

Re-Envisioning the Teaching Profession: A Collective Call to Action

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Education as a profession is undergoing major changes with implications for students, staff, leaders, teacher preparation institutions, and continuous professional learning. Change and progress are necessary components for personal and professional growth; change that impacts beliefs and actions housed at the very core of our profession requires the attention, knowledge and deep understanding of the issues at hand by all K-16 educators. Implementation of the identified issues will impact the continuum of teacher preparation, teacher effectiveness, and ongoing development of our professional practice.

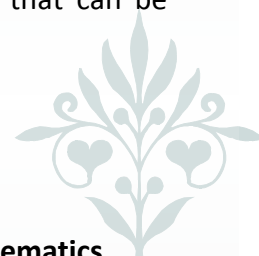
This *Info-Brief* attempts to identify three major issues and provide resourceful thinking and information to shape the likely adjustments and changes that can be made throughout a K-16 continuum.

The Issues

1. The *Common Core* State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics

As more information about the *Common Core* standards becomes available educators construct meaning through a variety of procedures and processes. They unpack standards in English language arts and mathematics, and begin to align the curriculum in place to the *Common Core*. In so doing, new curriculum that focuses on deeper understanding, higher level thinking, and adjustments to content at different grade levels is created. The foundation is re-shaped – not just with language arts and math teachers – with content area specialists as well.

The ***Common Core*** defines an **integrated model of literacy** in 21st Century language and competencies. Expectations are established from kindergarten through college readiness in core subject areas. Skills and abilities build from one grade to the next on the assumption that the new information and skill sets are learned and applied. Progressions begin and end in mathematics based on fluency and mastery of a set of foundational concepts and operations. The question, “What does it mean to be literate in social studies, history, science and technical subjects?” is addressed in a section of the English Language Arts standards which develops the use of primary and secondary sources to create an argument, defense and presentation of an idea.



Technology and media are essential to accessing, locating, and selecting information that is appropriate to identify and substantiate an issue or a selected point of view. Using technology as an instructional tool is essential! Assessments incorporating technology to measure learning are on the horizon; we await the first samples for review.

Instructional shifts in mathematics and language arts are defined and contained in the appendices of both *Common Core* documents. Some states have begun to interpret the shifts to provide professional development to staff. New York is one such state. With major differences in the ways that students will learn and teachers will teach, a compelling need becomes apparent for all educators: new learning. The *Common Core* presents a new direction with high expectations for outcomes for students in the United States and for educators responsible for their learning.

Provisions for success as a state were presented by the New Jersey State Department of Education at a recent symposium. The presentation by Dr. Penny MacCormack, Assistant Commissioner/Chief Academic Officer, is entitled *A Vision for New Jersey* and articulates the processes and a pathway for New Jersey educators to implement the *Common Core*. The power point presentation and information provided can be accessed on the NJASCD website at: www.njascd.org.

The **challenges to the profession are apparent** and numerous. Education is a complex process; it's not one dimensional. A single individual can no longer be responsible for the total being and outcomes designated by a rigorous set of standards.

To approach and achieve the desired level of outcomes, a set of requirements must be addressed:

- ◆ Model collaboration, critical thinking in a group, and problem solving. Toward this end, educators with students will need to create tasks that engage staff and students in academic content and its application to real-life settings. Learning will be relevant, rigorous and built on relationships necessary to accomplish the goal. (Tony Wagner)
- ◆ Complexity is heightened in the *Common Core* requiring elaboration, clear thinking, close reading, and interpretation of what is written in text. Developing this competency in staff at all grade levels and content areas is essential for transfer into effective instruction with students.
- ◆ For K-12, graduate students ready to enter college and take credit-bearing post secondary course work. Create/develop pathways of appropriate skill sets for students ready to begin careers in technical fields. (Penny MacCormack)
- ◆ Involvement of staff in curriculum design and implementation will enhance opportunities for deeper understanding of the *Common Core* and the necessary components to reach the desired effects. The development of model curriculum or unit plans or lessons can provide the samples necessary for staff to envision the instructional changes they will make. Dorothy Strickland describes a curriculum framework that is a model for planning and implementation that can be adapted to K-12 in self-contained or departmental settings in her article "Planning Curriculum to Meet the Common Core State Standards". *Reading Today*, February/March 2012.

