



Areas of Focus for Successful Standards-Based Education Reforms

All states have renewed their efforts to give each child a quality education by evaluating and in many cases overhauling their state education standards. By now, most states have adopted higher College and Career Ready Standards; some have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), some have opted for a hybrid of the CCSS, and others have created their own standards entirely. Whichever standards your state uses, the goal is the same: to ensure that every child graduates high school ready for college or career.

College and Career Ready Standards are an important step in creating better educational outcomes for all students, but new standards cannot stand alone. Each state must implement a robust action plan to ensure that the standards can be successful. National PTA, in partnership with the Learning First Alliance, has outlined five areas where states must focus—in a communications strategy called “Get it Right”—to ensure the higher standards have the supports needed for successful implementation.

These areas are broad and the work must be a comprehensive effort at the state level in conjunction with all state and local education agencies and education coalitions in individual states. Please note, PTAs cannot expect to be the lead in this work; but as parents we need to ensure that we are involved in the effort. PTAs should familiarize themselves with the topics and decide where their individual state PTA can actively participate. That participation may vary based on a variety of factors. Some examples might include serving on education coalitions or committees, reviewing and offering suggestions for plans, communicating information to all parents, etc. As state PTAs, you determine where you fit and how to balance the work with all of your other areas of importance.

5 Pillars of Successful Implementation of College and Career Ready Standards:

- 1. Alignment of standards, curriculum and assessments.**
- 2. Adequate professional development for teachers and principals.**
- 3. Sufficient resources and support for each child to meet high standards.**
- 4. Ongoing communication about the importance of standards and accountability.**
- 5. Balanced and comprehensive accountability systems.**

1. Alignment of standards, curriculum and assessments.

Once states and local communities institute standards that establish the knowledge and skills they believe students must learn, they must put in place curriculum and instructional programs that provide students with opportunities to learn the agreed-upon knowledge and skills. Appropriate tests must be used to measure student progress toward meeting the standards. Students cannot be expected to learn what they are not taught, but in too many places there has not been sufficient effort to ensure that curriculum and instruction match the standards or are aligned with the tests.

Teachers tend to teach what tests measure. Many assessments rely primarily on multiple-choice questions and measure primarily basic skills, rather than the full range of content and skills called for in the standards. It is essential that assessments measure students' ability to analyze and solve complex problems, write clearly and synthesize information, and measure their mastery of basic knowledge and skills. Students should be tested through a variety of measurement methods, such as essays and portfolios, as well as multiple-choice questions.

Finally, while assessments have productively focused attention on language arts and mathematics, important areas that are not assessed—such as music, art, foreign languages, science and social studies—may be neglected in America's classrooms. Educators should integrate these into the curriculum as well.

PTA Position: National PTA supports nationally agreed upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process. To develop a stronger and more accountable system of education, schools must place priority on student performance and achievement. Schools must focus on what children know and are able to do and be held accountable for ensuring that all children succeed. Challenging and precise standards must be developed which objectively measure achievement in academic areas to enable students to achieve at the highest levels possible. **National PTA Resolutions & Position Statements**

Getting it Right: *This pillar requires state PTA leaders to communicate the differences between standards, curriculum and assessments. Standards simply set the goals for what students should know at the end of each grade. States, schools and teachers have the autonomy to make decisions on which materials they will use and which tests to administer. It is important for PTA leaders to separate these issues while working to “Get it Right” in each separate area.*

Sample State Goals:

- **Standards:** *Advocate for state standards that are proven to be college and career ready based on a review of higher education officials and workforce leaders. Common Core would fit this definition, as would any customized Common Core standards.*
- **Curriculum:** *Ensure your state has adequate funding to purchase or write new curriculum aligned to higher standards. Advocate for a timeline that allows teachers adequate time to draft and implement new curriculum.*
- **Assessments:** *Advocate for a state testing system that is appropriately aligned with your state's standards. Many testing options are available and each state should ensure that their chosen test is the best option for your students based on a variety of factors. Advocate for a review of your state's accountability system: time spent testing, cost of testing, etc.*

2. Adequate professional development for teachers and principals.

The quality of teaching has a significant impact on student learning. Higher standards require more of educators just as they require more of students. Teachers must be knowledgeable about state and local standards, about the content they teach and about a range of instructional approaches that will enable them to help all students. Teachers and administrators must understand how to use information from assessments and student work to improve instruction for both individual students and school programs.

Meeting this challenge of ensuring well-trained teachers and administrators requires sustained and effective professional development. Both new and veteran teachers and principals need intensive and ongoing professional development with colleagues, mentors and outside experts that enables them to upgrade and hone their knowledge and skills.

PTA Position: National PTA and its constituent organizations support programs and policies that promote equitable distribution of high-quality teachers, thereby encouraging the academic achievement of all students. National PTA and its constituent organizations support programs and policies for the recruitment and retention of talented and committed educators, with special emphasis placed on ensuring teacher diversity and addressing the special needs of rural and urban areas. National PTA and its constituent organizations support high standards for teacher preparation, licensing, hiring and professional development for educators—particularly for beginning teachers—to promote the achievement of all students. National PTA and its constituent organizations support a balanced accountability system that uses multiple measures in order to improve academic achievement for all students. **National PTA Resolutions & Position Statements**

***Getting it Right:** Teachers, principals and schools must have adequate time to understand and implement the standards. Teachers must have access to high quality training and resources that enable them to successfully develop plans to teach the standards and adequate time with their peers to collaborate, brainstorm and learn best practices.*

***Sample State Goals:** Advocate for a review of the implementation timeline for your state's standards. Advocate for funding dedicated to professional development for teachers and a strong commitment to a collaborative process. Advocate for a professional development communications plan and/or forums for teachers.*



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help teachers visit:

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3. Sufficient resources and support for each child to meet high standards.

