

# The Bridge

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**Happy New Year everyone!** In this edition of *The Bridge*, Chief Academic Officer Tracey Severns of the NJDOE is sharing an article entitled, *Six Ways the Common Core is Good for Students*. The article focuses on such areas as putting creativity back in the classroom, ratcheting up rigor, collaboration to mention a few. Read the article to learn more.

As always, we provide updates to AchieveNJ. Included in this issue are recommendations and suggestions for effective District Evaluation Advisory Committees (DEACs), along with links to resources online.

Information is available regarding assessing and adjusting Student Growth Objectives (SGOs). This article discusses the process for districts to review the quality of their teachers' SGOs and identify any that should be modified to ensure they are appropriate for use in an educator's evaluation this. The article provides resources to guide you in the process.

In response to questions from the field, the department is providing additional optional guidance on the use of Principal and Assistant/Vice Principal Evaluation Leadership Instruments.

In December, the department convened the first meeting of the AchieveNJ Advisory Committee (ANJAC) to discuss implementation of the new evaluation system. Meeting feedback and follow up are included for your information.

Various resources are now available regarding individual professional development plans (PDPs) for teachers. Read the articles, entitled *Professional Development Planning for Principals and Chief School Administrators* to find out more.

As always, check out the professional development opportunities available.

## AchieveNJ Updates

### AchieveNJ Advisory Committee (ANJAC) Activities

In November, the Department convened the first meeting of the ANJAC to discuss implementation of the new evaluation system. The Department asked ANJAC members, the large majority of whom currently work as teachers and administrators within New Jersey districts, to discuss the barriers and facilitators to AchieveNJ implementation in the first few months of school. The key takeaways from the meeting were as follows:

- Clear and consistent communication plays a critical role in district implementation. This supports the common experience of pilot districts as documented on pages 17-21 of the [Final EPAC Report](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/FinalEPACReport.pdf) ([www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/FinalEPACReport.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/FinalEPACReport.pdf)).
- A thoughtfully constructed and well-managed DEAC makes implementation easier and more successful.
- Comprehensive initial and follow-up training in the teacher practice instrument – often using a turn-key approach – is important.
- Frustration over the SGO development process was increased for practitioners working in districts that adopted a top-down approach where little or no consultation occurred between teachers and supervisors.

In response to ANJAC feedback, the Department:

1. Has developed materials for DEACs on the AchieveNJ website and is working with professional groups to encourage districts to fully utilize their DEACs. The Department will also release guidance for the ScIP (School Improvement Panel) based on early implementation lessons in the coming months.
2. Is redesigning the AchieveNJ website to make it more user friendly; and
3. Has developed a plan to create assessment literacy training materials for districts.

The ANJAC will play an important role in the Department's continuing efforts to improve AchieveNJ.

The Department is publishing broadcast memos every few weeks with more information about the new evaluation and support system. Please visit [www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/memos.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/memos.shtml) to read these memos and other communications materials for educators.

# Is the Common Core Good for Kids? Let the NEA Count the Ways!

Presented By Tracey Severns, Chief Academic Officer, NJDOE

Three and a half years after the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, discussion about its merits and challenges continues to swirl like the winter winds. Amidst all of the chatter, I decided to hone in on the voices of our nation’s teachers. A quick Google search produced an article entitled, *Six Ways the Common Core is Good for Students*. It was written by Cindy Long and appeared in the May 10, 2013 edition of NEA Today. Given the role of this esteemed organization in representing the interests of educators, I thought this was worthy of sharing, especially in this season of giving (see the full article below). If, however, preparations for the holidays have left you short on time, I have provided you with a quick look at the six ways that educators believe the Common Core is good for kids.

1. **Common Core puts creativity back in the classroom.**
2. **Common Core gives students a deep dive.**
3. **Common Core ratchets up rigor.**
4. **Common Core is collaborative.**
5. **Common Core advances equity.**
6. **Common Core gets kids college ready.**

## Six Ways the Common Core is Good For Students

Written by **Tim Walker**, National Education Association, 1201 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036, May 10, 2013

As the Common Core debate heats up, we’ve heard a lot from policy makers, politicians, and even TV talk show hosts about the challenges posed by the new standards and whether they’ll help or hurt education. With all the chatter, the voices of the professionals who are actually responsible for implementing the Common Core have been all but drowned out in the mainstream media.

