Focusing on the *How*
Guidance for School and District Leaders on Supporting Teachers Through the Transition to the Common Core
About ANet

The Achievement Network (ANet) is a nonprofit organization that helps schools strengthen their practice and culture of using standards and data to accelerate student learning in underserved communities.

Founded in 2005 in response to teachers’ need for better and more timely student progress data to better target their instruction, ANet now supports a network of more than 460 partner schools by providing interim assessments, planning tools, and school leadership coaching to guide schools’ transition to the Common Core. ANet partner schools consistently achieve twice the academic gains of non-ANet schools in their state.

How To Use This Paper

This paper is designed as a resource for school and district leaders to reflect on their efforts to support their teachers’ transition to the Common Core and to identify strategies to focus on going forward.

The paper is constructed around the three rubrics that ANet has developed based on what we have learned from in-depth work with hundreds of diverse schools across many states. We provide case studies to offer concrete examples of how schools have brought the ideas within these rubrics to life. And finally, we designed questions throughout that we hope leadership teams might use to reflect together. Ultimately, we believe that this paper will help school and district leaders to identify one or two priority areas for future action, so that teachers and students are set up for success with the Common Core.
Introduction

When we talk to other educators about the Common Core, the word we hear most often is “uncertainty.” Without enough examples of what the Common Core will truly ask of their students, teachers and school leaders worry that the Core will require them to change in ways they cannot clearly identify. Amid these overwhelming feelings of uncertainty, however, an increasing amount of content and guidance to support the transition to the Common Core is emerging. Publicly available resources outline key instructional shifts that support Common Core level teaching, provide examples of what Common Core assessment items will look like, and offer professional development content in video and other formats.

Why, then, amid this growing set of resources, are many teachers and school leaders still feeling so rudderless? It is because they are not receiving enough guidance on the change process.

The vast majority of the support that teachers and leaders are receiving focuses on content change: What are the new concepts that students must master? What are the new lessons teachers must deliver? Very little of it focuses on the infrastructure and action needed to implement these content changes. As teachers look to school leaders and school leaders look to district leaders for guidance, they hear a lot about what, but little about how.

For educators, many of the traditional sources of stability and direction – curricula, lesson plans, their own mastery of material – are being upended by the Common Core. In the schools and districts we have seen making the most effective transitions to the Common Core, leaders are actively focused on helping teachers regain that sense of stability through consistent, collaborative routines for planning from standards, evaluating student progress, and adapting instruction based on student needs. These time-tested routines – not new curricula, one-time professional development initiatives, or new technology – provide the infrastructure for implementing the Common Core. These routines empower educators to be the captains of their own transition.

This paper is intended to help school and district leaders by providing them with real lessons from schools that are finding their rudder. We have developed it through our work with 460 diverse schools in under-served communities across seven states and the District of Columbia. While none of the stories in this paper offers a silver bullet in its own right, each one provides practical guidance about how educators are managing their transition, and not just what they are transitioning.
Building Routines to Help Educators Find Their Own Rudder

When The Achievement Network was founded nearly 10 years ago, academics and practitioners were beginning to codify a set of routines that helped teachers identify student needs with evidence from assessments to better target their instruction. Those routines were built on a few guiding principles:

- Schools must carve out time – frequently and consistently – to bring teachers together to analyze student interim assessment data and in doing so build understanding of what proficient student work looks like, where their students are struggling, and what actions will lead to success.
- School leaders must take an active role in ensuring this carved-out time is spent productively, in supporting teachers to practice how to analyze their data, and in creating a culture that understands the work as a tool for professional growth rather than evaluation.
- Routines must be supported by high-quality interim assessments that match the rigor of end-of-year summative exams, align to what has been taught in classrooms, and contain high-quality items that give granular information about student mastery of standards.

While many school and district leaders now recognize the value of these routines for helping students, few have fully harnessed the routines’ power for helping educators adapt their own instructional practice to more effectively target support for each student. Now more than ever, as schools navigate toward a world of more rigorous standards, teachers need these routines to help foster their own growth; school leaders need these routines to provide the infrastructure for implementing initiatives like the Common Core.

Together with our partner schools, The Achievement Network has developed three rubrics — one for leaders, one for teachers, and one about school structures. These rubrics are informed by our work with hundreds of schools and are designed to help schools implement strong planning and data routines. They demonstrate the kind of evolution that takes place as schools move from basic practices to what we call innovating practices across the rows in each rubric. (The full details for each of these rubrics can be accessed on our web site, www.achievementnetwork.org).

