

# COMMON CORE FUNDERS WORKING GROUP

CO-CONVENERS: Education Funder Strategy Group ■ Grantmakers for Education ■ Growth Philanthropy Network

## JANUARY 2015 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the January issue of the Common Core Funders Working Group Newsletter, designed to summarize and point readers toward the most relevant, helpful discussions, research and commentary about implementation of the Common Core standards. Our goal is to help funders committed to the success of college and career readiness standards navigate the field and match their resources to the greatest needs and opportunities in states, districts and schools.

### Working Group Updates

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The Common Core Funders Working Group seeks to leverage and organize the unique contributions of philanthropy - including resources, leadership, nimbleness and independence - to support students, districts, schools and states in successfully achieving new Common Core State Standards.

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#### New Resource: [A Funder's Guide to the Most Helpful Resources for Understanding the Standards and Their Implementation](#)

The Working Group produced this guide to spotlight the most helpful tools for grantmakers and grantees. This guide suggests where to go for easy-to-understand information for different audiences, as well as more specific tools about high-quality teacher professional development, aligned assessments and other implementation challenges. The guide summarizes some of the best tools and websites; please contact us if we can answer questions or point you to resources that support more specific goals.

#### Upcoming Working Group Events

As part of our focus on helping more funders support schools in the transition to higher standards, the Working Group is working with regional funder networks in Illinois and Florida to host an event in each state this spring. These regional programs will bring funders together to study specific implementation obstacles and problem-solve best ways for funders to help in their communities. Out-of-state funders are welcome to join the convenings to learn alongside local and regional funders about the challenges and opportunities in these states. We will share more details and dates in the coming weeks.

This newsletter was created by [Education First](#) for the Common Core Funders Working Group.

Please contact Joe Anderson ([janderson@education-first.com](mailto:janderson@education-first.com)) with any questions, comments or ideas for future content.



## Resources, Tools & Research

### Teacher, Building-Leader and District-Leader Capacity

#### Aspen Institute

##### [Core Ready Schools online tool](#)

Designed to support and accelerate school-wide planning and action, the Core Ready Schools tool builds on the institute's [school-level transition guide](#) created and released a little over a year ago. The interactive website helps schools assess, take action and monitor progress in each of the transition guide's seven key indicators of successful school-level implementation of the Common Core. The site asks probing questions to diagnose a school's current progress and provides guidance and planning templates on its possible next steps. Funders can use this tool to better understand how to support local implementation of the standards, and they can ask school communities to use the tool to help prioritize areas where outside resources or help would be most useful.

### Assessments

#### Data Quality Campaign

##### [Getting the Facts Straight about Education Data: Common Core State Standards-Associated Assessment Consortia](#)

As states choose to participate in the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia and implement the new assessments, it is important for everyone with a stake in education to understand what data the assessments collect and how student privacy is safeguarded. This brief document from the Data Quality Campaign dispels the most common myths - about federal student data collection, for example - with concise talking points and related resources. Funders should be aware of the facts when it comes to student data privacy and share this information with grantees working to support the standards and assessments.

#### Smarter Balanced [Initial Achievement Levels Setting](#)

In November, Smarter Balanced member states voted to approve the initial achievement levels, or "cut scores," for the math and English assessments. This link above includes detailed information about this decision, the achievement levels and how to interpret them. One especially helpful resource is the video, "Establishing a New Baseline for College and Career Readiness," that shows educators who were involved in the process explain how states set and approved the achievement levels. The achievement levels signal how well students are learning the skills and knowledge that put them on-track are for success in college and careers. Projections for 2015 based on spring 2014 field test-takers estimate that fewer than half of students will score a level 3, which signifies college and career readiness, or above - though that number will rise as teachers and students continue to meet the higher standards of the Common Core. Funders who work in Smarter Balanced states can share this guidance with grantees and educators, to support communications as schools administer tests for the first time this spring.

