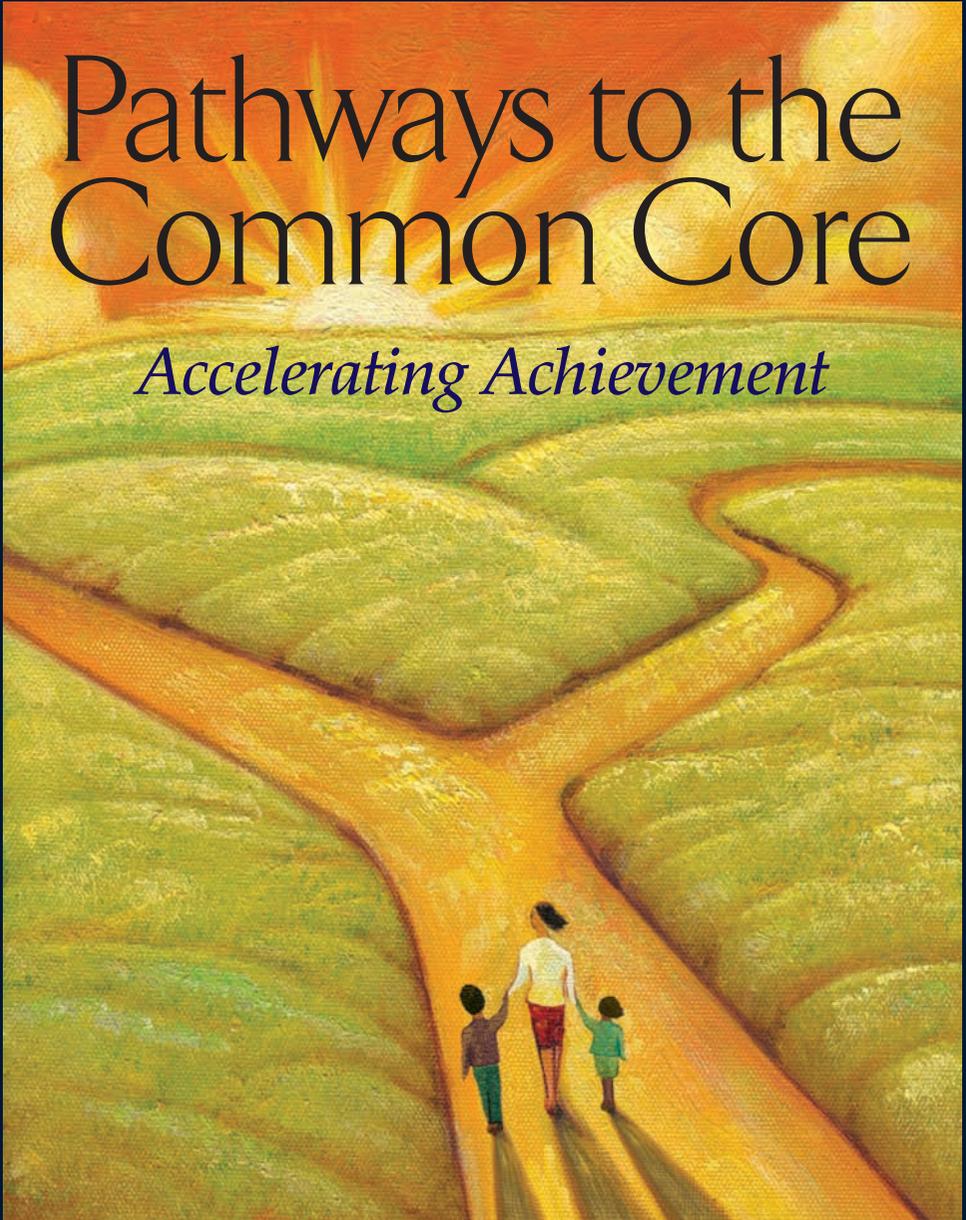


# Pathways to the Common Core

*Accelerating Achievement*



LUCY CALKINS ♦ MARY EHRENWORTH  
CHRISTOPHER LEHMAN

Heinemann

DEDICATED TO TEACHERS™

## Praise for *Pathways to the Common Core*

While acknowledging the ambivalence swirling around the Common Core State Standards, *Pathways to the Common Core* takes a proactive stance, encouraging us to scrutinize the standards carefully and accept the challenge to raise expectations for all children's literacy learning. It reminds us that it is up to schools and districts to decide how to implement the standards and choose our own way forward.

—**Ellin Keene**, consultant and author of *Talk About Understanding*

I began reading *Pathways to the Common Core* in my favorite chair, music playing, dinner cooking on the stove. "I'll just read a couple of chapters," I thought. I finished the book hours later, sitting at my desk, a legal pad filled with notes of all I had learned, and hungry for conversation with colleagues (and for dinner that had long-ago burned). *Pathways to the Common Core* sets you on a path for thinking more deeply about the standards, for teaching more inventively with the standards, and for helping students achieve the goals of the standards.

—**Kylene Beers**, consultant and author of *When Kids Can't Read*

The success of the Common Core State Standards will depend largely on how teachers implement them and whether they are able to resist narrow interpretations that could lead to increased failure rates and achievement gaps. In the hands of informed teachers the standards could promote deeper thinking and higher classroom performance. Read *Pathways to the Common Core* and be informed.

—**Tom Corcoran**, Co-director of CPRE, Teachers College

The Common Core State Standards are here and, as with any new initiative, there are the inevitable questions and concerns, debate and discontent. *Pathways to the Common Core* does not take sides; rather, the authors acknowledge the range of opinions swarming around the CCSS and wisely focus their energy on making sense of the standards. They provide a clear examination of what *is* and *isn't* stated and then invite us to seize this opportunity to reflect on our practice and to become "co-constructors of the future of instruction and curriculum." Let's take up that challenge.

—**Lester L. Laminack**, author, educator, consultant

Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman have taken up the challenge of the Common Core standards in a most valuable way. *Pathways to the Common Core* provides a context for teachers and administrators to advance productive instructional strategies while offering the critical language and logic needed to stand up to unfortunate interpretations and nonsense.

—**Peter Johnston**, Professor, The University at Albany

I love it when I sit down to view a table of contents and end up reading the whole book. *Pathways to the Common Core* is the most useful unpacking of the Common Core State Standards available to date. Lucy, Mary, and Chris help us understand what the standards emphasize and how this emphasis might lead us down different paths of instruction than we've taken before. With generous wisdom and experience, they help us keep one eye on rigor and the other on meaningful reading and writing.