### Leader Actions Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BASIC PRACTICE</strong></th>
<th><strong>INNOVATING PRACTICE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide Strong Data Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Sets goals without engaging teachers and an overwhelming set of priorities; expresses low confidence in the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Build a Culture of Achievement</strong></td>
<td>Feels complacent or lacks urgency about changing results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manage Execution</strong></td>
<td>Management rhythms and expectations are inconsistent, and lack follow-through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop Teachers</strong></td>
<td>Addresses many topics in PD such that teachers interpret conflicting messages about relative importance; gives feedback only through formal evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect and Plan for the Future</strong></td>
<td>Reflection happens annually; planning focuses on management of business as usual functions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teacher Actions Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PRACTICE</th>
<th>INNOVATING PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internalize a Data Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Unproductively challenges the interim assessment and data analysis process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan from Standards</strong></td>
<td>Doesn’t use pacing guide or assessment calendar to ensure that assessed standards will be taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analyze Data</strong></td>
<td>Gets overwhelmed by the data – doesn’t know where to start or gets sidetracked by details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adapt Instruction</strong></td>
<td>Reteach plans are focused on reviewing material, not trying new instructional methods; execution has minimal impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect, Learn, and Adjust</strong></td>
<td>Can’t explain what changed in student learning after the reteach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### School Structures Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PRACTICE</th>
<th>INNOVATING PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schedule Time</strong></td>
<td>Student intervention time, regular planning and collaboration time for teachers, and time for a school-wide data cycle aren’t reserved at the beginning of the school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standards, Assessment, and Curriculum Alignment</strong></td>
<td>School is held back by lack of common assessment calendar; misalignment between pacing guide and year-long schedule of assessed standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Leadership Team</strong></td>
<td>May not have the position or gravitas to compel teachers’ attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Information and Testing Systems</strong></td>
<td>Roster technology is a roadblock, delaying rostering process and resulting in errors; testing is frequently delayed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To put these rubrics to use, school and district leaders can begin by diagnosing where they stand against each row. The following questions can help guide that diagnostic exercise:

1. Which practice level(s) best describes your school(s) on the Leader Actions, Teacher Actions, and School Structures rubrics? What evidence can you cite to support your ratings?

2. Are there trends across schools around strengths and areas for growth? What do these trends make you think about potential priorities for your schools?
Like many schools, Powell Elementary had been using interim assessment data as an instructional tool for several years before the Common Core arrived. And like many schools, they had put in place the basic structures, such as regular time for teachers to review data. But with the impending arrival of the Common Core, the leadership team at Powell felt a need to strengthen their practice and to more fully embed these routines into the everyday culture and operations of their school. They began by prioritizing.

As the leaders at Powell reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of their practice before the 2010-2011 school year, they saw that a lot was already in place, but that it wasn’t always happening at the level of quality they would like. While they regularly held data meetings, advanced preparation for these meetings was often limited, focus was imprecise, and analysis lacked depth. “The leadership team felt that they weren’t always empowering teachers to do their best work,” says Adam Brewer, an Achievement Network (ANet) coach supporting Powell. As a result, they decided to focus on two key practices from the Leaders Action Rubric for the upcoming school year: “manage execution” and “provide strong data leadership.”

Powell’s focus on these rows took the shape of more disciplined interactions among the leadership team. They instituted and followed through on prep meetings ahead of their quarterly, school-wide data analysis meetings, in which they would review student data to identify priority content for teachers to focus on. They also debriefed after each of these data analysis meetings, discussing what their specific goals had been for the meeting and whether or not they achieved them.
Finally, they took a more active role in ensuring that teachers were following up from data meetings with strong reteaching plans.

Powell’s priorities among its leadership team aligned with those that they set out for the school’s teachers. The leadership team’s priority to better “manage execution” was intended to facilitate teachers’ priority to better “analyze data,” a row in the Teacher Actions Rubric. The leadership team helped teachers prioritize the most relevant standards, enabling teachers to dig more deeply into student data and spend more time analyzing assessment items to articulate the specific misconceptions that students were struggling with. “I [became] more focused on how I can use data… I also tried to look more carefully at the errors my students were making and how I can teach or reteach to those misconceptions,” says Cathy Moessner, a 5th-grade teacher at Powell.

As both the leadership team and the teachers at Powell felt their practice improve during the 2011 and 2012 school years, they thought about how they could rely on these routines to guide their transition to the Common Core. One clear area was in the level of rigor they expected of their students. Their routines became “an important tool… to set a level of rigor. The assessments push the curriculum towards college-ready rigor and expectations for all students, [and] our teachers own and take responsibility for increasing the rigor of student learning,” says Janeece Docal, principal at Powell Elementary.

