RETHINKING LITERACY

Reading in the Common-Core Era
VOICES OF EDUCATION
Surveys by School Improvement Network

School Improvement Network is taking the opinions of America’s educators and sharing their voices on the most important issues in education. Participate in the next survey from November 12 – 30 and be automatically entered to win a free Kindle Fire! Learn more at schoolimprovement.com/survey.

Common Core. Uncommon Results.

STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE WITH COMMON CORE 360
With over 110 training segments, dozens of in-class examples of Common Core lessons, a learning progression tool, the world’s largest online community, and more, your teachers will have everything they need to turn state standards into student achievement.

Are you ready to teach to the Core? Get free access today.
www.commoncore360.com/ew | 877-778-9360
Events

ONLINE CHAT
Literacy and the Common Core: Reflecting on the Research
Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2 p.m. ET

The common-core standards make dramatic changes in what it means to be literate in the digital age. Guests will discuss what the research says about these demands and how teachers can ensure their students meet the new requirements.

www.edweek.org/go/chat/literacy

WEBINAR
Common Core State Standards: Literacy and English-Language Learners
Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2 p.m. ET

As educators begin putting the common core into classroom practice, what instructional strategies will they need to bridge the gap between acquiring language and truly mastering academic content for ELLs? This webinar examines how teachers can develop and support literacy and academic language skills of ELLs in the common-core era.

www.edweek.org/go/webinar/CommonCoreReading

LEADERSHIP FORUM
Road Maps to Common Core Success
March 11, 2013 in Indianapolis and March 21, 2013, in White Plains, N.Y.

Join district leaders, experts, and colleagues to find your way around obstacles that can hinder success, at the Leadership Forum—an interactive day focused on discovering strategies and new approaches to the common-core roadblocks you’re facing.

www.edweekevents.org

Common-Core Coverage

Catch up on all the news, commentary, and analyses related to policy and implementation around the Common Core State Standards Initiative on this collection page:

www.edweek.org/go/standards

Copyright © 2012 by Editorial Projects in Education Inc.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication shall be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic or otherwise, without the written permission of the copyright holder.

Readers may make up to five print copies of this publication at no cost for personal, noncommercial use, provided that each includes a full citation of the source.

Visit www.edweek.org/go/copies for information about additional print photocopies.

Contents

2 Overview: Common Standards Drive New Reading Approaches
4 State Policies
6 New Research Thinking Girds Core
10 Writing Undergoing Renaissance in Curricula
14 Scales Tip Toward Nonfiction Under Common Core
18 Literacy Instruction Expected to Cross the Curriculum
21 New Texts Aim to Capture Standards
23 Building Bridges for ELLs

A pupil studies a character from the Dr. Seuss book The Lorax during exercises that integrate writing, reading, and drawing at the Blue School in Landaff, N.H. Often ignored, writing is now gaining prominence in the curriculum. PAGE 10

PHOTO, THIS PAGE: John Tully for Education Week

A pupil studies a character from the Dr. Seuss book The Lorax during exercises that integrate writing, reading, and drawing at the Blue School in Landaff, N.H. Often ignored, writing is now gaining prominence in the curriculum. PAGE 10

PHOTO, THIS PAGE: John Tully for Education Week

A pupil studies a character from the Dr. Seuss book The Lorax during exercises that integrate writing, reading, and drawing at the Blue School in Landaff, N.H. Often ignored, writing is now gaining prominence in the curriculum. PAGE 10

PHOTO, THIS PAGE: John Tully for Education Week

A pupil studies a character from the Dr. Seuss book The Lorax during exercises that integrate writing, reading, and drawing at the Blue School in Landaff, N.H. Often ignored, writing is now gaining prominence in the curriculum. PAGE 10

PHOTO, THIS PAGE: John Tully for Education Week
The Common Core State Standards aren’t exactly new; it’s been two years since most states adopted them. But it took those two years for the standards to trickle down from abstraction to daily practice, from a sheaf of papers in a state capital into a lesson plan on a teacher’s desk. Now they’re reshaping reading instruction in significant ways.

Whether the standards are shining a bright new light on reading or casting an ominous shadow over it remains a point of debate. But without a doubt, the shifts in literacy instruction envisioned by the common core are among the biggest in recent decades that have been directed toward teaching. All but four states have adopted the literacy guidelines.

The standards paint an ambitious picture of what it means to be literate in the 21st century, said P. David Pearson, a professor of language, literacy, society, and culture at the University of California, Berkeley.

“I think these standards have the potential to lead the parade in a different direction: toward taking as evidence of your reading ability not your score on a specific skill test—or how many letter sounds you can identify or ideas you can recall from a passage—but the ability to use the information you gain from reading, the fruits of your study, to apply to some new situation or problem or project,” he said. “That’s a huge change.”

Just take a look at some of the ways classroom instruction is changing because of the common standards:

- Reading instruction is no longer the sole province of the language arts teacher. The standards call for teachers of science, social studies, and other subjects to teach literacy skills unique to their disciplines, such as analyzing primary and secondary-source documents in history, and making sense of diagrams, charts, and technical terminology in science. A 4th grade teacher in Shell Rock, Iowa, for instance, had his students write science books for 2nd graders in a bid to fuse content understanding with domain-specific literacy skills.
- Reading and writing are closely connected, and writing instruction is explicit. Teaching writing has often fallen by the wayside as teachers focus on reading, but writing has to atrophy if expository writing expands. And that reading great works of literature has to dwindle if students read more original historical documents. Blending all those literacy experiences into students’ lives, they argue, is important for building flexible, strong minds.

How will that blend be achieved without sacrificing bulwarks of the discipline? An increasingly common element in answers: more reading.

“We have to dramatically increase the volume of reading kids are doing in English class and beyond,” said Penny Kittle, an English/language arts teacher at Kennett High School in North Conway, N.H.

False Choice?

The swirls of activity around reading, however, have raised as many or more questions than they purport to answer.

Some teachers worry that the common standards’ emphasis on reading informational text, and on writing that’s grounded in evidence from that text, could leave little place for reading literature and for the kinds of personal, creative writing that can unleash students’ passions.

Advocates of the informational-text approach argue that it is a powerful equalizer in building content knowledge for disadvantaged children, and that it’s crucial in building the skills most needed in good jobs and in college. Still others argue that nonfiction can engage some students in ways that fiction can’t and that devoting more time to it needn’t displace creative writing and literature.

Some reading experts are frustrated with what they see as an unnecessarily polarized debate about the standards. It’s a false choice, they argue, to say that students can’t write about things they’re interested in and still learn to base their ideas solidly on evidence from that text, could leave little place for reading literature and for the kinds of personal, creative writing that can unleash students’ passions.

By Catherine Gewertz
We’ll Meet You at the Intersection of...

95 Percent Group Inc. was founded by Susan L. Hall, EdD, a nationally recognized leader in RTI, data analysis, and reading instruction. With over 15 years of experience as a consultant to districts and schools, Dr. Hall is a frequent speaker at reading conferences nationwide and has authored several books, including the bestselling I’ve DIBEL’d, Now What? and Implementing Response to Intervention.

Partner with 95 Percent Group. Together We’ll Move Your Students Forward.

The Common Core State Standards describe the outcomes of Tier 1 instruction. RTI provides support for students in Tiers 2 and 3 who are reading and writing below grade level. Bringing these two critical literacy initiatives together requires strategic navigation.

That’s where 95 Percent Group excels.

- We’re experts in helping you implement both initiatives so ALL students have the opportunity to learn the skills of close reading needed for success throughout their school and career experiences.
- Our consulting services, professional development, publications, and tools will help your teachers make cohesive instructional decisions to transition their Tier 1 instruction to the rigor described in the CCSS while addressing deficits for students requiring Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.
- Our professional development goes beyond the WHAT of the Common Core to give you the HOW—such as HOW instruction looks different when the dialogue is about close reading of text.

