

## Teaching and Learning for College Readiness: The Role of Standards, Feedback, and Support

In the past few years, the goal of ensuring that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and career has been widely embraced. Yet, this goal can only be achieved by supporting teachers and teaching. To back this effort, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation along with our partners have focused on three critical levers: high standards, high-quality feedback, and strong, useful instructional tools. In the *Teaching and Learning for College Readiness Let's Talk* booklet, we explain why these levers are important, what we know about them, what we need to learn, and suggestions for what districts and schools should do in putting these levers into place.

### The Role of Standards

Studies show that students learn best when expectations for their learning are clear and that aligning policies for instructional guidance around a clear set of learning goals make policy and practice more effective. The Common Core State Standards, designed explicitly to lead students to college and career readiness, help set clear, consistent goals around English language arts and mathematics across states.

- *What We Know:* There is a 90% overlap between the Common Core mathematics standards and the standards for high achieving nations. States with mathematics standards similar to the Common Core have statistically significantly higher scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress than states that do not. However, implementation of the standards has been uneven, and traditional curriculum materials are not yet aligned to the standards.
- *What We Still Need to Know:* More research is needed on the conditions for effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards. For example, how do we provide additional resources, opportunities, and support that accelerate learning for students who need it most? This question and others warrant further attention.

### The Role of Feedback

Research by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future tells us that teaching is the most important school-related factor in student achievement and that the quality of teaching matters. In 2009, the foundation launched the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, an initiative to understand how to identify effective teaching as the first step to designing better feedback and support systems. The project, which included more than 3,000 teachers from seven districts, has broadened the field's knowledge about how to design teacher evaluation systems that can help teachers improve their practice and inform school and district leaders about how to direct resources for professional development and growth.

- *What We Know:* Successful teacher feedback and evaluation systems can help improve teaching performance and student achievement. We've seen positive cases of this in Washington, DC, Cincinnati, Chicago, and the state of Tennessee.
- *What We Still Need to Know:* There are gaps in the knowledge base about effective professional development for teachers. We are learning about the elements associated with professional growth, and how districts can apply these to better support teacher learning.

## The Role of Instructional Tools for Teachers

The Common Core State Standards generated new expectations for what students should know and be able to do, which created a demand for new tools. Anticipating this demand, the foundation made a major investment in the development and implementation of teacher-designed tools through the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC). Developed *by* teachers *for* teachers, the LDC and MDC offer a set of flexible instructional modules, tasks, and formative assessment tools to support instruction tied to college-ready standards.

- *What We Know:* Both LDC and MDC have led to statistically significant learning gains for students. However, teachers need more help incorporating the new approaches into daily classroom instruction.
- *What We Still Need to Know:* What would it look to give teachers more decision-making power over curriculum and instructional resources—including digital tools—rather than relying on state and district textbook adoption and purchasing decisions?

## The Next Challenge

### *Professional Learning to Support High-Quality Instruction*

To meet the challenge of improving instruction, teachers need support for continual learning. According to Teachers Know Best research, supported by the foundation, teachers value professional development that is relevant, interactive, delivered by other teachers, sustained over time, and treats teachers like professionals. Knowing this, the foundation built a framework for effective professional learning with six conditions.

Building a system based on this framework is an essential step if the United States is to make good on the promise that all students will graduate from high school college- and career- ready.

### *Six conditions for an effective professional learning system:*

- Clear expectations for student learning and teacher practice
- Time, expertise, and tools needed for professional growth
- Balance of individual and collective learning opportunities
- Growth cultures that encourage trust and provide safety for teachers to take risks
- Professional learning that is coherent and aligned across the individual teacher, school, and district levels
- Professional learning that supports continual improvement