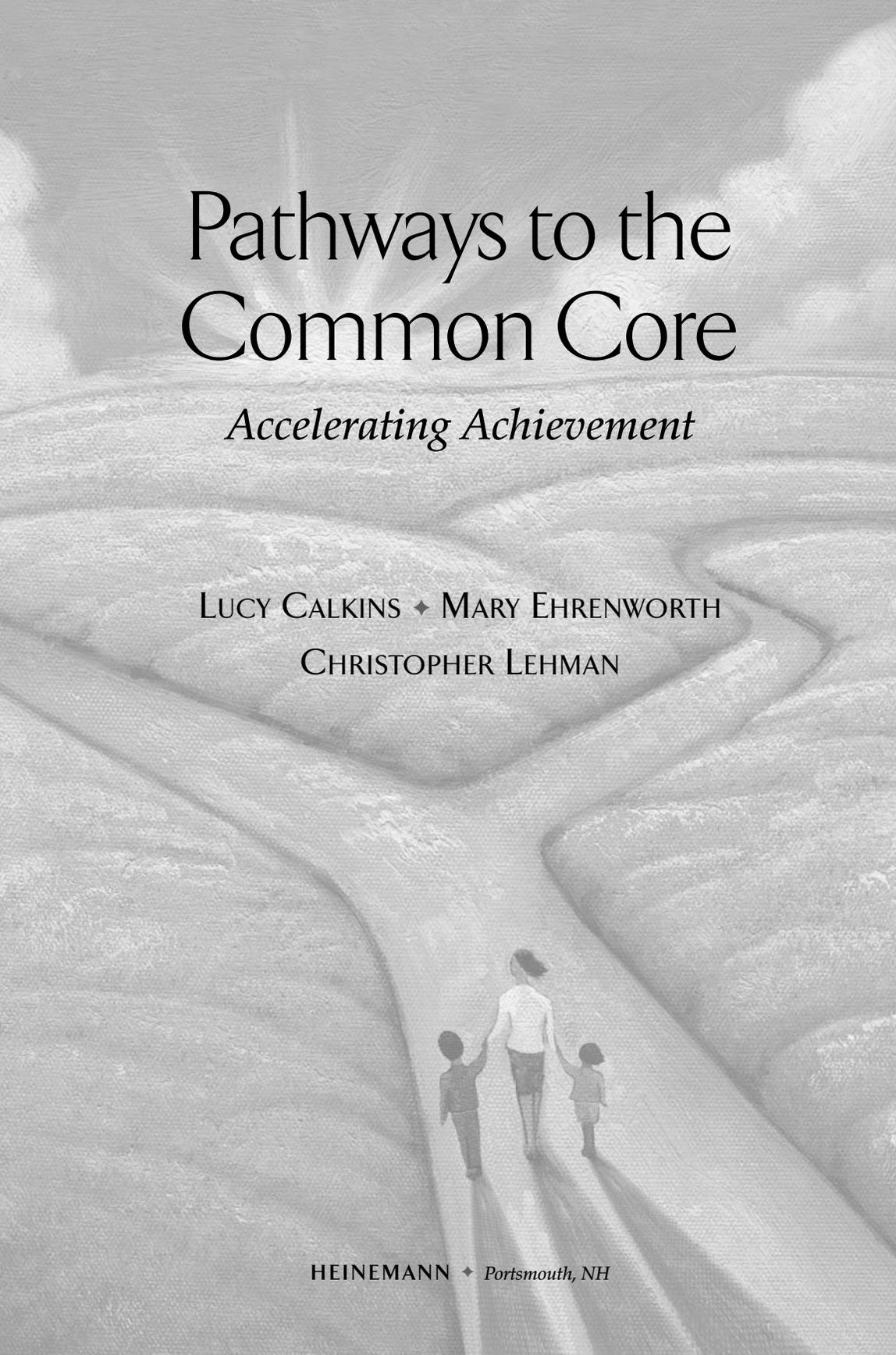
—**Gretchen Owocki**, Ph.D., Director,  
Reading and Writing Clinic, Saginaw Valley State University

Some of our most valuable resources in supporting a child's journey toward college and career readiness are the teachers who propel that journey. If the standards specify what every child needs to know and be able to do to be college or career ready, then *Pathways to the Common Core* specifies what every educator needs to know and be able to do to implement the ELA standards effectively.

—**Meghan Berry**, CPS, K-5 Writing Content Lead,  
Office of Reading and Language Arts, Chicago

While the standards may be daunting and technical, I am inspired by the way *Pathways to the Common Core* eases the reader through the concerns we all feel and supports us as we come together to take an honest look at our instructional practices and create systems that will accelerate student achievement. This book is encouraging and supportive; I feel prepared to roll up my sleeves and get to work alongside my staff.

—**Liz Tetreault**, Principal, Port Salerno Elementary School, FL



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HEINEMANN ♦ *Portsmouth, NH*

**Heinemann**

361 Hanover Street  
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912  
www.heinemann.com

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# An INTRODUCTION to the COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

*Pathways to the Common Core* will help you and your colleagues teach in ways that will bring your students to the Common Core State Standards' level of work in literacy. This book will illuminate both the standards themselves and the pathways you can take to achieve those ambitious expectations. It will help you understand what is written and implied in the standards and help you grasp the coherence and central messages of them. Above all, *Pathways to the Common Core* has been written to help you tap into the standards as a source for energetic and beautiful reforms in your literacy instruction and in your work with colleagues.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a big deal. Adopted by forty-five states so far, the standards represent the most sweeping reform of the K–12 curriculum that has ever occurred in this country. It is safe to say that across the entire history of American education, no single document will have played a more influential role over what is taught in our schools. The standards are already affecting what is published, mandated, and tested in schools—and also what is marginalized and neglected. Any educator who wants to play a role in shaping what happens in schools, therefore, needs a deep understanding of these standards. That understanding is necessary for anyone wanting to be a co-constructor of the future of instruction and curriculum and, indeed, of public education across America.

*Pathways to the Common Core* is written for teachers, literacy coaches, and school leaders who want to grasp what the standards say and imply—as well as what they do not say—deeply enough that they can join in the work of interpreting the standards for the classroom and in questioning interpretations others may make. The Common Core State Standards are clear that the responsibility for interpreting and implementing these expectations

rests on the shoulders of teachers and principals (as well as those of state leaders). The standards say, “The Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed. . . . Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards” (2010a, 4). *Pathways to the Common Core* expects that you will take the standards at their word and see it as your responsibility—individually and as a member of a school community—to study the expectations for end-of-grade results outlined by the CCSS and to use the Common Core as a lens for reflecting on your practice and for planning ways to support deeper and further learning. *Pathways* aims to help you embrace this role in shaping the future. It will allow you to listen critically to other people’s understandings of what it means to align curriculum to the Common Core and to either say yes or to say no. Most of all, it will allow you to make your own interpretations.

This book, then, is written for educators who are eager to embrace the responsibilities of implementing the Common Core, who see schools as centers of professional study, and who believe that teaching well means engaging in a continual process of studying students and their work in order to strengthen teaching and learning. The book will especially help you implement the CCSS in ways that strengthen student-centered, deeply interactive approaches to literacy, approaches that invite students to live richly literate lives, using reading and writing to pursue goals of personal and social significance. The rhetoric around the CCSS changes rapidly as new documents and assessments emerge. Rather than attempt to have the last word on the standards, we’ve chosen to help you with some implementation on the front end of the curve. We hope this decision helps with your immediate needs as well as your developing discernment and judgment, which will be brought to bear on future mandates.

We do not expect that you, our readers, will be wholehearted fans of every part of the Common Core, nor do we expect *Pathways* will erase your feelings of ambivalence about the standards. We are convinced, however, that ambivalence cannot be an excuse for not responding to the call for reform that is implicit in the standards.

## YOU CAN VIEW THE STANDARDS AS A CURMUDGEON—OR AS IF THEY ARE GOLD

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Often, when we talk with teachers and principals about the standards, we begin by pointing out that each one of us can choose how we regard the standards. We often tell them about a minilesson in which we ask a class of young readers, “Do you know what a *curmudgeon* is?” and then tell the children that on Halloween, they probably circle past the neighborhood curmudgeon’s house, not trick-or-treating at his door lest he rush out, snarling and waving an angry stick. In the minilesson, we tell children, “You have a choice as readers. You can read like a curmudgeon,” and we illustrate by reading a line or two of the class’ read-aloud book as if it were duller than dishwasher. But then we quickly reverse our tone and energy and we point out, “But you can, instead, read as if the text is gold.” Then we reread the passage, this time reading with heart and soul.

### **Reading the Common Core State Standards as Curmudgeons**

Educators, like those young readers, have a choice. We can regard the Common Core State Standards as the worst thing in the world. Frankly, it can be fun to gripe about them. Sometimes, we say to the educators who convene at our Common Core conferences, “Right now, make your face into a curmudgeon’s face. As a curmudgeon, think about those standards—the timing, the way they arrived on the scene, their effect on your school. Now turn and, as a curmudgeon, whine and complain about the Common Core.”

If you do this with your colleagues, you will find the room quickly erupting into heated conversation. After just a few minutes, you can reconvene the group. If people share complaints, they’ll probably mention some of the following, as well as others.

**If we really want to tackle the achievement gap, shouldn’t we be tackling poverty first and then standards?** Why is *now* a good time to raise the stakes for our kids, when a huge percentage are living in poverty and when the safety nets have been torn apart and there is no funding to improve education? The percent of children growing up poor in this country continues to rise, from 16% in 2000 up to 21% in 2009 (National Center for Children in

Poverty 2009). Of all industrialized nations, the United States ranks second highest, only slightly behind Mexico, for the percentage of children living in extreme poverty (UNICEF 2005). Not surprisingly, the countries that most often outrank the United States in international education measures have child poverty rates less than half of our own.

