



# Address New, Rigorous Core State Standards Through English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Career/Technical Courses

The Common Core State (or other rigorous) Standards (CCSS) being implemented by states across the nation are prompting school leaders and teachers to seek ways to move the standards into classroom instruction, assignments and assessments. Schools wanting to ensure that student work meets grade-level standards are using differentiated instructional strategies to enable students, particularly challenged students, to meet the new standards.

## Identify Strategies to Move New Core State Standards Into Classroom Instruction, Assignments and Assessments



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### Analyzing and Aligning the English/Language Arts Curriculum in Grades Nine Through 12

**T**he English/language arts (ELA) curriculum is not a stand-alone tiered curriculum for grades nine through 12,” said **Michael Gonzales**, former assistant principal at **Spring Hill High School** (SHHS) in Columbia, Tennessee, and now principal of Elkton Elementary School in Elkton, Tennessee. “It is a scaffold curriculum that is integrated across grade levels. Understanding grade-level integration is the first step in improving ELA instruction.”

SHHS leaders and teachers began looking at how to increase student achievement in ELA by performing a vertical analysis of Tennessee’s ELA standards across grade levels and by aligning CCSS grade expectations. The analysis showed that 87 percent of Course Level Expectations (CLEs), 88 percent of Checks for Understanding (CFUs) and 61 percent

of Student Performance Indicators were common across grades nine through 12. “Basically, the same standards are being taught at each grade level,” Gonzales said.

Next, the SHHS leaders asked: Which standards are most important for students to learn and to know? “This is a critical question, since there are so many standards in the curriculum,” Gonzales said.

By aligning each end-of-course practice exam question to a standard, the SHHS group compiled a frequency distribution that reflected standards that occurred most often. The ELA curriculum contains eight standards: language, literacy, logic, writing, research, communications, information text and media. “We found that four standards —

**SREB**

592 10th Street, N.W.  
Atlanta, GA 30318  
(404) 875-9211  
www.sreb.org

language, literacy, logic and writing — were being stressed more than the other standards,” Gonzales said. **Too little emphasis was given to reading informational texts, to research topics, and to students communicating their understanding orally and in writing in English and other classes.**

### *Higher Expectations*

Higher student expectations can be achieved now that each grade level understands what is being taught and built upon in the previous grade level. Knowing which standards are the most critical allows SHHS to fine-tune curriculum pacing guides.

Also, more time is allotted to the higher-priority ELA standards. The data also reflected that communication standards could be taught in a speech class, leaving more time to focus on higher-priority standards such as analyzing and reading informational texts in ELA classes.

“This approach focuses on the critical skills students need to master. We need to allocate more time to those critical skills to improve student achievement, not only in English but in other classes,” Gonzales said.

**Michael Gonzales**  
msgonzales@giles.k12.tn.us

## Reading for Meaning: Addressing Higher Expectations of the Common Core State Standards

**T**he higher expectations of the new, rigorous state core standards are causing students to do more than answer questions. Students need to read for meaning, restate important ideas, draw conclusions and defend their conclusions with evidence.

“Students need to make meaning out of what they are reading by discovering what is deeply important to them and developing the tools to dig into what interests them,” said **Tom Dewing**, senior consultant for **Silver Strong and Associates** in Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey.

“This strategy is based on research showing that proficient readers apply specific thinking skills in three distinct phases,” Dewing said. The phases are presented in the teacher guide, *Reading for Meaning: How to Build Students’ Comprehension, Reasoning, and Problem-Solving Skills*, by Harvey Silver, Susan Morris and Victor Klein.

**Phase 1:** Use simple statements to preview and predict **before reading**. Set the purpose of reading, activate prior knowledge and make predictions.

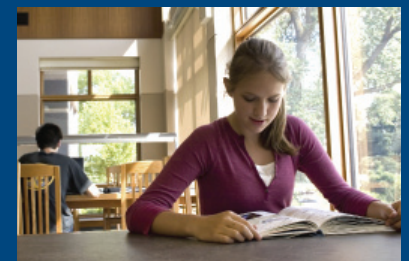
**Phase 2:** Actively search for relevant evidence **during reading**. Do sample reading; visualize where the text is going; hypothesize, confirm or change predictions; and monitor comprehensions.

**Phase 3:** Reflect on and synthesize learning and thinking **after reading**. Recall and retell, evaluate, discuss, reread, apply new knowledge in some way and become inspired to read more in the future.

