The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are not an enemy of special education. Many educators fear the impact of CCSS on students who are disabled or at risk of educational failure. CCSS increases the expectations for all students, but the shift to CCSS will increase opportunities for students with disabilities, particularly for students with print disabilities.

Instructional strategies for students with disabilities, if implemented properly, will no longer focus on student deficits. Instead instructional strategies will focus on students’ ability to think, process information, and problem-solve. Students with mild disabilities may not be able to read at grade level, but they can process information and problem solve at grade level if given the support and opportunity.

Common Core State Standards focus on the following:

1. Increasing the amount of informative text in English Language Arts
2. Providing literacy across all content areas
3. Having consistent standards across the states
4. Providing rich content and relevant processes
5. Infusing real-world application with academics

Classroom teachers will be expected to provide instructional activities that allow students to be active learners rather than passive learners. Students currently in classrooms are digital natives and have grown up with technology as an integral part of life. Educators who embrace CCSS will infuse technology into their curriculum and project-based learning. Real-world application of academic content cannot be separated from the reality of technology and its use in our lives.

CCSS also emphasizes the importance of explicitly teaching higher-order thinking skills across content areas. Many of our students, with print disabilities in particular, can think at grade level regardless of their ability to read or write at grade level. Teachers will be expected to change instruction to include these skills:

- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Complex thinking
- Comprehensive thinking
- Collaborative thinking
- Communicative thinking
- Cognitive transfer of thinking

Literacy is one of the hallmarks of CCSS.
MEMBER PROFILE: Joe L. Fulcher

DR. JOE FULCHER is the Chief Student Services Officer for the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), a large urban school system that serves more than 132,000 students in preschool through grade 12. It is the second largest school district in California and has about 15,000 students receiving special education services. As Chief Student Services Officer, Dr. Fulcher oversees 10 major departments, including Special Education. He began his career in the SDUSD as a District Counselor, and over the nearly 28 years that he has been in the school district, he has served in the roles of school psychologist, principal, and special education director. Joe has also taught graduate level courses at San Diego State University. He has been in his current position since 2009.

RON: How did you become involved in the field of special education?

JOE: I always knew I wanted to be in education, and while I was taking university coursework in counseling, I spoke to folks in school psychology and became excited about the work I could do in that field. My early interests were around nondiscriminatory assessments. I wanted to see if there was a way to fairly assess students of color in an unbiased way. I still maintain a strong interest in this area, and because I have colleagues and staff here in the district who share this interest, we have done some exciting work regarding assessment in our school district.

RON: Are you discouraged by the fact that after so many decades of struggling with the issue of disproportionality in special education, we still have not solved the problem?

JOE: I see us [SDUSD] as a progressive district. We were concerned that for many years our achievement scores for students with disabilities were flat. So, for the last five or six years, we have talked about a greater alignment between special education and general education, and we have been making this happen. I won’t say that it is seamless, but there is certainly more dialogue and discussion across our departments about the most pressing instructional and behavioral issues. At the school level, special education teachers are able to talk more with general education teachers about strategies that may work to intervene behaviorally or academically with all students, but especially with students of color. We have strengthened our inclusive practices, including the use of co-teaching, and we have seen achievement improve. I am very proud of the progress we have made in this regard, and we are committed to expanding inclusive practices and our collaboration with general education.

Response to Intervention has helped as well, and our pre-referral mechanisms have improved. We are expecting that certain things be done before students are referred to special education. We have instituted, with our board’s blessing, a comprehensive evaluation process which requires our assessment teams to look at a number of factors—we call them exclusionary factors—especially for minority students, before we decide

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English Language Learners with Disabilities in Massachusetts: Identification, Instruction, and Challenges
by Carrie Parker, Ed.D., Senior Research Scientist, Education Development Center, Inc.