**How can we possibly raise standards when conditions that support teaching and learning keep getting worse?** School budgets have been cut to the bone. In Hawaii in 2010, students lost nearly a month of teaching because of excruciatingly thin budgets. In California's Orange County, Fremont and San Jose have pushed the cap for kindergarten from twenty up to thirty students in a class. In some Oregon districts, middle school teachers are squeezing more than thirty-six students into classrooms.

**Underlying the CCSS is the questionable concept that skills that are essential at the college level should be combed backward throughout all the grades.** The entire design of the standards is based on the argument that the purpose of K–12 education is to prepare K–12 students for college (the rhetoric touts preparation for career as well, but this is not reflected in the standards). Because the standards were written by taking the skills that college students need and distilling those down through every single grade, kindergarten children, for example, are expected to “use a combination of drawing, dictating and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic or the name of the book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book” (CCSS 2010a, 19). The very premise that decisions about kindergarten curriculum should be based on a study of what college students do is questionable. For example, what research supports that kindergartners should spend their time writing pint-size literary essays rather than writing about firsthand experiences and observations? Whatever happened to the idea that curriculum reflects children's development?

**While the gridlike design of the document makes it easier to comprehend, this design also leads to questionable content.** For example, because the informational reading and literature standards are both grounded in the same ten anchor standards and because each grade level's standard for informational reading has a mirror image in a standard for literature reading, every skill that is important to readers of informational texts must also be

spotlighted in the literature reading standards. While it makes sense that readers of *informational* texts must gather and read several texts on a topic, comparing and contrasting the points of view of those texts and noting the different ways authors accentuate their claims, it is less clear that this is important work for readers of literature. Is it really the case that in real life, fiction readers collect books by a single predetermined theme and then compare and contrast the points of view and craft moves in those books?

**Who wrote the standards anyway?** One can search all 399 pages of the document and its appendices and find no trace of an author's name, and yet now that the CCSS have been ratified, two people, David Coleman and Sue Pimentel, have emerged referring to themselves as “the” authors in their own documents. If this is the case, why was their identity kept secret while states considered the standards? Was the goal to make it *look* like a large number of people (such as the Council of Chief State School Officers themselves) wrote the standards and thereby prevent questions about the specific authors' credentials from derailing ratification?

**Some documents published after the CCSS were ratified add guidelines for evaluating methods of implementation, contradicting the intention of the standards.** Since the CCSS were ratified, Coleman and Pimentel (and even others claiming to have some connection to the CCSS) have continued writing addenda to and interpretations of the CCSS that are hailed as “written by the authors of the CCSS,” as if this gives these addenda and interpretations the same authority as the CCSS themselves. These new documents spell out methods of implementation in a fashion that directly contradict the CCSS's explicit premise that implementation decisions be left in the hands of teachers and school leaders. The document that was reviewed and ratified by states explicitly says, “the Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach” (2010a, 6). Yet now, after states have agreed to take on these standards, some people are spelling out implications and specifying what they wish the Common Core had said, doing so without approval from all of the subcommittees that worked on the CCSS or from the states that have already signed on. One can argue, then, that it is problematic. Thomas Jefferson couldn't rewrite the Constitution that the states agreed to, nor was he (or any other one person) appointed as the Designated Interpreter of the Constitution. The full weight of these documents is not yet felt. At

the time of this publication, Coleman, as co-founder and CEO of Student Achievement Partners, received a four-year 18 million dollar grant from the GE Foundation to develop materials and do teacher training around the CCSS. There will certainly be additional materials and documents that emerge following this new round of money, with the potential to make similar curricular claims as the *Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3–12* (Coleman and Pimentel 2011) and the *Rubrics for Evaluating Open Education Resource (OER) Objects* (Achieve 2011). When documents such as these are presented as if they've gone through the process of review and been ratified by the states on the subcommittees, it is troubling. Without that endorsement, these materials should not be regarded as having the authority of the CCSS.

**The CCSS will be expensive.** We hear the tests will be taken on computers. Many schools have so few computers that it would be impossible to put every kid onto one of them on the same day, or even the same week. Plus, in any school, half the computers or the server are not functioning at any one time. Spending every new dollar on the technology to support a massive testing program is problematic as compliance with the CCSS requires other expenses as well. The CCSS will cost money that could have supported smaller classes, professional development, even access to books, Kindles, and iPads.

**If we assessed America's students now, only 15% would perform at the level suggested by the standards.** How will it be a good thing to label 85% of kids as failures? Who will pay for the remedial education after everyone fails?

**We do not have enough successes to declare with confidence that we have a research-based One Best Way for K–12 teachers to prepare students for college and career success.** The CCSS claim to be research based, but the vast majority of the research cited supports the fact that all is not well in America's schools; the deficits in U.S. education are well documented in the Common Core. Granted, some of the particular solutions set forth do draw on some practices that are research based (e.g., writing across the curriculum). But on the whole, the image of curriculum implicit in the CCSS (and explicit especially in the new documents attempting to spell out implications for instruction) is not visibly research based; it is not based on large-scale reforms that have demonstrated a method for

bringing high-needs students to the levels of the Common Core. If that were the case, then the nation would be invited to observe otherwise typical high-needs schools where most of the graduates are flourishing at their colleges. The CCSS represent an important hypothesis, but the *problems* are far better researched than the pathway forward.



After a few minutes of inviting people to share their qualms about the standards, we quell that conversation. We say to the principals, coaches, and teachers who have joined us to learn about the CCSS, “Like readers who need to decide if they will approach a book like they are curmudgeons or as if the book is gold, we also need to decide how we will approach the standards.”

## **Reading the Common Core State Standards as if They Are Gold**

Cory Booker, the mayor of Newark, New Jersey, has, through his approach to his city, helped us think about the need to read the standards or any initiative as if they are full of potential, to see them with eyes of hope. In a recent commencement speech at Williams College (2011), Booker told the story of how, as a young Yale law student, he decided to become a community organizer and thought the best place to start was Newark, the city that *Time* magazine had called “the most dangerous city in the nation.” People in Newark said to him, “If you want to help this city, you don’t need to learn from all those Yale professors. You need to learn from the Queen Mother.”

“The Queen Mother?” he asked. He said that it was suggested that he visit a woman who lived on the fifth floor of Brick Towers, one of Newark’s most notorious developments.

Cory Booker climbed the stairs and knocked on the door of Virginia Jones’ apartment. A seventy-something-year-old woman came to the door. Retelling this story, he recalled saying, “Ma’am, I am Cory Booker. I am from Yale Law School, Ma’am. I am here to help you out.”

The Queen Mother, unimpressed, responded, “Well, if you really want to help, follow me.” They walked down five flights, through a courtyard, past a group of drug dealers, and into the middle of the street. “Tell me what you see around you,” she instructed Cory.

In his speech, Cory began to describe the scene around him: “I see an abandoned building filled with people doing nefarious activities, I see graffiti. . . .”

The Queen Mother stopped him. “Boy, you can’t help this city,” she said and stormed off.

Cory ran behind her, stunned. “Ma’am? Ma’am?” he asked. “What just happened?”

Virginia Jones wheeled around and said to Cory, “You need to understand something, boy. The world you see outside of you is a reflection of what you have inside of you. If you are one of those people who only sees problems and darkness and despair, then that is all there is ever going to be for you. But if you are one of those people who sees hope, opportunity, and love, then you can make a difference.”

Cory Booker learned this lesson as he stood in the intersection of a busy street. We, in this country, stand at the intersection not of a busy city but of educational history. The field of American education is changing in ways that are more dramatic and more far-reaching than anything any of us could have imagined. If we are going to play a role in shaping the future, then we need to take the Queen Mother’s advice to heart. We need to see hope and opportunity. As part of this, we need to embrace what is good about the Common Core State Standards—and roll up our sleeves and work to make those standards into a force that lifts our teaching and our schools. For there is good in them. We would be pleased indeed if students in all our classrooms could do this level of work independently.