To get their perspective, NEA Today convened a panel of educators from around the country who were attending NEA’s Common Core Working Group in Denver, Colorado – a strategy- and ideas-sharing meeting of education professionals from the 46 states who have adopted Common Core. ([Find out more about NEA’s involvement in the Common Core.](#)) They told us there’s a lot of anxiety among educators about the Common Core, and a lot of unanswered questions. How do we best implement them? How do we train more teachers? How do we help students master the new content? And what about testing?

But despite these significant hurdles, the overwhelming consensus of the educators we heard from is that the Common Core will ultimately be good for students and education. Read on for six reasons why.



### 1. Common Core Puts Creativity Back in the Classroom

“I have problems and hands-on activities that I like my students to experience to help them understand

a concept or relationship,” says Cambridge, Massachusetts, high school math teacher Peter Mili. One of his classic activities is taking a rectangular piece of cardboard and asking the students to cut from each corner to make a box. They learn that different sized boxes need different lengths in cuts, and then they fill the boxes with popcorn and measure how much each box can hold.

“I haven’t been able to do that in years because of the push to cover so many things. Time is tight, especially because of all the benchmarks and high-stakes testing,” Mili says. “So I’ve had to put the fun, creative activities aside to work on drill and skill. But the Common Core streamlines content, and with less to cover, I can enrich the experience, which gives my students a greater understanding.”

Mili says a lot of teachers have fun, creative activities stuffed into their closets or desk drawers because they haven’t had the time to use them in the era of NCLB tests and curriculum. He thinks the Common Core will allow those activities to again see the light of day. That’s because the Common Core State Standards are just that — standards and not a prescribed curriculum. They may tell educators what students should be able to do by the end of a grade or course, but it’s up to the educators to figure out how to deliver the instruction.



### 2. Common Core Gives Students a Deep Dive

When students can explore a concept and really immerse themselves in that content, they emerge with a full understanding that lasts well beyond testing season, says Kisha

Davis-Caldwell, a fourth-grade teacher at a Maryland Title 1 elementary school.

“I’ve been faced with the challenge of having to teach roughly 100 math topics over the course of a single year,” says Davis-Caldwell. “The Common Core takes this smorgasbord of topics and removes things from the plate, allowing me to focus on key topics we know will form a clear and a consistent foundation for students.”

Davis-Caldwell’s students used to skim the surface of most mathematical topics, working on them for just a day or two before moving on to the next, whether they’d mastered the first concept or not.

“Students would go to the next concept frustrated, losing confidence and losing ground in the long haul,” she says. “The Common Core allows students to stay on a topic and not only dive deeply into it, but also be able to understand and apply the knowledge to everyday life.”

(continued on p. 3)

## • Six Ways the Common Core is Good For Students •



### 3. Common Core Ratchets up Rigor

The CCSS requires students to take part in their learning and to think more critically about content, as opposed to simply regurgitating back what their teachers feed them, says Kathy Powers, who teaches fifth- and sixth-grade English Language Arts in Conway, Arkansas.

One way Powers says the standards ratchet up the rigor is by requiring more nonfiction texts to be included in lessons on works of fiction, and vice versa.

She uses Abraham Lincoln as an example.

A lesson could start with “O Captain! My Captain!”, the extended metaphor poem written by Walt Whitman about the death of Lincoln, and incorporate the historical novel *Assassin*, which includes a fictional character in the plot. Then she’d follow that with the nonfiction work, *Chasing Lincoln’s Killer*, and have students also look at newspaper clippings from the time.

“Or if we’re working on narrative writing, I can have them read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and ask them not to just absorb the story, but also to evaluate C.S. Lewis as a writer, and then to try to write a piece of narrative in the style of C.S. Lewis,” she says. “In the past we’d ask them to simply write a story. But this requires more critical thinking, and this kind of increased rigor will make students more competitive on a global level.”



### 4. Common Core is Collaborative

The Common Core allows educators to take ownership of the curriculum — it puts it back into the hands of teachers, who know what information is best for students and how best to deliver that information.

“Not only does it integrate instruction with other disciplines, like English and social studies, or literacy, math, and science, the common standards will allow us to crowd source our knowledge and experience,” says Kathy Powers of Arkansas.

Kisha Davis-Caldwell agrees. “The Common Core will create opportunities to share resources and create common resources,” she says. “We can discuss what isn’t working and use our voices collectively. That way we can all be part of the conversation about assessment of teaching, learning, and the standards themselves.”

Peter Mili says the key word to focus on is “common.” He believes there is far too much academic variability from state to state and not enough collaboration. With the Common Core State Standards, “the good things that may be happening in Alabama can be shared and found useful to educators in Arizona because they are working on the same topics.”



