy, Regenstein, and McNamara analyzed three major cost areas associated with the new standards—instructional

materials, assessment, and professional learning. Their analysis, as well as that of others (Fordham Institute, 2012), makes it clear that success with Common Core requires investments in professional learning. In examining three different scenarios to determine costs of professional learning, the “Business as Usual” approach includes in-person training and delivery and is the most costly of the three. The other two approaches to professional learning, “Bare Bones” and “Balanced Implementation,” include online and blended professional learning respectively. Murphy, Regenstein, and McNamara propose that by repurposing existing resources and increasing their efficiency and effectiveness, it is possible to meet the implementation cost demands of the new standards with reasonable, not extraordinary, additional investments.

### Standards for Professional Learning

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...

**Learning Communities:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

**Leadership:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

**Resources:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

**Data:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

**Learning Designs:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

**Implementation:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

**Outcomes:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

(Learning Forward, 2011).

# INVESTMENTS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MUST CHANGE

Investment decisions are never easy. Even when working with a trusted financial consultant or skillful investment advisor, those making decisions face ever-expanding and attractive options, impending risk, and few certainties. The same is true when investing in professional learning, particularly to support a high-stakes initiative such as implementing Common Core State Standards. Individuals, schools, districts, states, and other education agencies recognize that how they invest resources for professional learning influences the returns they are likely to gain.

In too many situations, decisions about how to invest professional learning resources have had little significance. The reasons vary. First, the percentage of overall budgets dedicated to professional learning was typically less than 2%. Secondly, little accountability for the investments existed. Even today many districts and schools have inadequate means for tracking expenditures in professional learning. Thirdly, the urgency and scope of the change force decision makers to resort to what is familiar, even if it has been unsuccessful. With the increased public visibility of new standards and the intensity of states' and districts' implementation efforts exploding, decisions about investing in professional learning become more significant because stakes for results are high. Since professional learning resources in states and districts have declined over the last five years and new standards increase the importance of professional learning, it is time for thoughtfully deliberated decisions about investments in professional learning. Investments must be made wisely with an eye



to achieving college and career readiness for each student. Inappropriate or inadequate investments now will prove costly later, especially in terms of student success.

To achieve the results promised in Common Core Standards, states and district and school leaders must make smart and new investments in the capacity of educators. Successful implementation of Common Core standards that leads to every student being college- and career-ready requires a renewed commitment and focus from all policy and decision makers, elected, employed, or engaged within school communities. The recommendations below describe investments schools, districts, states, and other education agencies need to make in professional learning. The recommendations are based on an evidence-based adequacy model developed by Odden, Goetz, and Picus (2008). Their model identifies additional resources to support professional learning as well as realignment and repurposing of existing resources. “Given the importance of teacher quality to student learning and the link between teacher quality and professional development,” stress Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011), “the greater investment is likely to lead to greater levels of student learning.” The recommendations are ambitious, yet they are no less ambitious than the intended outcomes of the Common Core standards. While the list of recommendations focuses on what teachers need, the same list can be used to identify the professional learning needs of principals, teacher leaders, coaches, and central office staff.

Teachers and principals need considerable opportunities to develop deep content-specific knowledge, expand content-specific pedagogy, examine how students learn, and apply new learning with extended support and constructive feedback. Principals need to expand their capacity to serve as instructional leaders and support teacher and student learning. To meet these expectations, schools, districts, states, and other education agencies must make the following investments.

