



## Heavy lifting ahead to align curriculum instruction to rigor of Common Core State Standards

*English language arts teachers place emphasis on skills over texts, continue to match texts to current student reading levels*

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**Washington, D.C. (October 23, 2013)**—The Thomas B. Fordham Institute [today released a baseline survey on implementation of the Common Core State Standards](#), which finds that a significant portion of English language arts teachers have not made the instructional shifts necessary to make these rigorous English standards a success. Among the major findings:

- An astonishing 73 percent of elementary and 56 percent of middle-school teachers place greater emphasis on reading skills than the text; high-school teachers are more divided, with roughly equal portions prioritizing either skills or texts;
- The majority of elementary teachers (64 percent) make substantial effort to match students with books presumed to align with their instructional reading levels. This happens less often in middle and high school, with approximately two in five middle-school teachers selecting texts this way; and
- Many English language arts teachers (including 56 percent at the middle-school level) assign none of the informational texts listed in the survey, which represented both CCSS exemplars and other high-quality texts.

The Common Core State Standards emphasize the centrality of text in the English language arts curriculum, encourage assignment of texts that provide language complexity appropriate to the grade level, and place a significant emphasis on informational texts (including literary nonfiction such as speeches and essays).

Yet many teachers say their lessons are dominated by skills, are more likely to try to fit texts to skills than to ground their skills instruction in what is appropriate to the texts they are teaching, and assign texts based on students' present reading prowess.

“Common Core implementation will come down to whether teachers can make the instructional shifts that our classrooms and students desperately need,” says Michael Petrilli, executive vice president of the Fordham Institute. “We know that focusing on more complex texts over skills

enhances reading comprehension and verbal skills; but it's imperative that teachers embrace this.”

The study also showed hopeful signs for Common Core implementation: Most teachers believe that the new standards promise better learning for their students, and an overwhelming majority says that their schools have already made significant progress toward implementing the standards, including relevant curriculum changes and professional development.

*Common Core in the Schools: A First Look at Reading Assignments* surveyed more than 1,150 public-school English instructors from forty-six states and the District of Columbia that have adopted the English language arts portion of CCSS. A follow-up study, which will examine whether critical instructional changes have taken hold, will be published in 2015. This baseline study was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Louis Calder Foundation, as well as the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation—the Institute's sister organization.

To download *Common Core in the Schools: A First Look at Reading Assignments*, visit [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net).

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