### 5. Common Core Advances Equity

Cheryl Mosier, an Earth Science teacher from Colorado, says she’s most excited about the Common Core because it’ll be a challenge for all students, not just the high achieving students, which Mosier and her colleagues say will go a long way to closing

achievement and opportunity gaps for poor and minority children. If students from all parts of the country — affluent, rural, low-income or urban — are being held to the same rigorous standards, it promotes equity in the quality of education and the level of achievement gained.

“With the Common Core, we’re not going to have pockets of really high performing kids in one area compared to another area where kids aren’t working on the same level,” she says “Everybody is going to have a high bar to meet, but it’s a bar that can be met with support from – and for — all teachers.”

Davis-Caldwell’s Title 1 school is in a Washington, D.C., suburb. In the D.C. metro area, like in other areas in and around our nation’s cities, there is a high rate of mobility among the poorest residents. Students regularly move from town to town, county to county, or even state to state – often in the middle of the school year.

There has been no alignment from state to state on what’s being taught, so when a fourth-grade student learning geometry and fractions in the first quarter of the school year suddenly moves to Kansas in the second quarter, he may have entirely different lessons to learn and be tested on.

It also helps teachers better serve their students, says Davis-Caldwell. When teachers in one grade level focus consistently and comprehensively on the most critical and fundamental concepts, their students move on to the next grade level able to build on that solid foundation rather than reviewing what should have been learned in the previous grade.



### 6. Common Core Gets Kids College Ready

“One of the broad goals is that the increased rigor of the Common Core will help everyone become college and/or career ready,” says Peter Mili. Preparing kids for college and careers will appeal widely to parents and the community, especially in a struggling economy where only 31 percent of eleventh graders were considered “college ready,” according to a recent ACT study.

If a student who was taught how to think critically and how to read texts for information and analysis can explain the premise behind a mathematical thesis, she’ll have options and opportunities, Mili says. Students with that kind of education will be able to decide what kind of career path to follow or whether they want to attend a university or any kind of school because they were prepared to do a higher level of work that is expected in our society and our economy.

Student success is the outcome every education professional works so tirelessly toward, and the Common Core will help them get there if it’s implemented well, according to the panel of educators.

“Yes, it’s an extra workload as a teacher, and it’s difficult...but it’s for the betterment of the students,” says Davis-Caldwell. “And if we keep that our focus, I don’t see why we can’t be successful.” <http://neatoday.org/2013/05/10/six-ways-the-common-core-is-good-for-students/>

# AchieveNJ Updates

## Guidance for the Principal and Assistant/Vice Principal Evaluation Leadership Instruments

In SY13-14, principals and assistant/vice principals (APs/VPs) are evaluated in part on how well they implement evaluations for their teaching staff members. This measure counts for 20% of all principal/AP/VP evaluations and is scored using the State Evaluation Leadership Instruments. In response to questions from the field, we are providing additional optional guidance on the use of these instruments. This [Evaluation Leadership Instrument Overview](#) ([www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/principal/EvaluationLeadershipInstrumentGuidance.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/principal/EvaluationLeadershipInstrumentGuidance.pdf)) includes a suggested step-by-step approach for identifying data points and sources of evidence and conducting progress reviews throughout the year. In addition, the instruments are posted on the AchieveNJ website, as linked below:

- **Principal Evaluation Leadership Instrument** ([www.state.nj.us/education/AchieveNJ/principal/PracticeInstrument.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/education/AchieveNJ/principal/PracticeInstrument.pdf))
- **Assistant/Vice Principal Evaluation Leadership Instrument** ([www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/principal/APVPPPracticeInstrument.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/principal/APVPPPracticeInstrument.pdf))

## Professional Development Planning for Principals and Chief School Administrators

On November 19, the Department released information about individual professional development plans (PDPs) for teachers. In December, we provided guidance on new PD requirements and individual PDPs for principals/supervisors and chief school administrators (CSAs), accessed via the links below:

- **Overview of Principal/Supervisor PD Requirements** ([www.nj.gov/education/profdev/ipdp/PSRequirements.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev/ipdp/PSRequirements.pdf))
- **Overview of CSA PD Requirements** ([www.nj.gov/education/profdev/ipdp/CSARequirements.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev/ipdp/CSARequirements.pdf))

Each overview describes the origin and application of the new regulations, compares previous to new requirements, and delineates PD planning requirements. Additionally, the Department is developing optional PDP templates and examples for principals/supervisors and CSAs. Please visit the Department's [Professional Development website](#) ([www.nj.gov/education/profdev](http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev)) for more details on new professional development regulations, including the following resources:

