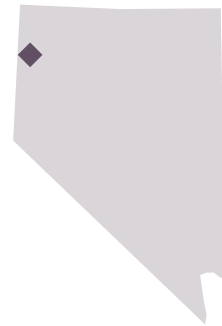


The Creative Implementer

WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Reno-Tahoe, Nevada, and Surrounding Areas



Restricted by a tight budget, Washoe County School District has creatively approached its existing resources and built on partnerships with national experts to roll out the new Common Core State Standards to teachers, students, and the community. The district's innovative and grassroots Core Task Project, which has reached about half the teachers in the district, is a model for teacher-centered, Common Core-aligned professional development. Washoe is now trying to ensure that this sustained professional development reaches all district teachers, and that it has reliable measures to gauge whether classroom change is truly taking hold. Lacking a comprehensive, Common Core-aligned curriculum, Washoe must assess whether current professional development offerings and curricular guidance are sufficient in helping teachers to make the extensive modifications demanded by the new standards.

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State and District Context

The Nevada State Board of Education adopted the Common Core in 2010. The state’s transition timeline staggered the initial rollout of the ELA and mathematics standards, committing to full ELA implementation by 2012–2013 and mathematics by 2015–2016 (see timeline below). Nevada was also granted a waiver from the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“No Child Left Behind”) in August 2012, contingent in part on its commitment to implement both the Common Core standards and a new Nevada School Performance Framework, under which schools receive a star rating on a scale of 1–5. Nevada also plans to transition its summative assessments to state-consortia-developed Smarter Balanced assessments in 2015. Until then, the state continues to gauge student achievement using Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) and the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE), which students must pass in order to graduate. During the transition, CRTs were revised for greater alignment to the Common Core and math cut scores were raised for grades 6–8 in 2012–2013, leading to dramatic drops in overall proficiency throughout the state.

WASHOE COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

- 65,206 students
- 3,364 teachers
- 63 elementary schools, 14 middle schools, and 13 high schools; 8 charters and 1 online school
- 44.2% free- and reduced-lunch eligible
- 16.8% limited English proficient
- 37% Hispanic; 48% white; 6% Asian; 3% African American; 2% Native American; 4% multiracial
- Urban district that encompasses Reno-Tahoe

Washoe County, a large district encompassing the urban center of Reno-Tahoe, recently underwent a leadership transition, hiring a new superintendent who started in the 2012–2013 school year. In his action plan for the district (which built on a 2010–2011 strategic plan already in place), the new superintendent emphasized high-quality Common Core implementation as a primary goal for the district. Central office and funding decisions have subsequently supported this emphasis; for example, the district moved its Department of Assessment from its Office of Accountability to its Office of Academics to prioritize a tighter relationship between new Smarter Balanced assessments and instruction.

| 2010–11 | 2011–12 | 2012–13 | 2013–14 | 2014–15 |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| October 2010, Nevada adopts the CCSS | Full implementation of CCSS in K–8 ELA and K–2 math; grades 3–8 math remain under NV standards with “targeted CCSS” expectations;* grades 9–12 ELA and math remain under NV standards | Full implementation of CCSS in K–12 ELA; full implementation of CCSS in K–2 math; 3–8 math under NV standards with “targeted CCSS” expectations; implementation of CCSS in Algebra I and Geometry in grade 9; NV standards in grades 10–12 | Full implementation of CCSS in K–12 ELA; full implementation of CCSS in K–8 math; implementation of CCSS in Algebra I and Geometry in grade 9 and Geometry in Algebra II in grade 10; NV standards in grades 11–12 | Full implementation of K–12 ELA and K-11 mathematics (NV standards in grade 12); implementation of Smarter Balanced assessments for school-level accountability purposes |

*See state-provided transition documents clarifying expectations for overlapping NV standards and CCSS at http://www.doe.nv.gov/NDE_Offices/APAC/Standards/Math/Transition_Documents/.

In recent years, the district has seen modest gains in reading performance for fourth grade and grades 6–8, based on state CRT data. This includes a 4 percentage point increase in fourth grade and a 5 percentage point increase in seventh grade between 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. Consistent with statewide drops in proficiency in under the revised CRT cut scores, the percentage of Washoe County students in grades 6–8 meeting proficiency in math dropped sharply in 2012–2013; math scores in the elementary grades, however, improved by a percentage point. Achievement gaps have narrowed slightly in both reading and math, but persist.

