

The High-Performing Suburb

SCHOOL DISTRICT 54

Shaumburg, Illinois and Surrounding Areas



School District 54 has taken a hands-on, focused, and collaborative approach to Common Core implementation. Teacher support of the standards has been spurred by several factors: a unified message from district leaders, a curriculum overhaul led by educators, dedicated time to collaborate, a focus on student performance data and continuous improvement, and the deliberate use of resources to support classroom instruction. With a new, Common Core-aligned curriculum and intensive professional development in place for teachers and principals, District 54 is well prepared to move forward; however, full implementation of the standards in classrooms is only just beginning in the 2013–2014 school year. Already, the simultaneous implementation of the Common Core in all grades and subjects led to major changes for teaching and learning in this mid-sized district, making it a particularly instructive site for other districts.

02

State and District Context

03

Detailed Research Findings

07

Summary of Findings

09

Appendix

10

Endnotes

State and District Context

The Illinois State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, with the goal of fully transitioning to the new standards by the 2013–2014 school year (see timeline below). In 2011, Illinois won a relatively modest (\$42.8 million) Race to the Top grant in the third and smallest round of the federal program, whereby the state committed to implementing the Common Core standards and instituting a statewide teacher evaluation system by 2016–2017. Aside from occasional political pressure for Illinois policymakers to review their decision to adopt the standards, there have not yet been any serious, organized challenges to Common Core implementation in Schaumburg.

District 54, located in a suburb of Chicago, is a relatively wealthy and moderately diverse elementary school district with a recent track record of academic success. From 2001 to 2012, the district raised the percent of students meeting proficiency on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) from 78 percent to 92 percent overall, though significant achievement gaps still exist for African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students. More recently, the state raised the ISAT cut scores in the 2012–2013 school year to reflect the rigor of both the Common Core standards and the upcoming PARCC assessment (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). As a result, District 54 experienced a significant drop to 77 percent of students meeting the new bar in math and 81 percent in reading.

As the district transitions to Common Core, District 54’s leaders present a tightly aligned and unified message focused on collaboration and transparency, while pushing the high-achieving district into more rigorous engagement with the new standards. District leaders have presented Common Core to parents as a stepping stone to higher-quality teaching and learning and an opportunity to move from good to great. Representatives from the district’s strong union vocally support the Common Core and the district’s implementation strategies; both labor leaders and district administrators credit open and frequent communication as key to the union’s endorsement.

As a result of its Race to the Top grant award, District 54 has committed resources to implement the standards at every grade level, beginning with the development of a new Common Core-aligned curriculum scope and sequence in the 2012–2013 school year.¹ A district-wide professional development effort held during the 2012–2013 school year and following summer aimed to prepare every teacher and administrator in the district for effective Common Core implementation prior to the start of the 2013–2014 school year. District leaders’ consistent message to administrators, teachers, and parents is that they consider Common Core to be integral to moving toward the district’s goal of performing in the top 10 percent of schools nationally.

DISTRICT 54 DEMOGRAPHICS

- 14,083 students
- 2,483 teachers
- K–8 only: 21 elementary schools; 5 junior high schools (7–8 grade); 1 K-8 school
- 18.9% free- and reduced-lunch eligible
- 18.9% limited English proficient
- 22.9% Hispanic; 45.4% white; 20.5% Asian; 6.8% African American; 3.4% multiracial
- Suburban Chicago area district

2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
June 2010, Illinois adopts the CCSS	Illinois designs implementation process and begins to develop and align resources	Illinois raises cut scores for Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) to better align with CCSS and upcoming PARCC assessment	Full implementation of CCSS in K–12 ELA and mathematics; ISAT revised again (after raising cut scores) for better alignment with CCSS	Implementation of PARCC assessments for school accountability (all of the state’s two- and four-year institutions have committed to using PARCC as one indicator of student readiness)

Detailed Research Findings

Administrators in District 54 knew that widespread teacher support of the Common Core was critical if the new standards were to gain traction. So they implemented the standards in all grades and provided the requisite training for all teachers via a new Common Core-aligned math and English Language Arts curriculum.² Both the development of and training on the new curricula for all grades represented tremendous investments of resources and energy; as a result, teachers appear to demonstrate a solid grasp of how their classrooms, lessons, and plans will need to change to address the demands of the Common Core. However, they are concerned about the increase in rigor demanded by the standards, and early first-semester assessment results are lagging, indicating the need for continued curricular improvements.