Visit this link to see a sample video from a CCSS workshop and to download free instructional aids for teachers.

www.95percentgroup.com/CCSS

95 percent of students reading at grade level... an achievable goal
STATE POLICIES

At the same time that thousands of school districts nationwide are beginning to implement the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts, many also face new state reading policies for the early grades that call for the identification of struggling readers, require interventions to help them, and, in some instances, mandate the retention of 3rd graders who lack adequate reading skills. A number of states recently adopted such policies, many of which have echoes of a long-standing Florida measure for reading intervention and retention for those who lack adequate reading skills. In all, according to the Education Commission of the States, 32 states plus the District of Columbia now have statutes in place intended to improve reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

Arizona tightened up a recently adopted policy for retaining 3rd graders who score “far below” their grade level on a state reading test, closing what advocates called a “loophole” that allowed parents to override the retention. The state policy calls on districts to provide one of several options to assist both retained students and struggling readers in earlier grades, including assignment to a different teacher for reading instruction, summer school, or other “intensive” help before, during, or after the school day. PASSED: 2012

Colorado is requiring schools—in partnership with parents—to craft individual plans for struggling readers to get them on track. For 3rd graders with significant reading deficiencies, the parent and teacher must meet and consider retention as an intervention strategy, but the final decision must be jointly agreed to and approved by the district. A special per-pupil fund was created to support specific reading interventions, such as summer school and after-school tutoring. PASSED: 2012

Connecticut instructs the state education agency to develop new K-3 reading assessment for districts to use in identifying struggling readers. It also mandates that K-3 teachers pass a reading assessment each year beginning in 2013. And it compels the state to devise an intensive program that includes “scientifically based” reading instruction, intensive reading-intervention strategies, summer school, and other features that will be offered for a limited number of schools to use. PASSED: 2012

Indiana identifies 3rd grade retention as a “last resort” for struggling readers. A state board of education policy says students who fail the state reading test at that grade would be retained, though technically, the state is only requiring that they be counted as 3rd graders for purposes of state testing. The policy allows for midyear promotions and has several good-cause exemptions. Districts must annually assess and identify students reading below grade level, and develop a reading improvement and monitoring plan for each pupil. Such students must receive at least 90 minutes of daily reading instruction and be taught by a “high-performing” teacher. PASSED: 2012

North Carolina schools must retain 3rd graders not reading on grade level, based on a state assessment, unless they meet one of several exemptions, including demonstration of proficiency through an alternative assessment or portfolio. Prior to retention, students must be provided summer reading camps and have one more chance to demonstrate proficiency. The measure also stipulates regular diagnostic assessments and early interventions for struggling readers beginning in kindergarten. PASSED: 2012 (OVERRING GOVERNOR’S VETO)

Ohio requires 3rd graders to meet a certain threshold on the state English/language arts test to advance to the 4th grade, but the law makes exceptions for some students. Districts must annually assess and identify students reading below grade level, and develop a reading improvement and monitoring plan for each pupil. Such students must receive at least 90 minutes of daily reading instruction and be taught by a “high-performing” teacher. PASSED: 2012

PASSED: 2012 (OVERRIDING GOVERNOR’S VETO)

Oklahoma calls for schools to retain 3rd graders who score “unsatisfactory” on the state reading test, though they may qualify for several good-cause exemptions. The new policy calls for districts to offer a midyear promotion for 4th graders who show substantial improvement. The law also calls on districts to identify and provide extra reading support and instructional time for students in K-3 reading below grade level. PASSED: 2011

Virginia mandates that local districts provide reading-intervention services to 3rd graders who demonstrate deficiencies on a state reading test or other diagnostic assessment. The measure does not include any requirements for retention. PASSED: 2012

Iowa requires 3rd graders with an identified “reading deficiency” either to attend an intensive summer reading program or be retained, except for those eligible for several good-cause exemptions. The new law also requires, if state funds are appropriated, for districts to provide such students in grades K-3 with intensive instructional services and support to improve reading, including a minimum of 90 minutes of “scientific, research-based” reading instruction and other strategies identified by the district, such as small-group instruction, an extended school day, or tutoring and mentoring. PASSED: 2012

—ERIK W. ROBELEN
THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS set clear goals for student achievement, but the implementation is in the hands of educators. IRA has a variety of research-based resources from field-leading experts to guide you through implementing the standards and increasing literacy achievement for all learners.

- Books and journal articles
- Webinars and live events
- Reading Today and IRA members-only resources
- Annual convention

Visit www.reading.org/ELACCSS to preview sample chapters and see all the ways IRA can help you tackle the Common Core State Standards.
By Sarah D. Sparks

The truism that students “learn to read, then read to learn,” has spawned a slew of early-reading interventions and laws. But the Common Core State Standards offer a very different view of literacy, in which fluency and comprehension skills evolve together throughout every grade and subject in a student’s academic life, from the first time a toddler gams a board book to the day they head off to college.

In doing so, the common-core literacy standards reflect the research world’s changing evidence on expectations of student competence in an increasingly interconnected and digitized world. But critics say the standards also neglect emerging evidence on cognitive and reading strategies that could guide teachers on how to help students develop those literacy skills.

“In our knowledge-based economy, students are not only going to have to read, but develop knowledge-based capital. We need to help children use literacy to develop critical-thinking skills, problem-solving skills, making distinctions among different types of evidence,” said Susan B. Neuman, a professor in educational studies specializing in early-literacy development at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. “The Common Core State Standards is privileging knowledge for the first time. To ensure they are career-and-college ready, we have to see students as lifelong learners and help them develop the knowledge-gathering skills they will use for the rest of their lives. That’s the reality.”

Response to Findings

It’s been 15 years since Congress convened the National Reading Panel to distill knowledge about how students learn to read. That group, in the heat of the so-called “reading wars” between whole-language and phonics approaches to instruction, focused on five fundamental literacy skills: the word-decoding skills of phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. The panel’s seminal 2000 report, “Teaching Children to Read,” was used as the touchstone of the $1 billion-a-year federal Reading First grant program, established under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Eight years later, the U.S. Department of Education’s research arm found that schools using Reading First did devote significantly more time to teaching the basic skills outlined by the panel, but ultimately “reduced the percentage of students engaged with print,” both fiction and nonfiction. The study by the Institute of Education Sciences found students in Reading First schools were no better at drawing meaning from what they read than students at other schools, and the program eventually was scrapped.

“One of the things we’re seeing with the common core is, there was general disappointment with the NPR report’s five critical skills as part of the Reading First initiative,” said Ms. Neuman, who was an assistant secretary of education during the first term of President George W. Bush, when the federal reading program was rolled out. “When the evaluation came out and the results were very modest, people said, ‘Well, what’s next, what do we do?’ We have not seen the emergence of a new model, and now, that’s on the verge of happening.”

Peggy McCordle, the chief of child development and behavior branch—which includes literacy research—at the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development, said comprehension became the “next great frontier of reading research” after the National Reading Panel. There have been other, narrowly focused panels on early reading and English-language learners, but the National Reading Panel still stands as the last comprehensive, Congressional task force on reading.

“What the National Reading Panel had to say about comprehension was, we do need to teach kids strategies, and it’s better if you teach them in combination—and we’ve taken that much further,” Ms. McCordle said. “While we don’t have reading comprehension completely figured out in

The common core’s vision of how students ought to learn, grade by grade, to comprehend meaning differently across different media is sketched out in one strand of the reading standards—part of “integrating knowledge and ideas.”

KINDERGARTEN: With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g., what moment in a story an illustration depicts).

GRADE 1: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

GRADE 2: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

GRADE 4: Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

GRADE 5: Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

GRADE 6: Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

GRADE 7: Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium’s portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).

GRADE 8: Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

GRADES 9-10: Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

GRADES 11-12: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
Looking for guidance on the many unique challenges presented by the Common Core State Standards?

With these sessions and so many more, you’ll come away from IRA CONVENTION energized, enthusiastic, and ready to put these fantastic ideas to work right away in your classroom, school, and district!

INVITED SYMPOSIUM

Ruth Culham, Steve Layne, Danny Brassell, and Greg Tang

Focuses on literacy in content areas as it relates to Common Core State Standards and Texas STARR

Look at these other exciting featured speakers who will address CCSS topics:

- Teaching Edge Session with Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey
- Invited Speaker Session with Lucy Calkins
- Featured IRA Authors Session with Maureen McLaughlin and Brenda Overturf

To review the full slate of Common Core sessions and to register, visit www.iraconvention.org
The common core’s emphasis on more complex text with higher-level vocabulary at younger ages—and particularly the use of informational, non-narrative texts as opposed to overwhelming narrative texts—also puts into practice research showing that there is no bright line for when students start to read to learn. Ms. McCardle said. Setting one would be “an artificial distinction,” she said, “because the ramp up to learning from reading starts earlier and is just that, a ramp-up, not a quick switch or a dichotomy.”