Teachers’ practice improvements and the transition to the Common Core also encouraged the leadership team at Powell to shift the focus of their professional development efforts from the rubric row “analyze data” to the row “plan from standards.” Their previous focus on data analysis had strengthened teachers’ ability to develop strong reteach plans at Powell, but the Common Core has led the leadership team to focus their support on helping teachers plan better and smarter the first time around. Because teachers were accustomed to dissecting items on student assessments, they could now use publicly released Common Core items to anticipate the level of rigor their instruction must deliver. They could also anticipate misconceptions their students were likely to have and plan to address those the first time they teach.

Throughout the 2012-2013 school year, the Powell leadership team continued to ensure that the practices they are developing school-wide reinforce and align with each other. For example, the reflection routines they put in place as part of their effort to “manage execution” have revealed that they needed to focus on how they “schedule time” at the school, as part of the School Structures Rubric. While teachers were developing strong reteach plans, they were having difficulty fitting those plans into an already busy schedule that asks them to reteach content within one week of a data meeting. Based on their reflections and feedback from teachers, the leadership team at Powell carved out more time and more creative ways to incorporate reteaching content.

As they go forward with their implementation of the Common Core, Principal Docal and the team at Powell are relying on the practices they’ve developed to guide their transition. As she puts it, these practices are helping them “support one another to face our current reality while pushing toward our desired state… where our classrooms are alive with learning, growth, mastery, and meaningful achievement for all of our students. ALL of them.”
Leader Actions Rubric: Building a Culture of Achievement

For many schools we work with, the Common Core is experienced as far more of an opportunity than a burden. In these schools, we consistently hear that the Common Core is “just an opportunity for us to do something we all wanted to do anyway.” Sentiments like this are a sign that school leadership teams are building a culture of achievement that empowers teachers to feel a true sense of ownership over the transition. This culture is not pre-wired in these schools. Rather, it has been built over time because the leaders in these schools have modeled a growth mindset that helps teachers aim toward consistently high expectations for all students. They are now using the Common Core as just another vehicle for reinforcing those expectations.

In order to build a culture of achievement to support the transition to the Common Core, school leaders actively spend time explaining why the Common Core will help students succeed and tying that explanation back to the school’s existing culture, instructional priorities, and goals for students. They don’t treat the Common Core as yet another initiative, but as an extension of the school’s foundational beliefs about the potential of their students. The case study below provides an example of how leaders at Neighborhood House Charter School have worked with teachers to build a culture of achievement through their framing of the Common Core.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide Strong Data Leadership</th>
<th>Build a Culture of Achievement</th>
<th>Manage Execution</th>
<th>Develop Teachers</th>
<th>Reflect and Plan for the Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BASIC PRACTICE</td>
<td>Feels complacent or lacks urgency about changing results.</td>
<td>Management rhythms and expectations are inconsistent, and lack follow-through.</td>
<td>Addresses many topics in PD such that teachers interpret conflicting messages about relative importance; gives feedback only through formal evaluation.</td>
<td>Reflection happens annually; planning focuses on management of business as usual functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INNOVATING PRACTICE</td>
<td>Models and expects urgency; helps teachers and students view what is hard as an opportunity for growth.</td>
<td>Uses consistent management routines to support teacher success in reteaching and addressing each student’s needs.</td>
<td>Creates development plan for teachers, based on yearly strategic priorities and on areas where student progress is slow; gives timely, actionable feedback to teachers.</td>
<td>Plans personal time to target high impact teacher/leader development needs; does long-term planning with stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School-wide discussion of the Common Core at Neighborhood House began in June 2011 with a presentation and a series of videos that showed how schools in a very different context were talking about the transition.

The school leadership team used YouTube videos as a way to reinforce the messages of their PowerPoint presentation and to prompt a discussion on meaning and belief. “We chose the videos very consciously. We wanted to show the way schools in a very different context – more suburban, more affluent – were talking about instruction and the Common Core,” says Kate Scott, assistant headmaster at Neighborhood House. By sharing these videos, Scott and the team grounded the discussion of their transition in a core belief of the school: social justice. “If kids in this other school were going to have these high expectations, why shouldn’t ours?”

From the beginning, the Common Core at Neighborhood House was about teaching and about how expectations for students can set them up for success in life. It wasn’t just about standards and assessments. The leaders wanted their teachers – both those who were excited for change and those who were nervous about it – to feel that the Common Core genuinely represented an extension of their foundational beliefs about the potential of their students.

Finally, Scott and the team wanted to make their school’s transition to the Common Core a fun, shared experience for all. “We also found some corny YouTube videos of pop songs that had the lyrics changed to be about the Common Core.” Leading the whole faculty in a sing-along gave them a chance to be silly as well as an anthem that “kind of pumped people up” about the opportunity for growth that lay ahead.