Rather than implement the Common Core in phases, District 54 chose to implement the standards in all grades, K–8, in 2013–2014. To prepare for this major transition, district leaders reviewed nationally available curricular materials claiming to be Common Core-aligned, but did not find any programs they felt were satisfactory, particularly regarding complexity of texts and lessons and supporting student mastery instead of just exposure to mathematical concepts. Instead, the district spent the 2012–2013 school year developing an aligned, unit-by-unit scope and sequence for each grade level in both mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA). Two task forces (one for math and one for ELA) comprised of representative teachers from all grade levels and schools in the district oversaw scope and sequence development. Task force members received training on the Common Core standards and the instructional shifts at conferences hosted by Student Achievement Partners and met monthly to develop their own understanding of the standards and the requisite instructional shifts. Rather than adopt new, purportedly Common Core-aligned materials, the task forces chose to work with existing curriculum materials, believing that their core programs contained viable curricular resources that, when repurposed, re-sequenced, and supplemented, could be effective tools in teaching the standards.³ One of the primary aims of the makeover was to increase the cognitive complexity of the materials and tasks

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(see Appendix for sample scope and sequence for English and math). Teachers developed targeted supplements to address gaps between the existing curricula and the new CCSS-aligned scope and sequence. Each unit includes assessment questions, modeled on PARCC sample items, and aligned to essential outcomes.⁴ The district also purchased, based on recommendations from the task force, nonfiction texts that tie into the demands of the standards and the district’s new scope and sequence.

The new unit template, organized into a singular scope and sequence, asks teachers to use existing materials in new ways: in a new order, in newly designed lessons aligned to new assessments, and alongside (when not replaced by) new content, in the form of new nonfiction/informational texts, new formative assessment questions in reading, and new mathematics activities that require more conceptual engagement from students. The new units are designed to be taught consistently at each grade level so that every teacher in the same grade level is teaching the same lesson at the

same time. However, the year ahead will shed light onto whether teachers are able to present familiar material in a novel way—or whether familiarity breeds bad habits and simplistic “tweaking” of old lessons.

As the task forces developed the scopes and sequences for math and ELA during the 2012–2013 school year, individual task force members shared them with their colleagues during faculty meetings, Wednesday early release days, and in their collaborative teams. In the spring of 2013, District 54 provided a full day release for all teachers at all

grade levels to introduce them to the Common Core and to the new scope and sequence for math and ELA and offer training in their use. The district also provided intensive professional development during the summer for teachers to work with their learning teams to plan for full implementation of the standards in 2013–2014 school year. “Our goal was that no teacher would leave here without knowing the expectation for them in August,” a district leader explained. Approximately 63 percent of the district’s teachers attended the multi-day summer planning courses.⁵ Although all teachers reported understanding the expectations, teachers who were part of the task forces appeared more confident in their ability to plan lessons using the new curriculum than those who were not part of the development process.

The district has also built feedback mechanisms into the task force structure so teachers can weigh in on the new curricula throughout the first year of implementation. District leaders expect this feedback to help raise the quality of the materials as teachers and administrators grapple with the realities of implementation. During task force meetings in mid-October 2013, for example, teachers

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noted that students did not do well on their first mathematics mid-unit and end-of-unit assessments, which were modeled on the PARCC sample items. As a result, the task forces made adjustments to the curriculum-embedded assessments (including a greater balance of item types), developed study guides for teachers to help them with the next round of unit assessments, and worked with teacher teams to reiterate the need to use assessments to guide planning.

As District 54 began its first year with the new Common Core-aligned materials, teachers and administrators seemed clear about district expectations and the impact that the new standards should

have in their classrooms. Yet some educators expressed concern about the higher levels of rigor demanded by the standards. Before the school year started, teachers reported that lesson planning was taking much longer, partly because the new questioning techniques they are asked to use demand that they think through and prepare for varied student responses to much more open-ended questions. Teachers found that applying the shifts in instruction—greater focus on questioning and the quality of student responses—and using the revised scope and sequence quickly exposed gaps in student knowledge and preparation at all grade and performance levels. Already, the district has added acceleration blocks for literacy and math to support students who are behind or to provide enrichment activities for high-performing students.

Union leaders noted that that some teachers were feeling overloaded with the additional planning required by the acceleration blocks, and that others were uncomfortable with the new unit templates. As the 2013–2014 school year began, union leaders were working tightly with district and building administrators to address these types of issues. When interviewed again two months into the new school year, district leaders reported that teachers were taking longer to plan lessons than to teach them, at least during the first few weeks of school. Now, however, they appear to be moving into a rhythm. District 54 administrators plan to monitor implementation closely during the remainder of the 2013–2014 school year to see whether educators are making Common Core-aligned instruction the “new normal” in their classrooms.