Washoe County district staff report a good relationship with its state education agency. By law and culture, Nevada is a “local control” state for education. Consistent with this governance approach, the Nevada Department of Education has provided minimal direction to its districts about either curriculum adoption or teacher training relative to transitioning to the Common Core. Washoe County is an influential district and leader in Nevada (together, Washoe County and Clark County—the state’s largest district—encompass more than two-thirds of the state’s schools), and the state has proven willing to defer to the district’s implementation priorities and plans. Politically, although some anti-Common Core sentiments have gained traction elsewhere in Nevada (particularly in the northern, less populated part of the state), pushback in Washoe County has been a relatively insignificant factor in its implementation efforts.

Washoe County also privileges school-based autonomy. Principals are held accountable through a 100-point index of school accountability created by the district and implemented in 2012–2013 (separate from the state’s school performance framework mentioned earlier). The index measures student growth, student proficiency, and overall learning conditions. District administrators are seeking to ensure that the Common Core is reflected in the index (e.g., by adjusting student performance measures to reflect Smarter Balanced assessments and requiring that schools address the Common Core in their “family engagement plans”).

Detailed Research Findings

Absent major new investments from the state or federal government, Washoe County faces a tight education budget, and has made smart use of partnerships with national experts and organizations to ease the transition to Common Core. District staff has also maximized relationships with the local press to communicate clearly with the public about the intent of the new standards.

Like many districts throughout the country, Washoe is attempting to implement major reforms with a budget decimated by the Great Recession. The district lost \$40 million, or 9 percent of its budget, in 2012–2013, and faced another shortfall of \$46 million–\$55 million in the 2013–2014 school year. Hence Washoe has made smart use of partnerships with national organizations to help tackle the resource challenges inherent in transitioning to the Common Core.

One such partnership is with the Basal Alignment Project (BAP), a national, collaborative initiative led by the Council of Great City Schools, which seeks to augment and align existing English language arts (ELA) curricular materials to the new standards. Starting in 2012, about twenty teachers in Washoe County participated in BAP, joining with other educators across the country to re-write questions and lessons in elementary curriculum materials to ensure that they reflect the rigor and intent of the Common Core ELA standards (Houghton Mifflin, McGraw Hill, and Pearson materials were revised). The work of the BAP teams is coordinated by Student Achievement Partners (SAP), a national nonprofit organization founded by the primary writers of the Common Core and a widely respected arbiter of alignment, to ensure quality of the resulting materials. The final products were disseminated to Washoe teachers via Edmodo, an interactive online platform that allows teachers to download and share lessons and tools. In the spring and summer of 2013, the same national collaborative (including Washoe teachers) began rewriting and aligning materials in literature anthologies for grades 6–10 (“Anthology Alignment Project”) and K–2 (the “Read-aloud Alignment Project”).

“ Washoe has made smart use of partnerships with national organizations to help tackle the resource challenges inherent in transitioning to the Common Core. ”

Although the BAP and its spinoffs don’t address the full scope of Washoe’s curricular needs (they provide only ELA instructional materials), participation in them allowed Washoe to leverage the work of a core group of district teachers and gain access to a suite of materials created and vetted by national experts. Washoe has also taken the tools that Student Achievement Partners developed to train BAP writers and used them as professional development materials for other district teachers.

At both the secondary and elementary level, Washoe has drawn extensively on its relationship with Student Achievement Partners. Teachers use SAP-developed rubrics and practice guides (described further below) to improve lesson delivery and materials. The district also has hosted experts from SAP to train teachers on the key instructional shifts called for by the Common Core. Similarly, Washoe leaders are participating in a (free) pilot project with Charlotte Danielson—a national field leader in teacher observation—to help them align district observation tools and practices with the Common Core.

Washoe has also leveraged local, non-monetary support to buttress Common Core implementation. For example, district leaders have approached journalists at the *Reno Gazette-Journal* in an effort to convey their plans to the community. The paper has proven willing to cover the Common Core consistently, featuring the new standards themselves, the district’s plan to implement them, and multiple articles explaining the differences between the old and new expectations (drawing from national sources like Smarter Balanced and CoreStandards.org). Recent articles have also compared sample assessment items under the former Nevada standards and the Common Core, illustrating the relative rigor of the latter.

Communications outreach and new partnerships cannot cover all of the resource gaps, however, and Washoe has real needs—particularly in funding the technology upgrades needed to deliver new Smarter Balanced assessments. Some components of the district’s strategy have also required significant reallocation of resources, not just innovating to stretch dollars. But Washoe’s commitment to maximizing local advantages and seeking out national partners demonstrates a smart start to implementation for other cash-strapped districts.

Washoe’s initial Common Core professional development activities have focused on key learning shifts and instructional changes, rather than developing a new curriculum. Their voluntary, teacher-led professional development programming—to date, reaching about half of the district’s teachers—has helped elementary teachers make major changes to their ELA practice and empowered social studies teachers to lead Common Core implementation in the secondary grades. But addressing instructional shifts in the absence of a full Common Core-aligned curriculum has raised significant challenges, too.