While the overall student population in Massachusetts has dropped slightly in the last 10 years (from 974,015 students in 2002 to 953,369 students in 2012), the number of English language learners (ELLs) has increased by more than 50 percent, from 45,779 in 2002 to 69,586 in 2012. ELLs have gone from 4.7 percent of the student population in 2002 to 7.3 percent in 2012. At the same time, the percentage of ELLs with identified disabilities has increased from 9.8 percent of ELLs in 2001-2002 to 14.8 percent of ELLs in 2010-2011.

In April 2012, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE) contracted with researchers at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), to study current practices across the state in identifying disabilities among ELLs and in meeting these students’ instructional needs in schools and districts. The study included an online survey sent to all directors of special education and directors and coordinators of English learner education programs in districts with ELLs, as well as in-depth qualitative interviews of directors from five school districts and principals and teachers from four schools. The survey was completed by special education and bilingual education leaders from 64 percent of Massachusetts’ districts, which serve 94 percent of ELLs across the state. While everyone interviewed described many issues in both identifying disabilities among ELLs and in meeting the instructional needs of ELLs with disabilities, almost all individuals also described concrete ways in which they are addressing the needs of ELLs, including both systems solutions and teaching strategies. The overall findings suggest that, while Massachusetts schools and districts face challenges in meeting the instructional needs of ELLs with disabilities—such as articulating the role and fidelity of implementation of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) for ELLs and improving the integration of ELL teachers and administrators in school and district collaborative structures—there are many highly committed individuals with extensive expertise who are using that expertise to meet the needs of ELL students with disabilities.

ELL teachers and administrators tend to identify more challenges in meeting the needs of ELLs with disabilities than do other teachers and administrators.

District ELL directors were consistently more likely than special education directors or others to recognize issues in identifying disabilities among ELLs and in meeting their instructional needs, particularly in distinguishing between disabilities and language acquisition, and in meeting both IEP goals and ELL support requirements. While formal collaboration opportunities exist in almost all the schools and districts interviewed, ELL teachers were rarely included in professional learning communities; when they were included, it was usually informally, during lunch breaks or before or after school. While district directors and principals described positive changes regarding the inclusion of ELL teachers or specialists in child study teams during the pre-referral and referral processes, there continue to be differences in perceptions between ELL teachers and all others interviewed and surveyed, both in terms of the integration of ELL professionals into formal collaborative structures and in how they view the needs of ELL students with disabilities. The different perspectives of ELL staff and special education staff also reflect the myriad initiatives currently present in the state and the consequent pressures on teachers to respond to them.

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MTSS is being interpreted and implemented in different ways in different schools and districts; these ways range from a simple shift in vocabulary to a significant move toward using progress monitoring as a tool to improve instruction for struggling ELLs and to provide more information for determination of disabilities.

Among those surveyed who said they are currently using some form of tiered instruction model, those who have been implementing MTSS for more years were more likely to say that the system is meeting the needs of ELLs with disabilities, while those who are new to MTSS were less likely to say that it is meeting those students’ needs. The interviews indicated a wide range of interpretations as to how to implement MTSS. In some districts, the MTSS vocabulary has been pasted on to existing pre-referral practices with almost no changes to instructional practice. In a few districts, generally those with more years of implementation, MTSS is seen as a new way of teaching, of providing tiered interventions and consistent progress monitoring, and of understanding what is working and not working for individual students—providing them with alternative ways to learn without waiting for them to fail. A small number of individuals spoke about the potential of using an MTSS model with English instruction as well as content, which would include tiered interventions to help ELLs learn English.

The repeated challenge of finding appropriate and valid individualized assessments is being addressed by some interviewees by using multiple sources of data for disability identification.

There was an overwhelming recognition among all those interviewed that ELLs with disabilities are diverse: they have diverse language backgrounds, diverse levels of English acquisition, and diverse disabilities, and thus meeting their needs demands a diversity of solutions.

Parent engagement was noted by many as a critical part of any successful program, but almost universally, those interviewed said that they have not found a successful way to engage parents of ELLs.