District 54 has a longstanding mechanism for teacher collaboration (a professional learning community) that drives improvement in the district and is central to school-level Common Core implementation, providing peer support and peer accountability.

District 54 moved to a professional learning community (PLC) structure about eight years ago (see sidebar on the next page). This move was a big change for the district, introducing transparency in teaching practice and materials, teacher teaming, and a laser focus on data and results. The shift to PLCs resulted in some initial turnover in school leadership over several years as a new emphasis on data helped identify principals who were not meeting district expectations and were subsequently let go. The district’s commitment to PLCs is evident in its induction of new teachers (who are provided with specific materials and training on PLCs before they set foot in their schools) and in its structuring of school-embedded professional development (which uses the PLC as the primary delivery unit). The district’s current union contract also includes collaborative time for teachers.

Of course, time spent in collaboration may prove to be either a waste of time or time well spent. The PLC is not a silver bullet, yet administrators and teachers believe that having this structure has laid a strong foundation for Common Core implementation. As one teacher put it, “We’ve been practicing in the PLC model for so long that we’ve been able to have these kinds of conversations [about instruction] and we have a level of transparency that is necessary to do this kind of work.” Expectations for PLCs are set by the district and monitored by school principals, instructional coaches, and mentors. The district expects that collaborative teams will spend most of their time on common planning, developing shared formative assessments, and analyzing assessment data to determine student needs and teacher actions. At the junior high level, the Common Core has placed a premium on grade- and subject-specific curricular conversations: although teams historically met within departments, they shifted to cross-subject (and single-grade) teams temporarily so that they could learn deeply about the standards specific to their grade. Now, the teams again meet departmentally (cross-grades) so that they can focus on the new curriculum for their subject area; principals and teachers felt it was easier for same-subject teachers to engage in in-depth instructional conversations. (Department teams also include resource teachers who support

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curriculum planning and assessment.) Administrators are expected to drop in on collaborative team meetings regularly and to provide support as needed, including calling on district coaches or identifying additional resources.

With the new math and ELA materials introduced in 2013–2014, collaborative teams now focus on implementation of the new scope and sequence, instructional strategies, and formative assessments. Administrators also plan to be more involved in facilitating Common Core implementation, troubleshooting issues as they arise. Given the district’s heavy investment in this collaborative structure, proper implementation will likely depend on how well teams use their time to focus on aligned instruction, curriculum, and assessments. Two months into the school year, district leaders reported that the quality of implementation mirrors the quality of the collaborative teams, with weaker teams struggling far more than stronger ones when it comes to teaching to the new standards and making the necessary instructional shifts in the classroom.

Regular use of student performance data, mostly gleaned from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), enables a culture of improvement and accountability in District 54. District leaders have used MAP to set and track growth targets over the last eight years, so it has gained great credibility with teachers and school leaders. But uncertainty about the new PARCC assessment and its correlation with MAP may present a challenge to the district’s culture of data-based accountability.

Concurrent with the introduction of PLCs eight years ago, the district also instituted the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) as a common, district-wide diagnostic assessment. The MAP assessment is administered three times a year in all grades. Test data are used by teachers to monitor student growth over the school year, identify areas of support for struggling students, and establish areas of acceleration for high-achieving students.

MAP is a key component of the district’s transparent and ongoing process of data sharing. The district conducts a ninety-day reporting cycle for all schools, by which every school reports to lead district administrators and the superintendent three times per year on their progress toward district goals as determined by MAP data, team-created common assessments, and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). District leaders also hold an annual data retreat for all

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

A **professional learning community (PLC)** is specifically designed to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. In education, core characteristics of PLCs include team work in which leadership and responsibility for individual student learning are collectively shared. PLCs are generally structured to provide educators with time to reflect on their practice, using extensive peer feedback, with the overall goal of improving student learning.

district and school staff to present current ISAT and MAP data. At the school level, each grade level develops an action plan, which is updated every six weeks. In 2013–2014, all action plans will focus on Common Core instructional strategies. Examples of such strategies featured in a school improvement plan include: “Teach academic language explicitly to students using sentence starters and sheltered instruction strategies”; “Monitor reading comprehension and build critical-thinking skills by implementing higher-level questioning and written response throughout the content areas”; and “Increase the quantity and quality of content area reading.”

