

## Strategy 8

# Developing Implementation Guides for the Common Core Standards

### What Is It?

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Teachers gain a tremendous amount of knowledge about the Common Core when they engage in large-group professional development sessions focused on unpacking the standards (see Strategy 5) and examining the vertical alignment of standards (see Strategy 6). When teachers unpack the standards, they learn that they will be helping students meet a total of 42 Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language standards. When they examine the vertical alignment of the standards, they discover that many standards address more than one instructional element. Thus, while unpacking the standards and examining their vertical alignment enable teachers to be more confident about their basic understanding of the Common Core, these activities may raise concerns about how they can possibly address all of the elements of the 42 standards. One way some school districts have helped teachers deal with their concerns about the management phase of the Common Core is through the use of implementation guides.

Implementation guides establish parameters of what should be taught during specific time periods in order to ensure that all teachers address all of the expected learning objectives (David, 2008). The best implementation guides “focus on central ideas and provide links to exemplary curriculum materials, lessons, and instructional strategies” (David, 2008, p. 88). Implementation guides are not new. Districts that use core reading programs develop implementation guides to provide all teachers at the same grade level with a realistic time frame for completing each unit’s instruction and assessment. Math is another area where implementation guides have

become commonplace, often used to ensure that teachers have taught all of the concepts on which students will be tested during the spring high-stakes assessment (Au, 2007). In addition to ensuring that all key literacy or math strategies and skills are taught over the course of the school year, these implementation guides ensure curriculum continuity for students who change schools within the district.

While implementation guides can aid teachers in managing the instruction related to a large number of learning standards or objectives, they have their drawbacks. When teachers feel pressured by the time frames set forth in the implementation guides, they often reduce the amount of time for collaborative student activities, activities that provide the guided and independent practice necessary for mastering the learning standards (Willis & Sandholtz, 2009). Also, when teachers are expected to rigidly adhere to the implementation guides, they may no longer be able to include the review and reteaching activities that are often needed, especially by lower-performing students (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Thus, rigid adherence to implementation guides can negatively impact student learning, resulting in students who don't meet expectations on high-stakes tests and who don't have the foundation needed for learning more complex strategies and skills.

You can avoid the pitfalls of implementation guides by applying the adult learning principles you learned about in Chapter 1 as you work with small groups of teachers to develop implementation guides for teaching toward the Common Core. Remember that adults are motivated when they need to solve problems that are highly relevant to their positions. Certainly, that description represents teachers at your school who are questioning how they will fit all of the standards into their instruction. In addition, teachers want to be involved in professional development activities that will impact their instruction. Thus, teachers are more likely to follow the implementation guides that they—not publishers or district curriculum coordinators—develop, especially if they see the guides as flexible tools that can be revised if needed.

## How Do I Do It?

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The following steps outline a procedure that you can use to assist small groups of teachers in developing implementation guides for their grade-level standards.

1 Work with the teacher leaders or a representative from each grade level to design a template for the implementation guides. Using the same template across grades facilitates a schoolwide shared understanding of how the standards will be taught and assessed. The implementation guide template shown in Form 8.1 includes the following important components:

- ◆ *Grade-level standard.*
- ◆ *Essential questions that are addressed by the standard.* Essential questions establish the focus of the learning and should be stated in student-friendly lan-

guage. When students can answer the essential questions, they demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge, strategies, and skills that are important for a proficient reader, writer, listener, and speaker.

