



Friday, July 6  
Welcome, Lisa Zellner (Logout)

Home > News & Publications > LeaderNet News

Print Page  
For help with this section, contact:  
Dan Gursky, 202/879-4430

AFT LeaderNet [dropdown]  
 [Search]

Search LeaderNet News  
 [Search]

My QuickLinks [down arrow]

News & Publications

- LeaderNet News
- Recent LeaderNet News
- Last Year of LeaderNet News
- Submit a Story Idea to LeaderNet
- Daily News Clips
- AFT Publications
- AFT E-mail Newsletters
- Receive LeaderNet E-mail Alerts
- Submit a Story Idea to LeaderNet

- About AFT LeaderNet
- Need Help? Contact Us
- Change Your Password
- Make LeaderNet Your Home
- Receive LeaderNet E-mail Alerts
- Report an Error
- LeaderNet Suggestion Box

**Common Core workshops promote collaboration**

AFT members sat down with administrators, district officials, parents and other stakeholders June 29-July 1 to drill down into the Common Core State Standards: Together they learned how to implement them most effectively and how to pass that knowledge and enthusiasm on to their colleagues.

Educators have praised the standards for presenting a comprehensive learning experience, rather than teaching to the test. "This new set of standards actually is about trying to help all kids reach a deeper understanding," AFT president Randi Weingarten told conference participants. "It is about helping us help kids learn to critically think, and learn to apply knowledge as opposed to simply memorize."

Bringing together different factions to implement the standards, as this AFT-sponsored conference did, is at least as important, Weingarten said. "I am a zealot about the Common Core, but I'm even more of a zealot about having to do the advocacy all together as a community: parents, teachers, teacher leaders, unionists, superintendents, curriculum folk, clergy, school boards."

Participants attended in teams, so that principals, teachers and others from the same district sat together, listening to examples of how other districts have brought different stakeholders together to successfully begin implementation. Then each group had time to discuss how those strategies might work in their own districts.

"[If we don't] take the risk and work to build these relationships, we're always going to be shouting across the aisle at each other," said James Liou, a teacher and member of the Boston Teachers Union. "This has allowed us to collectively dip our toes in the water," said Kathleen Aldred, a professional development specialist also on the Boston team.

The meeting began with a panel of members who helped write the Common Core State Standards. Their contribution, as six of the 30 teachers who provided teachers' voice for the authors, guaranteed a "reality check" for the final standards. "Often, we are involved in dialogue, and nothing happens with that information," acknowledged Elisabeth Dickinson, a member of the Toledo Federation of Teachers. "This time, the writers did listen; they took many of the suggestions."

Participants then spent an afternoon engaged with Common Core education experts, "unpacking" the standards in detail—relating specific standards to actual curriculum and tasks for students. A presentation about assessment and accountability followed, and then teams from four different districts presented their successful rollout of Common Core.

The Cleveland team advised participants to use what was already in place as a starting point, and avoid reinventing the wheel. The group from Cleveland described how the union and school district together presented four awareness symposia for 250 to 300 teachers, principals and district administrators; implemented two six-hour professional development workshops to unpack the standards for K-12 teachers; and established a "Common Core champion" at each K-8 building to consult and train new users.

The team from Volusia County, Fla., gave a passionate account of their success with Thinking Math, an existing curriculum recently realigned to meet the core curriculum. Teachers who observed colleagues using "TM" got so fired up about it they wound up texting photos to one another of the students who were now experiencing a much fuller understanding of math concepts.

In Albuquerque, N.M., the focus is on integrating English language learners into Common Core standards. In partnership with Colorín Colorado, Albuquerque is working hard to reach all students, without dumbing down the curriculum. "We cannot simplify the text. We cannot simplify the demands," said Ellen Bernstein, president of the Albuquerque Teachers Federation. "We have to spend the time with our English language learners and all kids to make sure that we plan backwards and we go deep."

Finally, the Chicago team explained its system of teacher leaders who train others in developing units of study. Supported by the district, which granted professional development time to facilitate the project, six teams of teachers wrote units that will be included in a national databank of exemplary Common Core-driven lessons.

Throughout the conference, participants were given specific tools to take home—such as examples of how colleagues in other districts found funding, samples of parent information letters explaining Common Core, even a flow chart outlining how to work successfully with disparate parties on a shared goal.

This collaborative spirit carried the conference. "If we do that one thing that doesn't cost a dime—work together—we will be able to navigate through this," said Weingarten. [Virginia Myers/Photo by Michael Campbell]

July 3, 2012



Albuquerque teachers shared their success with Common Core implementation.

Got a great, related story—one that's happening in your state or local? [Send a story idea to the AFT editorial department](#) with a short description and contact information.

<b>LeaderNet E-mail Alerts</b>
Would you like to receive e-mail notifications when similar stories appear on LeaderNet?
<a href="#">Sign up for the LeaderNet E-mail Alert service.</a>

