



LOOKING BACK TO MOVE AHEAD:

Lessons for Effective
Communications to
Support Implementation of
Common Core-Aligned Assessments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The vast majority of public school systems in America have adopted the Common Core State Standards, a set of academic expectations designed to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college, the workplace and life. At the same time, richer, more complex, performance-based assessments are needed to measure the full range of student growth toward these higher standards.

This effort is a sea change in public education, posing major challenges to school systems in both implementation and communication. As a result, even after multiple years of planning, public understanding about Common Core is uneven at best.

In too many places, the public remains generally unclear about what this initiative is (and what it isn't) and how the new standards will aim our schools and our students where they need to go. In a few states, however, aggressive, thoughtful strategies to educate teachers, parents and community leaders about Common Core helped build support for implementing this work and prepare the public for the inevitable initial drop in student achievement data when the new standards and assessments are fully implemented.

What makes the difference between public confusion and public support? To answer that question,

The Education Trust commissioned a review of previous state efforts to communicate assessment changes designed to meet higher standards, and how those efforts were received. These states made changes to existing tests or introduced new tests between 2004 and 2012. The results of this analysis offer a lens into what works for leaders of state education departments, local public school districts and charter management organizations, eager to achieve a smooth transition to the Common Core assessments being rolled out in 2014-15.

Among the lessons learned:

- Focus on internal communications and consider everyone a messenger
- Establish relationships that foster inclusive, two-way communication
- Develop consistent messages tailored to each audience
- Employ a wide range of communications tools to reach various audiences

Perhaps the biggest lesson learned is just to get started. While system leaders may wish they had begun these efforts sooner, it is important to develop a plan—or adjust a plan already in place based on the feedback you have received—now. Communication needs will only become greater and more complicated the longer you wait.

Looking Back to Move Ahead:

Lessons for Effective Communications to

Support Implementation of Common Core-Aligned Assessments

In the spring of 2015, large numbers of districts across the country will begin releasing scores on new, Common Core-aligned assessments. These scores will provide us with an initial look at how well our students are prepared for college and career based on the higher bar set by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Despite widespread adoption by most of the nation in 2010, according to the *2013 PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, 62 percent of respondents say they have never heard of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. This speaks to the need to go back to basics and address fundamental questions like:

- Why are new standards and assessments necessary?
- What do they mean for teachers and students?
- What is my role – as a teacher, parent, administrator, community member – in supporting students to achieve at this higher level?
- What happens when students don't do well on the new tests?
- What will be done to help students meet the new, higher standards?

There may also be questions about how scores on new assessments will affect teacher evaluation and accountability systems and even high school graduation.

How school systems respond to the challenge of communicating about these assessments will be critical. A well-developed, proactive plan is essential to prevent difficult and time-consuming efforts to respond to misinformation and a lack of information—allowing more time to focus on supporting teaching and learning and ensuring all students achieve at these new, higher levels.

To help prepare education practitioners and advocates for the changes ahead, we examined how recent changes in state assessments were communicated to stakeholders, and the results of those efforts. We interviewed parents, district and school administrators, state education officials, education advocates, union representatives and school board members in states that made changes to their assessments or cut scores in order to raise the bar of student expectations similar to Common Core-aligned assessments efforts now.

The findings offer a lens into what works for system leaders eager to develop strong support for new CCSS assessments and their overall efforts to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and career.

WHAT DOES A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN AROUND MORE RIGOROUS ASSESSMENTS ENTAIL?

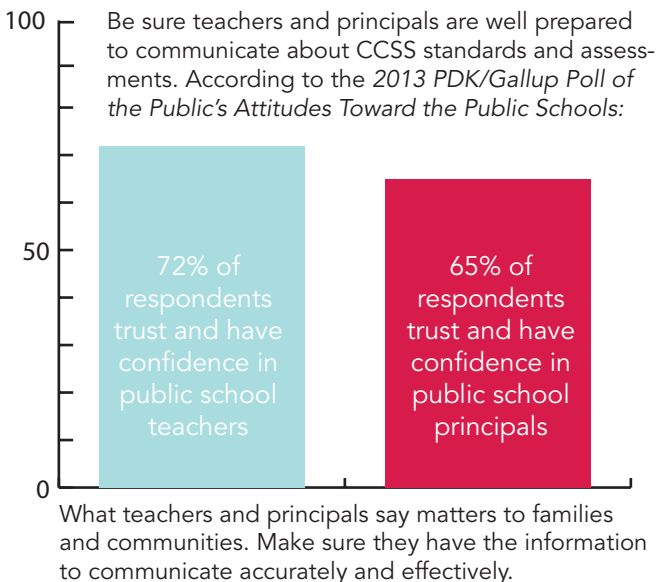
Strong communications goes hand in hand with strong policy implementation. School systems must have a clear, thorough plan of action in place because no amount of communication can replace solid implementation. The analysis of how school systems communicated changes in statewide assessments points to four common elements of plans that generated positive results:

- Focus on internal communication and consider everyone a messenger
- Establish relationships that foster inclusive, two-way communication
- Develop consistent messages tailored to each audience
- Employ a wide range of communication tools to reach various audiences

Focus on internal communications and consider everyone a messenger

Before reaching out to other groups, it is critical that all members of school systems — from the deputy superintendent to administrative support staff — are knowledgeable about the initiative and prepared to explain the rationale behind the implementation of new standards and assessments.

learned by Florida state officials was the need to follow up after these types of tools are circulated. Without follow up, Florida education officials were unclear if questions arose or if the materials were being used consistently to reach all teachers and parents.



Perhaps the most important messengers are those people closest to the children and families – teachers and principals. When parents have a question or concern, they naturally look to their child's teacher or principal for answers – and what say really matters. Ensuring teachers and principals are well informed and have effective and clear materials on hand are essential to articulating efforts to improve student achievement.

When Florida made changes to their state-wide assessments in 2011-12, state education officials provided district superintendents with specific talking points during their monthly conference calls to use with teachers and principals. One district superintendent in the state developed a similar protocol with her principals, providing them with talking points about the assessment changes to share with parents during parent-teacher conferences. While the talking points were the right idea, an important lesson



TOOLS AND TACTICS FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Offer sample talking points to teachers and principals that they can use when interacting with parents and caregivers.
- Share messaging and materials with teachers and principals through existing structures – e.g. professional development days, regional and local training centers, e-newsletters.
- Encourage school-based educators to leverage parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, classroom and school newsletters, and the like to educate parents and caregivers about the impending changes.

Many states, including Texas and New York, utilized existing structures to provide teachers and principals with the information and tools they needed to help parents, caregivers and others better understand the impending changes in statewide assessments. Called Education Service Centers in Texas and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services in New York, these regional offices provide training and information to local educators throughout their respective states.

The New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the statewide teachers' union, was also instrumental in getting information into the hands of local educators about changes in the state's assessments. To reach its 600,000 members, NYSUT used their newsletters and other established communications channels. Teachers' unions are typically viewed as a trusted source by their members, making them valuable outreach partners.



Establish relationships that foster inclusive, two-way communication

A strong communications plan must start with developing meaningful partnerships. From the very beginning and throughout the process, voices from the full range of constituencies must be included to ensure all perspectives, concerns and questions are addressed proactively. Additionally, these diverse groups must be considered critical target audiences for all communications efforts.

An open dialogue that keeps all members of key constituencies informed will help prepare people for sometimes difficult news and even garner champions for these important efforts. True partners will also serve as important messengers and provide validation of the need for higher expectations and new assessments.

A prime example of this approach was implemented in Tennessee. In 2008, the state board of education introduced new, more rigorous standards in recognition of a significant gap between results on state assessments and those on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Even though assessments aligned with the new standards would not be administered until 2010, an immediate effort was launched to support the initiative.

A coalition of about 30 organizations was built, including parents, teachers, business and advocacy organizations, school boards and other elected officials. This coalition was strong in part because it was built on mutual respect, valuing the contributions of school board and parent organizations as much as the Governor and SCORE (the statewide education advocacy organization founded by former U.S. Senator Bill Frist). The coalition developed a comprehensive communications campaign and shared the responsibility for implementing that plan.

As a number of people involved in this work said, the effort was not “owned” by the state or even SCORE but by the coalition as a whole. That sense of ownership helped maintain a tremendous amount of public support as the state moved to a more rigorous test.

Throughout Tennessee, people understood that scores on the new assessment were expected to drop precipitously because expectations were significantly higher than in the past. But because care was taken to make a strong, consistent case for the initiative, the public also under-

stood the rationale for the change and had developed a sense of trust that the change was worth it. (Visit the *Expect More, Achieve More* website, www.expectmoretn.org, to learn about Tennessee's current efforts to support Common Core implementation.)