While these early conversations were critical for creating a frame around the Common Core that would align with their core beliefs, the Neighborhood House team wanted to move quickly into content. After their initial discussion in June 2011, Scott and the Neighborhood House team helped teachers dive deeply into the standards. “All staff, including science and social studies, worked on the instructional shifts and had to create a presentation to the rest of the staff. Each team had to train the rest of the staff on their shift.”

Through these group projects, the work itself became the best way to build genuine belief and conviction in the quality and importance of the standards.
Teachers built a deeper understanding of the expectations the new standards would help them set for their students. Further, these projects empowered teachers to become experts in their respective shifts and to serve as resources to their peers in furthering the professional growth of all.

While their teachers worked, Scott and the rest of the leadership team continued to build their own expertise in the standards so that they could support teachers as they internalized the true level of rigor that the standards could help them achieve with their students. “There’s really no substitute for doing the work alongside teachers. A huge part of this is sitting down with grade-level standards and unpacking them with teachers and asking, [for example], ‘What does it mean to use a tape model?’”

All the while, the leadership team continued to reiterate their belief in the quality of the standards, the importance of the transition, and the potential of the Common Core. “We were always sending the message that these standards were improved,” says Scott. “We said over and over, ‘We like these standards and we believe in them. They are richer pedagogically, and they are a heck of a lot clearer about expectations we should be setting for students at each grade level.’”

Since the presentations and early work to understand Common Core content, Scott and her team have helped their teachers maintain momentum in three ways. First, the leadership at Neighborhood House has stressed that this transition is going to take time and is going to be a learning process. Said Scott, “We’re trying to take down the anxiety by telling teachers that it doesn’t have to be perfect the first time; it’s going to get better and better.”

In parallel, Scott and her team have also focused on being as clear and consistent as possible with communicating expectations. “We’ve been transparent about the timeliness of assessments and expectations...about when new things are going to hit.”

Finally, they’ve made sure to acknowledge the challenge of what their teachers are doing while maintaining a focus on what is possible. As their teachers got deeper into the standards, they began to realize how far some of their students needed to go.
“I’ll bet they surprise you with what they can do,” Scott recalled saying to one worried teacher. She continued, “Then the teacher did a round of assessment and it showed that a lot of kids were getting it.” Highlighting these wins helped teachers have confidence in the progress they were making and the benefits their students were receiving.

Reflecting on this past school year, Scott shared: “It’s been a ton of work and a crazily intense year, but once teachers see and believe the benefits of it, the transition becomes self-sustaining.”

To put these techniques to use in building a culture of achievement, school and district leaders should reflect on how they are framing the transition to the Common Core:

1. Are you consistently talking about why the Common Core matters, and is your rationale grounded in the things that are most relevant to teachers and students?

2. Is your discussion of the Common Core tied to instructional priorities beyond simple test scores? Does it extend to what you want your students to learn and your deepest beliefs about the best way to support that learning?

3. Are teachers given opportunities to be leaders among their colleagues by building their own expertise and openly discussing their successes and challenges?
Teacher Actions Rubric: Planning from Standards

Schools we support also adapted our rubric during their implementation of the Common Core by providing structures and resources that will help teachers build their capacity to plan from the new standards. There have been several trends across schools:

- Leaders start by providing teachers with a high-level view of the standards, but proceed quickly to side-by-side comparisons of assessment items from existing state summative exams, with example assessment items from PARCC and Smarter Balanced.
- Because there are relatively few items available from PARCC and Smarter Balanced, leaders supplement these example items with additional resources that help teachers understand standards.
- Leaders help their teachers focus by selecting one to two priority standards and one to two instructional shifts on which teams of teachers will concentrate their study.
- Leaders actively help teachers reflect on how the standards have changed what instruction should look like to help students reach the new level of mastery required.

In order to maximize the professional development experience offered by planning from standards, schools are also making conscious decisions about where they will provide resources to support teacher planning and where they will ask teachers to plan on their own.

Many district and school leaders struggle to identify the highest quality resources to serve as professional development tools for helping their teachers plan from standards. Many vendors claim alignment to the Common Core, yet so few substantiate their claims, and it’s little wonder this is a difficult task for schools. The case study below describes the choices UP Academy has made to help their teachers plan from standards. Following the case study, we provide a chart with some of the highest quality resources our school partners have utilized to help them transition to the Common Core.