- ◆ *Elements of the standard that should be addressed during each specific time period.* That specific time period is typically a quarter or a trimester, corresponding to the school’s report card cycle. Elements listed in an early time period are expected to be maintained or enhanced during subsequent periods so that, by the end of the year, students will have received the instruction and practice they need to successfully perform all elements of the grade-level standard.
- ◆ *Academic vocabulary that students will need to understand to achieve the standard.* Each standard includes specific terminology that students need to understand in order to master the standard. Listing these terms on the implementation guide reminds teachers that they need to explicitly explain the terms, use the terms when modeling and during discussions, develop activities that require students to use the terms repeatedly, and design assessments that include evaluating the students’ understanding of the terms.
- ◆ *Instructional resources.* During the initial development of the implementation guides, teachers may want to keep the list of instructional resources quite general. Listing all of the possible resources can be time-consuming and take the focus away from the primary purpose of the implementation guide—determining when to address each element of the standards. To avoid spending too much time on this section, teachers should know that they can add instructional resources to their copies of the implementation guide as they teach and share those ideas with colleagues when they review the implementation guides at grade-level meetings. Giving teachers the following categories will help them develop the list of instructional resources.
  - Specific units from a core reading program or from the district’s curriculum.
  - Titles of books that will be read aloud to the students.
  - Titles of guided reading selections.
  - Specific text exemplars from Appendix B of the Common Core standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).
  - Specific types of graphic organizers.
  - Interactive tools such as Photo Story, which can be downloaded for free from Microsoft, or tools found under Student Interactives at ReadWriteThink ([www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)).
  - Professional readings (articles, books, online documents) that provide the teachers with ideas for instructional strategies they can use to help students address the standards.
- ◆ *Assessments that will be used to determine if students have met the standard.* When developing an implementation guide for a set of related grade-level standards (e.g., Standards RL.1.1, RL.1.2, and RL.1.3 all focus on demonstrating an understanding of the main ideas and key details of literature), it is

likely that one or two assessments will be sufficient for determining if the students have met expectations for that set of standards. Teachers can share the assessments they are already using to determine which ones could be used as common assessments. If new assessments need to be developed, those assessments should be noted on the implementation guide.

**2** Meet with the grade-level team. Explain the purpose of an implementation guide and share the implementation guide template that will be used throughout the school. Collaborate with the teachers to select the standards they will focus on first. Often the standards within one category, such as Key Ideas and Details, are inter-related and, thus, it would be efficient to develop the implementation guide for all of the standards within that category at the same time.

**3** Project an electronic copy of the template so that it is easy to view and revise during the discussion. Using a white board or chart paper would also work.

**4** Guide the teachers to fill in the implementation guide template by following the steps described below. A completed implementation guide for Standards RL.1.1, R.1.2, and RL.1.3 is shown in Figure 8.1.

**a** Write the grade-level standards in the appropriate boxes.

**b** Assist the teachers in determining essential questions that will help students understand the purpose of their work. Asking a guiding question such as “What aspects of students’ literacy development will be enhanced by engaging in the activities delineated in standards?” can help teachers formulate the essential questions. The first-grade teachers who worked with their literacy coach, Sabrina Rosenberg, to develop the implementation guide shown in Figure 8.1 concluded that meeting standards RL.1.1, RL.1.2, and RL.1.3 would enhance students’ understanding of story elements and of author’s purpose. They used those ideas to develop two essential questions. The teachers expected that the first essential question, “How can I understand the stories I read?” would elicit responses such as “I can tell about the characters, setting, and major events to show that I understand a story” and “I can answer questions to show I understand. I can ask questions to find out about characters and events I don’t understand.” They expected that students would answer the second essential question, “Why do authors write stories?” with responses such as “Authors write stories for us to enjoy and to give us lessons about how we should live our lives.” Thus, just two essential questions were needed for those three standards.

**c** Facilitate a discussion about which elements of each standard should be addressed during each time period. For example, in Figure 8.1, for standard RL.1.1, Sabrina and the first-grade teachers decided to focus on answering questions during the first and second quarters and then move the main focus to asking questions in the third quarter. They discussed how this process would ensure that, by the end of the year, the students would have received

instruction as well as guided and independent practice on all elements of that standard.