- **Overview of Revised Professional Development Regulations** ([www.nj.gov/education/profdev/regspdpoverview.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev/regspdpoverview.pdf))
- **Frequently Asked Questions About New Regulations** ([www.nj.gov/education/profdev/regspdpfaq.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev/regspdpfaq.pdf))
- **Overview of Teacher PDP and CAP Requirements** ([www.nj.gov/education/profdev/ipdp/TeacherPDPandCAPOverview.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/profdev/ipdp/TeacherPDPandCAPOverview.pdf))

## New Resources for the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC)

DEACs are required in all districts by the TEACHNJ Act through at least SY16-17. This committee has great potential to improve the implementation of AchieveNJ, as was clearly recognized by New Jersey's evaluation pilot districts and is widely documented in the [Final Evaluation Pilot Advisory Committee \(EPAC\) Report](#) ([www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/FinalEPACReport.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/FinalEPACReport.pdf)).

Recommendations and suggestions for effective DEACs are offered from pilot districts in this [two-page excerpt](#) ([www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/deac/Recommendations.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/deac/Recommendations.pdf)) from the full report. The Department is committed to providing regular updates that may be useful for DEACs. These will be distributed to districts in a variety of ways including updates on the [DEAC Corner](#) ([www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/deac/](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/deac/)), a new page within the AchieveNJ website. Here, you will find sample meeting agendas and other useful materials for DEAC use. If any member of a DEAC has questions or feedback for the Department – or would like to share sample agendas or resources with other districts – please email [educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us](mailto:educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us). We also encourage educators who are not currently involved in the DEAC to ask their administrators how they may contribute to the success of this committee and to educator evaluation in general.

## Assessing and Adjusting Student Growth Objectives (SGOs)

As you know, all teachers were required to set SGOs with administrator approval by November 15, 2013. Although this deadline has passed, it is not too late for districts to review the quality of their teachers' SGOs and identify any that should be modified to ensure they are appropriate for use in an educator's evaluation this year. According to state regulations, SGOs may be modified with chief school administrator approval by February 15, 2014. Therefore, we encourage members of the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC), School Improvement Panel (ScIP), and others supporting evaluation within districts and schools to assess and potentially adjust SGOs as necessary and appropriate. As always, the Department encourages administrators and supervisors to work closely and collaboratively with teachers throughout the SGO process. Please view the [SGO page](#) of the AchieveNJ website ([www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/teacher/objectives.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/teacher/objectives.shtml)) to find resources to help educators assess and adjust SGO quality.

News,  
Upcoming Events &  
Professional Development  
Opportunities



Be sure to check the online upcoming [events calendar](http://education.state.nj.us/events/) (<http://education.state.nj.us/events/>) for opportunities available throughout the year.

### January 2014

**EATING DISORDER MONTH** – January is designated as “Eating Disorders Awareness Month” in New Jersey in order to increase public awareness of eating disorders and the need to expand research for treatment and a cure, broaden access to treatment, and promote healthful eating habits and a healthy body image. For more information, go to [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/).

**January 28, 2014 - QUALITY ACROSS SETTINGS (EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION AND BEST PRACTICES)** – Time: 9:30 am – 2:30 pm; Location: Learning Resource Center South at EIRC, 107 Gilbreth Parkway, (for GPS purposes enter: 700 Mullica Hill Road, Mullica Hill, NJ 08062), Mullica Hill, NJ 08062

This one-day training will provide effective and evidence-based practices for assuring the availability of high-quality early childhood classrooms and effective teaching practices for all children including children with disabilities. This training will cover the components of high quality preschool and kindergarten classes, a collaborative practice model for preschool and special education, and utilizing the review of the preschool day to assist in developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each district will work on an action improvement plan. For more information, visit [education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20183](http://education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20183).

**January 30, 2014 - 2014 MARCH CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** – Time: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm; Location: Webinar – Online access will be emailed prior to meeting, 100 River View Plaza, Trenton, NJ 08625  
This online workshop will detail the information applicants will need to complete the 2014 Charter School Application. To register, go to [education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20279](http://education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20279).