ABOUT THE CORE TASK PROJECT

The Core Task Project (CTP) is a two-year-old Washoe grassroots professional learning experience designed to help teachers understand the Common Core and make changes to their practice. The project initially began as a small group of elementary teacher leaders using training materials (including rubrics, sample lessons, and videos from national organizations) to address the instructional shifts inherent in the new standards. Under the direction of an interested social studies teacher leader, CTP grew to include secondary social studies in 2012–13. CTP is a three-week model, with three to four full days of professional development to support teachers’ classroom implementation experience.

In 2012–2013, the team also piloted the Core Task Implementation Project (CTiP), a sustained professional development program for two to three teachers from sixteen elementary schools who met in grade bands throughout the year.

To date, approximately 1,675 teachers, about half those in the district, have participated in CTP or CTiP, which is delivered and led by teacher leaders and program coordinators housed within the district’s Curriculum and Instruction Department.

CTP has since expanded into half of elementary schools by the 2013–2014 school year.

Please see Appendix: *Core Task Project Overview and Core Task Implementation Project Plans* for additional information.

While Washoe offers extensive curricular tools for supporting Common Core instruction,¹ the district currently does not provide teachers with a comprehensive, Common Core-aligned curriculum. (This absence, in part, reflects the field’s general lack of strong, Common Core-vetted materials that constitute full curricula). As the district chief academic officer explains, “We didn’t have the text to support the new standards, so we had to make our text fit the standards by supplementing, rewriting questions, etc. We don’t want to spend money until we know there is a 100 percent aligned product.” The district recognizes that these activities still leave gaps in instructional materials; for English language arts, it has sought to bridge them in part through its partnership with the different alignment projects described above.

Even so, it will be difficult for a district as large as Washoe to effectively implement the Common Core at scale without a high-quality, fully aligned curriculum available in every classroom. While Washoe waits for the publishing field to catch up, the district has energetically embraced a teacher-generated professional development strategy that is helping educators make major changes in their practice.

Washoe’s signature Common Core professional development program, the Core Task Project (CTP), as well as the related Core Task Implementation Project (CTiP), includes both elementary and secondary social studies teachers. (See *About the Core Task Project* sidebar). Because the district is adapting its curricular materials through a series of course guides, the Core Task Project focuses deeply on the learning shifts and instructional changes reflected in the standards, as opposed to training teachers specifically on a new set of materials. Teachers engage with curricular exemplars as models of what aligned English language arts instruction should look like (e.g., materials from the Basal Alignment Project and close-reading lessons developed by SAP).

The emphasis on classroom-level changes is complemented by collaborative planning. Multiple teachers explain that common planning with their grade-band peers means that they feel accountable to fellow teachers to execute the lessons crafted together properly. As one elementary teacher explained, “Your colleagues depend on your students’ mastery of the standards.” ELA teachers frequently cite the importance of the “vertical staircase,” meaning how the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (within the Common Core) organize each set of grade-specific standards by gradually building their complexity. Understanding the standards above and below each grade (and reflecting those standards in curriculum planning) is critical.

To support one another, the CTiP participants use the “Instructional Practice Guides” developed by SAP to assess their own lesson plans and guide reflection with their peers. For example, the guides ask whether, in early elementary lessons, “a majority of read aloud time is spent reading, listening to, speaking, or writing about text(s)”; in all grades, the guides ask whether “the text(s) are at or above the complexity level expected for the grade and time in the school year.”² District leaders also describe the importance of the Instructional Practice Guides in establishing a common district-wide language about Common Core instruction, giving everyone a shared set of practices to look for in observing and providing feedback.

At the secondary level, the focus on aligned instruction rather than a single, comprehensive curriculum has enabled the Core Task Project to expand to social studies teachers, including those in history and government. Washoe social studies teachers have generally welcomed the opportunity to align their instruction with the Common Core in English language arts/literacy, and explain that the emphasis on close analysis of primary sources supports the shifts to content-rich nonfiction and using text-based evidence. They particularly appreciate that the stress on literacy skills empowers them to spend more time on complex texts, and that the emphasis on text-based evidence levels the playing field somewhat for students with less background knowledge.

They also say that their department’s decision to move to performance-based assessments frees them to explore texts more deeply with their students (obviating concerns about “getting through” a certain amount of material). These same teachers have chosen to adopt Common Core ELA tools—such as the Smarter Balanced Argumentative Writing Rubric—to assess how their materials and students are performing against similar goals. As Common Core implementation moves forward in Washoe, these secondary teachers are poised to lead colleagues who teach other subjects.