WHO SHOULD BE AT THE TABLE?

Parents and community

As one advocate in Texas said, “The messaging about new assessments should not be built from the top down. We need to involve parents, community members and other stakeholders from the beginning so they understand the issues and reasons for change and can help frame the story in ways that engender support rather than backlash based on limited or poorly communicated information.”

To ensure strong representation of the voices of parents, states from New York and Georgia to Tennessee, Kentucky and Texas have included statewide advocacy groups like the PTA in their plans. The PTA has been a partner in important communications efforts in New York and in Kentucky. The Gates Foundation funded work with district PTAs in Kentucky to ensure understanding of higher standards and new assessments. In both Georgia and Tennessee, community organizations like the Kiwanis and Rotary were important partners and, in turn, became communicators of the need for more rigorous expectations and assessments.



BUILD REAL PARTNERSHIPS

School systems can't just talk at but must work together with:

- Parents, community members and local organizations like PTAs, churches and Kiwanis
- Business leaders through local business roundtables and groups like the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary
- Advocates that represent and work with key constituency groups including parents, teachers and administrators

The business community

When included in an authentic way, leaders from the business community can be among the biggest champions for high expectations and Common Core-aligned assessments that measure critical thinking skills. With a focus both on a strong economy and a strong bottom line, business leaders have a vested interest in education as a source for a qualified workforce.

Georgia and Tennessee were intent on attracting more businesses and a strong statewide educational system to support this goal. In both states, the Chamber of Commerce and a range of business organizations and individual business leaders were at the table from the beginning of the process. In Tennessee, the governor embarked on a listening tour to engage all stakeholders, talking with more than 300 business leaders and human resource managers to hear their needs and ideas. Feedback from these public meetings was then used to support the work and communications around implementing new assessments.

Advocates

Organizations that advocate for public education in general and/or specific constituencies within education are critically important stakeholders to include in the process. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) is a good example of such a group as they worked with parents in Georgia and many other states to bring important issues to the table.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATIONS – FIRST LISTEN, THEN TALK

Understanding stakeholders' questions, concerns and preconceptions is necessary to communicate effectively and proactively.

When Florida made changes to its state assessments in 2011-12, education officials and advocates conducted focus groups with a wide-range of stakeholders representing different points of view, including students, parents with children at different education levels (elementary, high school), families of varying income levels and local business leaders. Focus group participants were asked to share their questions and concerns about changes in assessments. These stakeholder perspectives were then used to support the development of the key messages and inform the type of communications methods developed.

In part due to the findings of the focus groups, Florida officials created a hotline for people to get answers to their questions and conducted a series of town hall meetings to convey information about the assessment changes as well as hear the concerns of additional stakeholders. Florida officials admitted that they should have implemented these strategies earlier to use and benefit from the information they gathered from the focus group sooner and in more ways. However, it is important to note that despite their later start, they still took this important step to ask and listen.



ASK AND LISTEN

- **Surveys:** Add questions to existing surveys of parents, educators and community members or use free or low-cost survey tools easily found on the Internet.
- **Focus groups:** Plan a segment of existing meetings (e.g. PTA or faculty meeting) to ask a few key questions or bring a group or groups of key stakeholders together to ask questions and listen to answers.
- **Capture conversations:** Track feedback and follow up with people.
- **Use technology to talk and listen:** Adding a comment box and a sign up for social media feeds and other announcements at the bottom of an e-newsletter or a specific email address on a letter may seem small but they are ways to solicit input and let people know you are listening.
- **Meet people where they are – literally and figuratively:** Look for opportunities to talk to people in formal and informal settings – everywhere from PTA meetings to the grocery store. And remember that not everyone is at the same place in terms of understanding the CCSS and aligned assessments. Be ready to provide background information to support your perspective.
- **Make sure listening is not a one-and-done activity:** Make the “listening tour” approach a constant in your interactions with key stakeholders. Listen to what people are saying and use that feedback to inform your work.

In 2012, Virginia officials initially planned to develop an RSS feed and use it to keep the state's teachers informed in general and specifically about changes to their Standards of Learning assessments. Before launching the plan, however, they decided to do a survey to understand how teachers preferred to receive information. Officials estimated that they would receive a few hundred responses to the nine-question survey; they got more than 11,000. This high response rate showed them that their employees valued being asked for their perspectives. The results also were instructive: State officials found that only five percent of survey respondents were reading memos from the superintendent posted on the

Department of Education's website. Instead, the survey feedback showed that teachers overwhelmingly preferred email communications and wanted email content related to the subjects they teach. As a result, the original plan for an RSS feed was scrapped in favor of a tailored email communications system.