Viewing comprehension as a sequential skill rather than a continuously evolving one “also implies they don’t need ongoing instruction after 3rd grade, and we clearly know they do,” she said. The Alliance for Excellent Education’s 2006 report “Reading Next” helped spark the common core’s approach. Education professor Catherine A. Snow and then-doctoral student Gina Biancarosa of the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that explicit comprehension instruction, intensive writing, and the use of texts in a wide array of difficulty levels, subjects, and disciplines all helped improve literacy for struggling adolescent readers.

“Timothy Shanahan, the director of the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a member of the common-core literacy-standards committee, likewise has found differences not just in the content knowledge but the approach to reading and getting information from text by professional scientists and historians. While “reading across the curriculum” research in the mid-1990s also stressed text in different content areas, Dorothy Strickland, a reading professor and education professor emeritus at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., said the common core leveraging emerging research on how students analyze and verify what they read in different types of text, from literature to a lab report or an Internet blog.

“One of the key elements of executive function is holding more than one thing at a time” in mind, she said. “Kids have to read across texts, evaluate them, respond to them all at the same time. In office work of any sort, people are doing this sort of thing all the time.”

The “Reading Next” report also highlights labor studies that show the 25 fastest-growing professions from 2000-2010—computer software engineers, database administrators, and medical assistants, among them—require higher-than-average literacy skills, particularly in informational texts.

In a series of experiments across several grades beginning in 2000, Nell K. Duke, a professor of language, literacy, and culture at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, found elementary classrooms spend on average only 3.6 minutes a day reading non-story-based informational, as opposed to narrative texts. In classrooms with high numbers of poor children, informational reading occupies less than two minutes a day.

“Even if there hadn’t been one stitch of research on informational text with young children, it’s still conceivable the common core would have had an incredible emphasis on informational text because that was what colleges and employers were saying students needed to be able to read,” Ms. Duke said. “Fortunately, there was a nice alignment between the concerns of researchers and the concerns of the college and business community.”

The fundamentals discussed in the National Reading Panel are still there, too, but have been given different weight. For example, vocabulary gets much more attention in the common core, not just individual words, but their meanings in different contexts. “There is a fairness in families of related words. In part, that’s because a student’s depth and complexity of vocabulary knowledge predicts his or her academic achievement better than other early-reading indicators, such as phonemic awareness.”

“There was a big push on academic vocabulary and the discourse of the disciplines. It’s likely come from that whole tradition of making sure kids not only have general academic language but deep vocabulary of history, social studies, science.” Mr. Pearson of UC-Berkeley said.

“The common core also marks a sea change in the way research- ers are assigning high numbers of informational text with a child’s reading level. For example, in a 2010 study in the Journal of Educational Psychology, researchers assigned two groups of poor readers in grades 2 and 4 to practice reading aloud text either at or above their reading level; a third group, the control, had no additional practice. They found students who practiced reading, even when it was difficult, were significantly better 20 weeks later at reading rate, word recognition, and comprehension, in comparison with the control group.

“It flies in the face of everything we’d been doing. Since the 1940s, the biggest idiots in the field—like me—we were arguing that you couldn’t teach kids out of books they couldn’t read,” Mr. Shanahan said. “We were setting expectations of such a modest level of learning being possible. We were unintentionally holding them back, and the common core called us on that.”

Standards and Grades

Ms. Strickland and Mr. Pearson said the common core’s strength comes from integrating many factors that have been identified as vital to adult literacy—such as facility with complex text or academic vocabulary—across all grades and academic subjects. “I think the idea of 10 standards that play themselves out grade after grade across different disciplines is a powerful thing,” Mr. Pearson said.

Still, researchers said, while individual standards are backed by evidence that students’ level of mastery of them can predict their eventual literacy in college and work, there is much less research supporting the grade-level descriptors of how those skills look through the years, or the most effective instructional strategies...
at each grade. Mr. Pearson said
description of the transition such
as in upper elementary and
middle school, may become the
“Achilles heel of the standards.”

“As you move through the
grades, it changes in funny ways,
and I don’t think the changes are
based on any actual research, but
on professional consensus,” Mr. Pearson said. “We may end up in
the strange position of having a
standard in 8th grade easier than
one in 9th grade.”

Mr. Shanahan agreed that
“some of the targets are a little
gooey,” noting, for example, that
the common core requires chil-
dren to compare two texts in
kindergarten, but there is no specific
evidence that this skill should
develop in that grade versus, say,
grades 1 or 2. On the other hand,
Mr. Shanahan said, “I think what
the learning progressions tell us
is a 4th grade teacher can no lon-
ger be a 4th grade teacher. They need
to be a teacher of literacy and un-
derstand the precedents and an-
tecedents of what a student needs
to know.”

Getting There From Here

Much of the criticism of the com-
mon core’s research base comes
from what it leaves out rather
than what it includes.

In the years since the Na-
tional Reading Panel, reading re-
searchers have made significant
advances in the development of
strategies for teaching compre-
hension, as well as metacognitive
factors that contribute to reading
success, such as attention and mo-
tivation.

In its preface, the literacy stan-
dards bluntly limit their scope
to “required achievements”—the
outcomes of reading, as opposed
to strategies for comprehension.

“The standards do not mandate
such things as a particular writ-
ing process or the full range of
metacognitive strategies that stu-
dents may need to monitor and di-
rect their thinking and learning,”
the common core states.

Rather, it says, teachers should
use their professional judgment
and experience to decide how
to help students meet the
standards.

“It’s not because [the common-
core designers] rejected that
research,” Mr. Shanahan said.
“The notion was that you wanted
to focus on outcomes, not the in-
puts. It might be helpful to teach
a student whether he’s paying
attention or not, and if not, to
do something. The common core isn’t
saying you shouldn’t do that kind
of thing, but that’s not an out-
come.”

Maureen McLaughlin, the
president-elect of the Newark,
Del.-based International Reading
Association, sees the lack of read-
ing-strategy research in the cur-
iculum as tantamount to having
no research base where it counts
most. “I see a gap between the
standards and school curriculums,
because typically when [previous]
state standards were developed,
they basically became the curricu-
lum,” said Ms. McLaughlin, who
also chairs the reading department
at East Stroudsburg University of
Pennsylvania. “If the states that
adopted the common core say to
their school districts, ‘This is the
curriculum,’ and teachers feel they
must teach to the test, the curricu-
lum as it exists would not include
the metacognitive strategies, the
writing-process strategies…and
that’s a problem.”

Ms. Neuman, the former as-
sistant education secretary, dis-
agrees. “I like the idea of focusing
on outcomes,” she said. “Compre-
hension strategies and metacog-
nitive techniques have often been
talked about as repair strategies,
but you have to actually know you
are not reading well to use those.
So it’s a little bit of a Catch-22
here. What this new approach is
saying is focus on the text, be-
cause many remedial readers rely
too much on their background
knowledge and think they under-
stand what they are reading when
they actually do not.”

The University of Michigan’s
Ms. Duke echoed the researchers’
general concern that there has not
been enough study of what good
comprehension looks like and how
to teach it in new contexts required
by the common core, such as Inter-
net articles, data tables, and texts
that also include graphics.

“When a standard calls for us
to get kids proficient at something
we don’t yet know how to get stu-
dents proficient at, we really have
to scramble a little bit,” she said.
“Hopefully, in a decade, we’ll have
really nice research on effective
ways to go about this.”
Mr. Shanahan agreed.
“I don’t know of any studies or
lines of research that might make
us decide three or five years from
now, let’s take out these items or
put these in,” he said. “In many
ways, the common core is silent
on that. They’re taking it on trust
that we’ll either know how to do
it or we’ll figure it out, and, as a
field, I’m not sure we do know how
to do it.”

Coverage of “deeper learning” that
will prepare students with the skills
and knowledge needed to succeed in
a rapidly changing world is supported
in part by a grant from the William
and Flora Hewlett Foundation,
at www.hewlett.org.
Teachers are focusing on writing instruction like never before. More and more, they’re asking students to write about what they read, helping them think through and craft their work, and using such exercises as tools not only to build better writers, but to help students understand what they’re studying.

The shift is still nascent, but people in the field are taking notice. It marks a departure from recent practice, which often includes little or no explicit writing instruction and only a modest amount of writing, typically in the form of stories, short summaries, or personal reflections, rather than essays or research projects on topics being studied.

In Oak Park, Mich., high school students are reading and rereading texts, taking notes on different features and levels of meaning each time, to inform their reading and discussion as well as the writing they will do about those texts.

First graders in South Strafford, Vt., are reading Dr. Seuss’ *The Lorax*, for fun, then for greater understanding, and then to hunt for evidence. They look for events in the plot that illustrate how the whimsical protagonist tries to protect the Earth and assemble examples into a simple paragraph to support the theme of the story.