So let’s look back to the standards, this time reading them as if they are gold. While concerns and questions are valid and important, we believe there is a lot to celebrate in the Common Core State Standards as well. We are convinced that if we can get about the business of embracing what is good in this document, we can use it to support dramatic improvements in our schools. Equally important, seeing the good in the standards can position us all to talk back to the not-so-good aspects.

So, what is good about the standards?

**The CCSS provide an urgently needed wake-up call.** America has gone from providing our children with a world-class education to scoring far below other countries on international assessments, landing in fourteenth place on the most recent PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) test for reading (OECD 2010).

Meanwhile, the world has changed. Whereas twenty-five years ago, 95% of jobs required low skills, today low-skills jobs constitute only 10% of our

entire economy (Darling-Hammond et al. 2008). New levels of literacy are required in the information economy of today. Consider this statistic: During the four years between 1997 and 2002, the amount of new information produced in the world *was equal to the amount produced over the entire previous history of the world* (Darling-Hammond et al. 2008)! The old mission for America's schools—providing universal access to basic education and then providing a small elite with access to university education—may have fit the world of yesterday, where most jobs required low literacy skills, but children who leave school today without strong literacy skills will not find a job. It is no longer okay to provide the vast majority of America's children with a fill-in-the-blank, answer-the-questions, read-the-paragraph curriculum that equips them to take their place on the assembly line. The assembly lines have closed down. Instead of continuing to provide the vast majority of students with a skill-and-drill education, the United States needs to provide all students with a thinking curriculum, with writing workshops, reading clubs, research projects, debates, think tanks, Model UN, and the like. The Common Core State Standards offer an absolutely crucial wake-up call.

**The CCSS emphasize much higher-level comprehension skills than previous standards.** Although some may question a few particular priorities of the Common Core, the document becomes more admirable when one considers what it replaces. It was just a few years ago when No Child Left Behind (NCLB) required educators to focus on the expectations of the National Reading Panel. Back then, the whole big world of comprehension was compacted into one small item in a list of five priorities—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—with all of comprehension being equal in emphasis to phonemic awareness. One glance at the Common Core's expectations reveals that today's document places a much stronger emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills. Even young children are asked to analyze multiple accounts of an event, noting similarities and differences in the points of view presented, assessing the warrant behind people's ideas. Readers of today are asked to integrate information from several texts, to explain the relationships between ideas and author's craft. Whereas the nation's last attempt to lift the level of literacy instruction defined literacy in a fashion that fit easily into basal reading programs, with their emphasis on seatwork and on little reading groups convened under the teacher's thumb, this new call for

reform forwards an image of literacy instruction that involves students in reading lots of books and documents of all sorts, meeting in small groups to engage in heady, provocative conversations about what they have read, taking stances for and against the views they find in books, and engaging in accountable-talk interactions. Surely this represents an important step ahead.

**The CCSS place equal weight on reading and on writing.** When NCLB expectations became the law of the land, there was zero emphasis on writing. Writing was not even mentioned in those mandates. What a reversal! Now, in these new standards, the emphasis on writing standards is parallel to and equal to the emphasis on reading, and furthermore, one can't help but think that reading will be assessed through writing, making writing even more critical.

Face it. People across our nation do not agree on much. This is a nation in which people are divided between Fox News and CNN, between the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements. It is huge, then, that a nation as divided as ours has come together to say that higher-level comprehension matters, that critical reading and analytic thinking matter. It is even more remarkable to think that the whole nation has agreed that writing needs to take its place alongside reading.

**The CCSS stress the importance of critical citizenship.** The adoption of the Common Core suggests that America's image of what it means to be educated will change. The Common Core document asks us to bring up a generation of young people who listen to or read a claim and ask, "Who is making this claim? What is that person's evidence? What other positions are being promulgated? How can I compare and contrast these different views, think about the biases and assumptions behind them, weigh their warrants, and come to an evidence-based, well-reasoned stance?" It is hard not to celebrate any effort to move our nation toward this sort of critical citizenship.

**The CCSS emphasize reading complex texts.** Then, too, most of us agree with the Common Core's emphasis on the importance of students learning to handle texts of increasing complexity, and have been engaged in this work for years. It is a relief to see that the makers of tests and standards are coming around, belatedly, to understanding that the level of

text complexity a student can read is a big deal. For years, we have heard that when a student got this or that question wrong on a high-stakes test, it showed this or that skill deficit—he couldn't infer, she couldn't handle cause-and-effect questions—and for years, we have known that the issue was more likely to be that the particular passage was either a challenging one or one that came late in the test.

**The CCSS has a clear design, with central goals and high standards.** Also, when one reads the standards like they are gold, it is hard not to admire the clean, coherent design of the document. The Common Core text repeatedly says that the aim should be for standards that are high, clear, and few. These standards accomplish this goal. The design is admirable, with ten anchor standards in reading and ten in writing, for example, which capture the ultimate goals. Then each of the ten reading anchor standards is rolled out across grades K–12, with corresponding, parallel work being expected in fiction and nonfiction. For educators who are accustomed to state standards that can't be contained within a huge bulging notebook and that ramble on endlessly, the design of the CCSS is impressive.

**The CCSS convey that intellectual growth occurs through time, across years, and across disciplines.** Another strength of the Common Core document is that it articulates grade level benchmarks and a trajectory of skill development. For example, reading anchor standard 2 is *determining central ideas of texts and analyzing their development*. The grade level standards create a progression of this anchor standard by expecting students to be able to retell stories in a way that includes details in grade 1, to determine a central message, meaning, or moral of a story in grade 3, to determine a central theme or idea and to show its development in the text in grade 8, and to analyze how themes develop and interact with each other across a text in grade 12. This kind of specification is helpful for grade level curriculum planning and for designing assessments. When one can see the spread of work across the grades, it can be a wake-up call, showing you that what seemed to be challenging eighth-grade work is in fact work that should be taught in the fifth grade. Then, a teacher can ascertain where her students are in the trajectory of skill development and then begin there, ramping up their proficiencies.

The CCSS design is also one of strongest features of the standards because it sends a message loud and clear: Growth takes time; it can't be the job of the fourth-grade teacher, or the tenth-grade teacher, to be sure

students reach the expectations for that grade level. Instead, students need to be supported by a spiral curriculum within which teachers across the K–12 spectrum share responsibility for students’ progress along trajectories of skill development.

**The CCSS call for proficiency, complexity, and independence.** It is important to note (and celebrate) that the emphasis in the Common Core is on students learning to read and write complex texts *independently* at high levels of proficiency and at a rapid enough rate to be effective. That is, it doesn’t do a student a lot of good if she can handle college-level work only with her classmates and her teacher in tow. The Common Core State Standards focus on proficiency and complexity, yes, but also on independence. The Common Core want to be sure kids graduate from high school able to do quick, on-the-run research when needed, to express their thinking verbally and in writing, and to summarize, synthesize, analyze, and design without needing teachers to insert the key questions along the way or to walk students through a step-by-step approach.

**The CCSS support cross-curricular literacy teaching.** These standards embrace the notion that literacy is everyone’s work. Social studies, science, and math teachers are all expected to support literacy. The same rich, provocative, critical reading and writing work that happens in ELA needs to be present across the curriculum.

**The CCSS emphasize that every student needs to be given access to this work.** Students with IEPs (individualized education programs) still need to be taught to question an author’s bias, to argue for a claim, to synthesize information across texts. Teachers are invited to use assisted technology or other scaffolds to be sure that every learner has access to the thinking curriculum that is at the heart of the CCSS.

**The CCSS aim to put every state on the same measuring stick.** It is a big deal that forty-five states have signed on to the CCSS. For years, each state has commissioned its own state test and has, year after year, made the test easier or more predictable to make it seem that students across the state have been steadily improving. Meanwhile, however, on the one and only test that has been given consistently across every state for decades, the National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), kids' scores across the same interval have flatlined.\* The Common Core aims to put all of us alongside the same measuring stick, creating a basis for credible judgments as well as encouraging states to learn from one another in ways that move the nation toward higher levels of accountability for student achievement.

