



Just ASK's

Making the Common Core Come Alive!

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Mind Shift One

The goal of curriculum should not be the coverage of content, but rather the discovery of content.

Common Core Mind Shifts

The **Common Core State Standards** initiative has the potential to cause some of the most influential changes in teaching and learning our country has ever experienced. The purpose of this monthly e-newsletter is to explore, from the perspectives of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, strategies for the implementation of the **Common Core State Standards** in ways that lead to those changes.

While much has been written about the instructional shifts embedded in the standards, little has been written about the mind shifts that need to occur to successfully implement these standards that raise the bar for our students in terms of college and career readiness. Educators must change their thinking about how they design curriculum, plan instruction, choose resources, deliver lessons, respond to learners, and use evidence to inform further teaching. Administrators will need to collect evidence about teaching and learning that looks different from previously collected data, and parents will be challenged to support their children's learning in different ways. Students must now take more responsibility for their own learning.

In this, the first issue of *Making the Common Core Come Alive!*, we identify and reflect on **Mind Shifts** that are essential for the successful implementation of this important work.

The goal of curriculum should not be the coverage of content, but rather the discovery of content.

The **Common Core State Standards** (**Common Core**) provide districts with a roadmap, a clear set of shared goals, and expectations for what knowledge and skills students need in order to achieve and be successful in college and career. While the

standards dictate what students should learn, they do not outline how the content should be taught. Districts, have the important job of deconstructing these standards and making decisions around how they will be met.

Traditionally, curriculum has been developed around lists of major topics to be covered in certain subject areas. As teachers cover each topic, it is checked off of the list and the next topic is presented. Students are told what's important about the content to be learned, and do far less construction of their own thinking about content.

What the **Common Core** has done for us has broadened our view of what curriculum should accomplish for students. If done well, the **Common Core** will elevate our teaching to new heights, and emphasize the construction of meaning, while deepening our understanding of our students. What is necessary for this to happen, is a shift in how curriculum is designed and implemented. Instead of writing a curriculum around content mastery, it should instead be written around the performance desired from our students as a result of their investigations into a variety of concepts, skills, and strategies.

The **Common Core** addresses individual grade levels for Kindergarten through eighth grade, and two year bands for ninth through twelfth grade, in order to allow flexibility in the design of courses. Furthermore, each set of standards is intentionally written to include coherence between skills and a progression of difficulty as students move through each grade level. In this day and age, when designing curriculum, a focus on connected deep understandings versus content coverage is essential. As Robert



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Access unit templates and other copyright-free tools in the Just ASK Resource Center at www.justaskpublications.com/ccss-sbe.htm

Mind Shift Two

A deep understanding of the content to be taught is paramount. (Or, we cannot teach what we do not understand.)

Marzano states, “A guaranteed and viable curriculum is the number one school level factor impacting student achievement.”

Points to ponder when developing a curriculum based on the discovery of content in lieu of the *coverage* of content are as follows:

- What authentic, performance based assessments are driving the learning?
- Do the assessments emphasize critical thinking and the transfer of knowledge?
- Do the assessments emphasize meaning making and deep understanding?
- Is the curriculum written with a focus on larger, overarching concepts?
- Have you focused these concepts with essential questions?
- Does the curriculum align vertically? Is there a careful consideration of pre-requisite skills and knowledge?
- Is student engagement central to the teaching and learning?
- Has there been an emphasis placed on 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, collaboration, and research?

A deep understanding of the content to be taught is paramount. (Or, we cannot teach what we do not understand.)

In order to effectively plan lessons, deliver high quality instruction, and analyze student progress, we need to have a deep and flexible understanding of the content we teach. With this deep understanding comes the ability to anticipate students’ misconceptions, see the linkages between ideas, and make explicit connections to real life.

The **Common Core State Standards** are rich and complex, and in order for teachers to transform this knowledge in a way that is accessible to all learners, they themselves

must have a solid understanding of what is to be taught. With this understanding will come the ability to represent and communicate the content in meaningful ways for all students.

