We at ASCD believe the national dialogue on the Common Core State Standards has reached a turning point. With 46 states adopting the standards, it is no longer a question of if the standards should be adopted, but how they will be implemented.

In one recent survey of deputy state superintendents of education conducted by the Center on Education Policy in January 2012, providing professional development in sufficient quantity and quality was the most-often cited teacher-related challenge to implementing the Common Core State Standards. This data underscores the fact that to successfully implement these standards, it is critical that educators at all levels—teachers, principals, superintendents—receive the necessary professional development. This, we believe, is the key to moving the Common Core State Standards from words to action. It's not enough to simply distribute the new standards to educators and expect positive, meaningful change to happen. We need to provide educators with targeted professional development to help them understand the new standards, plan lessons and deliver aligned instruction, evaluate learning to determine mastery, and provide additional support to the students who need it.

The professional development provided cannot be a singular event. Instead, the professional development must be sustained, job-embedded, and involve feedback and follow-up observations. It should be tied to specific instructional goals. And just as we evaluate students and teachers, we must evaluate the professional development itself to make sure it is meeting teachers’ needs. Building local capacity and enabling educators to help one another collectively deliver standards-based instruction will ultimately lead to improved student performance.

Hand in hand with an ongoing, job-embedded professional development effort should be an increased focus on the Whole Child approach to learning. ASCD believes each child, in each school, in each community deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. ASCD supports the Common Core State Standards because we support learning that challenges each student. However, for each child to succeed we must also set equally high standards and expectations for the school culture, family engagement, and the student’s social-emotional wellness.

Educators know that no single program or initiative provides the silver bullet for student achievement or school improvement. But we do know that the newer, higher standards will require schools and communities to more comprehensively support meaningful student learning. We believe they promote a level of academic preparedness for graduates to successfully pursue further education, a career, and civic participation. We believe they will encourage school instructional staff to develop and deliver effective, engaging instruction reflective of individual student needs and strengths. Perhaps most importantly, we know the standards necessitate an understanding of all the factors related to learning - health, safety, connectedness to school, personalization, relevance, and so forth to ensure the long-term success of students.

So, as our national dialogue around Common Core State Standards continues, let’s turn our attention to how sustained professional development and the Whole Child approach to learning can help us meet our shared goal of supporting the success of each learner.

David Griffith, ASCD Public Policy Director

Read the entire conversation from the National Journal (March 15, 2012).