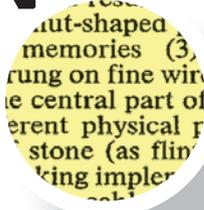# Leading COMMON CORE Implementation

Kentucky prepares principals to integrate the standards with leadership networks and a new technology platform.

BY TERRY HOLLIDAY AND FELICIA C. SMITH

Kentucky is no stranger to education reform, having worked for the better part of 20 years on raising standards to improve student achievement. In 2009, a recent point in our journey, the Kentucky General Assembly called for more rigorous standards to address high school graduates' college and career readiness. So when the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers led states to develop Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in language arts and mathematics in 2010, Kentucky became the first state to adopt the standards. During the 2011-2012 school year, teachers in Kentucky implemented the standards in all grades and in the spring of 2012, students were assessed on CCSS. (Schools and districts were held accountable for CCSS based on a waiver of the No Child Left Behind accountability requirements granted by the U.S. Department of Education.)
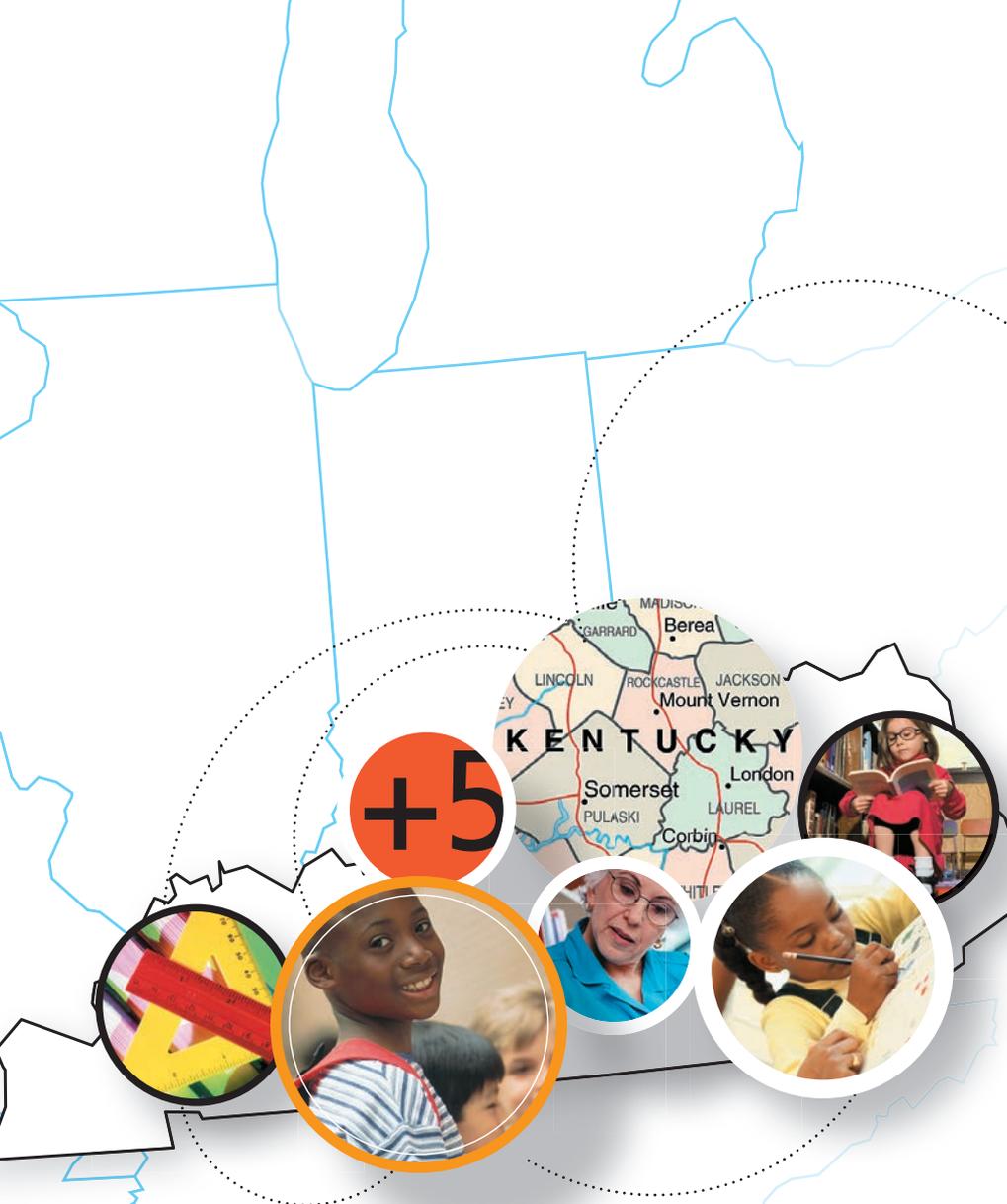
it was because of great state learning standards." He goes on to argue that "Good curriculums help, but high-minded, numbingly detailed standards don't produce them. How teachers are trained and supported in the classroom is what matters."