Still, the lack of a comprehensive, shared curriculum makes it easier for some to avoid change or fail to grasp the magnitude of the shifts. For example, at the close of 2012–2013, some teachers report that their peers who had not yet undergone intensive professional development had transformed very little in their classrooms. Given the clear need for explicit guidance on adapting teaching and materials, district-level administrators are not shying away from the task of curricular alignment. In addition to the aforementioned grade-by-grade overhauls of course guides, the district has also sought to revise, discard, and create new interim assessments aligned to the Common Core (see next section). Yet without a singular, content-rich curriculum in place, teachers still have to connect the dots between the new course guides, new interim assessments, and their existing materials as written—and principals and coaches have to both guide and hold them accountable for doing so.

“ Still, the lack of a comprehensive, shared curriculum makes it easier for some to avoid change or fail to grasp the magnitude of the shifts. ”

For some teachers, the paradigm shifts fostered by intensive professional development like the Core Task Project will be sufficient to make these connections. Whether that will be the case for all of Washoe’s 3,000-plus teachers remains to be seen.

Washoe has committed significant time and resources to scaling the Core Task Project in 2013–14 and 2014–15 to improve the effectiveness of its professional development offerings. Whether these efforts translate into improved instruction is to be determined, but early feedback from teachers is promising.

The Core Task Project stands in contrast to Washoe’s previous district-wide approach to professional development, which was considered largely insufficient in helping teachers make major changes in their practice or curriculum. Washoe’s director of professional learning, new to the district in the 2012–2013 school year, explains that the district’s prior approach had been school-based and not mandatory, leading to instructional silos, repetition, and unevenness across

“ We didn’t have the text to support the new standards, so we had to make our text fit the standards by supplementing, rewriting questions, etc. We don’t want to spend money until we know there is a 100 percent aligned product! ”

schools. Mandatory, all-district trainings had been few—usually just once a year—and insufficiently focused on the standards to deliver the kind of intensive reflection and learning fostered in the Core Task Project. The train-the-trainer professional development delivery system that pre-dated the new standards had also fallen short; the superintendent described it to the *Reno Gazette-Journal* as “like a game of telephone.”

Given these shortcomings, Washoe implemented major changes to its district-wide professional development team beginning in the 2013–2014 school year. The Department of Professional Learning, in collaboration with

“ Although not all training is specific to the new standards and shifts, the district’s goal is to integrate all professional development ‘through the lens of the Common Core.’ ”

the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and others, developed a comprehensive professional development plan, approved by the superintendent and school board, to expend \$1.7 million a year, for two years, on fifteen hours of annual training for all teachers, along with optional but encouraged follow-up (more below). Although not all training is specific to the new standards and shifts, the district’s goal is to integrate all professional development “through the lens of the Common Core.” For example, Washoe continues to deliver teacher training on its Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives,

but now does so through activities such as looking at SEL competencies in the context of the speaking and listening standards. The new plan also helps the district to reach all teachers directly, so that Common Core information isn’t secondhand, diluted, or fragmented. The goal, in the words of Washoe’s chief academic officer, is to “keep a healthy tension on teachers and principals through concentrated professional development and [keep everyone] living in a zone of productive discomfort.”

The district has also tapped the teacher leaders behind the Core Task Project to develop and lead district-wide professional development. At the end of the 2012–2013 school year, teachers who had undergone the CTP process reported cautious optimism that the district had identified the right priorities and team to deliver to others the high-quality training they’d received themselves.

The new professional development approach launched with an “8/8@8” event (held at 8:00 a.m. on August 8, 2013) for all district teachers, including specialists, arts, and physical education teachers. The kickoff began with a full-day professional development session on the Common Core English language arts/literacy standards, facilitated by site-based coaches and specialists, teacher leaders, building administrators, and central office administrators—all of whom were given tightly vetted materials to ensure consistency of message. Ongoing follow-up professional development will be delivered once a month on early-release Wednesdays, focusing in alternating quarters on the math and English standards. Initial response to the district-wide session was positive,³ encouraging district leaders who are dedicated to making professional learning more engaging and relevant to teachers’ needs.

As Washoe’s Common Core implementation and professional development efforts accelerate, a critical next step is assessing whether genuine change in classroom practice is taking hold. To do so, it will need to ensure its accountability tools accurately measure Common Core-aligned teaching and learning.

In order to improve the quality of instructional feedback for teachers, Washoe is participating in a pilot with the Danielson Group during the current school year (2013–14) to refine its classroom observation rubric (already in use in the district) for greater alignment with the new standards. The district expects the revised rubric to foster greater coherence across observers. Similarly, the district has trained all teachers on the SAP practice guides to self-assess their own areas of weakness and strength in implementation.