**The CCSS respect the professional judgment of classroom teachers.** Also impressive is the humility with which the standards writers introduce their document, taking several pages to outline not only what *is* in the standards, but also what the standards *do not* intend to do. Limitation 1 even begins: “The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach” (2010a, 6). It is important to celebrate that the standards acknowledge that teachers need to draw upon the knowledge of our field in order to bring students to these ambitious levels. Embedded in the document, then, is the right for the teachers across a school or a district to make decisions. This document does not support mandates that say, “Your standards-based classroom must look like X, Y, Z.”

## IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE

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In the end, the most important aspect of the Common Core State Standards is the part that has yet to be figured out: the implementation. As challenging as it must have been to write and to finesse the adoption of this document, that work is nothing compared with the work of teaching in ways that bring all students to these ambitious expectations. The Common Core State Standards have been written, but the plan for implementing them has not. The goal is clear. The pathway is not.

We trust that once you have read this book, you will be poised to think between your existing approach to literacy and the goals outlined in the Common Core. In order to determine a pathway for implementing the Common Core, it helps to know the standards inside out, but it is even more important to know the resources you can draw upon in your own

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\* NAEP scores for fourth and eighth grades have essentially remained flat since 1992, the first year the test was given, with only slight improvements at grade 8 and no change at grade 4 since 2007 (National Center for Education Statistics 2011).

classroom, school, and district. In developing a plan for implementation, you will need to consider initiatives that are already under way in your school, the resources and assets you will (and will not) be able to draw upon, the pressures that your students, teachers, and parents most want addressed, the nature of your student body and of your existing curriculum, and of course, the knowledge base and the beliefs of the professionals who will be involved. That is, you and the others who know your school well will, in the end, need to be the ones to determine your particular pathway to implementing the Common Core.

Having said this, it is also true that teacher educators at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project have now helped hundreds of principals and teacher leaders design plans for adopting the Common Core. As we've worked together to study school after school, in each instance engaging in data analysis and strategic planning, a few principles have emerged that are broadly applicable across many different settings. Because some of our advice could influence the way in which you read this book, we will summarize a few especially important recommendations in this first chapter and return to the recommendations in the final chapter, at which point our discussion of schoolwide standards-based reform will be well grounded in the details of the document.

The first thing we want to stress to anyone who is interested in standards-based reform is that the Common Core is, above all, a call for accelerating students' literacy development. The most important message centers on lifting the level of student achievement, not on course coverage and compliance. The most important reforms that a school system can make will be those that involve creating systems that support continuous improvement of instruction and increased personal and shared accountability for raising levels of student achievement.

It is tempting to interpret the mandate for reform as requiring a school to add some new little thing to your school day. But it will be a missed opportunity if the call to align curriculum to the Common Core is seen as a call for curricular compliance that leads a school to add this or that to the curriculum so that teachers can say, "Sure, we do the Common Core—we do it from 11:15 to 11:35." The real work on Common Core reform needs instead to revolve around creating systems of continuous improvement that result in teachers teaching toward clearer and higher expectations and doing this work in more transparent, collegial, and accountable ways,

with teachers working together within and between grade levels to be sure that students make observable progress along trajectories of skill development. We discuss this in more detail in our final chapter.

For now, let's just say that if you are going to adopt the Common Core State Standards, it will be important for teachers across your school to work together to ratchet up the level of instruction and, in so doing, to develop stances and systems for engaging in continuous improvement. It also won't be possible to tackle this work across the board, all at one time, so you will need to decide the best place to start.

### **First, look at your current literacy initiatives and set goals for how to improve them.**

We strongly recommend that in order to determine a starting place for Common Core reforms, you look at literacy initiatives already under way in your district and ask whether any one of them is already aligned to the Common Core. And then instead of checking that one facet of your literacy work off, declaring it a done deal, and moving on to address your deficits and gaps, we suggest you consider strengthening teaching and learning within that one area in ways that will allow your school to develop systems and habits of continuous improvement that can eventually be used more broadly.

If you feel as though one of your school's newer initiatives is already aligned to the Common Core, then we suggest that after taking a few minutes to pat yourselves on the back, you reread the standards, this time looking closely and critically at your students' work and at your own teaching. If your school is truly teaching this particular subject in ways that bring all students to the level of the CCSS, then examine the systems that are working well and consider ways to use those same systems to support other aspects of your curriculum. But chances are good that when you said, "Yes! We do this!" you meant, "Yes! We are *on the way toward doing that.*" And if that is the case, your yes should be a beginning, not an ending, of your reform work.

If you and a group of colleagues do a schoolwide walk-through to look honestly between the CCSS and an area of actual classroom practice and then do some reflective observations within your own classroom, chances are good that you'll see opportunities for growth. For example, you'll see instances when the promising initiative has not been implemented with

fidelity. You'll see instances when people are implementing the initiative in a rote, mechanical fashion, without any real personal commitment to these methods. You'll see instances when teachers continue to teach and teach and teach, without noticing that the student work is not improving as it should, without stopping to let students' work function as feedback to the teachers, prompting them to revise the instruction so that it actually supports observable progress. Addressing these underdeveloped initiatives is one of the most important things you can do to implement the Common Core, and to raise levels of student achievement.

### **Next, look at gaps in your curriculum and develop a long-term plan for reform.**

Having said that we do not recommend that a school rush around adding this or that to the school day in order to be "Common Core compliant," we do think that a school needs to reflect on the gaps that exist between what the school is already doing and what the Common Core requires, looking especially at the biggest and most fundamental mandates of the CCSS. Then the school needs to begin to plan and engage in at least one and perhaps more than one new area of long-term, systemic, and deep school improvement work. In weighing the decision over areas of priority, educators should know that there are a few emphases in the Common Core, and any one of these could lead to critically important changes. We suspect, however, that some areas of reform will be easier and less expensive to implement and will lead to more obvious, dramatic changes. Others seem to us to be options for schools that already support high levels of comprehension and composition and are ready to tackle new terrain.

**Implement a spiral, cross-curricular K–12 writing workshop curriculum.** Certainly for many school districts, we recommend a district-wide effort to improve writing instruction. There are many advantages to making writing instruction a priority. First, it's inexpensive. A school needn't purchase costly supplies for every student. The only expense is that of providing teachers with the professional development and the teaching resources they need to become knowledgeable in this area, both of which are important, as this is an area where few teachers have received any training at all.

Another advantage of instituting a district-wide writing initiative is that the way forward in the teaching of writing is very clear. In the field of

writing, there are no substantial debates over how best to proceed. Even the very conservative and old-fashioned textbook Warriner's supports a writing process approach to the teaching of writing, as do the standards. The CCSS are exactly aligned to the work that experts in the teaching of writing have been doing for years (although there are a few new priorities in the Common Core). We suggest, then, that a district implement a K–12 spiral curriculum, allowing students to spend considerable time working within informational, opinion, and narrative writing units of study, producing work that matches the work described in the Common Core.

An additional advantage to spotlighting the teaching of writing is that when students are actually taught writing and given opportunities to write an hour a day within a writing workshop, their skills develop in a very visible fashion. By teaching a genre-based writing workshop with an attentiveness to skill development along trajectories of skills, teachers can learn a great deal about the relationship between teaching well and student progress. By helping teachers plan and teach writing together and by helping them collect student work, teachers can learn a lot about working within systems of continuous improvement. The final advantage to supporting ELA writing instruction is that once students become fluent, fast, structured, and proficient writers across a range of genres, it is easy to take those skills on the road, using writing as a tool for thinking across all the disciplines. When students write across the curriculum, it not only escalates their engagement in other subjects but also makes teachers more accountable and more responsive. When students write about their fledgling understandings, teachers can't help but take students' ideas into account and to adapt instruction so that it has real traction. Supporting writing instruction and then using writing across the curriculum may be one of the most potent ways to help teachers across the entire school become more student focused and accountable.