Among principals and district directors, there was an acknowledgement that while efforts have been made to engage parents of ELLs, these efforts have by and large not been successful. Thirty-eight percent of all survey respondents identified as a challenge having teachers know about the diversity of language and cultural norms among ELL students; the percentage was higher (47 percent) among ELL directors, once again highlighting the differences in views between ELL directors and other survey and interview participants.
At both the school and district levels, there is a desire for more staff trained in both special education and English as a Second Language (ESL).

Among those surveyed, more respondents said that there is a need for training in effective ELL instructional strategies, in understanding the differences between special education and ESL instruction, and in understanding cultural and linguistic diversity. Fewer respondents said there was a need for professional development on special education strategies. Principals who were interviewed want more teachers with dual training in both special education and ESL strategies.

Further research can contribute to identifying those areas of strength that can be shared across schools and districts, as well as areas for improvement.

EDC researchers identified five areas for research, with a focus on MTSS, data-driven instruction, and professional development:

- Target research questions to the specific state or district context. For example, in Massachusetts, research could explore how districts are using the state-developed self-assessment tool for evaluating implementation of MTSS and how the tool is impacting MTSS implementation.
- Conduct in-depth case studies of those schools and districts that have been implementing MTSS for more than four years, focusing on the impact of MTSS on struggling ELLs.
- Conduct in-depth interviews with experienced teachers who are considered to have “intuition” about disability pre-referral and identification in order to articulate and systematize the expertise that is encompassed in their intuition.
- Using student-level data, assess the academic performance of students designated as Formerly Limited English Proficient (FLEP). There are a number of critical research areas: Are there differences in FLEP students’ performance by district exit criteria? Do FLEP students get referred to special education at a higher rate than their ELL or native English-speaking peers? Does FLEP student performance vary by the number of years in an ELL program? By the grade at which students are designated as FLEP?
- Investigate how schools use data to guide instructional planning and to address the needs of ELLs and ELLs with disabilities.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations suggested to MADESE as a result of the EDC study focused specifically on the state context in order to build on current successes and address pressing challenges. However, we summarize here those recommendations that may be relevant to all states and school districts:

- Develop a formal synergistic document or website that makes explicit connections between the many different education initiatives in the state, and identifies specific ways in which different stakeholders (special education, ELL, general education) can make connections in their practice.
- Identify research-based, web-based sources that provide guidance on interventions and other components of the MTSS model (e.g., the National Center for Response to Intervention at www.rti4success.org or the National Center on Intensive Interventions at http://www.intensiveintervention.org/).
- Promote greater integration of ELL teachers, specialists, and administrators in formal professional learning communities and other collaborative structures or opportunities, as well as in special education evaluation teams as appropriate, to obtain their perspectives on meeting student needs.
- Provide a glossary of terms that defines the multiple types of assessment tools and their uses (i.e., standards-based assessments, state standardized assessment, benchmark assessments, individual tests of achievement, tests of intelligence, curriculum-based measurements, curriculum-based assessment, criterion-based assessment, universal screeners, progress monitoring tools, reading diagnostic assessments for core instruction).
- Build on the positive trend toward individualization by providing districts and schools with the tools to quickly disaggregate their data in order to see disability categories, trajectories of growth, language levels, and assessment scores of ELLs with disabilities. This descriptive information can be a starting point for using data in individualizing instruction and as part of each district’s adoption and implementation of MTSS.
- Investigate promising practices for ELL parent participation identified in the literature, including different types of parent/family engagement.
- Embed professional development on meeting the needs of ELLs with disabilities into the overall vision for the state, district, and school, and present it in ways that support delivery of services (e.g., tiered teaching) and connections to ongoing initiatives.

**References**

Common Core State Standards...

6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*

8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

CCSS increases the rigor of classroom instruction. The shift from breadth to depth is the key to understanding the change in the instruction required when shifting to CCSS. Currently, many high school students do not acquire the reading skills needed to discern information appropriately through text provided at the college level. CCSS will provide the structure to increase students’ ability to critically read text across content areas in order to prepare students for college and careers. Finally, CCSS was designed to increase students’ ability to compete in a global society.