On a literacy landscape that rarely features explicit writing instruction, and where the writing that does take place is often unconnected to reading, experts say, these kinds of projects are unusual for the way they connect writing and reading. Attention to reading has persistently been high, they say, but a focus on writing has waxed and waned in the past few decades.

“Now we’re seeing a lot more attention to the idea that writing about a text can improve reading about that text,” said literacy expert Timothy Shanahan, the chairman of the department of curriculum and instruction at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Driving Change**

Several forces are bringing about that change. One is the Common Core State Standards, which tie reading and writing together by placing a heavy emphasis on writing in response to one or more texts. Another—echoed in the stan-

**Writing Undergoing Renaissance in Curricula**

Its ascent stems from the common core, college feedback, and new research

By Catherine Gewertz
reading—feedback from college professors and employers, who bemoan young people’s weakness in the analytical writing most needed in college and training for good jobs.

Research, too, is sparking reconsideration of the role writing can play in making better readers. “Writing to Read,” a 2010 meta-analysis of 93 studies of writing interventions, found that writing had consistently positive effects on students’ reading skills and comprehension. Writing about what they read was particularly helpful to students’ comprehension, but so were taking notes on what they read, answering questions about it, and simply writing more often.

An expert panel brought together by the International Reading Association and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development concluded in a report earlier this year that reading and writing require “independent instruction.” Too little is still known about the “reading-writing connection,” the panel said, but it is sufficiently promising to warrant further research to inform classroom practice.

In 2010, the Newark, Del.-based IRA revised its standards for teacher preparation to include a greater emphasis on writing “as a way of emphasizing the importance of the reading-writing connection,” said Rita M. Bean, who chaired that committee and is a professor emeritus of education at the University of Pittsburgh. A recent policy brief from the National Council of Teachers of English, based in Urbana, Ill., calls for having students write through high school,” said Mr. Graham, a professor at Arizona State University in Tempe. “It’s not very promising for writing or for writing instruction.”

**Poor Performance**

Scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reflect correspondingly lackluster writing skills. The report issued in September for the 2011 exam, shows only one in four young people can expect in college and work, she said.

“Telling stories scores very low. Expressing one’s relevant details and reasons,” Ms. Pimentel said. “Noting with alarm the growing gap, the National Commission on Writing in 2003 called for schools to double the amount of time they spent on writing.

“For all intents and purposes, ‘literacy’ became synonymous with ‘reading,’ and writing became the stepchild of literacy rather than an equal partner,” said Andrés Henríquez, a program officer at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which underwrote a string of studies on reading and writing, including “Writing to Read.”

Students still spend little time writing in school. Teacher surveys by Steve Graham, the author of “Writing to Read,” and colleagues show that students spend less than half an hour writing each day in elementary school, and much of what they write is lists and fill-in-the-blank answers to questions. Even at the high school level, seven in 10 teachers reported that their preservice training had not prepared them adequately to teach writing, and nearly half did not assign a single multiparagraph writing task per month.

“What we have, typically, is kids not writing more than a paragraph of text, all the way through high school,” said Mr. Graham, a professor at Arizona State University in Tempe. “It’s not very promising for writing or for writing instruction.”

**FACING PAGE:** Elise Tyler rewrites a scene from the book on a worksheet.

Wearing a mustache made of paper, Caleb Burns plays the role of the Lorax. Pupils took turns wearing the mustache and choosing their favorite scenes.
Robert McNelly shares his worksheet of a scene from *The Lorax* during a lesson in reading and writing at the Blue School, where children’s literacy lessons include exploring and rewriting scenes from the book.

Iowa’s State Director (Commissioner) Jason E. Glass, Ed.D. ’11

‘A Strong Tie’

Writing is poised to occupy a hefty role in the College Board’s Advanced Placement Program. In 15 schools, the organization is piloting two courses that, if completed along with three other AP classes, will lead to a new "apostle" credential.

A critical-reasoning course, taken during the junior year, includes a major research project that demands a 3,000-word group paper and a 1,200-word individual paper, said John Williamson, the project’s senior director. Students must also do a 15-minute written and multimedia presentation.

"There is a strong tie between reading and writing all the way through these courses," he said. "When students write about what they read, they come to new understandings about it. And it’s bigger than just the writing; it’s about communicating your disciplinary understanding to different audiences."

Catherine Snow, a literacy expert and professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, Mass., welcomes the shift to text-based writing, saying that personal narrative has been overemphasized in most language arts classrooms.

But the risk in focusing writing exclusively on text, she said, is that many students will not be interested enough in the reading to analyze it. The text-based skills can be taught, though, through topics and texts carefully chosen to engage students, Ms. Snow said.

In a Harvard project being developed in several districts in Maryland and Massachusetts, 4th through 7th graders tackle topics that fire them up, such as whether Tater Tots should be served in the cafeteria, Ms. Snow said. Such questions drive them back to their readings to search for information they can use to build well-founded arguments, she said.

Covington of “deeper learning” that will prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world is supported in part by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, at www.hewlett.org.

For a link to resources on writing, go to www.edweek.org/links.

Robert McNelly shares his worksheet of a scene from *The Lorax* during a lesson in reading and writing at the Blue School, where children’s literacy lessons include exploring and rewriting scenes from the book.

Robert McNelly shares his worksheet of a scene from *The Lorax* during a lesson in reading and writing at the Blue School, where children’s literacy lessons include exploring and rewriting scenes from the book.

Robert McNelly shares his worksheet of a scene from *The Lorax* during a lesson in reading and writing at the Blue School, where children’s literacy lessons include exploring and rewriting scenes from the book.

Robert McNelly shares his worksheet of a scene from *The Lorax* during a lesson in reading and writing at the Blue School, where children’s literacy lessons include exploring and rewriting scenes from the book.

Robert McNelly shares his worksheet of a scene from *The Lorax* during a lesson in reading and writing at the Blue School, where children’s literacy lessons include exploring and rewriting scenes from the book.

Robert McNelly shares his worksheet of a scene from *The Lorax* during a lesson in reading and writing at the Blue School, where children’s literacy lessons include exploring and rewriting scenes from the book.
Are your digital natives digitally literate?

More than ever, students need digital literacy skills to meet Common Core State Standards and prepare for next generation assessments.

Learning.com's complete digital literacy solutions include:

**EasyTech** – Builds students’ technology proficiency and 21st century skills

**21st Century Skills Assessment** – Identifies learning gaps and recommends EasyTech lessons to address student needs.

**WayFind** – Helps teachers assess their 21st century teaching skills, and prescribes PD for improvement.

CLASSROOM PREPARATION:
Prekindergartners at Calvin Rodwell Elementary School in Baltimore, above, listen to their teacher, Erika Parker, as she reads *A Day at the Pumpkin Patch*, a nonfiction book about visiting a farm. The book is part of a unit that aims to blend the reading of stories and nonfiction with learning outside the classroom. The day after the children read the book, they visited Summers Farm in Frederick, Md.

IN THE FIELD: From left, Nalani Williams, Joshua Johnson-Bey, and Unique Childs, all 4, select pumpkins to take home from Summers Farm.
Scales Tip Toward Nonfiction Under the Common Core

College and workplace demands are propelling the shift in text

The common standards expect students to become adept at reading informational text, a shift in focus that many English/language arts teachers fear might diminish the time-honored place of literature in their classrooms.

In schools nationwide, where all but four states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, teachers are finding ways to incorporate historical documents, speeches, essays, scientific articles, and other nonfiction into classes.

The new standards envision elementary students, whose reading typically tilts toward fiction, reading equally from literature and informational text. By high school, literature should represent only 30 percent of their readings; 70 percent should be informational. The tilt reflects employers' and college professors' complaints that too many young people can't analyze or synthesize information, or document arguments.

Some passionate advocates for literature, however, see reason for alarm. In a recent paper issued by the Pioneer Institute, a Boston-based think tank, the authors argue that instructors who focus only on informational texts worsen reading scores. "It's hard to imagine that low reading scores in schools result from the instruction that causes them," the paper says.

A New Blend

Taking a cue from the standards, many teachers are blending fiction and informational reading as they phase into the common core.

At Calvin Rodwell Elementary School in Baltimore last month, Erika Parker and her class of 4- and 5-year-olds were planning a trip to a nearby farm as part of a unit called "Fall Fun with Friends." She read the children two versions of "Chirp! Chirp! Chirp! They were addressing a common core expectation that they learn to compare representations of what the standards seek.