An anticipation guide is a tool used by teachers to prepare students to read. It asks them to react to a series of statements related to the content. Anticipation guides help students connect what they already know with what they are about to learn; they raise interest in the topic and involve students in a discussion after the reading is completed. “The technique also works well in conjunction with lectures, videos or demonstrations,” Dewing said. Using an anticipation guide involves several steps:

1. The teacher identifies major concepts in a text or other information source.
2. He or she develops three to five statements and develops an anticipation guide.
3. Students respond to the statements one at a time.
4. The teacher develops a class tally for each statement and discusses students’ opinions.
5. Students read the text and collect information to support or refute the statements.
6. Students compare their original responses with their post-reading understanding of the text.
7. Students reflect on the process.

“When a learning episode lacks focus, students may fail to take away anything meaningful from the classroom and will have a hard time remembering or applying what they have learned,” Dewing said. “Reading tools help students focus on learning so that they can internalize and use what they have learned and find value and meaning in their learning. This is what the new Common Core State Standards are calling for in teaching and learning.”



**“When a learning episode lacks focus, students may fail to take away anything meaningful from the classroom and will have a hard time remembering or applying what they have learned.”**

**Tom Dewing**  
Silver Strong and Associates

**Tom Dewing**  
rthomasdewing@gmail.com

## Literacy Framework Transforms New, Rigorous Core State Standards Into Everyday Practice in Career/Technical Instruction

**M**ore than 40 states have accepted the new CCSS. As a result, classroom teachers and support staff are pondering how to develop instructional materials aligned to the literacy standards and assessments to measure student progress. The dilemma is especially troublesome for career/technical (CT) educators, who may have come to the classroom from industry rather than through university preparation.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is working with other partners on the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) to develop materials for bringing the CCSS to classrooms across the curriculum, including CT courses.

**LDC uses a common literacy framework that helps teachers embed quality literacy tasks and instruction into their course work. The framework combines reading and writing with content in any course or curriculum.**

**Eleanor Dougherty** of **EDThink LLC** in Tucson, Arizona, and **Marilyn Crawford** of **TimeWise Schools** in Paducah, Kentucky, are members of the LDC design team that developed the strategy. “If students don’t practice literacy over and over, they cannot master the skills they are expected to learn,” Dougherty said. LDC is designed to support teachers in planning and engaging students in working experiences.

The CCSS include standards for English/language arts, history, science and technology in a document that specifies each area by grade level, six through 12. Standards that are relevant to career/technical teachers are the Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in science and technical subjects K-12 and Common Core Writing Standards for Literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects K-12. LDC has designed 29 task templates aligned to the CCSS anchor standards.

“Teachers can use the task templates to develop formative assignments, or they can use the LDC instructional ladder to create their own lesson plans that LDC calls modules,” Crawford said. “Many of the tasks include ‘levels’ or additional demands to give students the opportunity to work on increasingly demanding assignments.”

For example, one standard for literacy in science and technical subjects in high school is “Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different formats or media (e.g., quantitative data, video, multimedia) to address a question or solve a problem.” Teachers in English/language arts, history, science or technology could use the following LDC template — using the question version — to create a relevant task aligned to this standard:

**Level 1:** [Insert question.] After reading \_\_\_\_\_ (informational texts) on \_\_\_\_\_ (content), write (an essay or substitute) \_\_\_\_\_ that argues your position on \_\_\_\_\_ (content). Support your position with evidence from your research.

**Level 2:** Be sure to acknowledge competing views \_\_\_\_\_ (content).

**Level 3:** Give examples from past or current events or issues to illustrate, clarify and support your position.

A heating and air conditioning teacher might use this template to develop a reading and writing task about HVAC technology:

*Level 1: What is the best heating and air conditioning system for your client’s home? After reading your textbook, consumer reviews and technical documents on a variety of heating and air conditioning units, write a letter to your client that argues your position on the best system for his or her new home. Support your position with evidence from your research.*

*Level 2: Be sure to acknowledge competing views on the advantages and disadvantages of each system.*

The template collection also includes templates for writing informational/explanatory compositions. Here is an example of the “after researching...” version of the templates:

*After researching \_\_\_\_\_ (informational texts) on \_\_\_\_\_ (content), write \_\_\_\_\_ (a report or a substitute) to describe \_\_\_\_\_ (content). Support your discussion with evidence from your research.*

A science or technology teacher might use the template to construct a writing assignment.