The most important implication for shifting to CCSS is the change in employment requirements for the future workforce. Jobs in today’s workforce require an increase in education and training. The number of jobs available to adults with only a high school diploma has drastically decreased in the past 40 years, and this trend will continue into the future.

How Are the Common Core State Standards Better for Students with Disabilities?

The CCSS supports the development of higher-order thinking skills as well as problem-solving skills. Alignment across

The CCSS supports the shift from a traditional education, which aligned with the needs of the industrial age, to a progressive education that aligns with the global economy and the age of technology.
grade levels, based on the anchor standards, builds upon the most basic levels of reading and math skills while also progressively introducing deeper understanding at each grade level. The standards within each content area increase in complexity and require a higher level of processing skills to meet the standard as students increase grade levels. This allows teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all students within the parameters of the CCSS.

Lesson plan development for students with disabilities will require some creativity. Teachers will need to develop students’ thinking skills as the focus of the lesson. For example, teachers will need to have specific lessons with compare/contrast as the subject. Higher-functioning students may compare/contrast two passages from grade level informational text. Lower-functioning students may learn to compare/contrast by discussing the differences/similarities between something more familiar to them, such as Burger King versus McDonald’s. The key is that all students learn to compare/contrast, which is a thinking skill that must be explicitly taught.

**Where Do You Begin?**

Teachers across grade levels and in every content area will support the transition to the CCSS through explicit vocabulary instruction based on the academic vocabulary required within each content area. Research around the achievement gap focuses on understanding the achievement gap as a language gap, which begins long before students enter the school system. The CCSS focuses on literacy across content areas. To increase literacy, teachers will need to teach the academic vocabulary regardless of the content area.

SPEED, a special education district located approximately 30 minutes south of Chicago, designed a vocabulary program specifically for students with a broad range of disabilities and abilities. As a result of focusing on vocabulary development and the use of general education materials, while also increasing expectations for student learning, SPEED increased the number of students who were able to meet or exceed Illinois State Standards, as measured by the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT), and decreased the number of students in academic warning.

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**SPEED Student Progress on State Testing**

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**The CCSS and the Future of Education**

The CCSS supports the shift from a traditional education aligned with the needs of the industrial age, to a progressive education that aligns with the global economy and the age of technology. It also requires that students become active learners through project-based activities and the use of technology in instruction. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire describes traditional education as the banking system of education, in which children are passive learners and information is deposited and withdrawn. For many reasons, including advances in technology, the traditional system of education is no longer effective. The CCSS requires that all children (including those with disabilities and at risk of educational failure) be not only active learners but also have the ability to think, process information, and problem solve. As stated previously, students may not be able to read at grade level, but they can think at grade level. Therefore, the CCSS is not a barrier to supporting special education or urban education; instead, it is a set of standards that finally focuses on the abilities of students and not their deficits.

*For additional information: See “Research to Build and Present Knowledge” in Writing and “Comprehension and Collaboration” in Speaking and Listening for other standards relevant to gathering, assessing, and applying information from print and digital sources.*
there is a disability. We have worked very closely with community groups, also. For example, we are working with the Association of African American Educators and our Latino Advisory Committee in developing community-based interventions that support our students. This includes in-home interventions. These two groups also are very involved in our oversight committee that meets quarterly to look at our placement of students of color in special education. We have seen a steady decline in those numbers over the past two or three years.

RON: What positive changes have you seen in the field overall since you began your career?

JOE: One of the things that pleases me a great deal is that there has been a move away from a deficit model that focuses on fixing a problem with the student. Now we look at what we can do in the system to improve support to all students. I am also happy with the amount of inclusion that is happening in our district and in other urban districts around the country. More and more students with disabilities are now being exposed to the core curriculum, and the focus has shifted to quality of instruction for these students.

RON: What concerns do you have about the future of special education?