The data-sharing process helps district leaders see and hear themes and track data closely so that interventions—for individual teachers, across grade levels, and even building-wide—can occur swiftly. The process also encourages inter-school collaboration. “Every time we do [these 90-day reviews] principals are calling other principals to make site visits to other schools to learn about something that was shared. That was not the culture when I came here,” a district administrator explained.

“ Yet district leaders and teachers don’t feel they’ll know for sure whether MAP assessments are truly aligned to the Common Core until results can be correlated with the upcoming PARCC results. ”

Since its adoption, MAP testing has provided District 54 with a reliable, nationally normed benchmark for growth. As the district moves into full implementation of the Common Core, however, the MAP test itself also changed, adapting to align more directly with Common Core. Before the current school year started, teachers expressed some concern over the changing format of the questions and a potential disconnect between the purpose of the test—to measure growth—and the benchmarking of students’ ability to meet the standards.

With the first of three MAP administrations now complete in the 2013–2014 school year, district administrators report that they have seen positive changes in the MAP test. These include new types of questions similar to PARCC sample items and computer elements similar to PARCC, such as drag-and-drop responses that allow students to more easily cite evidence from the text. These changes in the MAP also appear to have ameliorated some of the concerns teachers expressed at the beginning of the year. As of this writing, ten of the district’s twenty-seven schools are outperforming on the new MAP where they were a year ago in both reading and math.

Yet district leaders and teachers don’t feel they’ll know for sure whether MAP assessments are truly aligned to the Common Core until results can be correlated with the upcoming PARCC results. The district is operating under the assumption that PARCC will be well aligned to the Common Core standards, but neither District 54 nor national researchers will be able to conduct a validation study until well after the PARCC assessments are released and in use. The PARCC assessment also presents district leaders with critical operational challenges: the logistical challenges of how the tests will be administered (including whether the formative components will overlap with MAP testing cycles or replace MAP altogether), and how the district will update its technology infrastructure to share data in quick turnaround cycles. Early insight into how District 54 will meet these challenges—and, more importantly, how well its new curricula and the MAP are preparing students for Common Core-aligned assessments—will come in Spring 2014, as the district participates in field-testing the PARCC assessments.

Summary of Findings

District 54 prepared intensively for a year prior to implementing Common Core by collaborating with teachers in all grades and schools and updating the district's learning and accountability structures. The district purposefully and thoughtfully rebuilt its curriculum to align more closely to the Common Core, and provided substantial school-embedded professional development support for educators and principals. Going forward, successful implementation of the new standards throughout the district will depend on school and district administrators' ability to learn from this first year of implementation, make adjustments to the curricular scope and sequence as needed, and continue to provide strong support for teachers. Uncertainty about the MAP's relationship to the as-yet-developed PARCC assessment may present a significant challenge if District 54's teachers do not feel that the consortium's assessments are consistent with the MAP tests they have come to value; such a mismatch could undermine District 54's data-driven accountability culture.


Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in District 54

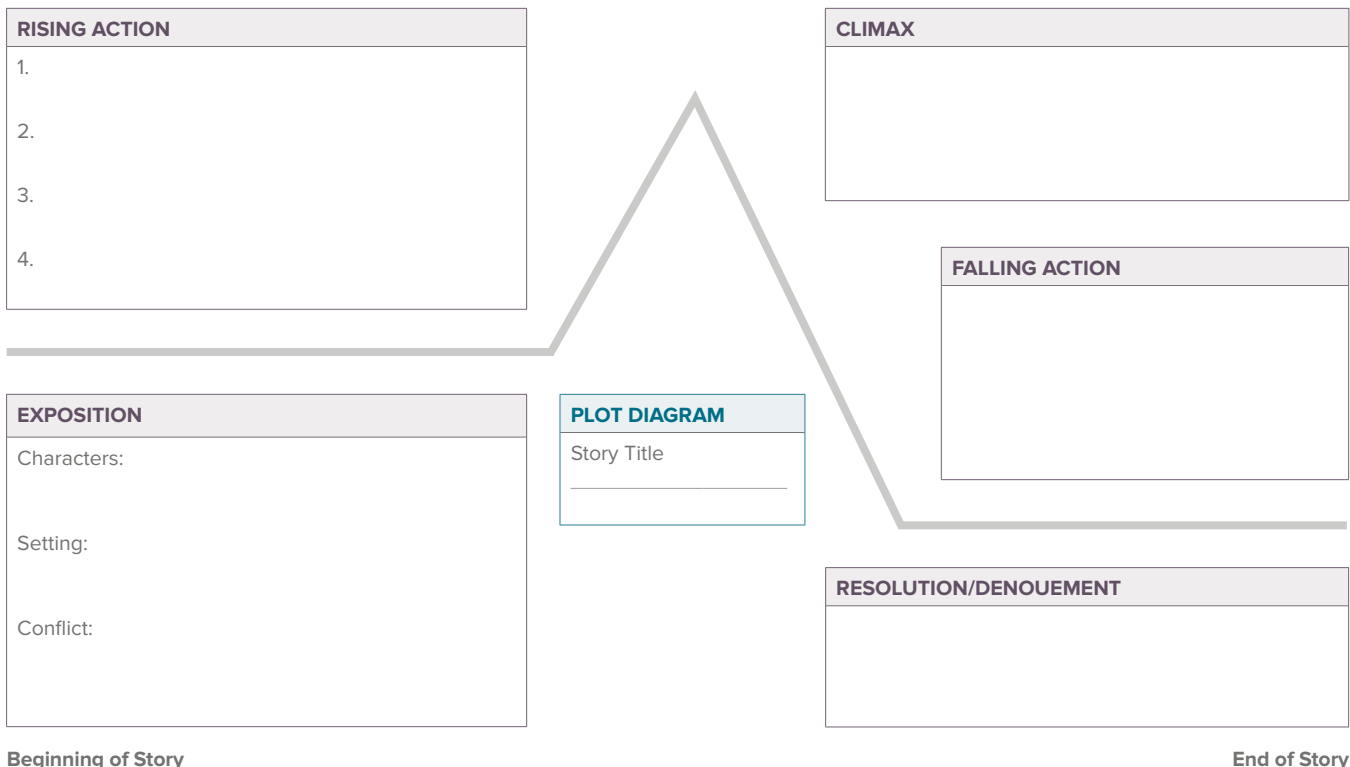
<p>Access to CCSS-aligned Curricula and Instructional Materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Two curriculum task forces (for math and ELA) met monthly during the 2012–2013 school year to develop a CCSS-aligned district scope and sequence that repurposed, realigned, and re-sequenced curriculum already in use. ◆ Task forces used supplemental materials from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), EngageNY, PARCC (for formative assessment questions), and other state websites. Two books, <i>Navigating the English Language Arts Common Core Standards</i> (A. Peery et al.) and <i>Common Core Mathematics in a PLC at Work</i> (M. Larson et al.), were central references for the revised scope and sequence. ◆ The new scope and sequence is designed to be taught in coordination with acceleration blocks (additional forty-minute blocks for math and literacy) and consistently at each grade level, so that every teacher in the same grade level is teaching the same lesson at the same time.
<p>Use of CCSS-aligned Assessments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ ISAT, the state summative test, is administered annually and required by the state. In preparation for the CCSS and to better align the test to the ACT, the state raised the cut scores for the ISAT in 2012–2013. ◆ The district uses the Measures of Academic Progress (an online, adaptive test that measures student growth in reading, math and science) testing in all schools to track student growth and set growth targets, AIMSweb (an assessment system that provides progress monitoring to support interventions and tiered instruction) to assess struggling readers, and end-of-course assessments for algebra and geometry. ◆ The new district curriculum includes formative assessment questions (modeled on PARCC sample items) that teachers use to design their own formative assessments in professional learning communities (PLCs). Once the PARCC assessments are available, the district will determine how well teacher-developed formative assessments align to them. ◆ District 54 will field-test the PARCC assessment in spring 2014 in twenty-five of its twenty-seven schools.

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in District 54 (cont'd)