- ◆ During this step, the coach may ask the teachers if they need to clarify the expectations for any time period. For example, the first-grade teachers working on the implementation guide in Figure 8.1 wanted to be sure that their students learned that good retellings are told or written in sequence, and so they added the expectation of correctly sequencing key details under RL.1.2 for the last three quarters. They also added the concepts of problem and solution and the use of graphic organizers in RL.1.3.
- d** Assist the teachers in determining the academic vocabulary that students need to understand in order meet the standards. It is generally not necessary to break down these terms by time period. The academic vocabulary is typically used across the school year, first by teachers when giving explicit explanations and modeling strategies, and then by students during guided and independent practice.
- e** Help the teachers understand the range of instructional resources that could be used to address the standards. However, remind them not to be concerned about listing every possible resource. At this point, you just want them to be sure they know some specific resources they will use; they can always add to the list as they teach. If a team is developing an implementation guide for a related cluster of standards, the same resources can typically be used when teaching toward that cluster of standards. Consider the cluster of standards in Figure 8.1 as an example. Sabrina helped the teachers realize that, when first-grade students read any of the stories listed under Instructional Resources for Quarter 4, they can be expected to ask and answer questions about the story (RL.1.1); to give a retelling of the story (RL.1.2) that includes a description of the characters, setting, and major events (RL.1.3); and to explain the central message or lesson of that story (RL.1.2). Thus, it would be efficient to list all of the stories that students will read throughout the fourth quarter as instructional resources for the entire cluster of standards.
- f** Assist the teachers in determining a small set of assessments that will be used to determine whether the students have met the elements of the standard for each time period. Keeping the number of common assessments to a minimum leads to an efficient assessment process, in terms of administering and scoring the assessments. It is also efficient if an assessment, such as an oral retelling or a story map graphic organizer, can be used for multiple time periods, as was possible with some of the assessments listed in Figure 8.1. If some assessments and/or scoring rubrics still need to be developed, note on the implementation guide who will be responsible for developing the assessment/rubric and when that draft will be shared with the members of the team.

**5** Make copies of the final implementation guide for all members of the grade-level team. Encourage the teachers to view the implementation guide as a work in prog-

<b>Essential Questions:</b> How can I understand the stories I read? Why do authors write stories?						
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Quarter 1</b>	<b>Quarter 2</b>	<b>Quarter 3</b>	<b>Quarter 4</b>	<b>Academic Vocabulary</b>	<b>Instructional Resources</b>
<p>RL.1.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.</p>	<p>Answer who, what, where, and when questions about key details in a text.</p>	<p>Same as Quarter 1</p>	<p>Ask who, what, where, and when questions about key details in a text.</p>	<p>Ask and answer who, what, where, and when questions about key details in a text.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ ask</li> <li>◆ answer</li> <li>◆ key details</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quarter 1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Read-alouds</li> <li>◆ Shared reading stories from Units 1 and 2</li> <li>◆ Leveled readers—literary selections</li> </ul> <p><b>Quarter 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Same as Quarter 1 except use stories from Units 3 and 4</li> </ul> <p><b>Quarter 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Same as Quarter 2</li> </ul> <p><b>Quarter 4:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Same as Quarter 1 except use stories from Units 7 and 8</li> </ul>
<p>RL.1.2: Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.</p>	<p>Retell stories orally, including key details.</p>	<p>Retell stories orally in correct sequence, including key details.</p>	<p>Same as Quarter 2. In addition, work with partner/small group to determine central message or lesson of story.</p>	<p>Retell stories in correct sequence including key details, and individually demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ retell</li> <li>◆ key details</li> <li>◆ sequence</li> <li>◆ central message</li> <li>◆ lesson</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quarter 1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Oral retelling—score with retelling rubric (don't score central message section)</li> </ul> <p><b>Quarter 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Unit assessments</li> <li>◆ Oral retelling—score with retelling rubric</li> </ul>
<p>RL.1.3: Describe characters, and settings, and major events in a story, using key details.</p>	<p>Name main characters and major events in a story, using key details.</p>	<p>Name main and secondary characters, and major events—including the problem and solution when appropriate, using key details. Complete appropriate graphic organizers.</p>	<p>With support, describe main and secondary characters, and major events—including the problem and solution when appropriate, using key details. Complete appropriate graphic organizers.</p>	<p>Describe main and secondary characters, and major events—including the problem and solution when appropriate, using key details. Complete appropriate graphic organizers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ character</li> <li>◆ main character</li> <li>◆ secondary character</li> <li>◆ setting</li> <li>◆ major events</li> <li>◆ key details</li> <li>◆ problem</li> <li>◆ solution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quarter 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Same as Quarter 1 except use stories from Units 5 and 6</li> </ul> <p><b>Quarter 4:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Same as Quarter 1 except use stories from Units 7 and 8</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 8.1.** Implementation guide for the category of key ideas and details of reading literature at grade 1.