We knew from experience that the implementation process was the key factor in impacting student learning, and that it would require equal partnership with higher education, as well as the involvement of deliberately trained teachers and principals. As a result, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) developed a unified plan with higher education institutions to provide professional development and support for teachers and principals. As a part of the plan, a team of facilitators—including college faculty and key district leaders—train principals to:

- Set a new vision for learning based on CCSS;
- Promote implementation efforts by nurturing school culture;
- Support necessary instructional shifts;
- Establish learning communities where teachers have adequate time to deepen their knowledge;
- Act as a coach, providing feedback and identifying exemplary practices to share best practices within their buildings; and
- Monitor and evaluate implementation efforts based on student work.

Two key components of Kentucky's implementation plan are Leadership Networks and a one-stop shop instructional learning platform known as the Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System (CIITS).

Leadership Networks

KDE created its Leadership Networks based on the premise that the department's role is to build capacity in district and school leaders to address

As we prepared to employ CCSS in Kentucky, we considered the lessons learned from prior reform movements in our state. We found that our perspective mirrored the sentiment expressed in a 2012 Brown Center Report on American Education, *How Well Are American Students Learning*? In the report, author Tom Loveless conveys doubt about the effect that the standards will have on student achievement. "Whatever impact standards alone can have on reducing within-state differences should have already been felt by the standards that all states have had since 2003," he writes.

Washington Post education columnist Jay Mathews echoes Loveless' position, explaining in his blog that while he has "interviewed hundreds of teachers who significantly raised student achievement … [n]ot one has ever said

shifts and changes in practice necessary to implement CCSS. The Leadership Network supports district-level leadership teams comprised of each stakeholder group involved in implementing CCSS. Each team has three English language arts (ELA) and three mathematics teacher leaders, three principals, and three district leaders (e.g., instructional supervisors, special education directors). The Leadership Network model depends on a team of facilitators—KDE consultants and field staff, faculty from the regional universities and colleges, and key district leaders—to design and implement professional learning experiences for content teachers, principals, and district leaders. Additionally, the Council on Post Secondary Education provided grants to promote learning experiences for other faculty and local district and school leaders.

During the past two years, we've held 10 Leadership Network meetings a year as day-long work sessions. These meetings have yielded cross-district conversations about curriculum development, communication, and regional consistency for learning expectations, in addition to establishing a three-year core curriculum for each role. Each district-level leadership team established a tailored set of objectives for implementing the standards, correlating to the roles. For example, because principals are primarily responsible for ensuring effective CCSS implementation in classrooms, the three-year curriculum includes competencies in understanding key instructional shifts, determining what successful implementation

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NAESP's **Common Core Implementation Checklist** determines areas where you have made progress as well as areas to focus on as you move forward.

Learn more about Kentucky's **Leadership Networks**.

The reality is that new technologies require a new set of instructional competencies.

looks like, and monitoring effectiveness. (See "Three-Year Common Core Curriculum by Role" for descriptions of competencies expected for teachers, principals, and district leaders.)

The Leadership Networks have led districts to engage in strategic professional development. For example, rather than districts and schools implementing CCSS competitively, Leadership Network meetings have created a collaborative effort, building stronger partnerships across districts.

Instructional Technology

While the Leadership Network design is a high-touch, face-to-face profes-

sional development model, KDE has also invested in CIITS, a one-stop, technology platform educators can use to access deconstructed standards. Through this lens, educators can see how the standards are aligned to instructional materials and resources, professional development, and specific assessment items, all of which can be used as a part of a school's formative assessment process.