It is more important to put your audience's needs first to ensure that your communications are effective. Take the time to employ early strategies that gather information from stakeholders and then act on that information to strengthen your policy and communications efforts.



Develop consistent messages tailored to each audience

Any major shift in policy and practice requires clear, consistent messages that explain the why and the how to all stakeholders. When implementing Common Core-aligned assessments, key messages must convey:

- Why new, more rigorous assessments (and standards) are necessary and important.
- What the new assessments will look like, and when they will be rolled out.
- How the new assessments will impact teachers and students and what supports are in place for both.
- How the results from the new assessments will be used and what other policies will be affected.

Like any good teacher knows, messages need to be adapted to reach people where they are, taking into account background knowledge and proactively addressing stakeholders' preconceptions, past experiences, questions and concerns.



QUESTIONS KEY MESSAGES NEED TO ANSWER PROACTIVELY

- Why do we need more rigorous standards and assessments?
- How do the questions on the new test differ from those on the old one?
- When will these changes occur?
- What supports are in place for students and teachers?
- Why are test scores likely to be lower initially?
- How will other policies in the system – graduation requirements, teacher evaluations, etc. – be affected?

MAKE THE CASE FOR "WHY" IN SPECIFIC, RELEVANT TERMS

State education officials in Georgia knew their expectations were far too low. There were many indicators that pointed to the need to raise the bar:

- About 85 percent of eighth-graders were deemed proficient in math, but only about 62 percent of students were able to pass the 9th-grade end-of-course math exam.
- While state assessments suggested most students were achieving, SAT scores ranked Georgia near the bottom nationally.

To address these concerns, state education leaders decided to eliminate classes that weren't preparing students, increase the rigor of all classes and better align assessments to what students were being taught. They understood the need to be clear with the public, honestly explaining the current state of student achievement, why it was important to raise the bar to support student learning and what specific changes would look like.

Georgia officials developed a set of easy-to-understand messages to explain the changes being made to support improvement. These messages were tailored for each key audience, including parent organizations, faith-based groups and business leaders. Framing the issues for business leaders, for example, meant making the connection between higher expectations and student achievement and economic and workforce development issues.

Even within specific audiences there will be variations that require further message tailoring. For example, parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds will interpret policy changes in different ways, based on their own personal experiences. Further, local small business owners will see things differently from leaders of bigger corporations. By developing trusting relationships with all stakeholders, school systems will be better equipped to understand, anticipate and address the variations in people's background knowledge and experiences.

WE'VE GOT A LOT OF EXPLAINING TO DO!

According to the 2013 PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 62 percent of respondents say they have never heard of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. That means messaging around Common Core-aligned assessments needs to help people understand the standards too.

BE HONEST THAT HIGHER EXPECTATIONS LIKELY MEANS LOWER SCORES INITIALLY

Much like Georgia, Tennessee's education and political leaders recognized several years ago that they were not measuring up in terms of student achievement. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce gave the state an "F" for truth in advertising because they were not delivering on the promise of a good education for the state's students.

When developing a communications plan for raising academic expectations, Tennessee officials were deliberate about sharing an important but difficult truth: higher expectations would likely mean lower test scores, at least initially, and that was a necessary part of the process. Those messages were echoed by all partners, not just the state department of education. In Nashville, school district officials even set up a customer service call center and trained staff to handle questions about the lower scores, anticipating possible anger and frustration from the callers.

When results from the new assessments were announced, they were indeed much lower. But because the state's messengers had been up front about this from the beginning, public sentiment and media coverage reported that the scores were "as expected" and Nashville's call center received very few angry calls.

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE SUPPORTS OFFERED FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS – AND FOLLOW THROUGH ON THOSE PROMISES

Knowing that students will likely receive lower scores is important. But perhaps more important is supporting educators and giving them what they need in advance to then support students who are not deemed "proficient." Of course, communication about this is predicated on a specific plan of action that articulates the supports and interventions that will be employed to support teachers and students.

