

# Transitioning from Adoption to Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

by Malbert Smith III, Ph.D., MetaMetrics President and Co-founder

Since the release on June 2, 2010 of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), there has been a great deal of attention devoted to the five Ws of reporting (NGA and CCSSO, 2010). That is, *who* created them, *what* they embody, *where* you can find them, *when* they were created, and *why* they were created. Unfortunately, as we have passed the two year anniversary of the CCSS, the *how* to implement them has been largely neglected. In the marketing and promotion of the CCSS, careful attention has been rightfully devoted to the five Ws and today one would be hard pressed to find an educator who, when asked, could not recite the answers to the five Ws. However, those same educators would likely be unable to tell you *how* they will implement these standards in a real classroom. When we conduct a Google search on the CCSS, one finds 13,400,000 hits<sup>1</sup>, however upon closer examination, the first few hundred sites all focus on the five Ws—not the H.

The success of the roll-out campaign for the CCSS is reflected in the fact that 46 states have adopted them (Wilhoit, 2012). At this point, it is likely that the few remaining hold out states will eventually adopt the CCSS as the standards become a common touchstone among educators throughout the nation. But the ultimate success of the CCSS movement will now largely depend on the next critical phase—the shift from adoption to implementation—how to use them.

What will teachers do differently in a post-Common Core world from what they did in the pre-Common Core world? Are there actionable tools, resources, assessments, and curriculum material aligned and predicated upon the new standards? On the assessment side, two testing consortia (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium) have embarked on a mission to create new statewide assessment models that align with the new standards. The earliest timeframe for these two groups to launch their assessments is the 2014-15 school year. Likewise, the educational publishing industry is racing to create and refresh their resources in an effort to provide such alignment as well.

While we enjoy tremendous success in the acceptance and adoption of the CCSS, we now enter the much more

challenging time of how to effectively implement them. At this point we should apply the historical lessons we have learned from previous adoption movements to ensure that we get this done right. One of the most ambitious, yet disappointing adoption movements in our country was the failure to implement the metric system. Even with congressionally authorized committees and legislation, our country never made the conversion to the metric system. In 1968, Congress authorized a three year study to examine the feasibility of adopting the metric system (NIST, 2002). This study culminated in the auspiciously titled report, “A Metric America: A Decision Whose Time Has Come” (NIST). In 1975, Congress passed the Metric Conversion Act “to coordinate and plan the increasing use of the metric system in the United States” (NIST). Growing up during this period, I remember seeing new sign construction on the highways to reflect the transition to the metric system. When was the last time you saw a highway posted speed limit sign expressed in the metric system in our country? While the adoption of the metric system is not totally dead, in that our government has continued to promote the metric system as the “preferred system of weights and measures for United States trade and commerce,” the acceptance and implementation by the overall public has been forfeited (NIST).

In every standard adoption movement there are critical “tipping point” moments and actions in which the movement takes hold or withers. From the unification movements associated with the measurement of temperature and standardized time, one can see the need for compelling and practical applications, the importance of underlying science, and the necessity of public and professional commitment. If the current movement of the CCSS is to realize its potential and promise, it is incumbent upon educators, policy makers, educational entrepreneurs, and the publishing industry to move as expeditiously as possible to build actionable tools and resources for educators and parents.

At MetaMetrics® we have been actively engaged in the *how* to part of the Common Core Standards since its inception. On the English Language Arts side, our research on how well one needs to read for college and career readiness is one of the core components in the

<sup>1</sup> Search conducted June 20, 2012. Google yielded 13,400,000 search results.

standards. Table A displays the associated Lexile® range by grade band. To facilitate the practical application of text complexity, we have provided a free web-based tool (the Lexile® Analyzer) that allows educators to measure text. Nearly 145,000<sup>2</sup> educators and other individuals have registered to use this tool, and over 1.6 billion words have been analyzed. Publishers and digital content providers have also utilized the Lexile Analyzer so that hundreds of thousands of books and hundreds of millions of articles now have Lexile measures. Additionally, more than 135,000 titles with Lexile measures are available to search on the popular “Find a Book” tool. “Find a Book” enables users to build custom reading lists based on Lexile range and personal interests and to check the availability of books at the local library.

Table A: Grade Ranges for Lexile Measures

Text Complexity Grade Bands	Lexile Ranges Aligned to College- and Career- Readiness Rexpectations*
K-1	N/A
2-3	420L - 820L
4-5	740L - 1010L
6-8	925L - 1185L
9-10	1050L - 1335L
11-CCR	1185L - 1385L

\*Common Core State Standards for English, Language Arts, Appendix A (Additional Information), NGA and CCSSO, 2012

To truly support differentiated instruction in reading, it is not sufficient to only measure the text complexity of content. It is imperative that student reading ability be expressed on the same scale as text complexity so readers and text can be matched. Fortunately, there are over 50 publishers of reading assessments that elect to report Lexile reader measures. These tests range from standardized norm-referenced publishers to interim test publishers and even statewide No Child Left Behind assessments. For a complete list of assessments, please visit: [www.Lexile.com](http://www.Lexile.com).

