

## ADDRESSING THE DEMANDS OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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**The K-12** student population in many states across the United States is becoming increasingly diverse. New York has the fourth highest number of English language learners (ELLs) across all states, behind California, Florida, and Texas (Migration Policy Institute, 2013). Therefore, all teachers in the state need to be prepared to work with ELLs. Yet, this student population is consistently ignored when content standards are conceptualized, and often treated like an afterthought. In particular, this appears to be the case with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts, Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects, and Mathematics, which set high expectations for the learning of all students, including ELLs.

The CCSS were developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), in response to a perceived need by members of these associations for a set of consistent learning goals that would be common for all students across all states. These members claim that schools have gradually lowered standards for grade-level expectations over the last half-century (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). The NGA and CCSSO identified the need to increase the difficulty of what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level in order to prepare students to be college and career ready.

The CCSS are divided into two sets: English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. These standards were developed for a general student population and did not take into consideration the demands they would present for specific populations, including special education students and ELLs. Though these standards are meant to serve as the target for student performance skills at each grade level and have their roots in the Standards movement in the United States, they provide little guidance for teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms. The only direction given is a two-page document entitled *Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b), which provides only very general information about ELLs and their needs—but no guidance for teachers in how to adapt and use the CCSS with ELLs, and nothing about how to fulfill the demands and expectations of the standards with this student population. This dedicated, specially themed issue considers such need in the context of the state of New York. Research on the CCSS is just beginning, especially related to ELLs (see de Oliveira, 2014–2016; Understanding Language Initiative, 2011).

The purpose of this issue is to offer ways to meet the demands placed by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with English Language Learners (ELLs). The CCSS are a “hot topic” as states across the United States continue implementation of these standards. The issue features research-oriented, practical articles that could be used by teachers in their instruction of ELLs. The articles and reports all focus

explicitly on the CCSS, from studies on how implementation has taken place to ideas, strategies, and ways to collaborate to incorporate the CCSS into classroom teaching. We are pleased to present it as an essential contribution to the field.

The issue begins with two research studies. In "Teaching Content Standards to English Language Learners: Elementary Science Teachers' Use of Language Development and Home Language Strategies," Lorena Llosa, Christopher D. Van Booven, and Okhee Lee report on a study that investigated the extent to which elementary science teachers report using language development and home language strategies when they teach science to all students, especially ELLs. They found evidence that teachers may be particularly sensitive to the needs of ELLs, as teachers with ELLs and former ELLs in their classroom reported more frequent use of these strategies. They also found that many science teachers with ELLs and former ELLs in their classrooms reported incorporating their students' home language in their teaching.

The second study is presented in "Developing Academic Literacy for English Language Learners Through Effective Instruction Within CCSS Implementation," in which Chiu-Yin Wong, Michele Armento, and Ashley Staggard examine how high-school-level ELLs' academic writing skills developed through content instruction, particularly using a three-step approach and a systemic functional linguistics framework. They report that the participants' writing skills progressed from the first to final essays in general, and showed noticeable improvement in essay two when direct instruction was implemented.

The next two articles are more practical in nature. In "Metacognition in the Common Core State Standards: Underlying (Yet Neglected) Focus?," Kendon Kurzer describes the potential role metacognition may play in helping students meet the increased cognitive demands required by the CCSS. He provides specific strategies/approaches for incorporating metacognition in the classroom, based on TESOL and educational research, that may help students with the CCSS demands.

Patricia Velasco, in "The Role of Background Knowledge in the Implementation of Standard 10 for Reading in NYSED Bilingual Common Core Progressions," describes the role that background knowledge plays in reading comprehension, specifically domain-specific or specialized background knowledge that can act as a facilitator for reading complex texts. She analyzes the principles that underlie Standard 10 for reading, as presented in the CCSS and the BCCP, and provides suggestions on how bilingual and ESL specialists can implement the BCCP Standard 10.

The issue concludes with two brief reports. In "Common Core Collaborations for the Sake of ELLs," Maria Dove and Andrea Honigsfeld present a ten-point framework of activities—both instructional and noninstructional—for collaboration around the Common Core Learning Standards based on their research and fieldwork. They argue that teachers and school leaders should explore every avenue for collaborative conversations concerning best practices for ELLs. Tracy Cretelle and Sharon Peck, in "Using CCSS, NYS Shifts, and NLAPS as Entry Points to Plan for ELL Achievement," provide guidance to ESOL and classroom teachers as they work to meet the learning targets of the CCSS. They argue for a successful integration of the standards through (a) careful planning, using the New Language Arts Program (NLAP) to zoom in to grade-level learning targets or to zoom out to focus on the NYS Common Core Shifts; (b) correlating targets with student proficiencies; and (c) holding rich conversations with partner teachers to ensure that student needs are at the center of all planning.

We hope this dedicated issue contributes to the growing scholarship focused on the CCSS for ELLs, a much-needed area of work. The CCSS ultimately are designed to provide students and teachers with consistency and stability across all grade levels, schools, and states in order to establish an overall "standard" of performance across the nation. Although the prescription of teacher pedagogy is not outlined in the CCSS, as assessments are created based on standards, the professional practice of teachers will be affected. But teachers need special guidance and assistance in order to provide effective instruction for ELLs in the CCSS era. This dedicated issue is a step in that direction.

## References

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