**Move students up levels of text complexity by providing them with lots of just-right high-interest texts and the time to read them.** Then, too, we recommend a focus on moving students up the levels of text difficulty in reading. As we discuss later, the standards in reading place special emphasis on this. Research and experience both have shown that often when students do higher-level thinking, the challenge is not that they do not have skills enough to compare and contrast, for example, but rather that they

can't handle the texts in the first place. As Allington states, "You can't learn much from books you can't read" (2002). We recommend, then, that teachers across a K–5 school, and across some middle schools as well, be asked to conduct running records of students' work with texts at a gradient of text levels, ascertaining the level of text complexity that the students can handle, and to track students' progress up the ladder of text complexity. Of course, in order for students to make the necessary progress, they need at least forty-five minutes in school and more time at home to read books that they can read with 96% accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The challenge here is that students need access to lots and lots of high-interest, accessible books that have been leveled. This reform, then, is not an easy one to put into place, but if schools begin to divert monies from expensive textbooks and toward single copies of trade books, it will make an important difference. Teachers will also want to collect data not only about the volume of reading students are doing and their progress up the gradient of text difficulties, but also about the actual eyes-on-print time they have in which to read. Chances are good that students who are not making optimal progress as readers do not have time in school each day for forty-five minutes of eyes-on-print reading (not talking about books, not writing about books) and similar time at home.



These first two priorities are urgent. Students need to become strong writers, and to do that, they need expert instruction, time to write, and meaningful opportunities for writing a wide range of informational, argument, and narrative texts. They also must become proficient readers of more complex texts, and that means they need expert instruction and opportunities to read a wide range and very deep volume of texts. A school simply must get these two literacy cornerstones in place. Assuming that these initiatives are in place and that you have already invested considerable energy in lifting the level of teaching and learning within these areas, then your school will probably want to consider how to support higher levels of reading and writing.

**Prioritize argument and informational writing.** You may decide that your school has a strong approach to writing but that you need to prioritize argument and informational writing. To start with this work, you'll need to recognize that writers generally refer to those kinds of writing differently.

Instead of saying he or she is writing an argument, a writer is apt to say he or she is writing a review, a persuasive letter, an op-ed column, an editorial, or an essay. Instead of saying he or she is writing an informational text, a writer is apt to label the work as an all-about book, an article (or feature article), or literary nonfiction.

**Focus on higher-order comprehension instruction.** You may think that if you have students moving up levels of text difficulty, you already have in place the higher-order comprehension instruction that is one of the hallmarks of the Common Core. You may. But it's very possible that your readers are mostly reading for plot, grasping the gist of what they read, moving rapidly across books, but not really working on their reading. And it may be that the comprehension work that second-grade readers are doing is not all that different than the work that sixth graders are doing. You and your colleagues might do a shared walk-through, noticing, for example, the way second graders and sixth graders grow theories about characters. If seven-year-olds are writing on sticky notes, "Poppleton is a good friend because . . .," and sixth graders are writing, "Abe Lincoln is humble because . . .," you and your colleagues may decide that it would be helpful to detail the intellectual work that students are doing at different grade levels in order to make sure that the same strategies are not being recycled year after year. This shouldn't be the case in a school that takes Common Core expectations for comprehension seriously. When you look at the standards for reading, you may find that even the adults in the building want to work on their reading in order to meet the high expectations of the CCSS. That is, the standards focus on a certain kind of close textual analysis. If you are familiar with Webb's depth-of-knowledge work, you'll see right away that the Common Core wants readers to be doing the intellectual work that is at levels two and three of Webb's hierarchy. That is, the Common Core State Standards expect students to sort and categorize, compare and contrast, evaluate, analyze, and reason. You'll see when you read Chapter Four of this book that the level of fiction reading demanded by the CCSS is very high—and the height comes not just from the level of text complexity that students can handle but also from the nature of their reading. If your students are already reading a lot and moving up levels of text difficulty, you'll find that the reading chapters in this book will provide you with pathways you can take to raise the level of work your students are doing *as* they read.

**Increase cross-curricular, analytical nonfiction reading.** For many schools, the Common Core State Standards are a wake-up call, reminding people that students need to read more nonfiction texts across the curriculum as well as to receive focused ELA instruction in nonfiction reading. It is a mistake, however, to interpret the CCSS as simply a call for more nonfiction reading. The standards also call for students to move away from simply reading for information, toward reading with a much more analytical stance. The standards suggest that at very young ages, readers be taught to compare authors' perspectives and points of view. If the sum total of discipline-based reading that occurs within your school is textbook reading, you will want to consider making some social studies and science units into reading-rich domains, and to do so you will need many primary source materials, trade books, and digital texts related to those topics of study. The Common Core emphasizes the importance of reading several texts about a topic, with readers determining the central ideas, issues, and disputes in those topics, and anticipating the arguments around a topic. That means that instead of reading a summary of the American Revolution, fifth graders in a CCSS-aligned classroom will read speeches made by Patriots, look at propaganda on the part of Loyalists and Patriots, weigh the reasons people took sides in that war, and imagine themselves in the shoes of people who hold different views on this topic.

**Finally, wherever you decide to begin your Common Core work, you'll find that you'll need to focus on assessment as well as instruction.**

In writing, you'll need assessments that will let you see the visible progress students are making as writers along the way, so that you'll be able to track the success of your teaching. You'll need the same in reading. Most schools already have formative assessments that let teachers see how students are moving up levels of text difficulty in fiction (though some secondary schools may find these assessments new and helpful as well). Many schools, though, have struggled to track meaningful progress in nonfiction reading and in upper-level interpretation and analytical skills across any kind of text. So as you focus your initiatives and decide on priorities, remember that assessment is a crucial part of that decision making. Chapter Eleven provides some help with looking at the assessments that are currently available and with designing assessments to give you insight into students' and teachers' progress.

## HOW THE BOOK IS STRUCTURED AND HOW YOU MAY USE INDIVIDUAL CHAPTERS

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We've organized the book so that you can read the whole text at one time, or you may dive into individual chapters according to your priorities. If you are a school leader, you'll want to read across the whole text, as the parts of the Common Core work are interlocking puzzle parts, and each piece is affected by other work. The reading and the writing work build on each other. The speaking and listening work can help students with the reading and writing work, and so on. Also, we tuck research and tips into each chapter where each seems most appropriate and don't repeat that research and those tips in other chapters. We have, however, designed the chapters so that you might choose one chapter at a time to read as a study group for a faculty meeting, a think tank, or a grade level or department level study. The one caveat is this: if you choose a reading or a writing chapter, you'll want to quickly read the overview chapter to reading or writing to give you some background before you get started.

In each chapter, we made decisions about how to best understand the Common Core State Standards and how to use them to raise achievement. We made these decisions after working with teachers and school leaders in workshops, in think tanks, and across yearlong studies. You'll see, therefore, that each chapter begins by unpacking the most significant aspect of the standards themselves. Then there is a section on implementation, where we have made practical suggestions for pathways toward achieving the standards. Where we thought it would be helpful, we have described some activities that teachers might want to try, in order to come to a closer understanding of the implications of the Common Core. We've tried to write those activities in such a way that you could duplicate them in a study group.

We wish you all the best as you embark on your Common Core studies. We've found this work to be illuminating. We've found that it has helped us raise the level of work students are doing in our schools. And we've found it can be a unifying force to help teachers think and work together. We hope it is the same for you.

# OVERVIEW of the READING STANDARDS

## WHAT DO THEY SAY AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

The Common Core reading standards are unusually efficient in the way they organize reading skills into a kind of grid. It is a grid that offers a set of skills for readers of every age, and for both fiction and informational texts. Whether you read the anchor standards, or the standards for reading literature, or those for reading informational texts, you'll encounter the same skill set. As you read across the grades, you'll note that the specific expectations for skills grow. These skill progressions—represented in the anchor standards—are the same whether the reader is reading fiction or informational texts.