Washoe has also made extensive efforts to revise its interim assessments to align more closely to the new standards. The district has required all teachers to discontinue use of interim assessments aligned to the old standards. At the elementary level, teachers have been asked to develop new interim assessments with district support. The Curriculum and Instruction Department trains teachers on new rubrics they should use to develop Common Core interim assessments, and the

Assessment Department helps ensure that teacher-developed interim assessments are technically sound. At the secondary level, the district has common end-of-semester assessments, and the Office of Academics has revised these assessments to align with the Common Core in math (there are no common district-wide end-of-semester assessments in ELA).

Ultimately, Washoe hopes to utilize a fully aligned system of assessment, including interim and summative tests, to help determine whether its professional development approach translates into improved student performance under the Common Core. The district eagerly awaits the arrival of the state-consortia-developed Smarter Balanced assessment and plans to field it in spring 2014.

Summary of Findings

Despite budget cutbacks, Washoe County School District is off to a promising start relative to Common Core implementation, driven by a grassroots approach to comprehensive professional development that has resonated with teachers. At the district level, administrators have sought and maximized partnerships that have helped them to improve upon their curricular resources, professional development, and monitoring of implementation. In the near future, the district has its hands full. It plans to scale sustained professional development (for all teachers) beginning in fall 2013, disseminate new accountability and curricular tools developed with national partners, and closely analyze whether these initiatives are paving the way for high-quality implementation.

| Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Washoe County | |
|--|---|
| <p>Access to CCSS-aligned Curricula and Instructional Materials</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Washoe County has central textbook adoption for math and reading at the elementary grades, with supplemental texts in use in different schools. These texts must be approved by the district's vendor product review (which was revised in 2013–2014 for greater Common Core alignment—see below). The elementary grades use Houghton Mifflin Reading; many grade 3–5 teachers are using the Basal Alignment Project materials, which are disseminated to all teachers through a virtual network called Edmodo. Beginning in 2013–2014, K–2 teachers are also using materials from the Read Aloud Alignment Project and secondary teachers are using materials from the Anthology Alignment Project. <i>Everyday Mathematics</i> is in use throughout the district for elementary math, and Washoe County curriculum administrators offer professional development trainings focused on how teachers can revise their <i>Everyday Mathematics</i> materials to better support the Common Core. ◆ In secondary grades, social studies teachers are using primary source documents purchased by the district through a Teaching American History grant. Teachers participating in the Core Task Project for secondary social studies have also developed close-reading and questioning tasks, as well as a rubric to score student work. <i>Holt Mathematics</i> is a commonly used text for 6–8 math, and grades 7–12 English courses widely use <i>Holt Elements of Literature</i>. ◆ While no single, Common Core-aligned curriculum has been adopted, the district provides course guides, paced by units, to help teachers make decisions about what and when to teach from their different textbooks. The Office of Academics has dramatically re-written the guides (one grade at a time) to ensure that they support the appropriate grade-level standards and sequence of the CCSS. ◆ The district relies on principals and implementation specialists to have discussions with teachers about using the course guides instead of the publisher materials as written; at the secondary level, the district has common end-of-semester exams in math, which holds teachers accountable for using the guides and adjusting their materials. ◆ The Office of Academics has also rewritten its rubrics and process for purchasing vendor products. For the former, they drew from EngageNY, the Publisher's Criteria, the Tri-State Rubric, and the EQUIP Rubrics in the rewriting of the ELA rubrics. For the rewriting of the math rubrics, they drew from The Mathematics Curriculum Analysis Project and National Council for Teachers of Mathematics/National Council of Supervisor of Mathematics. The new vendor rubric and process have not yet been applied to the adoption of new materials. |

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Washoe County (cont'd)