Comprehensive and coherent accountability systems can play an important role in helping every child achieve at high standards. Assessment information should provide a basis for decisions about changes in curriculum, existing policies and classroom instruction. Well-designed accountability systems also inform parents, educators and the public about the performance of school systems, schools, important subgroups of students and individual students. This information should help educators, parents and other community members make decisions about how best to improve teaching and learning.

To help all students—particularly those in greatest need—states and districts must invest in programs that work, providing deep and engaging curriculum, extended learning time, well-trained teachers, high-quality school leadership, smaller class size, modern facilities and effective technology. Moreover, they must direct greater resources to the schools and students who are the furthest behind.

PTA Position: National PTA believes that every child must be provided with a well-rounded, high-quality education, which will ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and become productive members of society. Access to a free public education is the most effective method of securing this opportunity, and should not be denied to any child. To develop a stronger and more accountable system of education, schools must place priority on student performance and achievement. Schools must focus on what children know and are able to do and be held accountable for ensuring that all children succeed. Challenging and precise standards must be developed which objectively measure achievement in academic areas to enable students to achieve at the highest levels possible. **National PTA Resolutions & Position Statements**

Getting it Right: *When done right, standards set the goals, proper assessments (formative and summative) identify gaps in achievement and proper accountability enables achievement. Each of these issues support the other and none can be successful alone. During the transition to College and Career Ready Standards, assessments play a vital role to help schools and parents pay particular attention so students do not fall behind. States should plan to provide support to assist teachers and students, especially those who struggle more to close the gap.*

Sample State Goals: *Advocate for better technology in classrooms. Advocate for early intervention programs during the transition to new standards. Advocate for an appropriate accountability system that gives teachers and students adequate time to transition.*



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4. Ongoing communication about the importance of standards and accountability.

Parents and community members must understand and support the content, use and purposes of standards and accountability. To make this happen, educators, civic leaders and parents must engage in ongoing dialogue and ongoing review of how well parents and other community members understand these issues. There must be accessible, understandable and widely disseminated information about effective implementation of standards, the opportunities provided for students to achieve them and how to make productive use of assessment results. This level of communication is crucial to maintaining public support for standards-based reform.

PTA Position: National PTA believes that no one educational program is best for all children and that schools and parents should work together to address the different ways in which children learn. National PTA supports the concept of shared responsibility in the development of school policies and in curriculum decisions. PTA urges all school boards to cooperate with parents, teachers, students, principals, administrators, business, civic and community leaders, and the general public in this process. We recognize that boards of education have the legal responsibility for school policy. At the same time, we believe that, because parents, teachers, students, and the general public are affected by school policy, it is appropriate that they participate in its determination. We believe that such sharing of responsibility will result in greater responsiveness to student and societal needs and therefore improve the quality of educational opportunity. **National PTA Resolutions & Position Statements**

Getting it Right: *This is the best area for PTA to lead in your state. PTA can facilitate communication between state leaders, district leaders, school personnel, teachers and parents. National PTA has created a wealth of resources to help parents understand the new standards and assessments. The Learning First Alliance has launched a new program that highlights best practices across the country that any leader can use. Utilize allies in your state including education coalitions and groups, the business community, teachers unions, etc. to provide a strong message of support of higher standards and the commitment needed to effectively implement, assess and hold students and teachers accountable for achievement.*

Sample State Goals: *Build a coalition that can work together on communications around College and Career Ready Standards, assessments and accountability. Seek donations to print and disseminate the resources available on PTA's website or distribute resources electronically. Build relationships with key leaders in your state and district. Work with partners and key leaders to ensure consistent messaging on these topics.*



For more information
on communications visit:
www.learningfirst.org

5. Balanced and comprehensive accountability systems.

Accountability is essential to improving education for all children. Educators are accountable to the public, who entrust their children and taxpayer dollars to them. The public and elected officials are accountable for providing the long-term support and resources necessary to make higher levels of learning attainable for all students. And students are accountable for their own learning progress.

The current concern about accountability focuses largely on high-stakes testing. Of particular concern is the practice of making critical decisions about schools and/or about student placement, promotion or graduation based on test performance alone. Student accountability and school accountability must go together. It is unfair to hold children accountable if school systems and schools are not held accountable.

No single test is a perfect measure of what a child knows and can do. Students learn in many ways and should have many ways to demonstrate what they have learned. Important educational decisions about a school or child should always take into account relevant information about student achievement in addition to test scores.

PTA Position: National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future. National PTA opposes federal legislation and/or regulations that mandate standardized testing or would lead to such testing, as well as federal policies that mandate comparisons of states, school districts, or individual schools and student retention based on a single test or sole criterion and the practice of social promotion. Standardized multiple-choice tests and school readiness tests should never be used with preschool and early elementary children for any purpose. **National PTA Resolutions & Position Statements**

***Getting it Right:** New standards require new tests, and new tests require time to adjust accountability. States should encourage state leaders to delay high stakes accountability measures for students, teachers, districts and schools until implementation is successful and the new tests have been evaluated.*

***Sample State Goals:** Advocate for a review of your state's accountability system. Advocate to ensure that one test score will never be a determining factor in a child's academic progression or teacher's evaluation. Advocate to ensure that accountability systems are fair for all students and teachers, especially during the transition to new standards and tests.*

For more information on planning an advocacy strategy to impact the adoption, implementation, assessment and accountability of College and Career Ready Standards in your state, please use the PTA Campaign Strategy training. For additional resources on College and Career Ready Standards, visit PTA.org/CommonCore. For additional resources on assessments, visit PTA.org/Assessments.