## Recommended investments in professional learning

Investment	Purpose
<p>10 days embedded within educators' work year and/or expanding educators' work year</p>	<p>To extend individual, team, schoolwide, and districtwide professional learning, teachers participate in university courses; enroll in expert- and peer-facilitated workshops; engage in blended, face-to-face, and online courses; attend local, state, or national conferences; interact virtually or in person with researchers and other experts.</p>
<p>Adjust school-day schedules to provide three to four hours weekly for collaboration among teachers, between teachers and their principals, and among principals</p>	<p>To provide daily time for educators to transfer learning into practice, develop shared expertise, and refine practice through continuous improvement by studying content standards and curriculum to plan units and lessons of curriculum, assessment, and instruction; analyzing student learning progressions to identify and design interventions; solving problems related to student learning; calibrating student performance expectations; supporting peer professional growth; and reflecting on and assessing practice.</p>
<p>Provide technology infrastructure and innovative programs and resources to increase accessibility, efficiency, and adaptability of professional learning</p>	<p>To provide access to just-in-time learning, models of effective practices, simulations of classrooms and schools, tools for knowledge management, analysis of practice, and presentation of learning; to connect educators with local and global networks of experts and peers to solve problems, seek information and support, and give and receive constructive feedback; and to make educators' practice public in networking environments.</p>
<p>Provide differentiated staffing and compensation to support coaches, mentors, and teacher and principal leaders</p>	<p>To tap the expertise of educators within the school and school system through which master teachers and principals provide mentoring, coaching, and facilitated learning to individuals, teams, and school faculty to adapt and implement learning; to increase the accuracy and frequency of use of the practices; and to increase their collective expertise.</p>
<p>Increase funding for professional learning expert consultants, technical assistance, conference registrations, program fees, print or electronic professional books and journals, memberships to professional associations, etc.</p>	<p>To maintain professional libraries with resources linked to national, state, district, and school goals; to provide registrations for local, state, and national conferences to acquire cutting-edge research and practices; and to access technical assistance from experts with new perspectives and research- and evidence-based practices to support goal attainment and address identified gaps, needs, or problems.</p>

## Resource allocation is an equity strategy

Student needs vary from school to school and district to district. Formulas for resource allocation too infrequently address the dramatically different circumstances, characteristics, and history of academic need that exist among schools. In their analyses of resource allocations in districts, particularly large urban ones, Calvo and Miles report that they find “significant misalignments in how they allocate resources to schools. . . . [S]chools and students with similar needs receive different levels and types of resources that don’t match their circumstances,” (2010, p. 40) typically because resource distribution is based on identical staffing and budgeting formulas regardless of the school’s needs. Principals, they report, are given limited flexibility in how to use resources to address their unique needs. “All too often, the result is a system that is unintentionally inequitable and inflexible and doesn’t serve school needs” (p. 40).

To address inequity, Calvo and Miles recommend weighted funding as a way to address the challenges and to create “transparency, flexibility, equity, and the conditions necessary for schools to organize themselves effectively around the particular needs of their students and staff” (p. 40). In some cases, allowing for such flexibility requires changes in federal, state, and local policies and perceptions about resources and organizing resources around academic need rather than formulas. Bold actions such as funding by academic need demonstrate accountability and responsibility for investments in educator success.

## Collaborating increases efficiency and effectiveness

Despite the growing need for support, resources are limited. In many cases, states, districts, and schools operate as independent entities in relationship to resources, especially those for professional learning. Collaborating on resource use may increase access to what is needed to support implementation of standards (Education First Consulting and Grant Makers for Education, 2011). Pooling resources through purchasing cooperatives, shared investments, and joint research and development, states, districts, and schools can exponentially increase their influence and purchasing power with vendors, developers, and



researchers. The common standards make pooling more viable than before. Besides combining resources for professional learning, states, districts, and schools might consider sharing in the costs of curricula, formative assessments, instructional resources, and technology to support implementation of Common Core.

## It takes everyone to make a difference

Federal, state, district, and school leaders can advance the potential of Common Core State Standards through smart investments in professional learning. The following list of recommendations identifies bold actions needed to ensure educator learning.

### Federal actions

- Establish a new program to support professional learning for Common Core standards and new assessments in those states and school systems demonstrating greatest student achievement needs.
- Require existing federal investments (Title I, Title II, RTTT, etc.) and federally funded agencies and programs (regional centers, comprehensive centers, NSF, MSP, etc.) to support professional learning for implementation of Common Core standards.
- Use definition of and Standards for Professional Learning as the framework for ensuring all federal investments in professional learning are positioned for success.
- Invest in a nationwide technology infrastructure to provide equitable access to innovative, web-based resources and support for implementation of standards.
- Develop tools, processes, and resources to assist individuals, schools, school systems, and states to plan, monitor, and assess the quality and results of professional learning.
- Establish recognition programs to spotlight states and school systems that demonstrate effective professional learning for Common Core standards and new assessments.