- ◆ Creating common or sample assessments at the district/school level that will serve as formative assessments based on the *Common Core* is desirable. As PARCC makes information available, this task becomes an important step in the process of implementation. Learn from NJ Department of Education and PARCC assessment plans; incorporate their processes in backward design formats to prepare students for predicted, expected, and measured competencies. Share this information with professors to develop in teacher preparation programs.
- ◆ Leadership in articulating a shared responsibility for student learning is key to success. Collegiality, as defined by responsibility for identified content and skill sets necessary to achieve a common set of goals for a group of students, holds the potential to accomplish learning at high levels. Sharing effective pedagogy builds competence and a higher degree of success.

2. The updated Professional Standards for Teaching (*InTASC*) (Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium)

The second issue provides the **foundation for the profession**. The *InTASC* standards are model core teaching standards, nationally respected, and formulate the basis for policies, programs, and course development in teacher preparation at colleges and universities throughout the country. These standards define four areas of responsibility in teaching: 1) The Learner and Learning, 2) Content Knowledge, 3) Instructional Practice, and 4) Professional Responsibility. Components of these four areas are developed to further outline and enhance understanding of these standards. They form the expectations for academic learning, content, and pedagogy for the profession.

The *InTASC* model standards have been updated to reflect 21st Century environments and legal provisions necessary for teachers and professionals to know. The updates inform course development and expectations for current staff. Knowledge of these changes is essential for all professionals involved in teaching, in developing programs that prepare candidates for teaching positions, and for accreditation of institutions.

Alignment and connection to the *Common Core* standards would create a seamless interaction of what teachers should know and be able to do. By association, college personnel assume this knowledge in preparing candidates for the profession as reflected in course work and experiences provided to apply new knowledge and expectations for learning in real settings.

As a result, a **common language** for the profession is developed and implemented by K-12 educators and higher education; a coherent continuum is created and can be sustained. The profession advances from separate entities responsible for portions of student and staff learning to a collective and collaborative infrastructure delivering instruction that is developmentally appropriate based on where a person is in school along a professional practice continuum. These standards are “intended as professional practice standards.” (*InTASC* Model Core Teaching Standards)


The **challenges inherent in this concept** depend on the following aspects:

- ◆ Agreement on *what* a teacher candidate will be expected to know and be able to deliver (a profile) is a K–16 responsibility by administrators with teacher preparation institutions. The window of opportunity to re-shape programming and extend experiences in school situations and other learning spaces is optimum at this time. A forum identifying possibilities deserves attention and has value for a K-16 audience. (Gene Carter)
- ◆ A new balance between academic preparation and experiential preparation in school and classroom settings is paramount. This concept calls for collaboration from two major education communities: higher education and K-12 schooling. Re-imagining the learning for teacher candidates that would be viewed as valuable and will ultimately place candidates in desirable positions for hire should become the focus of this notion. (Gene Carter)
- ◆ Flexible structures in schools that offer a sampling of time with the best instructors in different areas in a school deserve a place on the re-shaping map. Candidates who learn from the best professionals also acquire the best strategies, practices, understanding of student issues, and importance of each area of the curriculum. This concept nurtures the adage *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*. A clearer meaning about school is garnered and developed. Concentration in a particular grade or content follows or precedes this flexibility provision.

