



5 Ways

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN EMPOWER TEACHERS
AS THEY ADOPT NEW STANDARDS**

Successfully adopting new standards requires leaders to be intentional, resourced, and transparent so that clear and measurable goals can be set for students, grade levels, schools, and the district as a whole.



1 Strategically Communicate the Purpose

Education is constantly evolving. While this is certainly positive, changes can be disruptive and have a negative downstream impact.

Often individuals initially respond to the changes as something done to them – an event that has robbed them of agency. However, by developing a thoughtful communication plan, leaders can ensure all stakeholders understand that they are part of a positive change.

Clear communication of what is happening helps to alleviate the natural stress associated with change.

Develop a tentative schedule:

A thoughtful timeline for targeted conversations and planning should start well before teachers need to make changes. Teachers need time to process, read, plan, and collaborate with peers. Create a calendar for introducing new materials, professional development instruction, and administering assessments. This planning will provide structure and limit false information.

Use common language:

Being clear and consistent using language from the state department of education as rationale for the standard changes can help foster motivation and enthusiasm for standard implementation. All district communications should help educators see the purpose in what they are doing and assure them that they have the time and support to be successful.

Engage all levels of the organization in discussions:

Be sure to discuss the new standards in all appropriate settings. Discussions may include small professional learning communities, grade level/department meetings, school faculty meetings, principal meetings, PTA meetings, the superintendent's cabinet meetings, and public school board meetings.



2 Involve All Stakeholders

Once the state adopts standards, it's necessary to include multiple levels of stakeholders in the district and school implementation planning.

Include site leaders in early and ongoing discussions:

It's important that principals are present to determine how and when implementation will occur at their campuses. They may have unique site-level needs across staff and resource processes and any modifications to curriculum and pedagogy.

Empower classroom teachers to participate:

Leaders should include vertical teacher teams to ensure the local implementation aligns across grade levels. It's crucial for teachers to review the standards and have space and time for sufficient discussion or to express concerns about new initiatives and changes.

Encourage and embrace diverse perspectives:

Cast a wide net for participants. Include staff from schools with a broad diversity including low- and high-achieving campuses; new and experienced teachers; school communities and educators with diverse racial, ethnic, and gender attributes; socioeconomic diversity; and other important and relevant characteristics.

Districts can support efforts by being thoughtful about who participates in meetings and which individuals should be representatives.

3 Empower Educators to Drive their Journey

As stakeholders get involved, many want to know what they can do to ensure they can receive assistance, share their experiences with leadership, and adapt the new materials to meet their students' needs. It's crucial that leadership sets a tone that makes all educators feel supported.

Ensure stakeholders feel their input is meaningful and valuable. Acknowledging them goes a long way and will help drive continued contribution.

Open communication and collaboration channels:

Districts can create buy-in by establishing regular and persistent communication channels including dedicated email addresses or ongoing peer chats (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Google Chat, or a learning management system). Centralized communication forums enable educators to crowd source questions and responses and get a sense of broad concerns. District leadership can participate in these groups to provide fact-based responses, identify emerging challenges, and provide resources to address unanticipated needs.

Build a community:

Developing a foundation of communal support and trust for the implementation will help to support shifts from the ground up. By taking careful steps to encourage teachers and give them agency in implementation, leaders can reinforce their respect and value for classroom teachers' firsthand experience and professional expertise.

Encourage honest feedback:

It's critical to make sure that educators feel they can openly share concerns or challenges. Many district leaders develop guidance and systems for educators to report their insights to peers, building leaders, and district administrators. These systems enable stakeholders to share feedback in the way they're most comfortable.

4 Invest in Aligned Professional Learning

At a minimum, adopting new standards will require professional learning to occur at every impacted grade level and content course. Districts can support this work by planning for what will be the most effective and efficient.

Aligning the language and expectations of all teachers to the current standards supports coherence and helps scaffold student success.

Time is valuable, be efficient:

By aligning – and whenever possible combining – professional learning on standards and materials, teachers can see both the what and why of the available resources. A united team that clearly understands both the intentions and expectations of the new standards and is prepared to use their resources effectively to support learning outcomes is well-prepared to ensure student success.

Consider professional development for those with immediate and downstream impact:

New standards will impact a much wider array of courses with related content than explicitly addressed in the standards. For instance, new standards in math impact science. New standards in English impact every class with reading and writing. Best practices have shown that broadening professional development to include educators from these other core and elective subject areas benefit both teaching and learning.

5 Encourage Balance

There is an urgency to adopt new standards, but it should be coupled with a realistic, transparent, and systematic approach.

Provide clarity about changes and expectations:

Being explicit that there may be changes in performance measures under a new assessment system is important. There are often discontinuities in historical achievement trends when new assessment scores are released. Students and parents need to understand that this is a transition period. Students and schools throughout the state are adjusting to the new expectations.

Keep the community informed:

Districts should ensure that a public debrief of initial assessment scores occurs. An opportunity for this kind of review is offered at each school, as well. The summer before the second year of implementing new standards is when to make important improvements to the change process, ensuring that the long-term trajectory is one of growth and success.

Be realistic, but optimistic:

When district leaders lead with excitement and anticipation of the value it will provide for students, rather than frustrations with the bureaucratic shifts, momentum builds toward a positive transition.

Change takes time. And finding a balance between the fixed calendar of state assessment implementation and the flexible pace of changing local expectations is difficult.



A Thoughtful Plan Can Drive Student Success

The changes associated with adopting new state learning standards can feel overwhelming for district leaders. However, a plan that ensures communication, collaboration, and ongoing improvement can help leaders better execute. By considering the five best practices provided in this guide, district leaders can transition their community toward successfully adopting new standards and elevate teacher effectiveness and student achievement.



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