Arlington Public Schools in Northern Virginia was proactive with parents about its plan of action for supporting students who did not reach the new bar set by the state's Standards of Learning (SOL). Virginia, while not a Common Core adopter, developed and implemented new SOL assessments in 2011 and 2012. Arlington communicated early and often with parents to prepare them for the changes:

- ➡ One year before the new assessments were implemented, the district began a coordinated campaign to help parents understand that current expectations were not high enough to prepare their children well for life after high school and that raising standards would help boost student learning.
- ➡ Prior to administering the new tests, the district reminded parents of the assessment changes and the importance of raising the bar. These communications emphasized the anticipated score drop and outlined the district's support plan—including specialized summer school—for students who didn't score at the proficient level.
- ➡ When Arlington released the results, student scores were accompanied by another round of parent communications that reminded them that scores were expected to drop and reiterated the menu of district supports in place for students who were less than proficient.
- ➡ In the fall, the district ran a fourth round of parent communications, this time focusing on the impact of the summer efforts as well as additional supports being provided to students who needed more help.

Arlington's strategy was important. They recognized that they couldn't over-communicate a change this significant, especially one likely to produce anxiety among one of its primary audiences.



BE PREPARED FOR THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

- We already have a budget crisis – how much is all of this going to cost?
- Aren't we just setting up our schools/teachers/students for failure?
- Isn't this a federally imposed curriculum?

IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AND WITHIN VARIOUS PARTNER GROUPS, AND RESPOND ACCORDINGLY

While people within a given stakeholder group may share certain interests and concerns, they also have

different views and perspectives. In Kentucky, for example, advocates and education officials learned that they needed to further tailor their messages based on geography.

Focus groups were conducted with stakeholders in urban areas and yielded valuable information that was helpful in developing key messages around efforts to improve student achievement. But when advocates and education officials traveled to more rural parts of the state, they found communities concerned that aiming their young people at a higher bar would mean that more of them would leave the community to seek better opportunities after high school. With this important information in mind, they were able to tailor the message by explaining that good schools grow a good economy. If local schools have a reputation of preparing college and career ready students, new businesses will be drawn to the community giving young people a reason to stay.



Develop a wide-range of communications methods

Like the key messages, the methods of communication should be straightforward and accessible to stakeholders – meeting them where they are rather than expecting them to come to you.

The methods must also be designed to deliver the messages clearly and repeatedly. Marketing professionals talk about the Rule of Seven and even the Rule of 151, referring to the number of times people have to see or hear messages in order to understand and remember them. The truth of these old adages is that marketing and communications must be ongoing processes to be successful. Especially in today's world, a communications strategy of one-and-done will never be effective. We must repeat our messages, repeatedly.

School systems' leaders are likely to ask the very legitimate question...how much will this cost? Certainly, producing brochures and public service announcements cost money and the extent to which school systems can invest in these tactics will vary. The research shows, however, that strong communications requires something more than money – it requires a culture shift where developing trusting relationships with all stakeholders, and thinking about and prioritizing communicating, is a vital part of the work to roll out new assessments.

Developing an effective communications plan that includes developing genuine partnerships and two-way communications with all stakeholders, does not cost money but requires time and the development of new habits. All school systems have communications tools and opportunities that can be leveraged. And additional no cost and low cost methods can be added to support stakeholders' understanding of the important changes being made to improve the achievement of all students.

DEVELOP A CAMPAIGN APPROACH

Tennessee is a prime example of a state that adopted a holistic approach to communications via a thorough, well-executed campaign: *Expect More, Achieve More*.

Initiated when changes were made to the state standards and assessments, this effort included many key elements of a strong public education campaign. Then-Governor Phil Bredesen, a Democrat, joined forces with former U.S. Senator Bill Frist, a Republican and founder of the state-based education advocacy organization SCORE and traveled around the state holding bipartisan roundtable discussions with business leaders and other audiences. Feedback and learning from these discussions informed the development and implementation of new standards and assessments as well as the communication efforts to explain these changes to the public.

Coalition leaders developed an array of tools and tactics to support this public education campaign, including:

- Newsletters, brochures, parent guides, website content and videos.
- Briefings for school board members.
- Briefings for superintendents who were then provided with the tools they needed to be able to share information with principals, teachers, other school staff and parents.
- Briefings for county commissioners.
- A mini-campaign to get information out – through letters, meetings etc. – to all stakeholders, but particularly parents, in conjunction with the distribution of student report cards.

As Bredesen and Frist traveled through the state for these discussions, they also met with editorial boards and journalists in five media markets. Coalition leaders viewed the media as a secondary but critical audience for their communications efforts. Working with journalists early on helped them ensure that news coverage was accurate. But the coalition saw media relations as a reinforcement of their communications efforts, rather than the primary strategy.