3. The Impact of Teacher and Leader Assessment on Content and Pedagogy

Perhaps the most daunting effort of change is the assessment of teachers and leaders based on performance and student achievement. The performance areas can be learned and delivered; the issues connected to student achievement are complex and varied. Much information about progress on this initiative is provided through states' sources and websites. For educators, the questions are both personal and professional. The responses to high stakes accountability impact their future and, ultimately, their destiny. It then becomes the responsibility of all parties involved to provide knowledge, training, experience, and dispositions that will serve educators and potential educators well.

Building capacity in staff and leadership is essential. Developing capacity in teacher candidates complements these efforts for a more comprehensive view and sharing of responsibilities. At this point, introducing a Continuum of Professional Learning seems appropriate. Perhaps Sharon Feiman-Nemser conveys the message best in her article, **From Preparation to Practice: Designing a Continuum to Strengthen and Sustain Teaching**, when she writes:



“Learning to teach, especially the kind of teaching reflected in ambitious standards for students and teacher, is a complex, lengthy undertaking. It requires coherent and connected learning opportunities that link initial preparation to new teacher induction, and new teacher induction to continuing professional development. Creating a curriculum for learning to teach over time, anchored in a vision of reform-minded teaching, depends on the contributions of universities, schools, and unions working as partners at each stage along the continuum.”

Models to define and enhance professional teaching practice are known and not the purpose of this *Info-Brief*. However, knowing and communicating the multiple aspects of a model will be essential to the success of an educator. Whether the components of effective practice are learned in institutions of higher education or in school settings or in both along a continuum, the issue remains that they must be taught, understood, and implemented. The responsibility for understanding and demonstrating effective practice is firmly placed in the concerted effort of K-12 educators and higher education. It is the “window of opportunity” that presents itself for collaboration to determine what the future experiences should and could be that would best inform success in teachers and teacher candidates.

The **challenges of building and sustaining capacity** in teachers, leaders and teacher candidates involve K-16 professionals and include the following:

- ◆ The creation of a **necessary entitlement** for high quality, ongoing professional learning is vital to the future of the teaching profession. This component enables the task to become reachable for many and provides a platform for continuous learning to occur with colleagues in a positive environment. (Gene Carter)
- ◆ The design and development of a *Continuum of Learning* that identifies the knowledge and skill sets essential for success and begins with mastery of the Common Core standards, continues through teacher preparation programs, is refined through pre-service and in-service, and continues in the varied forms of ongoing professional learning throughout one’s career is a concept worth pursuing and *an idea whose time has come*.
- ◆ Focus and coherence developed in a well-thought-out professional development plan based on the *Common Core*, the *InTASC* standards, and the components of effective professional practice with the ultimate goal of student and teacher success should be in place in every district, school and institution for teacher preparation.
- ◆ Collaboration of K-16 educators to shape and implement a *Continuum of Learning* with the provision of ongoing communication for reflection and refinement holds the potential for the best results for all who are in the profession and those who plan to enter it.
- ◆ The support of associations, content organizations, colleges/ universities, and the New Jersey State Department of Education in providing vision, knowledge, process, and continuous opportunities for learning would advance collaboration toward the achievement of a common goal for all in the profession.



A Collective Call to Action

It quickly becomes apparent that no one person or group can accomplish these changes alone. The task is huge; the time is now; the collective intellect and wisdom of the profession is needed!

What can we do; how should we proceed? Several steps have already been taken to ensure guidelines. Many aspects are being discovered and shared nationally and statewide as the process of major change begins. To aid in these efforts, resources are available. But the real work will be completed by educators in partnership with schools and colleges/universities throughout the state.

New Jersey enjoys one of the highest rankings in the country for quality of education as measured by different polls according specific criteria. The capacity and competency to address these issues resides within us. Let us join together in collaboration to explore the recommendations and possibilities essential to creating the future of our profession.



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Web Resources

www.aacte.org

www.achievethecore.org

www.ascd.org

www.ccsso.org

www.commoncore.org

www.njascd.org

Note: All symposium presentations can be accessed at: www.njascd.org.