The optimal way for teachers to build this deep content knowledge is through professional learning over a period of time. Teachers will benefit greatly by learning from experts and research, and by collaborating with colleagues.

In our classrooms, it is the students’ voices, not the teachers’, that are heard.

Not only do teachers need to be skilled at questioning and leading meaningful discussions, but students need to assume responsibility for asking important questions and initiating rich conversations as well. What the standards demand from our students is a greater focus on metacognitive activities that encourage them to reflect and talk about their own understandings and beliefs, while listening to the understandings, reactions, and motivations of others. It can be as simple as using “Why” questions or asking students what they notice about something that can help to propel students’ conversations forward.

The **Common Core** demands that our students continually gather evidence, make generalizations, apply concepts, and represent their thinking in different ways. Students are expected to actively construct meaning from content, a process which is strengthened through student dialogue. Through meaningful, planned time to talk, students are given the opportunity to reflect on their understandings and confusion, while elaborating on their own ideas and building on others’ thinking using evidence from their learning.

Mind Shift Three

In our classrooms, it is the students’ voices, not the teachers’, that are heard.



Teachers in Greece Central School District, New York, celebrate the development, implementation, and peer review of their units.

Mind Shift Four

We are preparing our students to do the learning without us.

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By design, the **Common Core State Standards** emphasize proficiency and meaning making. Students are expected to negotiate texts and tasks of increasing complexity more than ever before. Our students need to be taught persistence and the importance of stamina. The ability to apply strategies, construct arguments, create representations, persevere when solving problems, employ technology, critique, and understand the perspectives of others, will come from the sophisticated work that educators do in preparing students to be independent.

The gift of multiple opportunities to “swim in the deep end,” will help our students to employ strategies that will empower them to be successful. For instance, if given frequent

experiences reading challenging texts closely, students will be able to encounter new texts with confidence. They will know the importance of needing to read slower while building a deep understanding. It is quality instructional experiences that will help turn students’ strategies into skills. These skills can then be translated into new or novel situations, without the teacher needing to guide the work.

We are educating our children for an unknown future.

The **Common Core State Standards** are robust, rigorous, and relevant in the real world. As the change agents in the education of our children, we need to push ourselves to consider a new direction for our teaching and its impact on our children’s tomorrow. We are no longer educating for today, but rather preparing our students for a future where

Mind Shift Five

We are educating our children for an unknown future.

Web Resources

www.corestandards.org

The website of the initiative: read the **Common Core’s** mission statement, download the standards, and access the informative appendices.

www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/myths-vs-facts

Myths about the **Common Core**, along with the facts to dispel those myths are available here.

engageny.org/resource/common-core-shifts

Learn more about the six instructional shifts needed for the effective implementation of the **Common Core**.

www.youtube.com/user/TheHuntInstitute

View short, accessible videos that explain the **Common Core State Standards**.



Mind Shift Six

We have a responsibility to help each student reach higher.

Mind Shift Seven

We can't ignore the evidence before us.

they will need to think, innovate, collaborate, problem solve, and compete globally. We need to embrace our existing technologies and see their potential. Along with teaching social responsibility that goes along with the use of these tools, we need to teach our children how to navigate and evaluate information online.

We have a responsibility to help each student reach higher.

Great respect should be awarded for the complexity of the art of teaching. In order to move our students to rigorous standards, we need an even more extensive repertoire of instructional strategies than ever before. After all, any given classroom can have a variety of levels and magnitude of student needs. We have a responsibility to make the learning accessible to our students, and to find ways to measure, support, and extend each student's growth.

In order to do this, the **Common Core** has provided us with clear standards, or outcomes, to anchor our units and lessons. These standards also provide learning benchmarks and a roadmap of the necessary skills required for all students, including those with disabilities, in poverty, or from non English speaking homes. By understanding this clear progression of skills over time, we are better able to not only recognize important pre-requisite skills to help us support our fragile learners, but to identify complex learning goals that reach above and beyond for our accelerated learners.