On the mathematics side, educators, students and parents can go to [www.Quantiles.com](http://www.Quantiles.com) for access to an array of educational resources and tools that support differentiated instruction aligned to the Common Core. Built upon the same psychometric principles as the Lexile® Framework, the Quantile® Framework allows educators to place a learner’s mathematical knowledge and math content on the same developmental scale so a match can be affected.

Currently, there are six end-of-the-year state accountability assessments (Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming) and two publishing companies with norm-referenced assessments (ERB and The Riverside Publishing Company) that report Quantile measures of students. American Education Corporation, Measured Progress, Scholastic and Cambium Learning Group are four of MetaMetrics’ partners that provide Quantile-based interim assessments for grades K-12.

More than 580 textbooks, 64,000 lessons and 3,100 downloadable resources that have been calibrated to the Quantile scale are available. Teachers can also utilize the following free tools:

- 1) The Math Skills Database: A great resource for teachers and parents. Search the QTaxon (math skills) database for math skills and aligned resources.
- 2) Math@Home®: Find family-friendly math activities that match your child’s Quantile® measure or math level.
- 3) Find your Math Textbook Tool: Offers teachers a Quantile measure for every lesson in their textbook that will help to inform their instruction and offer ideas for differentiated lessons.
- 4) Quantile® Teacher Assistant: This easy to use tool helps educators utilize the Quantile Framework for Mathematics to differentiate math instruction and to locate resources that can help identify those skills that are most relevant to the topic of the day.

Our organization is committed to building resources and tools that support differentiated instruction in a Common Core world. To realize the full potential and to gain traction with educators it is imperative that we not only discuss and analyze the Common Core State Standards, we must provide educators with readily accessible tools, modules, and instructional resources that translate the theory into practice.

As Marc Tucker pointed out in “Standing on the Shoulders of Giants,” of all the reform efforts we are implementing in our own country, only the Common Core State Standards is consistent with practices of the highest performing countries (Tucker, 2011). As Secretary Arne Duncan stated, the “Holy Grail” of education is to ensure that students graduate from high school college- and career-ready. The first step in capturing this Holy Grail was the creation and adoption of the CCSS. However, this is only the first, and likely the easiest step.

In many respects, the failure of the metric movement in America was the latency of conversion. If we follow the same path of that movement and proceed without creating the actionable CCSS-aligned tools and resources, educators, out of necessity, will resort to teaching and assessing the same content in the same way. The window of opportunity will have closed and we will have lost the momentum driving us through this historic moment of transformation. The opportunity to create lasting educational change will go the way of the metric system in America. Moving forward, it is my recommendation that we focus on the H—how to implement. If we get the *how* to right, not only will we restore our educational leadership in the world, but we will go a long way in maintaining our position of economic leadership around the world.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Malbert Smith III, Ph.D., is president of MetaMetrics®, an educational measurement and research organization. Together with co-founder and CEO A. Jackson Stenner, Ph.D., Dr. Smith created The Lexile® Framework for Reading; El Sistema Lexile para Leer; The Lexile Framework for Writing; and The Quantile® Framework for Mathematics. Dr. Smith strives to make educational measurement actionable in the classroom and at home. His vision of common metrics for reading, writing and mathematics opens the way for differentiated instruction. In each state—and increasingly abroad educators use Lexile and Quantile measures to blend instruction and assessment in whole-class and intervention settings. Concerned with the relationship between early literacy and college- and career-readiness, Dr. Smith led research to build a continuum of text complexity that places academic and life goals on the Lexile scale. He and Dr. Stenner were members of the team that contributed to the Common Core State Standards. They are also senior investigators on a national Center for Education Statistics research study to examine NAEP benchmark scores in relationship to college- and career- readiness.

Dr. Smith serves on the UNC School of Education Foundation Board, the advisory board of Capstone Digital, and is a member of the advisory board for EdSteps, a joint project of the Council of Chief State School Officers and The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He and Dr. Stenner are leading a three-year grant from The Gates Foundation on the efficacy of personalized learning platforms. Dr. Smith is a member of The American Association for the Advancement of Science, The American Educational Research Association and The National Council on Measurement in Education. He has taught graduate seminars in educational research and test development and design at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, from which he received the Distinguished Alumni Award. Dr. Smith frequently speaks at various events on educational research and measurement.

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