"We are certainly still reading works of fiction," said Quinton M. Lawrence, whose district serves a predominantly low-income, minority population. "Most of my kids have not been exposed to newspapers or magazines. So it's good for them to see these kinds of things, learn about their structure, as well as the genre of newspapers."
and to familiarize students with a variety of types of text. When Ms. Santelises visits classrooms, she still sees plenty of literature being enjoyed, so she isn’t worried about fiction losing its place in school, she said. “Fiction and narrative have been so overrepresented, particularly in the elementary grades, that I feel this is more of a balancing than a squeezing-out.”

In a study that painted a portrait of that imbalance, Michigan literacy researcher Neil K. Duke found in 2000 that informational text occupied only 3.6 minutes of a 1st grader’s day and 10 percent of the shelf space in their classroom libraries.

The Role of Literature

In the rush to rebalance, however, educators risk cheating literature, some experts say. “The emphasis on nonfiction is leading to the development of a whole new universe of activities that will leave less time for the ones about literature,” said Arthur N. Applebee, a professor of education at the State University of New York in Albany.

Thomas Newkirk, a professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, said he thinks the common core’s “bias against narrative” doesn’t serve students well. If teachers seek to make students ready for real life, he said, they must equip them not only to argue, interpret, and inform, but to convey emotion and tell stories. “The world is much more narrative than the standards suggest,” said Mr. Newkirk, who teaches writing to freshmen and trains preserve teachers.

“The world is much more narrative than the standards suggest,” said Mr. Newkirk, who teaches writing to freshmen and trains preserve teachers.

Think about when candidates are running for office, and they have to tell the stories of their lives, the story of where we are going as a nation,” he said. “When we honor someone who has passed away, someone who is retiring, we need to tell their story. And I don’t think fiction has to be more narrative than the standards suggest. The question of which faculty are responsible for the new informational-text expectations is permeating conversation.

The question of which faculty are responsible for the new informational-text expectations is permeating conversation.

Colette Bennett, the chairman of the English department at Wamogo High School in Litchfield, Conn., said she believes the standards allow her to keep her focus squarely on literature, with essays and other nonfiction used to enrich that study. “I going to drop out of my course to read more?” And I say, “What? You haven’t been doing a lot of reading all along?”

More Time on Reading

To avoid sacrificing literature and still give students deep experience with informational text, one thing will be required, according to Carol Jago, a former president of the National Council of Teachers of English: more time.

“Teachers don’t have to give up a single poem, play, or novel,” said Ms. Jago, who now directs the California Reading and Literature Project at the University of California, Los Angeles, which helps teachers design lesson plans. “But students are going to have to read four times as much as they are now.”

Where will the time come from? From substituting good-quality reading for “busywork,” movies shown in class, and the hours students spend daily on electronic entertainment such as texting and playing video games, Ms. Jago said.

In sorting out how to put the standards into practice, some experts caution against an either-or interpretation. It’s important for students to be steeped in all kinds of reading and writing, they say, and it’s all possible with good planning and collaboration.

“I don’t know why this dichotomy has been constructed in a way that is so divisive. It’s very unhelpful,” said Stephanie R. Jones, a professor who focuses on literacy and social class at the University of Georgia in Athens. “We shouldn’t teach kindergartners as if they’re going to join the workforce next year. But it won’t hurt us to make sure we are emphasizing nonfiction a little more in K-5. And I don’t think fiction has to be edged out at all,” she said.

In some college and career paths, it’s important to state a claim and justify with evidence, and in others, it’s important to be really creative and innovative and not start with an argument, but have open inquiry and move toward some kind of discovery.”

Coverage of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the common assessments is supported in part by a grant from the GE Foundation, at www.ge.com/foundation.
Developing World-Class Students

Getting ready for the 21st century with Common Core

When students sit in classrooms today, they are preparing for a future where they will be competing globally for careers that don’t even exist today.

How do we prepare students for this future?

That’s what the Common Core State Standards are all about... helping students think for themselves, tackle real-world problems, and defend their conclusions.

It’s a lot of work—this takes educators, parents, students, and business working to bring it all together.

And, CTB/McGraw-Hill can help you...

Assessment. Instruction. Reporting.

The world our students face will require their best. It’s up to all of us to help them every step of the way.

To learn more about how CTB can help, visit CTB.com/CommonCore
The 4th graders in Mason A. Kuhn’s classroom recently wrapped up an unusual assignment: Write a science-themed book and make the target audience not their teacher but 2nd graders at Shell Rock Elementary in northeastern Iowa.

One student wrote and illustrated a cartoon about a feline named Space Kat trying to figure out how to power up her rocket ship to get back home. Along the way, the story explored concepts such as gravity and friction.

At Lewis County High School in Vanceburg, Ky., science teacher Sara M. Poepelmann asks her chemistry students to closely read and analyze an essay Albert Einstein penned in 1946 for a popular science magazine.

The two science-related assignments dovetail with the call in the Common Core State Standards to teach literacy across the curriculum. The English/language arts standards adopted by all but four states specifically highlight the teaching of reading, writing, and other literacy objectives in science, history/social studies, and technical subjects.

Around the nation, education leaders are grappling with how best to help teachers and schools reflect this cross-disciplinary dimension. If not exactly a new idea, educators and experts say it’s often an expectation of engineers’ and scientists’ total working time.

“Reading, interpreting, and producing text are fundamental practices of science in particular,” the NRC says, “and they constitute at least half of engineers’ and scientists’ total working time.”

Science reading is often challenging for several reasons, the NRC says, including the use of unfamiliar “jargon,” complex sentence structure, and different modes of representation, such as diagrams, charts, and symbols. From reading to writing, the NRC says, “every science or engineering lesson is in part a language lesson.”

Hundreds of Examples

The common standards for English/language arts espouse a vision of literacy instruction that involves virtually all teachers. “The standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school,” the document says.

In grades K-5, the literacy objectives across disciplines are embedded with the rest of the ELA expectations. But for grades 6-12, there’s a special seven-page section, “Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.” (See chart, Page S20.)

For example, it calls for students to compare and contrast treatment of a topic in several primary and secondary sources, and determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and phrases as used in a scientific or technical context.

The standards document has an appendix with nearly 150 examples of informational texts, or “text exemplars,” that might be used, organized by subject and grade level, such as Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense,” and an article, “Amusement Park Physics,” from Scientific American. There’s even an excerpt of federal guidelines for home insulation with a table of information.

Several educators praised the appendix as a valuable resource to help teachers get started.

Ms. Hogan from the Lexington-Richland district said that at a recent meeting of school department chairs in the social studies, “I pulled out all the exemplars that match the social studies standards.” She wanted those attending to “have a whole list of the kinds of informational texts, the kinds of primary sources that the common core is expecting kids to have an opportunity to … do a close read on,” she said.

Under revisions to South Carolina’s social studies standards finalized last year, Mr. Huffman said, one addition was a suggested set of social studies literacy skills, some of which were derived from the common core.

At the same time, a set of common science standards being developed by 26 states—in collaboration with educators and experts—are expected to reflect an emphasis on literacy goals.

A framework for the standards, crafted by a National Research Council panel, spotlights the issue and explicitly references the common core. “Reading, interpreting, and producing text are fundamental practices of science in particular,” the NRC says, “and they constitute at least half of engineers’ and scientists’ total working time.”

Science reading is often challenging for several reasons, the NRC says, including the use of unfamiliar “jargon,” complex sentence structure, and different modes of representation, such as diagrams, charts, and symbols. From reading to writing, the NRC says, “every science or engineering lesson is in part a language lesson.”

E=MC²

Several science education experts say they’ve encountered resistance from some secondary science teachers to the notion that it’s also their job to teach reading and writing.

But Ms. Poepelmann, the Kentucky science teacher, said it’s nothing new to her. Literacy, she said, is a “fundamental practice” of her science teaching, long seen as a schoolwide affair for her school and district.

“Even before the common-core standards, we had that mindset in our building,” she said. “But now with the common-core standards,” she added, teachers are taking it “up a notch.”

One big change, she said, is that students are expected to tackle a higher level of text complexity than before. “You’re basically bumping up things by two years in a lot of cases,” she said.

By Erik W. Robelen
That’s what led her to introduce Einstein’s article for Science Illustrated magazine, “E=MC²: The Most Urgent Problem of Our Time.”

