

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?**

#### **CONTEXT AND PROMISE OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

In our experience, most teachers are not rigidly resistant to change, but they are often not provided with the critical explanations and rationales behind reforms and initiatives that contribute to creating a productive context for change. School-wide and district-wide initiatives quickly devolve to the nuts and bolts of getting them done, often because there simply is not enough time in the day, week, month or year to examine rationales, or because those responsible for making the initiative happen do not consider it important to provide a clear and coherent explanation of why the initiative is necessary. Any attempted change will stand a much greater chance of succeeding if teachers are provided with the rationale for why the change is important and necessary. This brief overview should answer the simple, but important question, “Why is this happening?” That is, why is California transitioning to a new set of standards?

Before discussing the history of the standards movement itself and the larger context for the Common Core standards, it is important to note that the federal government has no real authority over education in the United States, as authority over public education resides strictly with state and local governments. The federal government can however incentivize states to cooperate with federal educational initiatives by attaching federal funding to them. In each of the cases discussed here – including the Common Core, the federal government has done exactly that. In order for states to be eligible to apply for and receive certain federal funds, they must comply with certain requirements (e.g. Goals 2000, NCLB, Common Core State Standards). In point of fact, the Common Core standards are not National Standards. We do not now, and will not, as a result of the Common Core, have mandated “national standards,” as required by the federal government. Instead, they are truly a set of core standards that will be common to all states that choose to adopt them. Each state decides to adopt or not to adopt the new Common Core State Standards. Currently, 45 of 50 states have adopted the Common Core standards. That leaves some holdouts. Holdout states still may decide to adopt the Common Core and become eligible for certain federal funding (in the case of the Common Core, Race to The Top funding) or they may not. States have license to add up to 15% more material to the Common Core from their currently existing state standards. This affords states some latitude to make the Common Core their own by retaining standards they feel are of particular importance.

### **2.1. The History**

So how did we get to this point and why is the Common Core even happening? With regard to the new Common Core standards, there is a very clear rationale for why the new standards are necessary, and that rationale is rooted in the history of educational standards in this country. The history of the standards movement in the United States is short, reaching back only to the late 1980s. Goal’s 2000 was a set of six national goals developed by the National Governors Association in 1989 and introduced by President Bush in 1990. In 1994, President Clinton formally signed into law Goals 2000 with two additional goals added. As an initiative, Goals 2000 was intended to improve educational outcomes in the United States by the year 2000. The goals were broad in nature and very different from the kinds of standards we have become familiar with over the last 12 years. As an example, the Goals 2000 legislation specified that, “All children in America will start school ready to learn,” and, “United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.” As well intended as these goals were, they lacked the usefulness of standards that provide real direction and detail concerning that which students should be able to know, do and understand on a grade-by-grade basis. In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) effectively replaced Goals 2000 as the driving force behind national educational reform. NCLB required each individual state to develop state standards and annual assessments to measure student progress against the standards. The federal government accomplished this on a state-by-state basis. They negotiated with each state regarding exactly what their

standards would be, how they would assess them, and the level of achievement they would consider to be “proficient.” Although NCLB required annual measurable growth in student achievement each year until all students reached proficiency (by 2014), the legislation never defined what proficiency meant, leaving that for individual states to decide.

Some notable things were achieved as the result of NCLB. For instance, all states formalized learning goals in the form of state standards—no small achievement considering the latitude individual states have with regard to educational policy. It is notable, however, as it generally represents an effort to truly define that which students should be able to know, do and understand grade-by-grade, K-12. Fifty individual sets of standards, assessments and proficiency levels, however, represent a complex undertaking and significant variation became apparent as states began reporting results. Literally and figuratively, states were all over the map.