Teacher- and Principal-level Accountability for Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The district conducts a ninety-day reporting cycle for all schools. Every school reports to the cabinet and superintendent three times per year on its progress toward district goals as determined by MAP data and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). ◆ District leaders hold an annual data retreat for all district and school staff to present current ISAT and MAP data. Each grade level develops an action plan with actionable goals, updated every six weeks. In 2013–2014, all action plans will focus on CCSS instructional strategies. ◆ Principal evaluations are linked to building-level growth components and leadership standards, and include multiple measures and frequent observations. District leaders expect that principals will focus on and support the CCSS, the new curriculum, and the shifts in instructional practice. ◆ Teacher evaluations currently are linked to building-level student growth components (this may change once the new system is developed by the state). Teacher evaluations include observations using the Charlotte Danielson framework. ◆ PLCs and the CCSS curriculum task forces hold teachers accountable for implementing the CCSS and provide feedback loops to inform the district about specific issues or problems as they arise. Expectations for PLCs are clearly set so that they focus on instruction and assessment rather than managerial issues.
Data-driven, CCSS-aligned PD for Teachers and Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The district plans and delivers all district PD. Outside consultants Rick and Becky DuFour lead annual PLC trainings. ◆ In 2012–2013, the district provided one release day for staff, by grade level, to attend training on the CCSS and the new curriculum. In addition, the district provided intensive summer trainings for classroom teachers and their PLCs to start planning using the new CCSS-aligned curriculum. Sixty-three percent of teachers attended these trainings. ◆ The district provides embedded PD and support in schools through a team of full-time released teachers who act as instructional math and literacy coaches and instructional mentors. Principals work with the coaches and mentors to determine and meet educator needs. Principals receive the same training as educators during their own PD time or side-by-side with their teachers. District leaders are available to principals and teachers who have questions about the CCSS, the curriculum, or other instructional issues.
Communication and Buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ District leaders are tightly aligned on their messages to staff about their goals, the CCSS, and continuous improvement. This messaging is enforced in district-led trainings for coaches, mentors, and support staff and through talking points provided by the district to administrators and teachers. Talking points are also translated into several other languages and distributed to bilingual resource teachers. ◆ The district community relations director is developing a communications plan to support CCSS implementation specifically. ◆ The superintendent meets with union representatives several times per year to keep them informed and problem-solve. ◆ The district has a strong partnership with the PTA, which assists in making presentations about the CCSS to parents. The district developed and distributed parent guides at the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year that included information about the CCSS. ◆ The district distributes a monthly newsletter to parents and the community, and maintains a Facebook page and a website. The superintendent also writes a monthly article published in the local newspaper. ◆ A District Citizens Advisory Committee, made up of district leaders and representatives from each school and the community, provides an in-house focus group for the district, assisting the district to determine community responses to issues such as the CCSS implementation.

Appendix: Sample District 54 Scope and Sequence - English

Grade 3 • Unit 1 • Week 1			
ESSENTIAL OUTCOME			
RL.3.5 Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.			
I CAN STATEMENT			
I can analyze a story to identify elements of prose (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution) in order to explain how one event builds on an earlier section. I can identify parts of a poem.			
SHARED READER: REALISTIC FICTION	GRAPHIC ORGANIZER	HIGH COGNITIVE DEMAND TASKS	COMMON ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ First Day Jitters – Unit 1 p. 14-31 ◆ Tina’s Try-Out Day – Unit 1 p. 12-13 ◆ Give Me Normal - Read Aloud Anthology p. 10 	(see detail, below) 	Defend the author’s decision to _____. (<i>wait to reveal a character, not state something explicitly, write the ending of the story the way they did</i>). (DOK [Depth of Knowledge Level]3) Critique why you think the author chose to imply rather than state certain information important to the plot? (DOK 3)	Part A: Is there an identifiable problem in the story? Part B: Cite evidence that supports your thinking. Part C: How can you distinguish the problem you chose in Part A from other events that occurred in the story?
GUIDED READING: REALISTIC FICTION			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The New House ◆ The New Kid ◆ The New Hometown 			



Endnotes

1. “Curriculum” is defined here as a series of lessons that roll up into units that are sequenced appropriately, based on the discipline and paced to fit into a school year. Each lesson includes (1) a target standard for student learning and (2) activities and materials, including formative assessments, used to help the students meet that target.
2. “Scope and sequence” refers to a listing of the content and skills and the order in which the content and skills are taught in a lesson, unit, or grade level.
3. Existing district curriculum included the following textbooks: *Everyday Math* and *Treasures* (McGraw-Hill) and *Language of Literature* (McDougal Littell). Whether these materials are aligned to the Common Core is up for debate; authors of *Everyday Math*, for instance, have penned a piece that explains how their curriculum diverges from the Common Core deliberately. See: <http://everydaymath.uchicago.edu/teaching-topics/standards/common-core-article/>.
4. Essential outcomes are prioritized learning outcomes that the district believes all students should know and be able to do. These outcomes are assessed using formative and summative assessments.
5. District 54 offered optional full-day classes during the summer of 2013 to help teachers and school teams prepare to implement the Common Core in their classrooms in the 2013–2014 school year. Teachers could register as many days as they wanted throughout June and again in August. Sessions were staffed with Literacy or Math Task Force participants as facilitators to answer questions and provide guidance as school teams prepared lessons and unit plans for the upcoming year.