---

Teacher Actions Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Practice</th>
<th>Innovating Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internalize a Data Orientation</td>
<td>Unproductively challenges the interim assessment and data analysis process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constantly uses evidence to gauge student progress; seeks out data sources in addition to what is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan from Standards</td>
<td>Doesn’t use pacing guide or assessment calendar to ensure that assessed standards will be taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sequences standards to target content above the level of rigor of the standards. Plans different learning sequences for student subgroups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze Data</td>
<td>Gets overwhelmed by the data – doesn’t know where to start or gets sidetracked by details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluates trends in data through the lens of specific student subgroups. Has an opinion about whole and sub-group priority standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt Instruction</td>
<td>Reteach plans are focused on reviewing material, not trying new instructional methods; execution has minimal impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adapts and executes overall instructional plans to target instruction to individual student needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect, Learn, and Adjust</td>
<td>Can’t explain what changed in student learning after the reteach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constantly evaluating each student’s progress/gaps and root causes using data and student evidence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At UP Academy, planning from standards starts with the big picture. “We start by reading the standards themselves,” says Katy Buckland, now the head of math instruction at the school. “Then we think together as a team [of middle school math teachers] about the breadth of that content in general. For example, if it is about solving systems of linear equations, what do we know from our previous experience about teaching these? We know these include substitution, elimination, graphing.”

From there, the team at UP used guides from the state of Arizona, the state of North Carolina, and the Dana Center to help them break the standards down into objectives. Too often, educators stop at the standards themselves. “These guides are key. They helped us clarify what the standard meant and how to teach it,” says Buckland.

These guides also created some new challenges for the team around the rigor and depth of each standard. Using the same example of systems of linear equations:

“Do the students have to be able to do a real-world application? Do they have to be able to use three equations? Do they have to do it in slope intercept form?”

To answer these questions, the team at UP turned to publicly available assessment items. “We relied on items from Smarter Balanced and from Illustrative Math. Even though there are risks in looking at just a handful of items as an indicator of the level of rigor to expect from students, this was definitely the best place to start,” says Buckland. Seeing example items from writers of the Common Core helped the team at UP get more specific and detailed in their understanding of what each standard meant. However, one resource they put limited faith in was pre-packaged curriculum.

“Putting all our eggs in one curriculum basket is scary,” says Buckland. “We didn’t want to trust one source because there is so much up in the air. In order to really internalize your content and have it feel authentic and have ownership over it, I think it’s really important that you make some judgments about what you want to teach on your own.”

With so much material to cover, the UP team had to prioritize which standards they were going to focus on. Two criteria helped them prioritize. First, the state had announced certain standards that they would not cover in their summative assessment for the upcoming year. Second, and to a lesser extent, they used the designations of Major, Additional, and Supporting standards made available by PARCC to focus more time on the most foundational work in each grade.

In parallel to content planning within the standards, teachers at UP prioritized three instructional shifts they would focus on for the year: deep understanding, application, and fluency. These shifts meant significant changes in the way many of the teachers were delivering instruction and required additional support. In the case of deep understanding, for example, “We had to get away from ‘I-do-we-do-you-do’ lessons. Instead, we had to present students with a problem and let them grapple with it on their own, first.”
“Putting all our eggs in one curriculum basket is scary,” says Buckland. “We didn’t want to trust one source because there is so much up in the air. In order to really internalize your content and have it feel authentic and have ownership over it, I think it’s really important that you make some judgments about what you want to teach on your own.”

To help them make this shift, leadership at UP provided teachers with a structure for lesson planning called The Five E’s (Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, and Evaluate). The system was originally developed for science instruction, but the teachers at UP found it useful in math as well.

Along with lesson-planning frameworks, teachers at UP accessed publicly available descriptions and videos of the shifts, provided by EngageNY, as well as the Understanding by Design framework and resources from the SERP Institute. “We really pushed ourselves to think about planning our lessons for enduring understanding instead of for lots of little bite-sized skills. This is so important for our students because it will help them apply what they know to content they haven’t seen before,” reflected Buckland.

As the teachers at UP developed their expertise in the standards, content planning, and the instructional shifts, the leadership team made two key decisions that guided the support they provided to teachers. First, they had to make sure that the resources they were providing really were aligned to the Common Core. “It’s hard because there are many people claiming to create aligned textbooks, but so many of them aren’t quite aligned,” says Buckland. “Often, they just re-label old content rather than truly aligning it to what the standards demand.”

They focused on content being produced by people or organizations directly involved with the development of the Common Core, such as Illustrative Math and Student Achievement Partners, and they relied on colleagues and trusted friends for advice. “A lot happened by word of mouth; that’s how we found EngageNY,” says Buckland.

Second, they had to ensure that the planning and unpacking work they were asking teachers to do was truly meaningful. “It’s tricky,” says Buckland. “We wanted to set folks up well, but we had to make sure it didn’t feel like busy work. New teachers genuinely appreciate these unpacking and planning exercises, but for really experienced teachers some of this can feel a little frustrating. When we were really reflective about asking teachers to do only the most important cognitive work to examine and plan from standards, most people found it really helpful.”