JOE: One major challenge is the increased threat to special education funding. We need to make sure that the funding exists to provide the supports our students need.

RON: Speaking of that, we have noticed that in California in particular there is concern over the issue of “encroachment.” Some school boards have complained about the extent to which local contributions for special education encroach upon the funds for general education programs. What is your response to that?

JOE: Encroachment is not real. It is based on a faulty assumption that special education costs are syphoning off funds from general education, which is certainly not the case. We all know that special education is part of general education and not something separate. Perhaps if one sees special education students as unworthy of those services, you can see these costs as an encroachment. Otherwise it is absurd. The use of this term is faulty.

RON: Any other concerns?

JOE: The retention of special education teachers is an issue. We need to put some more energy into retaining quality teachers and other support staff. We need to work with our administrators, principals in particular, to help them effectively support special education teachers. We need to see how we can help special education teachers deal with the burdensome paperwork that is so much a part of their jobs and also eliminate the isolation that so many of these teachers feel at their schools. Special education teachers often feel alone on an island and don’t have the connections they need with other special educators in the district. Technology can help us with both these issues.

RON: We are pleased to be holding our Spring 2013 meeting in San Diego, and the focus will be on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a topic recommended by you and some of your staff. What is happening in SDUSD relative to services for students with ASD?

JOE: As in most other urban school districts, we have seen significant growth in the numbers of students identified with autism. We see the major areas of focus for these students as social thinking, peer interaction, and communication. We are trying to engage families as early as possible and have strengthened our preschool programs so they offer support to the families of students with ASD. In that way, by the time these students are ready for kindergarten, we have addressed some of the most important behavioral and communication issues. We also have a multidisciplinary behavior support resources team that is dispatched to schools throughout the district to assist with behavioral interventions. A large amount of their caseload is students with ASD.

RON: Why belong to the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative?

JOE: There are so many reasons; I don’t know where to start. I will say that it is always good to sit and have conversations with others who are struggling with the same issues you are. I love the collegial discussions that occur at the Collaborative’s Member Meetings, as well as the cutting edge information the organization provides through e-mails and newsletters. The member meetings are great opportunities to see what other school districts are doing and to learn from them. My team and I look forward to being at these meetings and speaking with our colleagues from all over the nation.
Spring Meeting to Focus on Autism Spectrum Disorder

The Collaborative’s Spring 2013 Member Meeting will be held in San Diego, California, May 8–11. Its topical focus will be “Covering the Spectrum: Current Trends in the Delivery of Services to Students with Autism.”

Autism spectrum disorder is a clinically defined condition that has severely challenged the capacity of educational leaders and teachers to provide appropriate and sufficient supports to a growing population of students. The goal of the Spring Meeting is to learn from nationally recognized researchers as well as experts from Collaborative member districts about current best practices and what these suggest for policy, service delivery, and leadership. The following questions will be explored:

• What principles should serve as the foundation for service delivery to this student population?
• What leadership and professional development strategies should be developed and implemented?
• What exemplars exist for effective partnerships with parents, medical professionals, and other providers serving students with autism and their parents?
• How do school districts protect against over-referral to special education, restrictive placements, and disproportionality?
• What assessments should be adopted?
• How can district leaders promote and support a focus on self-determination and transition planning for students with autism?

Our keynote speakers will set the tone for the meeting. Michael L. Wehmeyer, Ph.D., is a Professor of Special Education, Director of the Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities, and Associate Director of the Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas. Dr. Wehmeyer has authored or edited 30 books on disability and education-related issues pertaining to self-determination, transition, access to the general education curriculum for students with severe disabilities, and technology use by people with cognitive disabilities, including the widely used textbook *Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today’s Schools.*

Dianne Zager, Ph.D., is Director of the Center for Teaching and Research in Autism at the Pace University School of Education, as well as the Vice President of the Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities. She has gained national recognition for her work in the area of autism, focusing on personnel preparation and transition from school to work and adult living. Her recent books include *Autism Spectrum Disorders: Identification, Education, and Treatment* (3rd edition) and *Educating Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Research-Based Principles and Practices.*

For more information about the 2013 Spring Meeting, visit the Collaborative’s website at www.urbancollaborative.org.