Using the text is “one of the best ways that we have found” to address content goals in a unit on nuclear chemistry, Ms. Poeppelman said, while also “incorporating and weaving in common-core standards.” In particular, she identified two reading standards, one on analyzing text structure, the other on author’s purpose.

She typically spends four to five classroom periods on the article, which is read along with another piece published on the PBS website in 2005 about the legacy of E=MC².

To help students with the Einstein article, she engages the class in a close-reading approach that asks them to read one paragraph at a time and summarize it before moving on.

But Ms. Poeppelman is strategic about when to introduce such texts. “We try to be judicious and smart about it,” she said.

She also spends considerable time on writing. A recent chemistry assignment explored the use of X-ray scanners in airports to combat terrorism. Each student researched and wrote a paper focusing on scientific debates over potential health risks and alternatives. “They’re coming up with their thesis and supporting their claim with evidence and using citations, which is all in the common-core standards,” Ms. Poeppelman said.

In Mr. Kuhn’s 4th grade class in Shell Rock, Iowa, a recent science unit culminated with the writing assignment for a younger audience. “They have to break it down and explain it in a way their audience would understand,” he said.

“Science has such difficult vocabulary, and a kid can memorize vocabulary words and match them up on a quiz and completely forget.”

The task is informed by his participation for several years in a project to promote the Science Writing Heuristic, or SWH, an approach that uses language and argumentation to teach science, and that promotes critical-thinking skills. Recent state and federal grants have supported the SWH, including a U.S. Department of Education award in 2009 of $4.8 million to field test it in 48 Iowa elementary schools.

Brian M. Hand, a professor of science education at the University of Iowa and a co-developer of the SWH, said Mr. Kuhn’s technique in the assignment fits with this approach to writing as “an act of learning.” He explained, “We use writing as a learning tool, not writing as a recording tool.”

Mr. Kuhn is now sharing his experience with the SWH with fellow teachers in the 2,300-student Waverly-Shell Rock district.

Bridgette Wagoner, the district’s director of educational services, said the SWH is the focus of one of the four strands of professional development that her district currently offers teachers as they work to implement the common core.

She said she likes the approach because it is “literacy intensive” and embraces “an inquiry-based science approach” that engages students “as scientists in the work of asking and answering questions.”

In Boise, Idaho, history and social studies teachers recently got a dose of professional development to get a firmer grasp on the common core’s literacy objectives.

“We expect all of our history and social studies teachers to implement [them],” said Russ Heller, an education services supervisor for the 25,000-student district.

One goal of the workshop was to ease teachers’ anxiety about the common core, he said, noting that most of the district’s history and social studies teachers already bring a literacy focus to instruction.

“It’s not a matter of doing these things, but doing them with diligence,” he said, “intentionally, consistently, and in the right way.”

Mr. Heller highlighted the standards’ explicit reference to such matters as fostering close reading, understanding the difference between claims and evidence, building persuasive and reasoned arguments, and communicating clearly.

“The effort is to create a culture in which every day, a teacher walks into the classroom … conscientiously applying these principles,” he said.

‘Historical Context’

Fritz Fischer, a past president of the National Council for History Education, said the common core meshes well with a push in history education over the past 15 to 20 years to
focus more on the ability to understand primary and secondary texts and the differences between them, and on making use of them in writing to provide evidence and argument.

“I’m glad they’ve given a nod to history, and at least recognized its importance and the fact that it is unique,” he said.

At the same time, Mr. Fischer, a history professor at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, has concerns with the standards.

“They are much too narrow and incomplete” when it comes to literacy in history, he said. “There is so much more to reading historical texts than is in that section, and some of it leans too much toward literacy and not enough toward issues of historical context.”

Another concern Mr. Fischer has is whether teachers who lack history expertise will get the support they need to effectively teach more history texts, such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” which is cited as a text exemplar in the appendix.

“I’m afraid that an elementary teacher who doesn’t have any training in or understanding of history will just go to Wikipedia, and that will be their historical context,” he said.

Several other experts also offered concerns about implementation.

“With science and literacy don’t force the issue,” said Christine A. Roye, a professor of science education at Shippensburg University in Shippensburg, Pa. “There will be natural places where it will be a great match. ... Maximize those [rather than] trying to make everything connected.”

Dennis L. Schatz, a program director at the National Science Foundation who is on leave from the Pacific Science Center in Seattle, said he hopes the standards don’t lead some teachers to move away from valued science practices.

“The basic idea is great,” he said of the science-literacy connection in the standards, “but the reading [focus] could easily make people think, ‘Oh, I don’t have to do hands-on science.’”

More broadly, he said: “It’s easy to talk about integration, but the challenge is making that model come alive.”

Coverage of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the common assessments is supported in part by a grant from the GE Foundation, at www.ge.com.

“Reading is critical to building knowledge in history/social studies as well as in science and technical subjects. College- and career-ready reading in these fields requires an appreciation of the norms and conventions of each discipline, such as the kinds of evidence used in history and science; an understanding of domain-specific words and phrases; an attention to precise details; and the capacity to evaluate intricate arguments, synthesize complex information, and follow detailed descriptions of events and concepts.”

The Common Core State Standards include a seven-page section for grades 6-12 explicitly on literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.

**Grades 6-8 Excerpts**

- Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
- Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Grades 9-10 Excerpts**

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to grades 9-10 texts and topics.
- Conduct short and/or more sustained research projects to answer a question ... or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject.

**Grades 11-12 Excerpts**

- Evaluate authors’ differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning, and evidence.
- Synthesize information from a range of sources (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept, resolving conflicting information when possible.
- Develop and strengthen writing — by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant.

**SOURCE:** Common Core State Standards

---

**“K12 helps us be part of this new model of education happening across the nation.”**

Danielle Prohaska
Director of Teaching and Learning
Mechanicsburg Exempted Village School District, Ohio

K12 has partnered with over 2,000 districts in all 50 states, with 550 proven online courses delivered in virtual, blended, and classroom models. How can we partner with you to achieve your goals?

Call for a free consultation:
866.912.8588.

Visit: K12.com/educators

**DOWNLOAD OUR FREE CASE STUDY**

Mechanicsburg, OH: Individualized Learning is Key to Success at K12.com/mechanicsburg

In August 2007, this district decided to implement comprehensive online learning for all students. Integrating the Anywhere Learning System by K12 into its classrooms made a major contribution to achieving Ohio’s highest performance rating and AYP.

**AWARDED OHIO BOARD OF EDUCATION’S EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE RATING AND AYP.**

Performance Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>100.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

K12 helps you assess your students’ skill levels to improve reading comprehension and build language proficiency.

**SOURCE:** Common Core State Standards

---

“Note on range and content of student reading,” in the Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects:

“Reading is critical to building knowledge in history/social studies as well as in science and technical subjects. College- and career-ready reading in these fields requires an appreciation of the norms and conventions of each discipline, such as the kinds of evidence used in history and science; an understanding of domain-specific words and phrases; an attention to precise details; and the capacity to evaluate intricate arguments, synthesize complex information, and follow detailed descriptions of events and concepts.”
The two 5th grade volumes of McGraw Hill’s Treasures reading series at first glance look remarkably similar. Both include, for instance, a nonfiction selection about a scientific mission to Antarctica, coupled with snippets from a researcher’s journal. But there are subtle differences in what they ask students to think about as they read. The older edition, from 2008, merely asks them to explain the value of keeping a journal. The newer one, from 2011, asks the students to explain how “sensory details and other language” differ between a primary source, such as the journal, and a secondary source, such as the narrative.

In the 2013 version of its Reading Street series, Pearson officials have excised “reader response” questions and replaced them with prompts asking students to “use examples from the text to justify your answer.”

From analyzing text features, to citing evidence, to de-emphasizing personal responses to readings, such changes nod in the direction of the Common Core State Standards’ English/language arts expectations.

All three of the major K-12 educational publishers have unveiled new basal-reading programs that purport to embody the Common Core State Standards, highlighted in red. They also offer enhancements and supplements for their older curricula.

For this story, Education Week obtained and reviewed the 5th grade volumes of the

New Texts Aim to Capture Standards

By Stephen Sawchuk

The two 5th grade volumes of McGraw Hill’s Treasures reading series at first glance look remarkably similar.

Both include, for instance, a nonfiction selection about a scientific mission to Antarctica, coupled with snippets from a researcher’s journal. But there are subtle differences in what they ask students to think about as they read. The older edition, from 2008, merely asks them to explain the value of keeping a journal. The newer one, from 2011, asks the students to explain how “sensory details and other language” differ between a primary source, such as the journal, and a secondary source, such as the narrative.