*After researching primary and secondary documents on “green” technology, write a presentation to describe the five most significant “green” issues facing the automotive industry. Support your discussion with evidence from your research.*

“Templates intentionally connect reading and writing to ensure that course content is relevant across the CT curriculum,” Dougherty said. “LDC provides options and instructional strategies for teachers who want guidance on managing the reading and writing processes. This feature is helpful for CT teachers because texts and informational materials usually are presented at advanced Lexile levels with advanced vocabulary and content.”

LDC has produced a set of rubrics to go along with the initial LDC task bank. The rubrics are designed to help teachers assess students’ writing in response to completed LDC prompts.

SREB will work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the LDC team to develop a comprehensive state-scale strategy to help teachers deeply embed the state standards. The strategy will call for the development of school-based literacy team facilitators in four content areas: English/language arts, social studies, science and electives (CT). The facilitators will work to raise the capacity of content teachers to adopt LDC tasks and modules and will facilitate additional support from state and district trainers, the support of school principals, and a hybrid system of professional development and “virtual” support.

**Frank Duffin**  
frank.duffin@sreb.org

## Questions for Life: Preparing Students for Critical Thinking

**Q**uestions for Life (QFL) is a framework using 11 questioning strategies to improve students’ critical thinking. Teachers can use QFL in the classroom, while leaders can use the method to facilitate coaching and professional development.



“It is crucial for teachers to ask questions that trigger and facilitate students to think. It’s even more important for students to learn how to ask questions that drive their own learning.”

**Steve Barkley**  
Performance Learning Systems

**Steve Barkley**, consultant for **Performance Learning Systems**, said the 11 questioning protocols, along with cues to drive the questions, are grouped into three categories:

**Gathering Information** (Perception, Induction, Analysis and Same/Different) — These questions are intended to help students notice ideas and facts and decide whether or how they “fit” with what the student already knows or has experienced. The questions guide the student’s thinking to look for commonalities or patterns and to help him or her make decisions and draw conclusions about how the new information is the same or different.

**Working With Information** (Insight, Appraisal, Summary, Evaluation) — Information is connected to what someone knows and then is weighed and evaluated.

**Taking Action** (Idea, Prediction, Action) — Do something with the information: Set a goal, predict a likely outcome, or make a judgment.

“It is crucial for teachers to ask questions that trigger and facilitate students to think,” Barkley said. “It’s even more important for students to learn how to ask questions that drive their own learning.”

### *High School Lesson: Product Design*

Barkley gave an example of how the QFL protocol can be implemented in a classroom. A unit on consensus decision making for a high school course on interpersonal communications could focus on product design.

- **Students choose and analyze an advertisement.** Students sort through a variety of magazines and choose the ads that most grab their attention. Then they reflect and answer perception questions before they organize into groups.
  - What elements did you *notice* first in the ad?
  - What did you *see* in the ad after you examined it more carefully?
  - What *feelings* did the ad invoke in you?

Working in groups, students share their chosen ads and their perceptions about the ads by using QFL thinking skills.

- They *compare* and *contrast* their chosen ads. (Same/Different)
  - They make a *list* of various elements in their ads. (Analysis)
  - They make *generalizations* about the *common elements* of effective ads. (Induction)
- **Students create a new product.** Each group creates an imaginary product for their age group from a nontoxic, low-cost gel and then designs ads to market the product. (Action) They answer questions and respond to statements from QFL.
    - Brainstorm *options* for potential product ideas. (Idea) Each group generates 10 to 15 ideas.
    - Make *connections* to students your age. (Insight)
    - *Prioritize* the list to focus on the best ideas. (Appraisal)
    - *Predict* the appeal of your ideas. (Prediction)
    - *Compare* and *contrast* the various ideas. (Same/Different)
    - Share *opinions* regarding the various ideas. (Evaluation)
    - *Weigh* ideas and select what the group sees as its *best* idea. (Appraisal)
  - **Students design the new product.**
    - Brainstorm *ideas* for potential features of the product. (Idea)
    - Make *connections* to other students in your age group. (Insight)
    - *List* components to include in the new product. (Analysis)
    - *Predict* the outcome of using the various design components. (Prediction)
    - *Compare* and *contrast* the various ideas. (Same/Different)
    - Share *opinions* regarding the various ideas. (Evaluation)
    - Select the *best* elements for the new product. (Appraisal)
    - *Design* the new product. (Action)
  - **Students design an advertisement for the new product.**
    - Brainstorm *ideas* for potential elements of an advertisement promoting the new product. (Idea)
    - Make *connections* to your age group and to other ads studied. (Insight)
    - *List* components you want in the ad. (Analysis)
    - *Predict* the outcome of using the various ad components. (Prediction)
    - *Compare* and *contrast* the ad ideas. (Same/Different)
    - Share *opinions* regarding the various ideas. (Evaluation)
    - Select the *best* elements for the ad. (Appraisal)
    - *Design* the ad. (Action)