2013 SPRING MEETING
Wednesday, May 8th – Saturday, May 11th, 2013

Covering the Spectrum: Current Trends in the Delivery of Services to Students with Autism

www.urbancollaborative.org

Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina
San Diego, California
Research shows Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States. ASD now affects 1 in 88 children and 1 in 54 boys. The Collaborative provided Fall 2012 Meeting participants an opportunity to discuss some of the issues faced by special and general education leaders in urban districts as they strive to deliver services that best meet the unique needs of students on the autism spectrum. During Saturday’s closing session, the Collaborative’s Assistant Director, Dr. Claudia Rinaldi, gave a brief presentation on this topic. She covered IDEA’s definition of autism, diagnosis rates by state, and how school districts across the country are endeavoring to offer programs that result in positive cognitive, communicative, academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for students on the spectrum. Following Dr. Rinaldi’s presentation, the Collaborative ended a member meeting, for the second time, with attendees participating in the World Café protocol. The World Café, a process for hosting large-group dialogues, is structured so that participants divide into smaller groups and engage in three or more 20-minute rounds of conversation.

Members Engage in Discussion on Autism Using World Café Protocol

Following are the five questions members explored during the World Café session and a few of the ideas that surfaced during those conversations.

**What types of professional development is your district offering educators on differentiating instruction to help students on the autism spectrum best access curriculum?**

**Professional development districts are currently providing:**

- Two intense days of professional development followed by one day of in-class coaching support
- Inclusion planning to move students from most restrictive to least restrictive in the cascade of services
- Voluntary quarterly professional development for teachers in the autism program
- Support provided by teacher consultants, district-level supervisors with expertise, and university-level autism researchers and other local experts
- 18 hours of course work for general and special education teachers and offsite training that includes crisis prevention intervention

**Ideas for other offerings:**

- Capitalize on summer professional development
- Provide professional development across all grades for vertical and horizontal alignment
- Provide monthly professional development for paraprofessionals
- Offer topic-specific interactive online modules
- Mirror professional development for principals

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How can educators ensure that core instruction is delivered in a way that addresses the learning profiles of students on the autism spectrum, considering both their strengths and needs? (Students with autism tend to be visual as opposed to auditory learners and to learn concrete content more easily than abstract material.)

- Provide homework that is concrete
- Assign most experienced teachers to teach students with autism
- Offer autism training, including ABA, for all teachers, substitutes, school administrators, and bus drivers
- Incorporate Universal Design for Learning principles in the classroom
- Provide in-class support and consultation for teachers
- Build lessons around student interest, individualizing by sensory needs, structure, and levels
- Foster and teach self-advocacy
- Assemble panel of higher-functioning students to share what is working and what is not working
- Conduct regular cycles of progress monitoring

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Research shows Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States. ASD now affects 1 in 88 children and 1 in 54 boys.

The Collaborative’s Kimberly Willingham captures ideas of members during the World Café protocol.
At the school level, how is your district engaging parents of children on the autism spectrum as partners in developing education plans that best meet the individual needs of their children? At the district level, what supports exist for these same parents, and how does the district tap into the expertise of parents when designing programs and services and making policy changes?

What districts are currently doing to engage parents of children on the spectrum:

- For pre-school program, bringing in typically developing peers as peer models; inviting parents to observe these interactions
- Keeping an open line of communication with advocacy groups, being transparent, and developing positive relationships with them
- Holding voluntary monthly Parent Education Series in the evenings to discuss a given topic; parents support one another, and veteran parents reach out to new parents; parents have ownership over meetings and provide input on topics discussed
- Parent mentors supporting the navigation of services available in schools and community
- Autism task force mobilizing community around ASD and connecting parents; working on issues in/out of schools and community, shaping policy, and accessing resources
- Forming partnership with medical community, each promising to not send mixed messages to parents; having parents and educators sit together on hospital’s advisory committee