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| <p>Use of CCSS-aligned Formative and Interim Assessments</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Regarding interim assessments, the district has updated its common assessments as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The district adopted a new version of the <i>Measures of Academic Progress</i> (MAP) for math in grades 1–9 and reading in grades 3–9. The Department of Assessment reviewed items in the new MAP for consistency and alignment with Smarter Balanced sample items and has found the test to be largely consistent. » The Kindergarten Portfolio (an alternative assessment for kindergarteners, which draws from pieces of a student’s combined work) is designed to evaluate early numeracy, reading, and writing behaviors. Washoe’s kindergarten program coordinator encouraged schools to change assessment windows to prioritize year-end mastery of standards for consistency with the CCSS. Additionally, a committee of kindergarten and pre-K teachers modified the portfolio assessment for greater CCSS alignment. » The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) will be administered three times per year (formerly twice) and changed to electronic input to give teachers timely, accessible data to adjust instruction. The district assessment specialist and an external expert evaluated DRA’s alignment to CCSS and found that it aligned to the Foundational Standards. ◆ At the school level, teachers are required to discontinue use of interim assessments aligned to the old standards. At the elementary level, teachers are asked to develop new interim assessments and the district provides support to do so: Curriculum and Instruction trains teachers on new rubrics they should use to develop Common Core interim assessments, and Assessment staff help ensure that teacher-developed interim assessments are technically sound. At the secondary level, the district develops a set of common end-of-semester exams. ◆ Regarding summative assessments, Nevada plans to implement the Smarter Balanced assessment in 2014–15. In Washoe, twenty schools participated in the Smarter Balanced pilot in spring 2013 and the Assessment office is widely distributing SBAC sample items (released May 2013). Thirty-eight schools will participate in the field test in spring 2014. |
| <p>Teacher- and Principal-level Accountability for Results</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Washoe implemented a new school-level accountability system in 2012–13; ratings are released every September. The system is points-based and relative across the district, and the CCSS will be reflected in different components (e.g., Smarter Balanced assessments will re-norm student performance measures; schools will have to demonstrate family engagement plans that address the CCSS). ◆ The district’s new teacher evaluation framework was also implemented in 2012–13 year (although principals and teachers have experienced it largely as a pilot and are implementing gradually); current components are the Danielson rubric for evaluation and teacher-created growth plans. The district is participating in a pilot with the Danielson Group and Student Achievement Partners during the 2013–14 year to refine observation rubrics for greater alignment. A new measure of teacher effectiveness will be piloted in 2013–14. |
| <p>Data-driven, CCSS-aligned PD for Teachers and Principals</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The centerpiece of district’s professional development on CCSS-ELA is the Core Task Project. (See <i>About the Core Task Project</i> sidebar.) ◆ The 2013–14 PD plan includes approximately fifteen hours of professional learning for each teacher in the district. The programming is developed to be consistent with CTP principles and in consultation with the CTP teacher leaders, and is differentiated by grade band and site. Follow-up PD is to be provided by implementation specialists and via optional Saturday enrichment. ◆ Professional learning communities are in place throughout the district; the extent to which PLC time is used strictly to discuss instruction (vs. administrative or other planning issues) varies by school. ◆ As of 2013–14, a network of thirty-three implementation specialists serves the district’s elementary and middle schools and delivers PD programming and guidance as requested by teachers and principals; the expertise of these specialists skews toward better knowledge of the elementary CCSS than the high school standards and varies throughout the district. ◆ Thirty principals participated in a “Leading the Core” class (eighteen hours across six classes) taught by CTP teacher leaders in 2012–2013; the course was offered again in summer and fall 2013, and the district will deliver “Leading the Core” content through mandatory bimonthly principal trainings. ◆ The CTP teacher leaders also attend administrator and supervisor meetings to communicate about the CCSS. |

Table 2. At a Glance: CCSS Implementation in Washoe County (cont'd)

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|---------------------------------|--|
| Communication and Buy-in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The <i>Reno Gazette-Journal</i> has provided extensive and positive coverage of the CCSS and Washoe's implementation plans. ◆ Six CCSS-focused courses were offered through Parent University, a grant-funded, district-wide parent training program, in 2012–2013; courses focus on content of standards and academic vocabulary and what to look for to support children. Halfway through 2012–2013, Parent University has reached 750 unduplicated parents of Washoe County School District Students, or approximately 63 percent of its target of 1,200 for the program year. ◆ The new accountability framework for schools includes points within the index for student and family engagement. ◆ District administrators present a different Smarter Balanced sample assessment item to the School Board at each monthly meeting to educate these decision makers and the community about the specifics of the changes in instruction and expectations. |
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Appendix: Core Task Project Overview and Core Task Implementation Project Plans for Years 1 and 2

IMPLEMENTING THE CORE TASK PROJECT

Overview:

The Core Task Project occurs over three weeks. During the first week, teachers are released for a half-day professional learning to learn about the CCSS and collaboratively explore a Close Reading Exemplar. During the second week, they implement the lesson with their students. As available, CTP facilitators are in the field taking notes and supporting teachers through the work. In the third week, teachers are released for a half-day debrief and professional learning on assessing/measuring text complexity and writing text dependent questions.

Week 1: Learning about the CCSS and the Close Reading Strategy

The purpose of this half-day of professional learning is to frame the inquiry for what it means to shift instruction to the Core. Although some educators have heard of the “instructional shifts,” few have had a sheltered opportunity to explore and discuss the implications for working with text complexity and text-dependent questions, particularly with the Close Reading Strategy.

The first half of the session focuses on building a shared foundation. Teachers review the “instructional shifts” via video content that includes CCSS authors, and share thoughts with partners and groups. Teachers juxtapose their personal experience to what is described in the video and what is explicitly stated in the Common Core Standards documents.