“In this unit, the Questions for Life process is repeated several times as students select an idea, design the product and design the advertisement,” Barkley said. “Each time students go through the process, they practice well-thought-out, informed decision making.”

## Teaching Down-to-Earth Reading for Students in the Middle Grades

**M**ost students learn to read words, but many don't understand what the words mean.

Author, speaker and former teacher **Judith Holbrook** of Peachtree City, Georgia, has developed a systematic, organized approach to reading comprehension known as Daily Reading Practice. Students focus on one reading passage per week with emphasis on a different set of reading skills each day.

"If we don't revisit knowledge again and again, it goes into short-term memory and we forget," Holbrook said. "For students to apply what they learn, they need to know the skills on a subconscious level."

Teachers using Daily Reading Practice assign a new reading selection weekly. One example for seventh-graders is a short autobiography of George Pullman, famous for building railroad cars and a company town near Chicago where his workers lived.

Each day, students quickly review the reading assignment and focus on skills that are different and more difficult throughout the week:

**Monday** — Subject, title, genre, reader's purpose and author's purpose

**Tuesday** — Homophones, antonyms, synonyms, roots, affixes, etc.

**Wednesday** — Inferences, idioms, problems, points of view, types of writing, true/false, fact/opinion and mood

**Thursday** — Main idea, skimming, predicting, topic sentences, details and graphic organizers

**Friday** — Students make a list of key words and write a summary of the text.

"By Friday, even struggling readers can feel successful with reading and understanding the passage," Holbrook said. "The passages get harder as the year goes by, preparing students to handle passages on standardized tests and to understand written materials in other courses they are taking."

The book *Daily Reading Practice* and a new interactive version are available at [www.dgpublishing.com](http://www.dgpublishing.com).

**Judith Holbrook**  
[judithholbrookdgp@gmail.com](mailto:judithholbrookdgp@gmail.com)

## Evaluate Student Work to Ensure It Meets Grade-Level Standards

### Standards-Based Grading: One High School's Experiences in Giving Feedback on Learning

**P**incipal **Richard Callahan** and the leadership focus team at **Spring Hill High School** (SHHS) in Columbia, Tennessee, attended a session on standards-based grading at the *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in summer 2010. As a result, Callahan and the team decided to look at the relationship between SHHS students' grade point averages (GPAs) and their performance on the ACT.

SHHS enrolls 870 students, of which 74 percent are white, 18 percent are black, 7 percent are Hispanic, and 1 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. One-third of students are economically disadvantaged, while 16 percent have disabilities. SHHS has been a member of the *HSTW* school improvement initiative since the 2009-2010 school year.

#### *Grades Did Not Reflect Mastery*

**"A scatter plot graph prepared by a member of the leadership team showed that there was not always a strong correlation between a student's grades and his or her performance on the ACT,"** Callahan said. "Many students with high GPAs were scoring below the ACT college- and career-readiness benchmarks. Conversely, some unmotivated students scored well on the ACT but had low GPAs."

A review of grade books revealed that teachers were working hard and assigning many grades per grading period, yet many grades did not necessarily reflect a student's mastery of state standards. **Instead, many grades showed whether students completed homework or classwork assignments.**

At the beginning of 2010-2011, Callahan and the leadership team presented information on standards-based grading to the faculty and set expectations for teachers to use the new



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**Richard Callahan**  
Spring Hill High School

method. “Standards-based grading provides feedback to students on the degree to which they are meeting standards, which may be delineated as benchmarks, grade-level expectations or performance indicators,” Callahan said. “A standards-based grade communicates information to help students assess their own progress and supports further learning.”

Standards-based grading:

- provides clear, accurate feedback on what students know and can do.
- places a consistent focus on learning rather than on compliance with individual teachers’ expectations.
- communicates readiness for the next level.
- promotes a better match between grades and standardized or state assessment results.