In this regard, simple templates and forms were a big help – by keeping their questions high level and leaving plenty of room for teachers to share their thinking, the templates set teachers up to consider the standards and shifts in the ways that were most important to them.

As they look ahead, the team at UP is thinking about how they can best build on this work. “This year, we did a good job on individual lessons – capturing rigor, teaching the content of the standards – but next year we [will] start to think about how we sequence these lessons into full chapters and units. We had to understand the lessons before we could really create the chapters that would be right for different groups of students.”
The following questions can help school and district leaders utilize some of the resources and techniques that UP Academy has used to help teachers master and plan from standards:

1. How frequently do you set aside time for teachers to examine standards and assessment items collaboratively? How much time do you give them in each session?

2. What is the right balance of support and independent work for your teachers? Are you providing that balance by drawing on the highest quality resources available?

3. What are you doing to empower teachers as leaders of these sessions? How are you giving teachers the tools and opportunities to become expert in select standards or subjects?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOURCE TYPE</th>
<th>HIGH QUALITY RESOURCES</th>
<th>LINKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sample items for comparison with state standards | You can find example items directly from PARCC and Smarter Balanced. You can also find high quality items from Illustrative Math, Student Achievement Partners, and states such as NY, MA, and KY. | You can find these at:  
  - www.parcconline.org/ELA  
  - www.parcconline.org/math  
  - www.smarterbalanced.org  
  - www.illustrativemathematics.org  
  - http://achievethecore.org  
  - www.engageNY.org  
  - www.doe.mass.edu  
  - http://education.ky.gov                                                                                                   |
| Performance tasks                     | High quality tasks are offered by The Mathematics Assessment Project and the Literacy Design Collaborative, as well as the Institute for Learning from the University of Pittsburgh and the Common Core Library from the New York City Department of Education. | You can find these at:  
  - http://map.mathshell.org  
  - www.literacydesigncollaborative.org  
  - http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu  
| Progression guides                    | You can find progression guides from Arizona, Delaware, and Ohio.                                                                                                                                                      | You can find these at:  
  - http://ime.math.arizona  
  - www.ncced.org  
  - www.ohioleadership.org                                                                                                    |
| Guides for unpacking standards         | High quality guides for unpacking standards are offered by North Carolina, Arizona, and Idaho, as well as The Aspen Institute and The Dana Center.                                                                       | You can find these at:  
  - http://www.ncpublicschools.org  
  - www.sde.idaho.gov  
  - www.azed.gov                                                                                                               |
| Videos and other content describing the Common Core shifts | You can find videos from The Hunt Institute in partnership with CCSSO, as well as EngageNY and The Aspen Institute.                                                                                           | You can find these at:  
  - www.youtube.com/user/TheHuntInstitute  
  - www.engageNY.org  
  - www.aspeninstitute.org                                                                                                    |
| Curriculum exemplars                  | High quality curriculum exemplars are offered by Student Achievement Partners and the Mathematics Assessment Project as well as EngageNY and Odell Education.                                                      | You can find these at:  
  - http://achievethecore.org  
  - http://map.mathshell.org  
  - www.engageNY.org/ELA  
  - www.engageNY.org/math  
  - http://odelleducation.com                                                                                                  |

To see the complete links listed here, please visit [www.achievementnetwork.org](http://www.achievementnetwork.org).
School Structures Rubric: Standards, Assessment, and Curriculum Alignment

Schools and districts typically use interim assessment for two main purposes. First, they establish expectations for the breadth of standards and level of rigor that teachers must help students master over a given time period. Second, they enable teachers to understand the specific areas in which students are not meeting those expectations so that they can target their instruction.

With the arrival of the Common Core and the substantial increase in rigor that it entails, these two purposes can be at odds: If the expectations that the assessments set truly meet the level of rigor demanded by the Common Core on all standards, those assessments can make it difficult for teachers to identify specific areas of struggle for students because their students appear far behind in all standards. On the other hand, if these assessments do not truly reflect the rigor demanded by the Common Core, they risk setting up teachers and students for failure on end-of-year exams.

The schools and districts that we have seen making the most effective transitions to the Common Core are making deliberate choices about how they achieve the right level of rigor on their interim assessments; they are engaging in an inclusive process for developing assessments that reflect those choices; and they are aligning their communication and support with those choices.

One of the most important tools in their efforts is a schedule of assessed standards – a map laying out which standards will be included on each interim assessment. The following case study describes the experience of Springfield Public Schools in creating assessments that set clear expectations and help align what is being taught in the classroom with what the Common Core demands.

