

**Achieving Success in The Common Core**  
**By Building the Moral Infrastructure through Character Education**

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The Common Core has now been adopted by all but five states in the U.S., making it **the** topic of discussion in faculty rooms all across the country. It touts high standards that encapsulate the knowledge and skills students need for college, career and civic readiness in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society, but will it really deliver on its promise?

There is much to like about the new Core. Governors and State Superintendents all across the country are responsible for its genesis, reflecting our national ideals of state and local control of education. This collaboration has also resulted in the development of high standards rooted in performance that meet our national goals of preparing every young person to be college, career and civic ready by high school graduation. The standards also draw heavily from best practice and research on what high performing countries do.

The new standards could elegantly inform our journey a decade into this new century with a vision of what it means to be educated and prepared for the challenges of a new global society. The purpose of the new Core is to make rigorous academic content accessible to all students so that all students can be successful. They represent a paradigm shift in that they move teachers away from an emphasis on preparing students for low level, multiple-choice tests to more real-world, performance-based assessments. The level of rigor has been increased, with daily reading and writing across the curriculum in a wide range of texts, including literary and informational, and increasing text complexity across disciplines.

So what's missing that might help students grapple successfully with the increased rigor and expectation of performance in this new Core? While it lays out what students need to know and be able to do in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society, it falls short on identifying what students need to "be like," (term coined by Ivor Pritchard, senior researcher at the U.S. Department of Education) or the dispositions and qualities of character they will need to develop to be well-prepared for what it means to be educated in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world, and to be successful on high stakes performance tests. Some of these key learning, inquiry and literacy skills include collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, communicating, building arguments, creativity, planning, presenting and researching. Clearly character is implicitly built into the new standards, but is not explicitly named or identified as key to successful implementation of the standards. However, character is the important foundation and common denominator that will help students grapple successfully with all of these greater demands.

The new Core makes it clear that it does not attempt to identify all that should or could be taught, or the supports that schools must continue to put in place to help all young people be successful. And these are standards—they don't identify the curriculum or teaching and learning strategies that teachers will use. An important dimension of optimal school planning that will help both students and teachers succeed with the new standards includes a focus on the following:

- Explicit planning for the core civic and ethical values that young people will need to acquire to be college, career and civic ready, and to grapple with the greater performance demands of the Common Core
- Modeling core values and teaching a curriculum grounded in values so that young people have clearer visions of the kinds of people they might become
- Intentional planning and working towards a pervasive sense of community for every student and the caring relationships that foster optimal human development across all domains—intellectual, social/emotional and ethical
- Collaboration to create a school and classroom culture rooted in respect, responsibility and excellence, so that students not only develop moral character, (caring, respect, trustworthiness, for example) but the performance character they will need to successfully grapple with more rigorous standards, (diligence, effort, responsibility, for example)
- High quality teaching and learning with appropriate scaffolding and supports to help all young people be successful
- Collaboration among teachers, with support from administrators, to understand and plan for implementation of the Common Core

The Common Core lays out a clear vision of what it means to be educated in the twenty-first century. It will require educators to look deeply within themselves, reflect on what students most need to be prepared for a very different world than has existed in the past, and to move forward skillfully, courageously and gracefully so that every student can succeed, contribute and create happy and flourishing lives for themselves.