Challenges districts face as they engage and support parents of children with ASD:

- Staff needing professional development on writing IEPs and what should go in them (writing specific apps for iPad in IEPs rather than type of support needed)
- Disconnect between referral sources; clear distinction between medical and educational diagnosis and connection to outcomes
- Cost of providing in-home training and paying external partners for such training
- Transition/postsecondary outcomes
- Students with Asperger’s Syndrome are an underserved population

The discussions that members shared during the World Café were rich and generated diverse viewpoints and strategies. They also surfaced concerns, including the resistance of some general education teachers and administrators due to a lack of knowledge or comfort with behavior management; complicated planning, depending on where services take place; inadequate support teams to meet increasing demands; training for psychologists on identifying students with autism; sustainability of current best practices and extension across all grades; and turnover in teaching staff and the implication for training. The Collaborative will continue this timely conversation at the Spring 2013 Meeting, “Covering the Spectrum: Current Trends in the Delivery of Services to Students with Autism,” during which time members will hear from nationally recognized researchers as well as experts from our member districts about current best practices and what these suggest for policy, service delivery, and leadership.

Find Dr. Rinaldi’s full presentation, along with notes from this session, at the Collaborative’s website, www.urbancollaborative.org, under Fall 2012 Meeting Presentations.

To learn more about the World Café protocol, visit http://www.theworldcafe.com/.
The topic of the 2012 Fall Member Meeting focused on one of the hottest issues in education today—the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS are driving professional development efforts and restructuring instruction in 45 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories. A large challenge for educators in the field of special education is addressing the needs of their special education students to meet these new and challenging national standards.

With this in mind, the meeting opened with an engaging consultancy session, during which participants benefitted from a facilitated, thought-provoking discussion on two challenges facing the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS): the transitioning of students to less restrictive settings and the meaningful assessment of students with disabilities.

Following highly engaging district size-alike conversations and interactive focus groups, David May-Stein, Assistant Superintendent of PPS, and Mary Jane Conley, Executive Director for PPS Program for Students with Exceptionalities, welcomed everyone to Pittsburgh and shared some key points about the many initiatives driving change in PPS. After their welcoming presentations, Dr. Brian McNulty, Vice-President for Leadership Development at the Leadership and Learning Center, and Ms. Rachel Quenemoen, Senior Research Fellow for the National Center on Educational Outcomes, keynoted the meeting and shared the latest research on the potential of the CCSS for students with disabilities and special educators.

Dr. McNulty’s keynote address was entitled “The School and District Improvement Leader, CCSS, and Students with Disabilities” and highlighted the need to capitalize on the CCSS goal of addressing reading, writing, listening, and language instruction as a shared responsibility of the entire school. He focused on the key aspect of the CCSS that addresses the instruction of more complex text and higher critical thinking skills for all students, including those with disabilities. He further stressed the importance of the use of data and fidelity of implementation to drive outcomes and close the achievement gap by closing the implementation gap.

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Dr. McNulty concluded his talk with suggested next steps for the adoption of the CCSS, including concentrating on thoroughly implementing a few standards at a time, monitoring and providing feedback and support, and learning as a system.

Following Dr. McNulty’s Keynote, Ms. Quenemoen delivered her complementary keynote speech CCSS and CCR for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (and the Educators who Teach and Support Them), focusing on communicative competence and its role in the CCSS and assessment practices. She presented research on the need for and benefits of using contemporary technologies to expand the communication abilities of students with severe disabilities. She emphasized the need to develop educators’ understanding of how students with significant cognitive disabilities learn, construct knowledge, and demonstrate what they learn. Ms. Quenemoen linked how communicative competence and the CCSS will elevate expectations for students with moderate and severe disabilities and how new assessment systems will ensure that all students meet higher standards. She presented the Standards-based Planning Tool for IEP Teams document that will enable teams to use standards to guide the development of IEP goals and objectives. (To review this tool, please visit the Collaborative’s website – www.urbancollaborative.org)

As an appropriate follow-up to the keynote presentations, concurrent sessions delved into specific CCSS planning and implementation initiatives across Collaborative member districts. During these sessions, representatives from member districts shared their innovative evidenced-based practices and professional development efforts for English language arts, mathematics, and science. The sessions resonated with attendees who were looking for practices and ideas to adopt in their own districts and engaged attendees in rich discussions of what has been effective so far.