### Schedule Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PRACTICE</th>
<th>INNOVATING PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student intervention time, regular planning and collaboration time for teachers and time for a school-wide data cycle aren’t reserved at the beginning of the school year.</td>
<td>Teachers and leaders use planning and collaboration time to ensure student intervention time is targeted to meet individual students’ learning needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Standards, Assessment, and Curriculum Alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PRACTICE</th>
<th>INNOVATING PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School is held back by lack of common assessment calendar; misalignment between pacing guide and year-long schedule of assessed standards.</td>
<td>Curriculum is aligned to standards and in-year assessments in a way that truly supports teacher and student success on mastering learning goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Data Leadership Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PRACTICE</th>
<th>INNOVATING PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May not have the position or gravitas to compel teachers’ attention.</td>
<td>Has influence with teachers and can compel attention to deadlines and quality control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Student Information and Testing Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PRACTICE</th>
<th>INNOVATING PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roster technology is a roadblock, delaying rostering process and resulting in errors; testing is frequently delayed.</td>
<td>School creates an accurate student roster at the beginning of the year; testing dates rarely change; if they do, there is early communication to all stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANet and Springfield Public Schools (SPS) have been partners since 2010, working together to build the right routines across the district for planning from standards and using student data to shape instruction. As the two organizations have worked together to navigate the Common Core transition, one of the biggest challenges has been ensuring that assessment content is both well aligned to classroom instruction and that it helps guide the transition to new and more rigorous standards.

“Working with Springfield to develop a schedule of assessed standards for math was all about iterating between standards, curriculum, assessment, and instruction so that all four were able to shape each other,” says Ali Turro, an ANet coach. “Our main goal was to ensure that teachers were getting clarity and consistency across all dimensions. Especially because of the changes brought on by the Common Core.”

To do this successfully, the first step was to get the right people with the right expertise in the room. SPS needed teachers and instructional leaders who were working with students every day and were closely in touch with the instructional content students experience in Springfield classrooms. They also needed people who deeply knew the scope and rigor of the Common Core standards. And finally, they needed district-level staff to provide perspective across different functions within the district. The team that was assembled consisted of:

- **District Leaders:** Springfield’s chief academic officer who played a critical convening role, facilitating, and ensuring the work was prioritized; and Springfield’s math director, who is responsible for curriculum and professional development across the district, and three members of her team.

- **School-based math coaches:** Each school in Springfield has a math coach who spends 20% of his or her time teaching and the other 80% overseeing curriculum implementation and teacher professional development in his or her school. Across the district there are roughly 45 such coaches and all of them participated in the group.

- **Assessment developers from ANet and Springfield:** An assessment designer from ANet provided expertise on the Common Core and did the work of developing the schedule of assessed standards. She and her colleagues worked closely with two assessment staff members from Springfield.

- **Teachers:** In the final round of the process, principals from five schools asked a subset of their teachers to review and provide feedback on the nearly final product.

### Springfield Public Schools
Springfield, MA

Springfield Public Schools strive to provide the highest quality of education so that all of its students are empowered to realize their full potential and lead fulfilling lives as lifelong learners, responsible citizens, and leaders in the 21st Century. The district serves 25,000 students, of which 61% are Latino, 20% African American and 13.5% white. Over 85% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In 2012, 41% of students scored proficient or advanced on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in ELA and 28% scored proficient or advanced in math.

An ANet coach, who supports SPS school leaders to develop their school-wide practice of using standards and data to shape instruction, served as the facilitator of the team.

Once together, the team followed a three-round process that spanned early February through May. First, the team was presented with a draft schedule of assessed standards based on the current year’s interim assessments, Springfield’s curriculum and pacing guide, data showing the standards that students struggled with last year, and the Common Core standards as they were being phased in by the commonwealth of Massachusetts.
As pre-work ahead of an initial three-hour review session, all members of the team were asked to review the draft schedule and identify areas where the schedule included content not covered by Springfield’s pacing guide and where the draft was out of sequence with the delivery of instructional content in Springfield’s classrooms.

The exchange in the first session was critical – some participants spoke to the Common Core expectations, others to what the district-adopted curriculum called for or what teachers believed to be most effective for students. Based on the collective development of judgment calls from the session, a second draft schedule of assessed standards was developed.

The second session, about two hours in length, focused on engaging the school-based math coaches. Working in grade-level groups, the coaches discussed key questions that had been identified around placement of standards and the correlation between assessed standards and the units in Springfield’s pacing guides.

In implementing this round of feedback, one of the key areas for discussion was determining which standards could be broken down and assessed in smaller pieces. “Thinking about how we could break up the assessments helped us all think about how we were really going to teach the standards,” says Turro. “It’s another way in which assessment and instruction played off each other and helped SPS learn more about the Common Core.”