Both earned media and paid media were leveraged during the two years between the adoption of the standards and the implementation of the new assessments. Public service announcements featuring Tennessee-based celebrities like Patrick and Gina Neely, African American restaurateurs from Memphis, and popular athletes from the state were produced and aired statewide to further bring attention to the campaign. State education officials also provided communications toolkits to local school districts, offering press release templates and other materials that could quickly and easily be localized and deployed.

District leaders also created localized materials for every parent advisory council in the district to better prepare advisory council members and educators at each school to be effective messengers. Inspired by a conversation with a district employee whose nephew was a high jumper, Nashville adopted the image of a high jumper as a metaphor for increased student achievement and integrated the image into their materials and presentations.

As a result, the response to supporting higher standards and more rigorous assessments came from parents and teachers – not just administrators and policymakers.

The success of the *Expect More, Achieve More* campaign can be measured in part by the fact that it was begun under one governor and continued under a successor affiliated with another political party. But the real measure of success came when the first scores from the new assessments were released and, while they were much lower than in the past, they did not ignite a public firestorm. By leveraging a systematic communications strategy and engaging partners at all levels, education leaders were able to get their messages out multiple ways, multiple times and by multiple voices.

DEVELOP “SHOULDER TO SHOULDER” COMMUNICATIONS AND MATERIALS THAT CAN BE EASILY LOCALIZED

Georgia education officials were comprehensive and strategic in making the case for higher standards aligned with more rigorous assessments. The state created a wide array of communications materials that included website portals organized by stakeholder group which offered sample test questions and explanatory videos. They also developed a close partnership with Georgia Public Television, which created a weekly program about education improvement efforts that aired statewide.

Many of the communications tools were designed by Georgia’s state education officials to be personalized at the local level. Districts were supplied with PowerPoint presentations, FAQs, webinars, brochures and data that could be adapted easily to include district level specifics. They also planned many meetings and events designed to meet “shoulder to shoulder” with stakeholders.

In some instances, personal engagement required an added level of outreach. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), for example, was instrumental in working with Spanish-speaking immigrant families new to the United States and our education system, inviting them to meetings and giving them necessary background information. In one of the schools in which MALDEF worked, the principal created a network of volunteers who would staff each bus stop to share information and answer questions from other parents and caregivers. The volunteers also personally invited and reminded families to attend informational meetings.

In Kentucky, advocates developed a staff of volunteer “grocery store ambassadors” who would share key messages and information with the community about their effort to implement higher standards and assessments similar to the current Common Core effort.



Conclusion

Effective communications is not easy. For too many school systems, it requires a significant culture shift to prioritize strategic communications and relationship building as cornerstones of good policy implementation. But they are indeed cornerstones. Even the best policies will only be as successful and sustainable as the implementation and communications plans that accompany them.

To prepare for the implementation of higher standards and more rigorous, aligned assessments (much like the Common Core State Standards and Common Core-aligned assessments efforts now), state departments of education employed a variety of strategies to help the public better understand why these higher expectations are critical to getting our schools and our students where we need them to go. While each state developed its own strategy, common themes emerged from the places that have built the strongest support:

- They made internal communications a top priority and considered every system employee a messenger.
- They built trust among various stakeholders by listening early to concerns and questions.
- They developed consistent messages tailored to each audience.
- They employed a wide range of communications tools and strategies to reach audiences where they were.

And while some school systems may wish they had started sooner, it is crucial to just get started. The need for strategic communications efforts will continue to build the longer you wait.

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METHODOLOGY

The Education Trust commissioned a series of interviews to learn about communication of changes to state assessments in the recent past in an effort to collect lessons learned for school systems that will be implementing Common Core-aligned assessments in 2014-15.

Interviews focused on six states that made changes to their annual student assessments between 2004 and 2012 – Florida, Georgia, New York, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia – though additional conversations were conducted with individuals and organizations from other states. Parents, district and school administrators, state education officials, advocates, union representatives and state- and district-level school board members were interviewed to learn how they communicated changes in assessments. This paper is based solely on these interviews.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The series of interviews upon which this paper is based was commissioned by The Education Trust, a national organization based in Washington, D.C. The Education Trust's mission is to promote high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. And their goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those from low-income families or who are black, Latino, or American Indian—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

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