## [PARCC Field Test Lessons Learned and Smarter Balanced "Tests of the Test" Successful](#)

As they prepare to administer their new tests for the first time to all students in member states this spring, both assessment consortia have released reports on lessons learned from their respective field tests a year ago. According to the PARCC report, one-third of students characterized the English language arts test as "harder" than their schoolwork, while two-thirds said that about the math test. Despite the difficulty of the test, however, nearly all students reported that they had enough time to finish the test.

For Smarter Balanced, students at all grade levels found the field test more difficult than their state's previous test. The proportion of students who found the field test more difficult increased with grade level, from about 14% in the elementary grades to 46% in high school. They found the Smarter Balanced items "challenging" and "really hard" and said they "took more thought to answer questions." One 10th grader said the test was "hard" because "if you didn't know it [the answer] you couldn't guess" like you could on multiple-choice tests. One 6th grader said, "It's the first test I've ever taken where I actually learned something while taking it." The consortia used these survey data to continue to refine the operation assessments for this spring.

## Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

### [U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and Council of the Great City Schools](#)

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Business for Core site includes a new video, "[An Academic Checkup](#)," that makes the case for how academic assessments, when done well, are based on high state standards and designed to check students' educational progress and give parents and teachers the information they need to help students succeed in the skills that matter most. Likewise, the Council of the Great City School's new video, "[The Future](#)," (also available in Spanish) reinforces the Common Core and assessments' abilities to measure students' progress. Both videos address concerns of a once-size-fits-all curriculum and over-testing by describing the flexibility teachers have and how new assessments are designed to be different, respectively. In addition, the Chamber's new interactive website, "[Make Their Minds Fly](#)," explains how the standards focus on problem-solving and innovative thinking and call parents and stakeholders to action. Funders can view the videos themselves to build their understanding, and can share with grantees who work directly with parents and educators.

### [Montana Office of Public Instruction Elevating Educator Voices](#)

The Montana Office of Public Instruction created these videos to amplify the voices of local educators and community leaders who support the Common Core. This project is a great example of how a state education agency can proactively communicate about the new standards and how educators are beginning to use them in the classroom. Funders can share the videos, all of which are available on the [Montanans for the Common Core YouTube page](#), with grantees and other organizations invested in teacher voice and other communications work.

## **[Be a Learning Hero](#)**

Be a Learning Hero, a new website for parents, collects some of the best tools and trusted resources about the Common Core, specifically helping students with new math standards, in one easy-to-navigate site. With resources from trusted partners like NCTM, the National PTA, GreatSchools, Council of Great City Schools and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, this site provides straightforward answers to frequent questions that parents and others have about the standards, such as "How do I support my child with her homework?" and "How will the standards help my child succeed?" Funders can return to this site frequently as it is updated with the most relevant resources for parents and anyone else wanting answers about the Common Core.

## **Achieve**

### **[Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?](#)**

Achieve's recent national survey of public high school graduates finds about half felt unprepared for life after high school and most would have worked harder if they had realized the expectations of college and the workplace. The survey of 1,347 graduates from the high school classes of 2011 through 2014 was conducted this fall for Washington-based nonprofit Achieve by Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies.

According to the survey, if high schools had demanded more and set higher academic standards, 87 percent of those surveyed said they would have worked harder. The Common Core make good on the promise of higher academic standards, though educators also need to maintain these high expectations for all students. The report concludes with the following bottom-line solution: "All means ALL. Be sure all students understand and know the benefit of academic preparation for college and career; everyone needs to be prepared for their next steps." Funders can use these survey findings to continue to make the case for rigorous standards like the Common Core with their grantees.

## **NPR**

### **[Four-Part Series on Reading in the Common Core Era](#)**

Through NPR's excellent reporting, you can listen and read about how the Common Core English language arts and literacy standards have changed the way districts, schools and teachers around the nation teach reading and how students learn it. The series is a great refresher on what Common Core really looks like in classrooms, and can be especially helpful for funders and their grantees who are not educators themselves.

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