### *Converting to Standards-Based Grading*

“Teachers agreed to use tests, projects and performances such as essays, research papers, presentations and lab experiments to determine a standards-based grade,” Callahan said. “Other learning factors such as homework completion, class participation, attendance, behavior, effort and timeliness would be reported separately from the standards-based grade.”

Some departments found it easier than others to convert to standards-based grading.

- The **mathematics** department “jumped in head first,” according to **Pauline Boylin**, who teaches Algebra I. Countywide state standards had been aligned within units of study. Exams were divided into standards or skills necessary to meet the standards, and points were assigned to each standard skill. Students must pass standards within units to pass the course. Teachers remediate and retest until students master the standard. Students are required to attend remediation sessions provided during the school day, where they redo only the exam sections they failed. Math teachers no longer grade homework.
- When standards-based grading was introduced, **science** teachers felt overwhelmed but realized that some grades were inflated when they analyzed the inconsistencies between grades and scores on achievement exams. Biology teacher **Lesha Napier** said the teachers set to work to revamp their teaching styles, including more instructional variety, more labs, vocabulary development and remediation strategies.
- **English/language arts** teachers struggled more than some other content teachers, due to the fact that Tennessee has a large number of course level expectations, checks for understanding and state performance indicators for English/language arts. The teachers reported initial difficulty in “chunking” or grouping standards.

Teachers enter grades in pencil and circle them in their grade books. The grades are posted online and change continually as students retake and pass portions of tests. Grades remain in pencil until all standards are met. Tests are marked with a T and quizzes with a Q. Grades drop at first but improve as students retake sections of the tests.

Assistant Principal **Christine Potts** recommends educating parents about standards-based grading to minimize confusion while changes are taking place. “In hindsight, we could have communicated better with parents in the beginning,” Potts said.

### *In-School Remediation Session*

Raider Time is the school’s 30-minute remediation session during which students receive tutoring, complete make-up work, retake tests, recover credit, serve detention or participate in other activities related to student learning. **Phillip Wright**, former assistant principal at SHHS and now principal at Spring Hill Middle School (SHMS), helped set up Raider Time and a similar intervention program at SHMS.

### *Overall Success*

“Overall, standards-based grading was successful in its first year at Spring Hill,” Callahan said.

Benefits were especially noticeable for students in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Teachers began using the inclusion model with special education students in regular English/language arts and mathematics classes. The school has no separate grade scale for IEP students. “The problems assigned or the directions given may be different or there may be other modifications according to the IEPs, but the concepts taught are the same for all students,” Potts said. “Teachers discovered improvements in IEP meetings and IEP development because specific deficiencies could now be pinpointed.”

After the first year of standards-based grading, SHHS data showed a drop in average grades. The reason was that grades previously had been inflated with homework, notebook work and extra credit. Average state test scores, however, were higher in 2011 than in 2010, and graduation rates have continued to improve. “We found that the academically weaker students benefitted the most from standards-based grading,” Callahan said.

**Richard Callahan**  
callahanr@k12tn.net

**Phillip Wright**  
pwright@k12tn.net

## Student, Know Thyself: Understanding Self-Assessment in Writing and in Life

Teachers at **Moore Norman Technology Center** in Norman, Oklahoma, believe in giving students a voice through implementation of real-world writing that incorporates the concept of constructive self-assessment.

**Bonner Slayton**, literacy specialist, and **Meleah Meadows**, sonography instructor, recommend a number of strategies to help students self-assess:

- **Think Aloud** asks students to say out loud what they are thinking when they read. It is useful for teaching students how to access prior knowledge before reading a new passage or to revise a paper for a specific audience.
- **Verbal Self-Assessments** allow students to demonstrate knowledge and understandings verbally.
- **Written Self-Assessments** given every four weeks allow students to express what they liked about the text and what they need to improve.
- **Rubrics** let students grade their own work before a teacher grades it.
- **Self-Examination** asks students whether they would hire themselves based on their evaluations. The teacher reviews the responses with each student.
- **Real-World Writing** is based on information from a career pathway such as Health Occupations. For example, sonography students conduct research on abnormal cases observed at their clinical sites. This process allows them to learn more about specific pathologies and how patient care could be improved through other tests, modified protocols and better communication. The method builds students' critical thinking skills, improves communication skills and helps prepare students to be better sonographers.

- **Steps in the Writing Process** should guide students while the teacher inspects each step. The steps are pre-writing, writing, revision, editing and publishing.