ress. Suggest that, as they implement instruction related to the standards, they make notes right on the implementation guide. For example, they might jot down whether too many or not enough elements were covered during a particular time period. They might jot down additional instructional resources they found helpful, and they might list a new assessment they used and want to discuss with their colleagues.

**6** You and/or the teacher leader should meet with the grade-level team to review the implementation guide at the end of each time period. At the meeting, the teachers will share student assessment results and the notes they made on their implementation guides. They will use the assessment data and notes to revise the implementation guide so that it more closely reflects actual practice.

Helping a grade-level team work through the entire process once or twice will provide them with the skills and confidence they need to develop implementation guides for other standards.

## The Strategy in Action

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Sabrina Rosenberg is a literacy specialist at a K–2 building that includes six teachers at each grade level. She spends half of her time coaching and half of her time providing instruction to students who struggle with reading. During one of the professional development days held prior to the start of school, Sabrina and the teacher leaders worked with the grade-level teams to develop implementation guides for the Reading and Writing standards; they plan to work on implementation guides for the Speaking and Listening and Language standards during the school’s October professional development day.

Now that the first grading period has been completed, Sabrina wants the grade-level teams to review their implementation guides. To assist them in the process, she developed a protocol that all grade-level teams could use (see Form 8.2). The first-grade team wants to start their review by looking at the implementation guide for standards RL.1.1, RL.1.2, and RL.1.3 (see Figure 8.1). Sabrina will model the process so that Chanda Patel, the first-grade teacher leader, can facilitate future reviews.

The first-grade teachers brought their annotated implementation guides, unit assessments, and oral retelling rubrics to the meeting. When Sabrina asked them what the assessment results indicated, all six teachers commented that most of their students could answer the “who” and “what” questions but had some difficulty with “where” and “when” questions. They made a note in the second-quarter box for standard RL.1.1 that they should emphasize “where” and “when” questions. When examining the oral retelling rubrics, the teachers found that students generally included all characters, not differentiating main from secondary characters. The teachers noted that, during the second quarter, students should begin to make that distinction because the teachers plan to provide explicit explanations about main and secondary characters and use those terms during discussions of their read-

alouds. The retelling rubrics also indicated that many students had difficulty retelling the key details of the stories in sequence. This reinforced the team's earlier decision to add the sequential element to the second-quarter focus for standard RL.1.2. The teachers concurred that the two assessments had been sufficient to determine whether the students had met the elements expected during the first quarter.

Sabrina asked the teachers to turn their attention to the Instructional Resources section and revise it to show what they had actually used during the first period. She then asked them to look forward to the second quarter. During the discussion, she noted that the students were expected to complete graphic organizers to show their understanding of story elements but that no such organizers were listed under Instructional Resources. She shared two possible graphic organizers with matching rubrics, discussing how they corresponded to the standard expectations for the second, third, and fourth quarters. The teachers suggested some minor revisions to one of the organizers and decided to use it with students during instruction and as a second-quarter assessment. This information was added to the second quarter of the implementation guide. Chanda, the teacher leader, also mentioned that she had recently found a story map that students can complete online and recommended that it be added to the Instructional Resources section for the second quarter. She offered to demonstrate the story map for her first-grade colleagues at the next grade-level meeting.

As the meeting wrapped up, the teachers commented that this session helped them see how the implementation guide could be a useful tool in developing data-driven instruction. After the meeting, Chanda thanked Sabrina for facilitating the meeting and said she felt confident that she could use the same protocol to facilitate future reviews of implementation guides.