

chapter
ONE

Strategic Planning to Strengthen Curriculum

STRATEGIC ACTION PLANNING: HOW TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

I'm not sure who said it first, but one of my favorite quotes is: "You can make things happen, you can watch things happen, or you can ask, 'What just happened?!'" In order to make things happen, you need a plan. More specifically, when it comes to the English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core Standards and work related to the Common Core, your school needs a strategic action plan.

Here is a simple template to facilitate the action-planning process:

Topic/Issue/ Task	What Do We See?	What Do We Want to See?	What Will We Need to Do in Order to See What We Want to See?	What Resources Will We Need? (including human and fiscal)	When Will We Tackle This Task?

Keep in mind that this is a *template* for organizing ideas and information. Don't let the size of the boxes fool you. To answer these questions, you will probably write lots and lots of notes. And although you can complete the template by working in isolation, this tool is actually more useful as a vehicle for collaborative reflection and problem solving. When I've presented it in workshops, participants working in teams are often surprised by how much agreement they find among colleagues whom they previously thought they disagreed with. Working together to identify and solve problems enables



people to understand the perspectives of others, and these efforts will almost invariably fortify the sense of mission and purpose that you and your colleagues share. As with any other work, the more deeply that people are involved in the planning and development, the more personally they become invested in the results. The reverse is also true. For example, when only a few people sit in isolation and write the curriculum, it's not uncommon to see colleagues who were not involved in the process simply ignoring what was produced. Bottom line: Collaboration is essential, and every teacher needs to have a firm grasp of what the Common Core Standards entail and how to design units and lessons that will help students meet them.

To decide what to put in the “Topic/Issue/Task” column, you and your team might start by brainstorming a list of “things we need to work on,” then narrow it down to two or three items. Your longer list might include curriculum writing, lesson planning, standards, assessments, test prep, schedule, or even skills such as reading, writing, or speaking and listening. But try not to spend too much time haggling over which topics to address. As one workshop participant noted wryly after I'd given her group thirty seconds to pick a topic and go with it, countless meetings throughout history have begun and ended with nothing accomplished because people couldn't decide what to focus on. So when it comes to choosing topics, keep it simple. Start with one.¹

Of course I can't tell you what you see (column 2) in your school, but in the case of what you want to see (column 3) as you implement the Common Core Standards, that checklist should probably include the following items (and more):

- Teachers use a common lesson-planning template.
- Teachers are trained in how to write effective RPM (rigorous, purposeful, measurable) objectives and use them in their lesson plans.
- Teachers align objectives with other parts of the lesson plan.
- Teachers receive frequent feedback and support on their lesson plans and instruction.
- Teachers receive coaching on how to unpack the ELA Common Core Standards and design lessons and units based on the Standards.
- Teachers meet regularly for grade-level and vertical articulation in support of curriculum development and other professional development needs.

This list is just a start. And of course it's not enough to make a list. You and your colleagues must identify steps that will enable you to accomplish these aims (column 4), along with key resources (both human and fiscal—column 5) that you will need. For example, if your school does not already use a common lesson-planning template, you



will need to create or select one (see the “Annotated Lesson Plan Template” in Chapter Five for one option), then train staff how to use it effectively. As surprising as it might sound, it’s not safe to assume that every teacher will know how to write an effective lesson plan. You will need to clarify your expectations for each section of the plan and provide models and training (see Chapter Five for more information).

Finally, for every item on your list, it’s vital to schedule sufficient time for the work to get done (column 6). If you’re a school leader, how you allocate time for instruction and professional work reveals what you value. If you give teachers time to write curriculum together, that sends a message. If you don’t, that also sends a message.

HOW TO KEEP TRACK OF THE STANDARDS

In order to design units and lessons aligned with the Common Core, one must be “fluent” in the standards. The Common Core Standards Website² offers the standards in downloadable PDF documents,³ which are fine, but—let’s face it—not totally user-friendly. For this reason, I have developed a more manageable format, putting the literacy-related standards into Excel spreadsheets. When you’re developing a year-long set of unit plans, these grade-by-grade spreadsheets make it easy to track which standards you’ll hit in each unit. I’ve created two separate documents: “K–12 ELA Common Core Standards Tracking Spreadsheet,” to support and monitor literacy instruction in every grade, and “6–12 CCS for Literacy in History, Science, Technical Subjects Tracking Spreadsheet,” for those who teach history, social studies, or technical subjects in grades 6 to 12. Both files can be found on the CD as well as on the TLC “Standards” page.⁴ The following snippet from the fourth-grade ELA spreadsheet, showing the fourth-grade Reading Standards for Literature, offers a brief taste of how the standards are laid out.