## **2.2. The Evidence**

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education published a report that analyzed state reported results against achievement data collected by the U.S. Department of Education. Every 2 to 4 years the U.S. Department of Education through the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) and the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), conducts a random sample assessment of students across the country called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). While NAEP is by no means a national exam (random samples of students within each state at grades 4, 8 and 12 are given the test), it is a common exam and as such provides an interesting cross-reference to the data that states were reporting via their own individual standards-based assessments. NAEP data, when cross-referenced with achievement data reported from states for the purpose of NCLB showed a clear and very interesting correlation. States that were reporting larger percentages of students meeting state standards tended to have lower equivalent achievement levels on NAEP, and states reporting smaller percentages of students meeting state standards tended to have higher equivalent achievement levels on NAEP. Extracted from the 2007 IES report, Table 2.1 lists NAEP equivalent scores and the percentage of students meeting state standards for Math at Grade 4 and 8 in 2005. For grades 4 and 8, respectively, columns 3 and 7 include the average percentage of students meeting or exceeding the state proficiency criterion (a cut score) at the schools randomly sampled in the NAEP assessment. To determine the NAEP equivalent score shown in columns 4 and 8, the IES/NCES analysts determined the NAEP score met or exceeded by the average percentage of students meeting state proficiency criteria. For example, in California, on average, 51% of fourth graders across the schools in the NAEP sample scored proficient or advanced in ELA on the California Standards Test in 2005 (CST scale score of 350 or better). On average, 51% of fourth graders in the NAEP sample scored at or above a scale score of 231 on the NAEP assessment that same year. The NAEP equivalent is the score that divides the state’s NAEP sample into the same percentage meeting and not meeting as the state assessment.

Table 2.1 orders states by their NAEP equivalent score for each of grades 4 and 8. States with the highest NAEP equivalent scores tended to have the lowest percentages meeting state proficiency criteria. States with the lowest NAEP equivalent scores tended to have the highest percentages meeting state proficiency criteria. The results indicate that states were setting the bar for proficiency at significantly different levels. The vast range of state proficiency results is hard to explain in and of itself: Why in 2005 would some states have as few as 15-30% of 4th and 8th graders meeting state proficiency standards while others had almost 90%. The identification and reporting of the NAEP equivalents made very clear that the bar set for meeting state proficiency varied significantly from state to state.

**Table 2.1a. Mapping state results to the NAEP mathematics scale, grades 4 and 8, 2005.**

Grade 4				Grade 8			
1 Row Num.	2 State	3 Estimate of percentage meeting the state proficiency standard	4 Estimated NAEP score equivalent to the state standard	5 Row Num.	6 State	7 Estimate of percentage meeting the state proficiency standard	8 Estimated NAEP score equivalent to the state standard
1	MA	39%	255	1	MO	15%	311
2	WY	39%	251	2	SC	24%	305
3	HI	30%	247	3	MA	42%	301
4	SC	39%	246	4	HI	20%	296
5	MO	41%	242	5	WY	37%	293
6	AR	53%	236	6	AR	34%	288
7	WA	60%	236	7	NM	24%	287
8	NM	39%	233	8	KY	37%	285
9	OH	65%	233	9	ND	65%	277
10	CA	51%	231	10	IL	54%	276
11	FL	63%	230	11	MD	53%	276
12	NV	52%	230	12	DE	56%	275
13	IN	72%	225	13	NY	56%	275
14	WI	74%	225	14	OH	63%	274
15	ND	80%	224	15	NJ	64%	273
16	LA	63%	223	16	TX	61%	273
17	AK	71%	222	17	PA	62%	272
18	MI	73%	222	18	FL	58%	269
19	CT	78%	221	19	MI	61%	269
20	NJ	81%	221	20	OR	65%	269
21	IA	80%	219	21	AK	65%	268
22	TX	82%	219	22	ID	70%	266
23	KS	85%	218	23	IN	70%	266
24	OK	74%	218	24	AZ	61%	265
25	GA	75%	215	25	LA	56%	264
26	MD	78%	215	26	WI	75%	263
27	WV	75%	215	27	IA	76%	262
28	ID	91%	207	28	MS	53%	262
29	NY	87%	207	29	CO	74%	258
30	MS	79%	206	30	OK	67%	258
31	NC	91%	203	31	CT	76%	257
32	CO	90%	201	32	GA	69%	255
33	TN	87%	200	33	WV	71%	253
				34	DC	40%	252
				35	NC	84%	247
				36	TN	88%	230