CIITS serves as a key strategy for developing a 21st century professional learning culture in which educators from across the state can share lesson plans, assessments, instructional resources, and materials that are aligned to CCSS. Through the School

Kentucky principals explain the top three actions they have taken to help implement CCSS in their buildings:

"**I needed to study** and become knowledgeable of the standards myself as the instructional leader in the building. Having an in-depth understanding of the standards allows me to effectively coach and support teachers in their implementation process. It also provides me the opportunity to actively engage in team planning sessions in which implementation decisions are made."

"**My top priority involved** providing teachers time to meet collaboratively to identify the changes in the standards across each grade level while developing an understanding of these changes and a strategic timeline to address them."

"**An accountability system** for weekly PLC meetings with grade-level content area colleagues, administrators, and literacy coaches was utilized to monitor the progress of implementation."

"**I implemented a component** for measurement, utilizing PLC time to create common assessments to ensure that all teachers were monitoring the progress of students on an equal level. Providing common assessments and quarterly benchmark tests also allowed teachers an opportunity to reflect on what strategies for learning were successful or not."

Overwhelmingly, Kentucky principals described how critical it was for them to not only understand the standards, but also know the intended learning implicit in the standards. In addition, principals expressed the importance of providing teachers with more time to become familiar with the standards for a higher level of implementation.

Three-Year Common Core Curriculum by Role

Role	Year ONE	Year TWO	Year THREE
Content Teachers	• Understand the ELA/math standards • Deconstruct the standards into student-friendly targets • Determine pacing and curriculum needs for implementing CCSS	• Design instruction that is congruent to intended learning • Evaluate instructional materials that are aligned to the CCSS	• Analyze student work and evidence based on CCSS implementation • Develop competencies for coaches and teacher leaders • Provide effective peer-to-peer feedback to improve instructional practice
Principals or Building Leaders	• Establish a vision and sense of urgency for shift to CCSS • Recognize the key instructional shifts intended in ELA/math standards • Facilitate a gap analysis process for transition to CCSS • Identify potential barriers to implementation	• Determine what effective implementation looks like in the context of highly effective teaching and learning • Establish assessment literacy practices to support enhanced student learning • Identify lead teachers to coach and mentor other teachers	• Monitor teacher effectiveness based on student work • Sustain a climate of professional learning for teacher growth • Align educator effectiveness system to CCSS implementation to identify evidence of effective teacher practice and student learning experiences
Instructional Supervisors or District Leaders	• Establish a vision and sense of urgency for shift to CCSS • Understand the ELA/math standards • Develop a plan for districtwide implementation (K-12)	• Review and revise district implementation plan • Determine gaps in implementation and identify strategies for improvement • Highlight strong school-level implementation to share effective practices within and across districts	• Monitor implementation efforts • Examine district supports for building-level implementation • Align educator effectiveness rubrics to CCSS implementation • Identify resources to remove barriers to implementation • Commit to creative scheduling to provide time for teacher support

Improvement Network Common Core 360 applications in CIITS, principals can create groups for teachers to collaborate on CCSS implementation.

Principals use the system to access student-level data and soon they will be able to tap into teacher-evaluation data. The system also can merge data connected to individual teachers for a comparative view of aggregate data at the school, district, regional, and state levels. This resource has brought about greater efficiency in the use of data to drive instructional, building-level decisions.

Principals also will be able to use the system to connect teacher-evaluation data (based on observations and other key measures) to customized professional learning. Principals who are early adopters of this technology platform are already developing professional learning communities aimed at identifying strategies for continu-ous improvement. An added benefit is that teachers and principals can access data through this system anywhere and at any time.

However, the reality is that new technologies require a new set of instructional competencies for principals. Even though principals are committed to using CIITS to attain higher levels of learning, many are initially reluctant and others report needing additional support. To take advantage of the existing momentum to use CIITS, KDE has designed several summer professional learning opportunities tailored for district- and school-level use. In addition, KDE works with the state's Council on Post-Secondary Education to infuse new technology competencies into teacher preparation programs. In the future, colleges of education in Kentucky will introduce CIITS in teacher and principal candidates' preservice experiences.

The implementation of CCSS in Kentucky has brought about systems change. Principals have had to communicate the changes to their education communities while providing teachers with the necessary resources for success. In developing principal and teacher capacity, working collaboratively, and supporting district and school planning processes, Kentucky will realize the intended vision of CCSS, with more children graduating prepared for success in college and career. **P**

Terry Holliday, a former principal, is commissioner of education, Kentucky Department of Education.

Felicia C. Smith is associate commissioner, Office of Next Generation Learners, Kentucky Department of Education.