The final round of feedback came from teachers, with the goal of ensuring that curriculum, pacing, assessment, and instruction were all aligned to actually play out in a coordinated way in the classroom. The process itself was valuable for these teachers by helping them to learn more about the standards and giving them confidence that they would have the right data throughout the year to guide them as they help their students achieve mastery of the Common Core.

“With all of the changes Common Core presents, it has been critical to have strong alignment between our pacing guides and interim assessments,” says Kate Fenton, Chief Instructional Officer of Springfield Public Schools. “Engaging district and school leaders and teachers in this process was well worth the time, as we ended up with aligned planning tools that will support student learning.”
The following questions can help district and school leaders put the lessons from Springfield into action so that they are creating consistent, transparent expectations for teachers’ use of assessment as they transition to the Common Core:

1. Do you have an explicit plan, down to the level of individual standards, for how interim assessments will evolve to meet the level of rigor demanded by the Common Core? Would the average teacher in your school or district be able to explain this plan?

2. Have the right stakeholders across your organization been included in your process for designing and developing interim assessments? Have you balanced expertise in what the Common Core demands with on-the-ground perspective of what’s being taught in the classroom?

3. In what ways have assessment and curriculum been used to shape each other and to build the expertise of leaders across the district in the content of the Common Core standards?

Conclusion

The concepts we share in this paper will likely be familiar to many readers. The idea that leaders should be building a culture of achievement in their schools or that teachers should be planning from standards is not new or especially groundbreaking. Neither is the idea that assessment, curriculum, and professional development should align. But in practice, quality execution can be hard to achieve and areas of misalignment can be extraordinarily difficult to spot, especially during times of change.

Our school partners have shown us that the right structures and routines can make change easier and can set up schools to drive dramatic gains in student achievement. Over the past eight years, as we worked alongside our partners to build these rubrics, we have realized that the practices they describe are simply a mechanism for helping schools manage change. Literally thousands of books and articles have been published on the topic of change management. While they comprise hundreds of different ideas about the right ways to navigate change, nearly all of them suggest that identifying a small handful of priorities can be one of the best ways to overcome challenges associated with change.

And so we close this paper recommending that you conduct an exercise that will help you prioritize. Start by reviewing each row on all three rubrics, rating your practice, and identifying the rubric rows that will most help your school develop strong routines to guide your transition to the Common Core. These questions can structure your reflection as you undertake this prioritization exercise:
To put these rubrics to use, school and district leaders can begin by diagnosing where they stand against each row. The following questions can help guide that diagnostic exercise:

1. Reflect on the case studies in this paper. What resonates with you as an area(s) of focus applicable to your context? What additional areas of focus might you choose based on your school diagnosis?

2. Are there any areas of the rubric that you now see as more or less important after reading this paper?

3. Based on your reflections and diagnosis, what are the one to two rows of these rubrics that you would prioritize to help your school(s) progress in their practices?

4. How would you act on these areas? Consider your approach to change management, communication, professional development, and sequenced implementation.

By working hard on these priorities, we believe schools can unlock the promise that the Common Core has to help their students achieve. This transition can seem daunting – it asks more of us as educators and more of our students as learners. Alongside schools we support, we’ve seen students from across the country rise beyond the inconsistent expectations that we have set for them in the past. By building the right routines we can support educators as they help all students reach their full potential.
Acknowledgements

The Achievement Network would like to thank the individuals and organizations who supported this paper.

We are grateful to our partner schools and districts that made the case studies in this paper possible. In particular, we would like to thank Katy Buckland and the rest of the leadership team at UP Academy, Kate Scott and the educators at Neighborhood House Charter School, Janeece Docal and her team at Powell Elementary, and Kate Fenton and the educators and administrators at Springfield Public Schools.

Thank you as well to several advisors and friends for their feedback on the paper, including: Sheila Brown, Ross Wiener, Tracy Epp, Judy Wurtzel, Judy Elliott, Leslye Arsht, Helen Chong and Amy Slamp.

We are grateful to the team at The Achievement Network who were the driving force behind the ideas and content in this paper: Adam Brewer, Julie Cipriani, Kim Cockrell, Tara Czupryck, Elizabeth Dill, Emma Doggett, Katie Graves-Maycock, Elizabeth Horan, Vanessa Lillie, Ashley Martin, John Maycock, Melea Nalli, Gillian Porcella, Chris Rupprecht, Mora Segal, Edlyn Smith, Justin Smulski and Ali Turro. A special acknowledgement goes to Carter Romansky, who led this effort from start to finish.

Finally and always, we are indebted to the dedicated and determined school and district leaders and teachers who the ANet team works with and learns from every day. Thank you for all you do to help your students achieve at high levels.