NOTE: NAEP mathematics cut scores at grade 4 are 214 for Basic and 249 for Proficient, and at grade 8 are 262 for Basic and 299 for Proficient. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2005 Reading and Mathematics Assessment, and National Longitudinal School-Level State Assessment Score Database (NLSLSASD). To be included in the analysis, states had to have available both sets of assessment results. California does not appear in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade results because California did not employ a single mathematics assessment at grade 8 (some students took an Algebra test, and some took a General Mathematics test).

There are a few likely explanations for these results and the concerns they raise: First, there might be great variation among the standards developed by states for NCLB. While some states may have developed more challenging standards for students to master, others may have developed less challenging standards that many students readily master. Second, there might be great variation among the assessments

developed by states to measure student progress. As is the case with the standards, some states may have developed more challenging assessments, and others may have developed less challenging assessments. Third, there might be great variation among individual state's definition of proficiency. As an example, even before NCLB went into effect, California had established five achievement bands for the California Standards Test: Far Below Basic, Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. Ostensibly, California could have set its NCLB bar at Basic or better (CST scale score of 300 or better), but chose instead to retain the criteria already established in the state pre-NCLB, which was Proficient or better (350 or better). Some states likely opted for setting their bar at a level corresponding to what would be Basic or better in California.

The Common Core is, in large part, intended to eliminate this kind of inconsistency created by NCLB's state-by-state approach to standards, assessment and accountability. A "Common Core" should contribute to greater consistency and coherence across states. This effort represents not just a "raising of the bar" but a matter of setting the bar at the same height for all states. However, given the state-by-state history of educational standards and their development, it stands to reason that the implications for transitioning to the Common Core are also somewhat state-specific. Since each state is transitioning from its own set of standards, assessments and proficiency definitions, the transition to the Common Core—what it means and what it entails—will naturally vary from state to state. In California, given the available data indicating the relative strength of our standards and proficiency criteria, the transition clearly will be different from those who previously set the bar significantly lower.

• Section notes: For additional reading on the history and analysis of standards-based reform in the U.S. and the major source for the explanation in this section see Resnick, L. B., Stein, M. K., & Coon, S. E. (2008). "Standards-based reform: A powerful idea unmoored." In R. Kahlenberg (Ed.), *Improving on no child left behind: Getting education reform back on track* (pp. 103-138). New York: The Century Foundation.

### **2.3. The Response**

Given the growing concern about inconsistencies in achievement data described in the previous section and the National Governors Association's (NGA) involvement in the standards movement from its very inception, it makes sense that once again it was the NGA that led the charge for standards reform specifically to create greater coherence in learning goals and outcomes nationally. Under the banner Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), the NGA and the National Council of Chief State Schools Officers (CCSSO) recruited and established specific groups to (a) develop, (b) feed back, and (c) validate the Common Core standards. The process involved representatives from a wide range of stake-holder organizations, including the National Council of Teaching of English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, American Association of School Administrators, National Parent Teacher Association, National Association of State Boards of Education. Drafted and reviewed and revised after several public hearings, the Common Core Standards were finalized and published in June of 2010 (for additional information see [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)). Immediately subsequent to finalization of the Common Core standards California established a Commission to review them, propose items to be added from the 1997 California ELA standards, and make recommendations to the California State Board of Education about adoption. In August of 2010, the State Board of Education adopted California's versions of the Common Core standards for ELA and Math. Initially, California chose to retain Algebra as the standard for grade 8; however, over time the State Board of Education changed course and decided to remain consistent with the original Common Core that designates Algebra as the standard for grade 9. This change was formalized in the April 2013 publication of California's Common Core Math Standards.

Section notes: For additional reading on the CCSS Initiative, CCR standards, and the development of the Common Core K-12 standards, as well as the major source used for explanations in Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4, go to [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).