In the 2013 version of its Reading Street series, Pearson officials have excised “reader response” questions and replaced them with prompts asking students to “use examples from the text to justify your answer.”

From analyzing text features, to citing evidence, to de-emphasizing personal responses to readings, such changes nod in the direction of the Common Core State Standards’ English/language arts expectations.

All three of the major K-12 educational publishers have unveiled new basal-reading programs that purport to embody the Common Core State Standards, highlighted in red. They also offer enhancements and supplements for their older curricula.

For this story, Education Week obtained and reviewed the 5th grade volumes of the
IF WE MAKE A MISTAKE AND ALLOW textbooks to go forward with our endorsement, it will indicate they are rigorous in a way many ... probably are not.

JOHN WHITE  
State schools chief, Louisiana

Great Expectations

As one of the few highly visible vetting agents, textbook adoption offers a window into the thorny topic of curricular alignment.

Pewer than half the states have a formal textbook-adoption or -review process, but among them are states with a large K-12 population, such as Florida and Indiana. And there are already signs that the common standards are beginning to change how publishers think. Their “response” is drawn from the common standards and the publishers’ criteria. Among the state’s demands: Publishers must provide both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the complexity of each text selection in their basal series.

Using Lexiles and other quantitative ways of measuring text complexity is already common, but analyzing them subjectively is another matter. That requirement demands attention to such things as whether a story is told in first or third person, the genres in the piece, the organization of the piece, the particular aspects of writers’ craft that we’re asking students to identify or learn about. We felt the base was there, and complex texts should be read multiple times, identifying its new vocabulary, meaning, and craft.

McGraw-Hill and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt may offer the newest basalts, which weren’t available for review, offer similar features.

New Tests

The ultimate test of alignment, though, lies in the hands of state reviewers.

Complicating those decisions is the fact that the state adoption text must be an all-or-nothing decision, leaving less room for shades of gray. Materials in Florida, for instance, are being evaluated on each criterion on a 1-to-4 scale, but they don’t have to clear a particular point threshold in order to win adoption, state officials said.

In New Mexico’s adoption earlier this year, reviewers detailed perceived weaknesses in several of the basal series, said the K-12 literacy and social studies coordinators, for the first time, will issue grades to English/language arts texts, Ms. Barton said. Faced with being disqualified from the rest of the review process, the publisher created an addendum.

“We saw publishers respond, when given information about places where their products were not meeting expectations,” she said.

Publishers’ Response

The major education publishing houses have, in general, distinguished between their bridge products, such as older editions or products they’ve supplemented, and brand-new editions that they crafted from scratch to embody the standards.

Districts using Treasures, for example, were offered free supplements, including teacher guides and new reading selections where needed, according to Daniela Perinelli, the vice president of editorial for elementary reading at McGraw-Hill School Education, based in New York City. They were also provided with an analysis showing units in their old manuals that they would need to provide aligned instruction.

“We did have that variety of text types already incorporated, and we were able to see how seamlessly the content fit the genres in the piece, the organization of the piece, the particular aspects of writers’ craft that we’re asking students to learn to do,” she said. “We felt the base was there, and

Mr. Dewitz of Mary Baldwin College, for instance, contends that past the earliest grades, basal textbooks may no longer be an ideal way to teach to the depth envisioned in the standards.

“If you read deeply into the common core, you have to be able to track the development of an idea or a character over time,” he said. “Essentially from 3rd grade up, the texts are almost impenetrable.”

Ms. Barton says more Tennessee districts have expressed interest in using the publisher’s proprietary basal series, rather than newer, prepackaged curriculum units.

“I do hear districts say, ‘We’re going to use these three short texts and these two long ones,’ and that they want to get the copyright licenses and go forward. But even in the basal series, it’s the ability to take and track the development of an idea or a character over time,” she said. “We don’t yet have the ‘iTunes’ version of curriculum, ... but common standards do change the economies of scale.”

In one development, educators across the country are increasingly making use of free or open-source materials to craft lessons. And while the quality of those materials is widely variable, New York officials view their project as a way of signaling what a baseline standard of alignment quality should look like in the state. Unlike the proprietary basal series, the curriculum will be open-source—free for teachers, districts, and even states to use as they see fit, Ms. Gerson said.

Though it’s difficult to say how the market will evolve as implementation continues, some see opportunities amid the chaos.

“I have a sense from teachers that they are going to want greater control over decisions that heretofore have been left to publishers or central offices,” Mr. White said. “That’s going to happen because the levels of thousands of different forms; but I think it implies a shift away from teachers who are willing to say, OK, I will take this book of content and its assessments on face value as simply what I need to teach.”

Beyond Adoption

The rush to update the basal readers has some observers asking deeper questions about the architecture of reading curricula.

Coverage of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the common assessments is supported in part by a grant from the Gates Foundation, at www.gce.org/.


dated for the first time, will issue grades to English/language arts materials, a move officials hope will give better sense of reviewers’ perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses in each basal series’ alignment to the standards.

Louisiana’s 2012-13 adoption process served as a test case of how far states are willing to press on the issue of alignment. Ms. Barton says that their own evaluation of basal series’ alignment to the Common Core State Standards was published, in June 2011; Pearson’s Reading Street, McGraw-Hill, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s Journeys, from 2009 to 2011. (McGraw-Hill also offers a new basal series, Reading Wonders, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt a new version of Journeys, but full volumes of those products were not available for review.)

The ultimate test of alignment, though, lies in the hands of state reviewers.

Complicating those decisions is the fact that the state adoption text must be an all-or-nothing decision, leaving less room for shades of gray. Materials in Florida, for instance, are being evaluated on each criterion on a 1-to-4 scale, but they don’t have to clear a particular point threshold in order to win adoption, state officials said.

In New Mexico’s adoption earlier this year, reviewers detailed perceived weaknesses in several of the basal series, said the K-12 literacy and social studies coordinators, for the first time, will issue grades to English/language arts texts, Ms. Barton said. Faced with being disqualified from the rest of the review process, the publisher created an addendum.

“We saw publishers respond, when given information about places where their products were not meeting expectations,” she said.

Publishers’ Response

The major education publishing houses have, in general, distinguished between their bridge products, such as older editions or products they’ve supplemented, and brand-new editions that they crafted from scratch to embody the standards.

Districts using Treasures, for example, were offered free supplements, including teacher guides and new reading selections where needed, according to Daniela Perinelli, the vice president of editorial for elementary reading at McGraw-Hill School Education, based in New York City. They were also provided with an analysis showing units in their old manuals that they would need to provide aligned instruction.

“We did have that variety of text types already incorporated, and we were able to see how seamlessly the content fit the genres in the piece, the organization of the piece, the particular aspects of writers’ craft that we’re asking students to learn to do,” she said. “We felt the base was there, and...
Andrew Archuleta, a 4th grader at Emerson Elementary School in Albuquerque, N.M., raises his hand to ask a question about a writing assignment. Teachers at his school are piloting ways to help English-learners master new reading and writing standards.

**Building Bridges for ELLs**

By Lesli A. Maxwell

In Yolanda Medrano’s class here at Emerson Elementary School, hands shoot into the air to answer questions she is asking about women and professional baseball.

These 4th grade students—most of them still learning English—have just finished reading and listening to a story about Jackie Mitchell, a 17-year-old girl who struck out baseball legends Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig when she pitched in an exhibition game against the New York Yankees in 1931.

Noting one expression in the story, Ms. Medrano asks the students to tell her what “throws like a girl” means.

“It means you don’t throw good,” a boy answers. “It means that no one thought she should play with boys,” says another one. “It means that girls aren’t good at baseball, but that isn’t true,” offers a girl.

Ms. Medrano checks with a few other 4th graders to make sure they understand the insult, which is common in English but doesn’t exist in Spanish, the first language for most of them.

This reading lesson is part of Emerson Elementary’s, and the entire Albuquerque school system’s, foray this year into the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts in the primary grades. The district piloted the new standards in 4th and 8th grades last school year, and this year, it is rolling them out in every kindergarten through 3rd grade classroom.

The new English/language arts standards demand that students sharpen their skills at reading, understanding, and analyzing a variety of complex texts. For teachers of English-language learners like Ms. Medrano, using strategies and supports (such as clarifying unfamiliar words and expressions) have long been crucial tools in effectively teaching ELLs, but they are even more critical for all teachers who work with English-learners now that the new standards expect that ELLs will be able to read and comprehend complex texts across all content areas despite their unfamiliarity with English.

