

North Dakota builds support for the Common Core from the ground up



The Challenge

When a committee of North Dakota teachers reviewed the Common Core draft standards in 2010, about two-thirds were supportive and the rest were wary—not exactly a “universal endorsement,” said Greg Gallagher, standards and achievement director for the North Dakota Department of Instruction (DPI). But because North Dakota curriculum decisions are made at the district level rather than at the state level, DPI took an uncommon path to gaining support for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by involving and supporting teachers from the beginning of the process.

Strategic Solution

North Dakota’s first step was to bring McREL in to conduct a gap analysis between existing state standards and the CCSS. McREL consultants and the teacher committee discussed the meaning of the standards and what areas might be the most difficult for teachers to implement. English Language Arts (ELA) teachers identified “challenge standards” for professional development and developing curriculum. Mathematics teachers spent much of their time annotating the CCSS document so that teachers could more easily read and interpret the language of the standards.

When North Dakota teachers decided to support the adoption of the CCSS, DPI felt that they would need resources to help them make the transition effectively. As part of the North Dakota Curriculum Initiative, which was funded by a grant given to North Dakota

State University, McREL consultants worked with 70 ELA and mathematics teachers in 2011 to produce a variety of support materials.

Results

The end result was the North Dakota Curriculum Initiative website with resources and tools organized by subject and grade level, such as sample lesson and unit plans, transition documents, assessment information from national groups, and supporting documents such as “I Can” statements. The committee, said Gallagher, is proud of creating “a whole array of documents to support local school districts efforts to create their own curriculum and move forward with instructional changes.”

Next Steps

While the North Dakota Curriculum Initiative has plans to develop a set of webinars produced by McREL on particular strands of professional development, for now, the committee members are taking what they’ve learned about the CCSS and resources back to their schools and colleagues. “I think building a core group of teachers across the state that had a really strong foundation in CCSS was important so that we could then go out to our own school buildings with fairly good confidence...and help people implement them,” said Crystal Ridl, a middle school ELA teacher. Currently, teachers are using these resources to begin implementing the standards this year with the goal of testing them in the 2014–2015 school year.