“Verbal self-assessment is just as important as written self-assessment,” Meadows said. “It allows the student and the instructor to know the student’s knowledge level immediately and makes it possible for the instructor to provide immediate support if the student thinks he or she is not at the level he or she should be at the time.”

Slayton said, “I have seen a dramatic increase in students completing writing assignments since I started breaking down and teaching the process. Every semester, I receive feedback from students who say the process helped them greatly in expressing themselves orally and in writing.

“Teachers say that having students to self-reflect on their own work, coupled with individual conferences, has resulted in positive changes in the classroom and higher student performance,” Slayton continued.

Although the results to date have been qualitative, the school has begun keeping a quantitative record of success for the 2011-2012 school year.

**Bonner Slayton**

[bonner.slayton@mntc.edu](mailto:bonner.slayton@mntc.edu)

**Meleah Meadows**

[meleah.meadows@mntc.edu](mailto:meleah.meadows@mntc.edu)

## Middle Grades Teachers Collaborate to Improve Teaching and Learning

After joining *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* in 2010, leaders and teachers at **East Hoke Middle School** and **West Hoke Middle School** in Raeford, North Carolina, identified the need to enhance the rigor of assignments and assessments in raising student achievement.

One technique that has made a big difference in promoting teacher collaboration at both schools is the use of Tuning Protocols for teachers to examine assignments and student work and receive feedback from peers. During common planning time, teachers participated in professional development mini-sessions on how to develop assignments and assessments at the Proficient and Advanced levels. The Tuning Protocol process has six major steps:

1. **Presenting the Work** (five to 10 minutes) — A teacher (or a team of teachers) gives a brief but thorough description of student work and the content of the work (an assignment or a rubric). The presenter provides a focus question that is a request for feedback. One example of such a question is, “How well is the unit aligned to the proficiency level of the standard?” Another is, “What modifications can be made to the unit to increase the level of rigor?”

2. **Clarifying Questions** (two to three minutes) — Participants ask brief questions to obtain information before giving feedback. They may ask, “How long does this unit take?” or “How many assessments were included?”
3. **Reflection Time** (one minute) — Participants write their input.
4. **Warm Feedback** (five minutes) — Participants give input on strengths, features and highlights of the work while the presenter listens and takes notes.
5. **Cool Feedback** (five minutes) — Participants share feedback; the presenter listens and takes notes. The emphasis is on how to improve, change or refocus the work.
6. **Presenter’s Response** (three minutes) — The presenter responds to the feedback; the participants are silent.

In a three- to five-minute debriefing, the Tuning Protocol facilitator leads a critique of the experience — What was helpful? What was not useful? What was learned? What might be done differently or more thoroughly in the future?

Principals **Erica Fortenberry** of East Hoke and **Mary McLeod** of West Hoke said their schools have enthusiastically embraced the Tuning Protocol to share teacher assignments and student work and receive structured feedback on how to raise student achievement.

Both schools saw increases in the percentages of students scoring at the Proficient level on end-of-grade exams from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011. The increases at East Hoke were from 78 percent to 79 percent in reading in grade six, from 70 percent to 74 percent in reading and from 84 percent to 89 percent in mathematics in grade seven, and from 82 percent to 91 percent in math in grade eight.

The percentages of students achieving the Proficient level on end-of-grade exams at West Hoke between 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 rose from 47 percent to 57 percent in reading and from 78 percent to 82 percent in math for seventh-graders and from 72 percent to 84 percent in math for eighth-graders.



**Erica Fortenberry**  
efortenberry@hcs.k12.nc.us

**Mary McLeod**  
mmcleod@hcs.k12.nc.us

## Navigating Through Change: Moving Forward With Standards-Based Alignment

**B**everidge Magnet School of Global Studies and the Arts (BMS) in Omaha, Nebraska, serves some 800 students in grades seven and eight. The student population is 52 percent minority, and nearly 60 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

In 2009, Omaha Public Schools (OPS) began the process of implementing standards-based education and standards-based grading practices. BMS joined in the process of intensive professional development for administrators and teachers and constant communication with students and parents.

“Research on best practices led the Omaha school system to choose the standards-based approach,” Principal **David Lavender** said. “Standards-based instruction and assessment are guided by learning goals and rubrics that describe the levels of desired student performance. The guidelines are written so that students know exactly what is expected. Achievement is based on what the student knows and can do.”