To appreciate the elegance of this grid, simply glance at one page of the reading standards. For instance, let's look at the standards for reading informational text for grades 3–5 (CCSS 2010a, 14):

| Grade 3 students:   | Grade 4 students:   | Grade 5 students:  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Key Ideas and Details</b>  |   |  |
| 1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.  | 1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.   | 1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.   |
| 2. Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.   | 2. Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.  | 2. Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.   |
| 3. Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect. | 3. Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text. | 3. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text. |

| Grade 3 students:   | Grade 4 students:  | Grade 5 students:   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Craft and Structure</b>  |  |   |
| 4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a <i>grade 3 topic or subject area</i> .   | 4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a <i>grade 4 topic or subject area</i> .   | 4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a <i>grade 5 topic or subject area</i> .  |
| 5. Use text features and search tools (e.g., key words, sidebars, hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.  | 5. Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.   | 5. Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.   |
| 6. Distinguish their own point of view from that of the author of a text.   | 6. Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.   | 6. Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.   |
| <b>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</b>   |  |   |
| 7. Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).                                 | 7. Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, timelines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears. | 7. 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.   |
| 8. Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence).  | 8. Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.   | 8. Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).   |
| 9. Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.   | 9. Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.  | 9. Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.   |
| <b>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</b>  |  |   |
| 10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently. | 10. By the end of year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 4–5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.                           | 10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 4–5 text complexity band independently and proficiently. |

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For a moment, look at third grade, on the far left, and move your eyes down the page from top to bottom, from standards 1 to 10. Then run your eyes down fourth grade, and then fifth grade. You'll immediately notice the same ten skills are present, whether you read grade 3, grade 4, or grade 5. Then too, the skills required up and down the grade levels of a standard are cohesive (there isn't a laundry list of assorted subskills subsumed under any one skill). Then choose one of those skills, such as that described by standard 1, which is reading closely to determine what the text says. Look horizontally across the page, and you can notice how this skill changes as readers progress from third to fourth to fifth grade.

Chances are, you've done this before. You've looked across the reading standards, and thought to yourself that it's convenient how they are organized. It's more than convenient, though. The remarkable aspect of the Common Core standards is the way they create a unified statement about what is important in reading. Most standards try to be all things to all people. Often they end up with so many criteria there is no way to figure out what is important. The Common Core, though, has decided that there are a small number of enduring skills that constitute reading for readers at any age, no matter what kind of text a reader holds. You may agree or disagree with the values that are embedded in the CCSS, but in any case, these standards make a coherent and clear statement about reading. The Common Core conveys this statement in ten standards—which are really nine skills, because standard 10 simply calls for the ability to perform standards 1 through 9 on grade level texts. So, the first notable achievement of the Common Core reading standards is that they distill reading to a single set of nine reading skills that readers can carry across texts and up grade levels.

The second notable aspect of the Common Core reading standards is that these nine skills all require deep comprehension and high-level thinking. If we turn back one page in the standards document, we'll see that the first skills that the youngest readers, kindergartners, are asked to work toward when reading informational texts, for instance, are “ask and answer questions about key details in the text” (standard 1), and “identify the main topic and retell key details of a text” (standard 2). The low-level literacy work of sound-letter correspondence and so on—work that dominated the National Reading Panel report (2000) that has undergirded NCLB for years—has been, thankfully, marginalized in its own separate section of the CCSS. That work doesn't even qualify as part of the reading

and writing standards. Reading, in the Common Core, is making meaning. To confirm this focus, look at the reading skills for the lowest grades. You'll notice that kindergartners and first graders are asked to compare and contrast, categorize, identify key details, and demonstrate understanding of the main topic or central message of any kind of text. All readers, therefore, from the youngest age, are expected to attend to meaning, according to the Common Core.

In this chapter, we look at

- what the standards do and don't value in reading comprehension
- how the same skills are applied to reading literature and informational texts
- implementation implications of the reading standards

## WHAT THE STANDARDS DO AND DON'T VALUE IN READING COMPREHENSION

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It is important to notice what the standards value and devalue in reading comprehension. We have seen that they value deep comprehension and high-level thinking skills—but which skills in particular? We can judge what the standards value by looking at what they give repeated attention to and what they leave out. For instance, these are some of the phrases that are repeated in the descriptive text leading into the reading standards: “close, attentive reading” (CCSS 2010a, 3), “critical reading” (3), “reasoning and use of evidence” (3), “comprehend, evaluate, synthesize” (4), “comprehend and evaluate” (7), “understand precisely . . . question . . . assess the veracity” (7), “cite specific evidence” (7), “evaluate other points of view critically” (7), and “reading independently and closely” (10).

These are phrases repeated in the grade level specifics (grades K–12): “demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text” (12), “refer to details and examples in a text” (12), “quote accurately from a text” (12) “objective summary” (36), “determine . . . describe . . . explain . . . compare and contrast . . . analyze” (12).

These phrases are *not* in the Common Core: make text-to-self connections, access prior knowledge, explore personal response, and relate to your own life. In short, the Common Core deemphasizes reading as a personal act and emphasizes textual analysis.

To educators who have followed reading schools of thought for many years, the Common Core marks a return to the kind of reading that was promoted in the thirties and forties through New Criticism. New Criticism put the text at the center and equated reading with close analysis of the text. It's a kind of highly academic reading that can be particularly effective on very complex texts that reward poring over language and structure and deciphering internal meanings—you can see why seminars on New Critical approaches proliferated at Ivy League institutions and at the Sorbonne. Perhaps because the Common Core authors worked backward from these elite college skills and imagined a progression of reading skills that would lead to this sort of reading of university-level texts, the standards reside in this territory of academic reading. Objective, close, analytical reading is what is valued as deep comprehension and interpretation by the Common Core.

In focusing on textual analysis as the primary means of comprehending and interpreting texts, the Common Core puts aside theories of reader response. To return to the historical view, the notion that all meaning resided solely in the text was rejected by Louise Rosenblatt. In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt (1938/1968/1976/1995) argued that the meaning of texts resides in the interaction of the reader with the text. The logical consequence of Rosenblatt's definition of reading is that when two readers read *Charlotte's Web*, they can't and won't see the same things in it because their own experience partially shapes their interpretation. Even the same reader at different ages will see different things in the text. The reader as a third grader may particularly notice Fern's friendship with Wilbur, while that same child, twenty or thirty years later as a mother, may reread *Charlotte's Web* and see more clearly a theme of the willingness to sacrifice oneself for a loved one. Reader response approaches to reading suggest that even if you claim that themes reside within the corners of the text, the variation in the readers' experience and preoccupation releases meanings differently. Louise Rosenblatt, Peter Johnston, many reading researchers, and we posit that reading, like any activity, is *always* subjective. As Robert Scholes remarks, reading remains "incomplete unless it is absorbed and transformed in the thoughts and deeds of readers" (1989, x).

You may want to assess your students to see if they need more support with academic, text-based responses. If you want to assess adults' or children's current reading practices, ask them to discuss a poem or story with a familiar plot or issue. Do they veer off into discussions of their own experiences? They'll need nudging to move to CCSS work.

## HOW THE SAME SKILLS ARE APPLIED TO READING LITERATURE AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

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As mentioned previously, the skills for reading literature and the skills for reading informational texts are the same in the Common Core. That is, they share the same ten anchor standards. The Common Core does, though, provide individual grade level skills for reading literature and for reading informational texts. Sometimes the grade level skill for a standard is exactly the same for reading literature and for reading informational texts. Other times, there are subtle differences in the skill as it is described for reading literature and for reading informational texts. For example, if you look at the sixth-grade version of anchor standard 1, it describes the skill of restating a text in a way that is applicable for all genres:

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. (2010a, 36)

Because this skill is appropriate for narrative as well as expository text, it is worded identically in both sets of standards, for literature and informational texts, at sixth grade.

However, this is not the case for the sixth-grade version of anchor standard 3 (analyzing how various elements develop over the course of a text). The literature standard reads:

Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution. (36)

Obviously describing narrative structure and pivotal moments of change makes for sharp analytical work in literature but may not pay off in a science text. For reading informational texts, this same standard reads:

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes). (39)

You can see that these iterations of anchor standard 3 are two sides of the same coin. Both versions push readers to look closely at how parts,

problems, characters, and ideas are introduced and connected, but they do it differently.