Ten Collaborative member districts shared their CCSS work in addressing the specific needs of students with disabilities:

• Albuquerque Public Schools: The Balancing Act: Scaffolding Instruction to Meet the Demands of CCSS while Individualizing Education for Students with Disabilities

• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: Access to the Common Core State Standards for Students with Severe Disabilities and Autism

• Chicago Public Schools: Common Core in the Chicago Public Schools

• Los Angeles Unified School District: The Los Angeles Unified School District’s Collaborative Journey toward CCSS Implementation

• New York City Community School District 75: Climbing the Staircase of Complexity

• Orange County Public Schools: Granting all Students Access to the Promise of the Common Core State Standards: An Administrative Perspective

• Pittsburg Public Schools: Common Core State Standards: Supporting Students with Disabilities through Improved Service Delivery

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Meeting participant Kevin Jamison, of the Cincinnati Public Schools, shares during our Thursday morning Size A-like Session.

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• **SPEED Special Education Joint Agreement District #802**: No Longer the Tip of the Iceberg: Providing Specialized Instruction Based on Depth and not Breadth Using the Common Core Standards

• **The School District of Palm Beach County**: Common Core and Students with Disabilities: A Blueprint for Change

• **Washoe County Public Schools**: Common Core: From Theory to Practice

These presentations reinforced the diversity of approaches that school districts are taking in adopting the CCSS in instructional practices across subject areas. For most presenting school districts, their efforts began by identifying the instructional shifts that must happen to meet the demands of the new CCSS. Then, they developed pathways to support teachers, such as professional learning communities, professional development, and coaching, to build capacity across their districts. Most districts stated that they had adopted multi-year plans to transition or bridge to the CCSS, identifying deliberate goals, expected outcomes, and timelines. For example:

• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) presented on the development of its CCSS curriculum guides for general and special education teachers for each grade and subject, with accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities.

• Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) presented the state’s development of online modules that guide teachers in adopting the CCSS and its practices and linking the standards to individualized education goals. Further, LAUSD also presented on its use of Edmodo, a form of social media for education, and how it has aided the school district’s efforts to share the modules and links to its current basal adoptions in the different areas of the nation’s second largest school district.

• A session by New York’s District 75 focused on the use of research-based instructional practices and Universal Design for Learning in providing wider access to the core curriculum based on the CCSS.

These are just a few examples of the many practices and efforts that are aiding the adoption and implementation of the CCSS, and keeping students with disabilities and other diverse learners as a central focus. Collaborative members may view videos of Dr. McNulty’s and Ms. Quenemoen’s keynotes as well as member district presentations by visiting the Collaborative’s website at www.urbancollaborative.org.

Rachel Quenemoen and Brian McNulty answer questions from the audience following their keynote presentations. Ms. Quenemoen shares data from Moving Your Numbers, a report by the National Center on Educational Outcomes.

“...stressed the importance of the use of data and fidelity of implementation to drive outcomes and close the achievement gap by closing the implementation gap.”
Urban Perspectives in a publication of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative. The Collaborative's mission is to improve educational results and life opportunities of children and youth with disabilities in urban schools through leadership development.

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NEW COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS

The Collaborative currently links together 90 school districts from 28 states. Three school districts have joined since October 2012.

Iredell-Statesville Schools, NC
Maine Township High School District 207, IL
Wichita Public Schools USD 259, KS

For a complete list of Collaborative members and enrollment information, please visit our website at www.urbancollaborative.org.