In the second half of the session, teachers experience the Close Reading Strategy via the text exemplar they will be teaching the following week. Teachers in K–2 approach this work through the read aloud, as foundational skills are vital but are not the focus of this work. Considerable time is also spent reading and discussing the elements of the lesson and how they differ from current practice. There may be some angst, as teachers are asked to suspend many of the practices they typically engage in introducing the text.

At the close of the session, teachers are asked to gather a range of student samples and closely monitor how their students performed as well as personal reflections during instruction.

Week 2: Implementing the lesson

During this week teachers implement the lesson. As available, facilitators offer to support teachers during instruction. This might include observing, sharing materials, and answering questions.

Week 3: Debriefing the Lesson and More Professional Learning

The focus of this half-day is on reflection and professional learning. Teachers spend nearly an hour reflecting on their experience with colleagues, including sharing student samples and considering next steps for this work. Facilitators engage with teachers in the reflections, learning from the experiences, and considering how to move the project forward.

In the second half of the session, teachers explore tools for understanding text complexity and writing text-dependent questions. Specifically, they analyze a piece of text using the text complexity qualitative rubric. Then they collaboratively write text-dependent questions.

CORE TASK IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT 2014: FULLY INTEGRATING CCSS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM YEAR 1 (2013–14)

Tools, Resources, and “Instructional Shifts” to Move Students to College- and Career-Readiness; Building Sustainable Instructional Leadership

Overview:

By design, the CTiP functions as a cross-school PLC, employing the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Using exemplar resources from Student Achievement Partners and the Basal Alignment Project, teachers plan common lessons, reflect on student work, learn and plan again for lessons to be taught between meetings. Integrating new learning grounded in the Instructional Shifts, teachers systematically insert close reading exemplar lessons and BAP lessons into the literacy block, shifting instruction toward CCSS outcomes. The work of the CTiP helps inform and drive the successful implementation of the CCSS in WCSD, offering a replicable model for site-based learning.

In Year 1, three teachers from each school site are brought together in a cross-school PLC to safely explore the instructional shifts and to gain confidence in the power behind the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Monthly sessions are spent in reflection (on instruction and student data), professional learning grounded in the Instructional Shifts, and planning anchored in the BAP resources and Close Reading Exemplars. In between sessions, teachers implement the lesson, engage in blended learning on Edmodo, and reflect on their implementation and focus students.

Essential Questions:

1. How does the Basal Alignment Project and the Core Task Project fit within a strong literacy block?
2. How do we assess/monitor student progress using BAP and close reading exemplars?
3. How can the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium (WIDA) be integrated into this process?
4. How does collaborating shift instructional practice to align with the CCSS?
5. How can facilitating conversations in PK–3 align instructional practice to support student learning?
6. How does building capacity in individual teachers empower instructional site and district leadership? What tools and processes can be shared across the district?

| CTiP 1 DATES | CONTENT | FOLLOW-UP |
|---|---|---|
| ½ day sessions: SRG: 8:30 – 11:30 a.m.; C&L: 12:30 – 3:30 p.m. | | |
| Sept. 17 (PK–2) Sept. 19 (3–6) | Close read, Collecting student evidence | Edmodo professional learning & reflection; lesson implementation; informal sharing with colleagues |
| November 5 (PK–2) November 7 (3–6) | Using BAP Resources | |
| December 3 (PK–2) December 5 (3–6) | Speaking and Listening SEL connections | |
| January 23 (PK–2) January 30 (3–6) | Text-dependent Questions/Text Complexity (SPED & ELL – supporting ALL students with questions) | |
| February 25 (PK–2) February 27 (3–6) | Writing to Sources | |
| March 18 (PK–2) March 20 (3–6) | Academic Vocabulary/ SLO Connections | |
| May 22 8:30 – 3:30 (full day) | Celebrations/Reflection/Planning 12:30 – 3:30 will include 6-12 vertical participants | Leadership role for following year’s planning |

** SRG will have a vertical meeting (PK–12) on January 16, 8:30 – 11:30—more information forthcoming.

Key Points:

- ◆ Meet monthly with teams from each elementary site for three hours in grade band groups
- ◆ Teachers should be chosen across the teacher continuum (novice, effective, expert) but must possess a positive attitude and effective classroom management
- ◆ Embed learning in cycle of planning/instruction/assessment: complex text, TDQs, resources, writing, speaking, and listening
- ◆ Stipend for Edmodo work between classes
- ◆ Implementation Specialist support follows the class and is embedded, working on the goals for the month

Outcomes:

- ◆ Through the inquiry-based PLC, collaboratively explore and develop CCSS messaging and resources to share with the district
- ◆ Align instruction to the Common Core and the SBAC Claims
- ◆ Create models of exemplary instruction that district personnel could visit (e.g., What does a close read look like?)
- ◆ Communicate across departments to effectively implement district initiatives including CCSS, MTSS, PGS, WIDA, and CASEL