### Major Shift

The use of “trend scores” is a major shift for teachers, students and parents. Trend scores measure what a student knows at the end of a unit. Students are not penalized for lower grades earned earlier in the course. “Trend scores tend to be higher than averaged scores,” Lavender said.

Grades in standards-based education reflect classroom achievement on standards. Assessments such as exams, projects, journals, labs, written papers and oral reports keep the teacher and the student informed of progress.

Grading scale scores (0 to 5) have replaced percentage scores on progress reports, assignments and exams. The top score is 5, while a 0 indicates that no work was turned in. Students in grades five through 12 will continue to have scale scores translated to a final letter grade on the progress report and the report card (GPA calculations remain the same):

A = 4.01 to 5.00	D = 1.01 to 2.00
B = 3.01 to 4.00	F = 0.00 to 1.00
C = 2.01 to 3.00	

### Getting Ready for Change

“Our leaders and teachers spent considerable time processing how the change would affect the grading scale,” Lavender said. “We read the book *Truth in Grading*, reviewed data and engaged in dialogue to reach agreement on the percentages that practice, homework, and formative and summative assessments would play in a grade.”

BMS used a number of professional development and communication approaches to prepare teachers, students and parents for standards-based teaching and grading.

These strategies included:

- professional development, including reading and discussing the book *How to Grade for Learning: Linking Grades to Standards* by Ken O'Connor and examining case studies.
- writing lesson plans.
- conducting a new student orientation.
- hosting an open house to show a PowerPoint presentation created by the school district.
- holding parent-teacher conferences to discuss “talking points” about the new teaching and grading process, sending information via a newsletter and a website.

- making presentations at PTSA meetings.
- encouraging teachers to explain the process to students.

Lavender provided key points to successful implementation of standards-based grading practices:

- Teachers need to provide clear, descriptive feedback to students and parents.
- Students need strong support and encouragement to make the effort to succeed.
- The instruction should include a balance of regular practice with formative and summative assessments.

**David Lavender**  
david.lavender@ops.org

## Use Differentiated Instruction to Enable All Students to Meet Grade-Level Standards

### “There’s an App for That”: Using Technology to Differentiate Instruction

“There’s an app for that” has become a catch phrase that is grounded in truth. Teachers have access to a variety of apps as they seek to differentiate instruction for today’s technology-driven students.

**Jeannie Nicholson**, assistant principal, and **Leslie Trail**, high school English teacher, at **Eagleville School** in Eagleville, Tennessee, call on a variety of apps for teacher and student productivity. They have also found that a single iPad can be used in class for whole-group, small-group or individual instruction. Several apps, such as DropBox and DocsToGo, are useful for managing information and files.

Trail pairs an iPad with a document camera to provide whole-group instruction or class access to resources. For current events, she uses free apps from a variety of news sources, such as NBC and *USA Today*. Students gather information by using several note-taking and archiving apps, such as Evernote, Soundnote and Penultimate.

“I frequently use the iPad as a planning tool and another app to access the Common Core State Standards,” Trail said. She uses the Planbook app to write lesson plans that can be e-mailed or shared.

“Apps exist for almost all content areas at all levels of instruction,” Nicholson said. Although many apps are free, some require expenditures of funds. Nicholson pointed out that apps can be financed through local grants or by applying to DonorsChoose.

- For information on the Teacher section of the iTunes Store, see <http://tjhouston.com/2011/07/apple-opens-a-teachers-section-on-itunes-appstore/>.
- A list of apps (categorized by content area) is available at <http://appsineducation.blogspot.com>.
- Kathy Schrock’s online Guide for Educators contains a list of apps that support various levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. See <http://kathyschrock.net/ipadblooms/>.
- The Texas Computer Education Association has compiled a spreadsheet of useful apps (categorized by grade level and content area). Go to <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?authkey=COOnNtvwO&key=0AvFbfb1mWoNwdGlweWtkZkFRS1gzUDMtTUtoTEw0MkE&hl=en&authkey=COOnNtvwO#gid=0>.

“Technology is one way to make the real world come to life for students,” Trail said. “This approach will increase student engagement and help students to be better prepared for life after the classroom.”