Grade 4 Excerpt from ELA Common Core State Standards

	Reading Standards for Literature	CPI Code ^a	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6
	KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS							
1	Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.	RL.4.1						
2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.	RL.4.2						

(continued)



Grade 4 Excerpt from ELA Common Core State Standards

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	Reading Standards for Literature	CPI Code ^a	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6
	KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS							
3	Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).	RL.4.3						
	CRAFT AND STRUCTURE							
4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., <i>Herculean</i>).	RL.4.4						
5	Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.	RL.4.5						
6	Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.	RL.4.6						
	INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS							
7	Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.	RL.4.7						
8	N/A ^b							

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Grade 4 Excerpt from ELA Common Core State Standards

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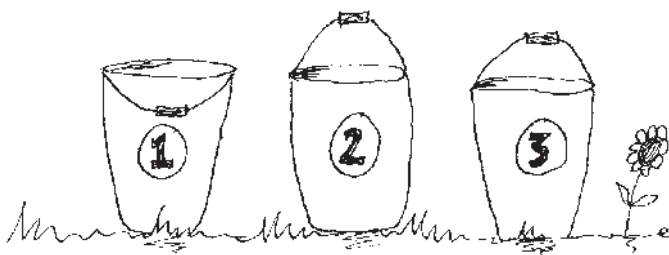
	Reading Standards for Literature	CPI Code ^a	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6
	INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS							
9	Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.	RL.4.9						
	RANGE OF READING AND LEVEL OF TEXT COMPLEXITY							
10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 4–5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.	RL.4.10						

^aCPI stands for “cumulative progress indicator,” otherwise known as a standard.

^bThere is no RL Standard 8 because evaluating claims and use of evidence in a text is not generally relevant in literature.

CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Once you’ve decided to write curriculum units and made a plan for how to make it happen, you will need to pull together some key resources, which fall into several buckets:



Standards and Assessment

As we have just established, you must have ready access to the standards themselves. Probably the most useful and most overlooked resources are the Appendixes for the Common Core Standards:⁵

- Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards and a Glossary of Key Terms



- Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks
- Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing

Find out which assessment approach your state has selected, and study the appropriate Website:

- PARCC (<http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-assessment>)
- SmarterBalanced Assessments (<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/>)

These Websites provide released assessment items and updated information on test specifications; it's a good idea to sign up for e-mail updates. For additional updates or background on the assessments, *Education Week* is a helpful resource.⁶

Sample Unit Maps

For pre-designed unit maps (available online and in print), check out the Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project.⁷ This Website was developed by teachers for teachers, and for a modest fee, it provides six sample ELA unit maps for each grade. The standards in each grade are clustered logically. So instead of covering fifty standards in sequence from 1 to 50, the units are set up so that students read memoirs while writing personal narratives, for example. The units also suggest useful grade-appropriate texts and potential activities and assessments. You certainly don't have to follow these maps, but they're a helpful starting point for thinking through how to organize units. More than a few schools I've worked with have used them as a launching point for overhauling their ELA curriculum units.

Unit Planning Templates

Chapter Four in this book includes blanks and samples of the “Annotated Curriculum Overview Map” and “Annotated Unit Plan Template.”

Online Resources

Every day, new resources emerge to support Common Core-aligned curriculum and instruction. Rather than present a list that will quickly become outdated, I refer you to two pages on The Literacy Cookbook Website where I curate the most current online resources pertaining to Common Core curriculum, instruction, and assessment:

- TLC “Curriculum Resources & Links” page (<http://www.literacycookbook.com/page.php?id=123>)
- TLC “Standards” page (<http://www.literacycookbook.com/page.php?id=138>)





Most links on these pages offer free resources, and you can download any TLC materials you like with your free thirty-day trial membership (see “How to Use The Literacy Cookbook Website” at the end of this book).



DOGGIE BAG

- What is the status of your school’s strategic plan for implementing the Common Core Standards?
- How familiar are *all* of the teachers at your school with the ELA Common Core Standards?
- Which resources and ideas from this chapter will you share with colleagues? Why?

ENDNOTES

1. In *Cage-Busting Leadership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 63–64, author Rick Hess refers to this idea of focusing on one thing as “the Curly rule.”
2. <http://www.corestandards.org/>.
3. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, *English Language Arts Common Core State Standards* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), found at <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/download-the-standards>.
4. See the TLC “Standards” page (<http://www.literacycookbook.com/page.php?id=138>).
5. The Appendixes can be downloaded here: <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/download-the-standards>.
6. An online version of *EdWeek* can be found at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/index.html?intc=thed>.
7. Online editions of the unit maps can be found at <http://www.commoncore.org/maps/> or you can order print editions here: http://commoncore.org/maps/news/print_edition_available.