**January 31, 2014 - BILINGUAL MASTER TEACHER WORKSHOP – STATEWIDE** – Time: 9:30 am – 2:30 pm; Location: Department of Education, 100 River View Plaza, (1st floor conference room), Trenton, NJ 08625  
This workshop is for bilingual master teachers and/or preschool bilingual coaches/supervisors. In this session, the results of the “Supports for English Language Learners” survey will be shared. Participants will review and discuss updated guidance documents for supporting English language learners. Participants should come prepared to share one successful strategy, technique or innovation for supporting ELL students. For more information, visit [education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20096](http://education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20096).

### February 2014

**February 1, 2014 - THE AMISTAD SUMMIT - FROM LEGISLATION TO IMPLEMENTATION: AMISTAD AND NEW JERSEY'S EDUCATION REVOLUTION** – Time: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm; Location: Rutgers University Busch Student Center, 604 Bartholomew Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Fee: \$5.00 for student registration and \$10.00 for general registration.

The New Jersey Amistad Commission, the Education Committee of the NJ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban Issues Institute at Essex County College are excited to request your presence at a one-day conference to strengthen implementation of New Jersey’s historic K-12 Amistad legislation. We are convening this one-day summit to discuss solutions for the systematic underperformance in the implementation of and support for the only legislation in New Jersey—and indeed in the nation—of this kind. For more information, visit [education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20258](http://education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20258).

## State Emergency Information – Call 211

In the event of a statewide emergency such as Hurricane Sandy, district personnel and parents can call the state's emergency response line at 211 for up-to-date information. In addition to the information line, there is a Web site with current information at [www.nj211.org](http://www.nj211.org)

**February 3, 2014 - TEACHNJ: MINIMIZING LIABILITY IN AN AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY –** Time: 9:00 am – 3:00 pm; Location: Morris Union Jointure Commission, 340 Central Avenue, New Providence, NJ 07974. Fee: \$150 This workshop, sponsored by NJPSA, will provide a review of the statutory provisions relevant to tenure charges and evaluation requirements as set forth in TEACHNJ. In addition, lessons learned from the first arbitration decisions under TEACHNJ will be discussed. Critical steps to take to properly document employee performance, including a follow-up to address a negative evaluation, will be shared. Lastly, strategies for minimizing potential legal liability and properly addressing staff performance issues will be reviewed. For more information, contact NJPSA/FEA at 609-860-1200 Ext. 134. To register, go to: [www.legalonenj.org/calendar/2014-02-03?mini=calendar%2F2014-02](http://www.legalonenj.org/calendar/2014-02-03?mini=calendar%2F2014-02).

**February 6, 2014 - QUALITY ACROSS SETTINGS - EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION AND BEST PRACTICES –** Time: 9:30 am – 2:30 pm; Location: Learning Resource Center North, 7 Glenwood Avenue, 2nd Floor, Suite 201, East Orange, NJ 07017 This one-day training will provide effective and evidence-based practices for assuring the availability of high-quality early childhood classrooms and effective teaching practices for all children including children with disabilities. This training will cover the components of high quality preschool and kindergarten classes, a collaborative practice model for preschool and special education, and utilizing the review of the preschool day to assist in developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each district will work on an action improvement plan. For more information, go to: [education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20187](http://education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20187).

### **February 18 and 19, 2014 (TWO DAYS) - INTRODUCTION TO THE WIDA ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR ADMINISTRATORS –**

Time: 9:00 am – 3:00 pm; Location: Middlesex County College - Edison Campus, 2600 Woodbridge Avenue, College Center - The Corral (Room 300 - 3rd Floor), Edison, NJ 08818 This workshop is for administrators who are not familiar with the WIDA standards. The 2012 amplification of the WIDA ELD standards will be introduced on day one. Participants will be able to identify the three features of academic language which are used to measure language performance. With the rise in enrollment of English Language Learners (ELLs) and the teacher evaluation initiative across the state of New Jersey, it is critical for administrators and curriculum development specialists to have a depth of knowledge of the additional standards that ELLs must meet. In addition, the WIDA ELD Standards Framework with connections to the Common Core State Standards will be discussed and explained. Participants will also gain an understanding of how teachers can use the model performance indicators (MPI) and the features of the amplified matrix when planning and delivering lessons.

**Day 2 of this workshop is an extension of Day 1 - Introduction to the ELD standards.** English language learners need instruction that is differentiated for their diverse proficiency levels. In this workshop administrators will learn how teachers can deliver instruction that is comprehensible yet challenging, while taking into consideration the student's proficiency level. Participants will identify ways to customize instruction based on WIDA ELD Standards connected to CCSS, English language proficiency level and performance definitions. For more information, visit [education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20199](http://education.state.nj.us/events/details.php?recid=20199).

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