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**Leslie Trail**  
Eagleville School

**Jeannie Nicholson**  
nicholsonj@rcschools.net

**Leslie Trail**  
trail@rcschools.net

## Advancing Student Achievement in a Credit Recovery Academy

The Advance Program for Credit Recovery is an academy for repeating ninth-graders and some 10th-graders at **Queens Vocational and Technical High School** (QVTHS) in Long Island City, New York. The program has increased the percentage of students earning 10 or more credits in grades nine and 10 by more than 20 percentage points since 2007.

QVTHS enrolls a diverse population of 1,200 students from the five New York City boroughs. The student population is 70 percent Hispanic, 11 percent white, 10 percent black and 9 percent Asian. More than 75 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, while approximately 7 percent of students are English-language learners.

In 2004-2005, QVTHS joined a cohort of New York City schools that received U.S. Department of Education grants to organize into small learning communities, also known as academies. QVTHS has five academies — a ninth-grade academy, three career-themed academies and the Advance Program for Credit Recovery for at-risk students. The school selected *HSTW* to provide services for implementing the academy concept.

### Project-Based Learning

“We chose a project-based learning strategy that embraces differentiated learning, team teaching and multi-standards/multi-content lessons,” Advance Coordinator **Matthew Hammond** said.

Recognizing that all students need to be engaged and challenged with real-life projects and assignments, Advance Program leaders and teachers plan lessons that make sense and appeal to students.

- Students use a New York City subway map to develop a survival plan in the event of a “zombie attack.” The final product involves English/language arts, math, science and social studies standards.
- Using intriguing photos in a PowerPoint format, a math teacher tells a story and then uses mnemonics, a learning technique that aids memory, to relate the story to a geometry lesson.
- Students integrate literacy, math, science and geography standards to investigate the purity of bottled water in the city.

The program uses technology to connect with students and celebrates student success. “We have found that acknowledging perfect attendance for one week provides positive motivation and increases students’ attendance rates,” Advance Director **Bethann Kramer** said.

The graduation rate at QVTHS grew from 58 percent in 2007 to 73 percent in 2010. The goal is at least 80 percent.

*Queens Vocational and Technical High School is profiled in an HSTW case study available on the SREB website at [www.sreb.org/page/1424/HSTW\\_Publications](http://www.sreb.org/page/1424/HSTW_Publications).*

**Matthew Hammond**  
[mhammond2@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:mhammond2@schools.nyc.gov)

## Differentiated Instruction Makes a Difference: New Ways to Teach Social Studies

How do you engage seventh-graders in remembering the many dates and facts in social studies? **Thomas Thompson** of **Chastang Middle School** in Mobile, Alabama, uses 3-D models and other artwork to allow students to “construct their own learning.”

A self-described doodler and sci-fi/monster movie fan, this middle grades teacher has designed hundreds of costumes and masks and has built scale models of buildings and other structures to make social studies more meaningful for students, regardless of their previous achievement.

To prepare to teach a unit on U.S. government, Thompson went online at Google Images to find representations of the three branches of government. Using an image of the U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington, DC, he built a three-foot model and asked students to construct their own one-foot replicas.

“Students created individual models and wrote important facts about each branch of government on the columns of the buildings,” Thompson said. “This project engaged students in collaborative problem solving and required them to apply mathematical reasoning to determine the correct scale of the building.”

## *Lively Learning*

The social studies classroom is a lively place when students work together. “Every student has an opportunity to shine, whether through academic skills, artistic talent or construction know-how,” Thompson said.

Research shows that benefits from hands-on activities include increased motivation to learn, increased learning, more enjoyable experiences in learning, better independent thinking and decision making, increased perception and more creativity. Students in activity-based programs have been shown to exhibit better communication and reading skills.

“During one school year, I had a class with several students who were considered to be very low performers,” Thompson said.

**“These students usually were taken out of core classes and received individual instruction in small groups. But they were outstanding in my classroom. They were among the first to finish projects and helped other students with their work.** Some of these students, who had never passed an end-of-quarter exam in social studies, made 70 percent to 96 percent on my exam.”

Last year, one of Thompson’s students had trouble relating to other students and teachers; as a result, he often got into trouble. The decision was made to remove him from regular classes and place him in a small-group environment all day. “When the student heard this, he said, ‘Please don’t take me out of Mr. Thompson’s class.’ This type of situation says loud and clear that the hands-on instruction in my classes is working,” Thompson said.

**Thomas Thompson**  
tthompson3@mcps.com

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This newsletter of “best practices” in implementing the *High Schools That Work (HSTW)*, *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* and *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* school improvement models is based on presentations at the 25th Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, in summer 2011.

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