### State actions

- Adopt the definition of and Standards for Professional Learning to guide decisions about professional learning investments.
- Use rule-making authority to create a transparent, flexible, and equitable process for distributing resources, particularly time, staffing, and funding, to districts and schools with most significant student learning needs.
- Require state-supported agencies to focus their professional learning efforts on implementation of new standards and assessments.
- Repurpose existing resources for professional learning on the high-priority areas related to implementing college- and career-ready standards and new assessments.
- Provide guidance to districts and schools on how to review and make smart investments in resources and services from third-party providers to best meet their professional learning needs.
- Coordinate and fund the development of a statewide technology infrastructure and learning management systems to provide access to high-quality professional learning, especially personalized, just-in-time support for implementation of new standards.
- Coordinate efforts of state and community partners to assist districts in creating programs for extended student learning time and to provide time for teacher collaborative planning, study, and problem solving.
- Recognize and support differentiated teacher licenses to position teacher leaders with professional learning expertise to support consistent and full implementation of Common Core standards statewide.

### **District and school actions**

- Adopt definition of and Standards for Professional Learning to guide decisions about professional learning and investments in it.
- Use rule-making authority and waivers to create a transparent, flexible, and equitable process for distributing resources, particularly time, staffing, and funding, to schools with most significant student learning needs.
- Design professional learning that leverages appropriate face-to-face, blended, and virtual learning and support to ensure that all educators develop the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices necessary for deep implementation of Common Core standards.
- Use differentiated staffing including teacher leaders, instructional coaches, principal coaches, and mentors to ensure school- and classroom-based facilitation of individual, team and schoolwide professional learning.
- Collaborate with community partners to create programs for extended student learning and to provide time for teacher collaborative planning, study, and problem solving.
- Provide technology infrastructure and learning management systems to provide access to high-quality professional learning, especially personalized, just-in-time support implementation of new standards.
- Realign professional learning resources to prioritize the implementation of new standards and assessments.

## DECISION TO BUY:

Process for selecting, procuring, implementing, and evaluating professional learning resources for Common Core State Standards

Verifying and purchasing the appropriate resources (materials, support, and technology) for professional learning requires careful deliberation, and if done well, provides teachers with the support they need to be successful in shifting instructional practice and school leaders with the expertise needed to support teacher and student learning. The process below outlines the recommended steps for accomplishing the task of acquiring and using resources. When the stakeholders who will use the resources are engaged in all aspects of the process, it is more likely to result in sound decisions. To make savvy decisions about resource investments for professional learning, education leaders and policy makers need to be deliberate and thoughtful with decisions prior to purchases; this is step one in increasing the value of the investments. The second step is developing and using a solid plan for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating investments.



## Decision to Buy Recommended Steps

- Assess student learning needs in context of instructional and content shifts of Common Core State Standards.
- Assess educator learning needs to meet student learning needs, asking such questions as:
  - What are educator needs related to addressing Common Core content meaningfully?
  - What are educator needs related to mastering new kinds of instruction?
  - Are educators prepared to differentiate new kinds of instruction to reach a range of student populations?
- Use analysis of student and educator learning needs to identify professional learning content,
- Establish criteria for reviewing, selecting, and purchasing professional learning resources, such as:
  - User friendly;
  - Flexible content;
  - Platform interdependence;
  - Aligned with defined curriculum and standards;
  - Contextually appropriate;
  - Meets IDEA standards;
  - Adapts to differing educator learning needs;
  - Comprehensive, sustained, and intensive; and
  - Includes opportunities for feedback and extended support.
- Identify potential collaborators or shared users.
- Invite collaborators.
- Review and revise selection criteria with collaborators.
- Invite vendors and/or identify or design products, services, and other investments.
- Screen products, services, and other investments using established criteria.
- Select or design products, services, and other investments.
- Design implementation/use plan
  - Staging use;
  - Professional learning to launch and support use.
- Design evaluation for resource use and results.
- Negotiate purchase/use agreements.
- Implement resource investments.
- Monitor and assess implementation of resources.
- Evaluate implementation and results of resource use.

## CONCLUSION

States, districts, and schools must take bold steps to focus resources “on improving instructional practice and student learning” that will require “instructional revisioning and staff reallocation,” recommends Odden & Picus (2011). “The current fiscal shortcomings buffeting schools shouldn’t be used as a rationale for failure to make continued progress toward higher levels of student achievement” (p. 48). To improve resource investments in professional learning, states, districts, and schools need transparent and deliberate processes for require clear accounting, ongoing analysis of data about investment in, quality of and results from professional learning (Killion & Hirsh, 2012, p. 16).



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