Generally, then, the Common Core works to unify reading so that readers bring the same skills to various texts. Within the grade level specifics, you will, as noted, find small variations in how the anchor skill is described for literature versus informational texts, and these differences relate both to the particular challenges different types of texts pose for readers and to the different purposes that readers often have when reading the different kinds of texts. Readers usually turn to informational texts to be informed and persuaded, and so the Common Core informational skills emphasize reading to determine central ideas and analyze authors' viewpoints. These same readers, when reading literature, usually expect to encounter vivid characterizations, thematic connections, and expressive language, and so the Common Core literature skills emphasize reading to determine themes, to elucidate figurative language and allusions, to trace narrative elements.

The Common Core does not give more weight to fiction than nonfiction or vice versa. However, in weighing these types of reading experiences equally, and requiring deep comprehension and interpretive skills for each, there is an implicit sharpening of focus on nonfiction, as reading instruction in most schools, until now, has happened exclusively in ELA classrooms.

You'll find recommended distribution charts for literary versus informational reading in the first few pages of the standards. There, the Common Core recommends following the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) distribution, which is

- 50% literary texts and 50% informational texts at fourth grade
- 45% literary texts and 55% informational texts at eighth grade
- 30% literary texts and 70% informational texts at twelfth grade

This distribution does not mean that the CCSS call for dramatically more nonfiction reading within the ELA classroom. To the contrary, the standards make it clear that the call is for literacy to be a shared responsibility in *content-area classrooms* as well as in ELA classrooms. The CCSS say, "because ELA classrooms must focus on literature (stories, drama, and poetry) as well as literary nonfiction, a great deal of information reading in grades 6–12 must take place in other classes" (5).

## IMPLEMENTATION IMPLICATIONS OF THE READING STANDARDS: SOME ESSENTIALS

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**The Common Core’s emphasis on high-level comprehension skills calls for a reversal of NCLB’s focus on decoding and low-level literacy skills.** Even for the youngest readers, the Common Core pushes for reading for meaning. This shift in focus means a few things. One is that classrooms (or states) that have coasted on low-level reading skills need to quickly get on board with high-level reading skills. You might try the activity with *Charlotte’s Web* that we offer in Chapter Four to illuminate the higher-level reading skills called for in the Common Core. You might watch videos of students engaged in high-level partnership or book club conversations (there are many such videos available on the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project website: [www.readingandwritingproject.com/](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com/)), and ask whether your students are conversing in equally analytic, text-based ways. You might consider how your school can recommit itself to teaching high-level comprehension skills through read-aloud and accountable talk.

**As you embrace high-level comprehension and analytical reading skills, you may need to acknowledge that many teachers never received any training or practice with these skills in their education or own reading lives.** Some of the CCSS skills, such as analyzing texts for craft and structure (more on that in upcoming chapters), do feel very much like university skills. You’ll need to study and practice these skills as a community, probably through some shared reading of texts. We think of the National Writing Project, for instance, and how it brought generations of teachers to shared, insider knowledge of writing. That same urge to work on our reading and become mentor readers will be needed here.

**In order for students to do Common Core reading work, they’ll need explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of high-level comprehension.** Undoubtedly students will need explicit instruction in high-level comprehension. They’ll need a repertoire of strategies that undergird these reading skills. They’ll need the skills broken down into manageable steps, and they’ll need to practice these steps and get expert feedback along the way. They’ll need lots of repeated practice, on a variety of texts. As they do this practice, teachers will need assessments that will allow them to carefully

calibrate their teaching, to move kids up levels of skill and text difficulty. They'll also need structures that will make reading work visible—structures such as reading partners and clubs, which give students opportunities to have the rich literary conversations about fiction and nonfiction that the standards call for. Teachers will also need to focus on methods of giving feedback while kids are practicing these skills, with gradual release and decreasing scaffolds, to lead students to internalize these skills.

**Teachers will need to assess the texts the kids are holding, and ensure they are texts on which they can actually practice synthesizing and critical reading.** Classrooms that have depended on excerpts, anthologies, and textbooks will find themselves needing to extend their libraries with literature and, for older students, primary and secondary sources. Students don't have to hold *Black Beauty*, as fifth graders, or *The Odyssey* as ninth graders. They can do this work on *The Tiger Rising* or *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. But if they're holding an anthology of texts that are short, modified, or excerpted, they can't truly analyze craft, structure, symbolism, or thematic development except in the most rudimentary way. If they're holding a textbook, they can't really analyze the warrant and reasoning that back up authors' claims, or compare craft, structure, and perspective; everything is already a summary.

**Because reading will no longer be the domain solely of ELA teachers, as it has been in most schools, science and social studies teachers will need to participate in professional development on reading instruction.** Teachers who have been proven effective at improving reading outcomes for students will be called on to offer support across the content areas. School leaders will need to arrange ways to share strategies and methods across classrooms so that students can carry reading skills to every text they encounter—and content teachers can help kids carry their literacy learning across the disciplines. Teachers who share teaching charts, look at student assessments together, organize collaborative teaching of nonfiction reading, and create shared language in a building will help the teaching of reading become systemized in a school.

We consistently see teachers underestimate how much reading kids get done when they read. Third graders who read Magic Tree House books, for instance (level M, about eighty to ninety pages with pictures), often read two of these texts every three days. If they read for extended periods

at home, or you extend their protected reading time in school, they'll read more. That means you'll need somewhere between five and seven books for them for each week.

In *Outliers*, his study of conditions that lead to extraordinary success, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) talks about the theory that expertise requires an investment of ten thousand hours. This research looks at piano players, programmers, NBA players, and so on. The unifying factor that led to their greatness? Hours of practice. Hours and hours. Ten thousand hours. Readers, too, become great when they have many hours of practice.

# About the Authors

**Lucy Calkins** is the Founding Director of the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University. For more than thirty years, the Project has been both a think tank—developing state of the art teaching methods—and a provider of professional development. As the leader of this world-renowned organization, Lucy works closely with policy makers, superintendents, district leaders, school principals, and teacher-leaders to initiate and support schoolwide and systemwide reform in the teaching of reading and writing. But above all, Lucy works closely with teachers and with their classrooms full of children. Lucy's many books include the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing* series for grades K–2 and 3–5, and the *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* series for grades 3–5. Most recently, she published a set of yearlong, grade-specific curricular plans for grades K–8 that help you align your reading and writing workshop instruction with the Common Core State Standards.



**Mary Ehrenworth** has a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College. She is also a national and international education consultant and Deputy Director of the Reading and Writing Project. She is the author of *Looking to Write: Students Writing Through the Visual Arts* and coauthored with Vicki Vinton *The Power of Grammar*. Most recently, Mary published *A Quick Guide to Teaching Reading Through Fantasy Novels*, a new addition to the *Workshop Help Desk* series.



**Christopher Lehman** has an Ed.M. in Education Leadership from Teachers College. A former middle school and high school teacher, Christopher is currently a staff developer and has been deeply involved in developing new teaching practices in Jordan, in partnership with the Reading and Writing Project, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, and the Queen Rania Teacher Academy. He coauthored an article on the experience in NCTE's *Voices from the Middle*. Christopher recently published *A Quick Guide to Reviving Disengaged Writers*, a new addition to the *Workshop Help Desk* series.



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I love *Pathways to the Common Core!* The way it explains how the standards work will correct many misconceptions and go a long way toward changing literacy instruction for the better, a primary intent of the standards. It will help people know how to read the standards and will help teachers see how they already address this new view of comprehension and what more they need to do. This book is an amazing reference for any teacher working to accelerate student achievement, and it is a must-read for those facing the challenge levels of the Common Core State Standards.

— **Sally Hampton**, *member of the writing team for the Common Core ELA standards and member of the Pearson Foundation curriculum design team*

With piercing insights, Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman dive deep into the CCSS to debunk myths, extract meaning, and provide needed guidance for each and every standard. *Pathways to the Common Core* is a necessity for the principal, curriculum leader, professional developer, and teacher seeking a thorough analysis of the standards from which to launch an informed approach to this critical initiative.

— **Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs**, *author, consultant, and director of the Curriculum 21 Project*

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I was blown away by this smart, artful, enthralling book.

— **Stephanie Harvey**, *educator and co-author of the Comprehension Toolkit series*

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