At Emerson—a long-struggling school of about 500 students in one of the poorest sections of Albuquerque—the focus on effectively teaching the common-core standards to English-language learners is the centerpiece of a new strategy to drive up academic achievement. Nearly 50 percent of students at Emerson are English-learners.

After years of sluggish test scores and the discovery of a troubling pattern that showed very few ELLs were progressing, even modestly, in their English-proficiency over the course of a school year, leaders in the district and the local teachers’ union agreed last spring to overhaul the school.

District leaders and Ellen Bernstein, the president of the Albuquerque Teachers Federation, worked together to select a new principal and vice-principal, and agreed that teachers would be invited to reapply for their jobs or transfer to different schools. About three-quarters of the teachers who were hired came from other city schools; only a handful reapplied and were selected to stay. Most significantly, the district agreed to pay for an extra hour of work time each day that would be spent

A New Mexico school focuses on making standards accessible to everyone—including English-learners

**Albuquerque, N.M.**

Yolanda Medrano's class here at Emerson Elementary School, hands shoot into the air to answer questions she is asking about women and professional baseball.

These 4th grade students—most of them still learning English—have just finished reading and listening to a story about Jackie Mitchell, a 17-year-old girl who struck out baseball legends Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig when she pitched in an exhibition game against the New York Yankees in 1931.

Noting one expression in the story, Ms. Medrano asks the students to tell her what “throws like a girl” means.

“It means you don’t throw good,” a boy answers. “It means that no one thought she should play with boys,” says another one. “It means that girls aren’t good at baseball, but that isn’t true,” offers a girl.

Ms. Medrano checks with a few other 4th graders to make sure they understand the insult, which is common in English but doesn’t exist in Spanish, the first language for most of them.

This reading lesson is part of Emerson Elementary’s, and the entire Albuquerque school system’s, foray this year into the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts in the primary grades. The district piloted the new standards in 4th and 8th grades last school year, and this year, it is rolling them out in every kindergarten through 3rd grade classroom.

The new English/language arts standards demand that students sharpen their skills at reading, understanding, and analyzing a variety of complex texts. For teachers of English-language learners like Ms. Medrano, using strategies and supports (such as clarifying unfamiliar words and expressions) have long been crucial tools in effectively teaching ELLs, but they are even more critical for all teachers who work with English-learners now that the new standards expect that ELLs will be able to read and comprehend complex texts across all content areas despite their unfamiliarity with English.

At Emerson—a long-struggling school of about 500 students in one of the poorest sections of Albuquerque—the focus on effectively teaching the common-core standards to English-language learners is the centerpiece of a new strategy to drive up academic achievement. Nearly 50 percent of students at Emerson are English-learners.

After years of sluggish test scores and the discovery of a troubling pattern that showed very few ELLs were progressing, even modestly, in their English-proficiency over the course of a school year, leaders in the district and the local teachers’ union agreed last spring to overhaul the school.

District leaders and Ellen Bernstein, the president of the Albuquerque Teachers Federation, worked together to select a new principal and vice-principal, and agreed that teachers would be invited to reapply for their jobs or transfer to different schools. About three-quarters of the teachers who were hired came from other city schools; only a handful reapplied and were selected to stay. Most significantly, the district agreed to pay for an extra hour of work time each day that would be spent
Yolanda Medrano discusses a nonfiction text with students at Emerson Elementary. The 4th grade teacher says English-learners may need extra help, such as clarifying unfamiliar words and phrases, to master more complex texts.

On the first page of the story, the teacher uses “sleep,” “nap,” and “snooze,” words with similar meanings, but only one of which—“sleep”—might be familiar to her English-language-learner students. Ms. Lujan-Quihiones will point out “sleep” and ask her students to tell her if they read or heard another word with the same meaning. She’ll ask them to act out “sleep,” “nap,” and “snooze,” as she says the words aloud.

Arranged in this way, she has to spend much more time reading and thinking about the text herself before asking them to tackle it,” she said. “And it’s not enough just to read it to them or read it with them, we’ve got to break it down and have discussions.”

Preparations for All
Back at Emerson, the team emphasized how the new efforts are—not only in figuring how best to teach the new standards to ELLs, but also in establishing a strong school-wide program, with involved parents and strong community partners. They are less than three months into what they hope will be a transformation of the school and a model for the city.

But Clint “Tee” McDougall, a 4th grade dual-language teacher before he was tapped last spring to be the school’s new assistant principal, sees signs of promise.

“I did a classroom observation in 5th grade and watched these small groups of English-learners reading and discussing a science text on the Albuquerque aquifer,” Mr. McDougall said. “First, just seeing these kids work with a complex science text is a huge shift, and seeing them persevere with it shows me that our teachers are creating the conditions students need to stick with something until they understand.”

But educators here are also concerned about how they can make sure English-learners in all classrooms across the district will be prepared to change their practices and provide the intense supports that English-learners need. One of the next major common-core-related initiatives in Albuquerque involves intensive professional development for principals on the needs of English-learners. In addition, the district is getting ready to release an adaptation of its common-core English/language arts units of study for dual-language teachers who also teach Spanish/language arts.

“We do worry about the children who could be left behind by this,” said Ms. Rosen. “But then you have to worry that figuring out how we make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Coverage of “deeper learning” that will also support skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world is supported in part by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, at www.hewlett.org.
When your school library program is gone, the loss to the school community is beyond words.

School libraries are much more than literacy centers. They serve as a safe environment to explore and learn, access new information technologies, and collaborate with peers. When a school library program is destroyed by a natural disaster, the students and the community feel the immediate loss of a valuable resource that reaches far beyond books.

Since 2006, the American Association of School Librarians, with funding from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, has given more than one million in grants to over 125 school libraries across the country affected by natural disasters.

Apply today for a Beyond Words grant: www.ala.org/aasl/disasterrelief

Photographs are courtesy of Beyond Words grant recipients.
The discussion of standards is not new. For three decades, educators have struggled with the various challenges of standards-based education: some sets of standards attempted to cover too much content; others included too many knowledge dimensions in one standard. Curriculum lagged behind standards; assessments were misaligned. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) undertook to resolve many of these difficulties, but for them to be effective, educators across the nation must understand the research and theory behind them and strategies for their successful implementation.

In *Using Common Core Standards to Enhance Classroom Instruction & Assessment*, we begin by discussing the organization of the CCSS and the role that learning progressions played in determining their structure and content. Both research and theory suggest that organizing content in relatively specific sequences (called learning progressions) facilitates student understanding; such sequences are embedded throughout the CCSS.

Next, we provide concrete strategies to help teachers implement the CCSS in their classrooms. We describe how teachers can identify, assess, and grade their students’ levels of performance for each of the CCSS. In addition to presenting a process that educators at all levels can use to identify learning targets (with simpler and more complex levels of performance for each target), we explain how MRL’s scales for the CCSS were developed, and how school and district administrators can use our system of measurement topics and elements to give teachers specific guidance about how to implement the CCSS.

We also address the practice standards of the CCSS: those skills that students must use to interact with knowledge and information and collaborate with others in their academic and vocational pursuits, such as:

- Solving problems
- Constructing arguments
- Evaluating others’ reasoning
- Depicting and modeling their learning
- Using digital tools effectively and efficiently
- Striving for precision and accuracy

Our analysis of the college- and career-readiness standards and the Standards for Mathematical Practice identified 17 specific strategies that teachers can use to infuse these cognitive and interpersonal skills from the CCSS into classroom instruction. We describe each strategy, exemplify how a teacher would use the strategy in mathematics and ELA, and provide lists of words and phrases that teachers can use to prompt and reinforce students’ use of these college- and career-readiness skills.

Finally, we provide a complete set of ready-to-use ELA and mathematics scales for the CCSS, designed by teachers and researchers at Marzano Research Laboratory.

Maximize your PD with strategies grounded in research from Marzano Research Laboratory.

By Robert J. Marzano and Julia A. Simms

Our analysis of the college- and career-readiness standards and the Standards for Mathematical Practice identified 17 specific strategies that teachers can use to infuse these cognitive and interpersonal skills from the CCSS into classroom instruction. We describe each strategy, exemplify how a teacher would use the strategy in mathematics and ELA, and provide lists of words and phrases that teachers can use to prompt and reinforce students’ use of these college- and career-readiness skills.

Finally, we provide a complete set of ready-to-use ELA and mathematics scales for the CCSS, designed by teachers and researchers at Marzano Research Laboratory.