We can't ignore the evidence before us.

The standards themselves were created using an extensive body of evidence. It is this same evidence that will guide our teaching of students. Research indicates that the use of formative assessment to guide instruction causes great gains in student achievement. At the outset of any unit or lesson should be the identification of evidence that the students' will have successfully met expectations.

Standards also set the benchmark for the quality of student work. In order for work to be meeting standards, it must demonstrate the rigor and expectations set forth in the **Common Core**. In the Appendices of the **Common Core** document, the authors provide specificity around the types and demands of tasks that will provide evidence of students having reached standards.

In conclusion, we have the innate ability to change our mindset if it no longer helps us accomplish our goals. Our current beliefs are grounded in the prior knowledge we've gained through our administrative and teaching experiences, our lives as students, and our collaboration with educators. Our beliefs impact all that we do, how we act and react, and the potential we see in others. When we can successfully shift our mindset, we are ready to form new lines of thinking and abandon old habits. By doing so, we have successfully positioned ourselves to do the work required by the **Common Core**.

Just ASK Publications & Professional Development (Just ASK) is based in Alexandria, Virginia, USA. Established in 1989, Just ASK provides products and services for educators in formats that facilitate a shared understanding and use of best practice in teaching, learning, and leading in classrooms, schools, and districts in the 21st century.





Future Issues of *Making the Common Core Come Alive!*

- Habitual Thinkers: Creating Classroom Cultures
- Meaningful Questions: Engaging the Mind
- Uplifting Conversation: Promoting Meaningful Discourse
- Navigating Uncharted Waters: Close Reading of Complex Texts
- Thinking Outside of the Box: Fostering Creativity
- And the Winds Changed Direction: Using Data to Inform Practice
- Catching a Falling Star: Designing Quality Interventions
- Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall: Promoting Reflection

Lessons from the Field - Curriculum Work in Pittsford Central School District, New York

During the 2011-2012 school year, Pittsford Central School District, in Pittsford, New York, embraced the opportunity to breathe life into their existing curriculum processes and products for K-12 in all content areas. The group spearheading the work was led by Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Melanie Ward, and included District Standards Leaders and teachers in a variety of content areas throughout grades K-12, our Teacher's Center Director, and a building administrator (me!).

The goal of our task force was to make revisions to our curriculum processes and products, in order to more effectively integrate the **Common Core Learning Standards** and reflect the next generation skills required of our students. We began our work by creating a vision of what we hoped our curriculum would accomplish for students, teachers, parents, and leaders. We read a variety of research, leaned on the collective knowledge of our group, and had meaningful discussions. Included in our conversations was what evidence we felt would give us an indication of how we were doing relative to accomplishing our vision.

As we rolled up our sleeves to accomplish the work, a great deal of thought was given to the constructs that would inform us, as

well as time spent creating common understandings of the critical vocabulary relative to those constructs. Another important step in our endeavor was determining a process for proposing, completing, and reviewing curriculum projects. Lastly, we created drafts of what our curriculum template would look like, thinking deeply about how it would embed next generation skills, be aligned vertically by subject area, while also supporting content integration and the emphasis on literacy skills across each discipline.

Ultimately, we created the **Pittsford Curriculum Template** which is available as a Word document in the **Just ASK Resource Center**. The next step for us will be for our curriculum, in this format, to be uploaded into NYLearns.org, a customizable New York State curriculum management system. While our template appears simple, the thinking and planning behind it were not. However, the shot of adrenaline we gave our curriculum processes and products will serve us well in our future **Common Core** aligned teaching and learning in Pittsford Central.

Access the **Pittsford Curriculum Template** and many other **Common Core** resources in the **Just ASK Resource Center** at www.justaskpublications.com/ccss-sbe.htm

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