CORE TASK IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT 2014: FULLY INTEGRATING CCSS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM YEAR 2 (2013–14)

Tools, Resources, and “Instructional Shifts” to Move Students to College- and Career-Readiness; Building Sustainable Instructional Leadership

Overview:

By design, the CTiP functions as a cross-school PLC, employing the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Using exemplar resources from Student Achievement Partners and the Basal Alignment Project, teachers plan common lessons, reflect on student work, learn and plan again for lessons to be taught between meetings. Integrating new learning grounded in the Instructional Shifts, teachers systematically insert close reading exemplar lessons and BAP lessons into the literacy block, shifting instruction toward CCSS outcomes. The work of the CTiP helps inform and drive the successful implementation of the CCSS in WCSD, offering a replicable model for site-based learning.

Year 2 of the CTiP draws on the learning of the Year 1 teachers, employing the CCSS Evidence Guides to frame learning for site teams. Grounded in the 2012–13 CTiP (Year 1) foundational work with the instructional shifts, quarterly meetings focus on extending the learning to larger school-based teams. Following each quarterly meeting, it is expected that sites devote two to four early-release Wednesdays to professional learning with the full site. Leadership teams reflect on implementation and professional learning (specific to the Evidence Guides) through Edmodo.

Essential Questions:

1. How does continuing to build capacity in individual teachers empower instructional site and district leadership? What tools and processes can be shared across the district?
2. How does using the Basal Alignment Project and close reading exemplars within the teaching and learning framework support teachers in meeting CCSS and SBAC expectations?
3. How do the CCSS Evidence Guides guide site leadership teams in professional learning?

| CTiP 2 MEETINGS | | CONTENT | FOLLOW-UP |
|--|--|---|---|
| Whole school team | Grade bands | | |
| August 27 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 – 3:30 | August 29 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30 | Review close reading, planning, CCSS Evidence Guides, monitoring, and collecting student evidence | Team shares whole staff, and follows up with two to three Wednesdays engaged in P-D-S-A cycle |
| September 24 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 – 3:30 | September 26 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30 | Speaking and Listening, Student Evidence within T/L framework, CCSS Evidence Guides | Team shares whole staff, and follows up with two to three Wednesdays engaged in P-D-S-A cycle |
| January 28 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 – 3:30 | January 30 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30 | Text sets, Resources, CCSS Evidence Guides | Team shares whole staff, and follows up with two to three Wednesdays engaged in P-D-S-A cycle |
| March 4th 8:30 – 11:30 or 12:30 – 3:30 | March 6th 3–6: 8:30 – 11:30 PK–2: 12:30 – 3:30 | Performance Tasks, Reflection, Planning, Celebrations | Engage in planning for following year |

Key Points:

- ◆ Nine to ten teachers from each site: last year's two to three CTiP participants, plus seven to eight new members; meet with two to three other schools in same vertical/ similar socio-economic status
- ◆ Instructional Support follows the class
- ◆ Use Edmodo for class reflection
- ◆ Planning for the core, evidence guides, assessment/data use, text sets
- ◆ Following each meeting: Quarterly staff meeting then the following two to four focused PLCs at the site that support the work

Outcomes:

- ◆ Develop CCSS messaging and resources to share
- ◆ Increase site-based capacity and confidence around CCSS-aligned instruction
- ◆ Capture models of exemplary instruction through video and scheduled observation (e.g., What does a close read look like?)
- ◆ Collaborate for a deeper understanding and effective use of CCSS Evidence Guides and engage in conversation around implications for Framework for Teaching

Endnotes

1. The district provides course guides aligned to the CCSS math standards and separated into instructional units (along with assessment activities) to help teachers decide what and when to teach from their textbooks (*Houghton Mifflin Reading and Everyday Math* in the elementary grades and *Holt Elements of Literature* and *Holt Mathematics* in the secondary grades). The Office of Academics has dramatically re-written the guides, one grade at a time, to ensure that they support the appropriate grade-level standards and sequence of the Common Core. (See Part One: Findings by Implementation Areas of this report for concerns about the use of “spiraling” curricula, such as *Everyday Math*.)
2. Student Achievement Partners, “CCSS Instructional Practice Guides,” updated September 2013, available at <http://www.achievethecore.org/page/434/ccss-instructional-practice-guides>.
3. The majority (60 percent of 1,000) of teachers responding to an evaluation survey reported that the new professional development rollout “help[ed] deepen [their] understanding of the instructional shifts” either “quite a bit” or “a lot.” Another 29 percent reported that the session “help[ed] deepen [their] understanding of the instructional shifts” “a moderate amount.”