

# THE CURRENT



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## *Director's Report*

*By Kim Gibbons, Ph.D., Executive Director*

### **Making Sense of Common Core State Standards: Fact vs. Fiction**

In recent months, there has been an increased interest in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Depending on whom you talk to, some think CCSS are the answer to improving the educational system and outcomes for students while others think it is the demise of education. As educators, how do we sort out fact from fiction and convey the facts to parents and the broader community?

#### What are Common Core State Standards?

Let's start with the basics. Standards are not new. Prior to states adopting standards, there was a set of standards that were driven by textbook publishers that produced national series used across states. Then, states began developing their own standards, often built upon the standards written by others. At the same time, there has been growing concern that education quality and student achievement has remained stagnant across the nation based on student achievement data and comparisons with other countries. One possible reason has been an uneven patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

At an intuitive level, if we use research to guide what students should be able to know and do in reading and math, there really shouldn't be variation from state to state. Students who live in Wisconsin shouldn't be expected to learn different concepts and skills than students who live in MN. Recognizing the value and need for consistent learning goals across states, in 2009 the state school chiefs and governors worked on developing consistent standards for what students should be able to know and do in English/Language Arts and Math. The CCSS are informed by the highest, most effective standards from states across the United States and countries around the world. The standards define the knowledge and skills students should gain throughout their K-12 education in order to graduate high school prepared to succeed in entry-level careers, introductory academic college courses, and workforce training programs. On the surface, CCSS seem pretty straight forward, however, in recent months, there has been increasing "hype" around the standards and there are many myths floating around.

## *Director's Report – continued*

### Common Myths around CCSS

Myth #1: CCSS tell teachers what to teach. The CCSS establish what students need to learn but do not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

Myth #2: CCSS amount to a national curriculum for our schools. The CCSS are *not* a curriculum. It is a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

Myth #3: CCSS will be implemented through No Child Left Behind (NCLB), signifying that the federal government will be leading them. The Common Core is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind or any other federal initiative. The federal government played no role in the development of the CCSS. State adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory. States began the work to create clear, consistent standards before the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which provided funding for the Race to the Top grant program.

Myth #4: CCSS were adopted by states as part of the Race to the Top grant program. SCRED recently completed a Race to the Top application. The federal government gave competitive advantage to Race to the Top applicants that demonstrated that they had or planned to adopt college-and career-ready standards for all students. The program did not specify the Common Core or prevent states from creating their own, separate college-and career-ready standards. States and territories voluntarily chose to adopt the Common Core to prepare their students for college, career, and life. Many states that were not chosen for Race to the Top grants continue to implement the Common Core.

Myth #5: CCSS will result in a national database of private student information. There are no data collection requirements for states adopting the standards. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Implementing the Common Core State Standards does not require data collection. The means of assessing students and the use of the data that result from those assessments are up to the discretion of each state and are separate and unique from the Common Core.

### CCSS in Minnesota

Now that the “myths” around the CCSS are addressed, let’s talk about how CCSS are addressed in MN. MN adopted the CCSS in reading but not math. Our state did not adopt the math standards as we believed our current standards were more rigorous than the national standards. The major underlying premise of these standards are increased rigor and higher standards for students. The alternative to having high education standards is not having them. Is that really what we want for our students, particularly, when there is so much research that confirms that high expectations are significantly related to increased achievement?

## *Director's Report – continued*

Despite the importance of high expectations, rigorous standards alone will not improve student achievement. The devil is always in the detail, and the detail is implementation! School districts around the country, including SCRED districts, need to focus on the critical details of implementation and allot enough time and resources to helping teachers learn the best ways to teach the standards. Remember, the standards tell us what students need to be able to know and do at each grade level. They do not tell teachers how to teach the standards, which curriculum to use, how much time to allot to the various standards, what order to teach the standards, and what to do if students are not meeting standards. This is the hard work that is ahead of us and will continue to be the focus on staff development and support offered through SCRED! Setting rigorous expectations for what students should know and be able to do is an essential step that will bring a degree of consistency to our national education system. However, the CCSS standards alone will not do the job. I would argue that it is time to shift our national intensity away from the standards and focus on their implementation, with a focus on curriculum and instruction. At SCRED, we are embracing the opportunity to continue working with your member districts on preparing students to have successful lives after they leave our educational system!

*UNIQUE LEARNERS' UPDATE*  
*By Jamie Nord, Director of Special Education,*  
*Nicole Jack and Nicole Woodward, Unique*  
*Learners' Managers*

2014-2015...A Year of Change at SCRED!

In light of ever-changing and ever-growing student needs, along with the retirements of some long-standing and highly valued SCRED employees, the 2014-2015 school year will be marked with numerous changes here at SCRED! It is in celebration of all their service and accomplishment that we bid farewell to Marleen Zak, Low Incidence Collaborative Planner (retiring in June) and Stuart Harder, Autism Consultant and Behavior Analyst (retiring in January). While we surely will not be able to replace the expertise and passion both Marleen and Stu bring to their service to SCRED and its member districts, we are thrilled to share the exciting changes on the horizon!

Jamie Nord, who has been wearing the hat of a Special Education Director as well as a Unique Learners' Manager (ULM) (serving Chisago Lakes School District) for the past few years, will relinquish her ULM duties and shift her focus to providing direction to all member districts and SCRED staff. Nicole Jack will be taking over Jamie's ULM duties in Chisago Lakes and will also be serving Pathway to Change and Vision, SCRED's federal setting IV programs. Nicole Woodward, will continue to serve as the ULM for North Branch and Rush City. Holly Grams is the newest addition to the ULM team and will be serving Pine City (with the exception of Vision), East Central, and Hinckley-Finlayson.

Secondary Low Incidence will have the pleasure of receiving support from Jennifer DuFresne. Jennifer has already been spending time at SCRED and in the districts, and we are very excited for the experience and knowledge Jennifer will bring to the team. Cindy Bruning has just accepted a special education teaching position in her hometown of Bemidji. We will be working to fill her position as Elementary Low Incidence Collaborative Planner as soon as possible.

Jeanne Johnson will shift her focus to provide service to students served under the categories of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Physical Impairment (PI) only. Stu Harder, in his last few months of employment with SCRED, will step away from ASD evaluation and be taking on the role of Other Health Disabilities (OHD) consultant! Stu will be working with our students who have rare medical conditions that impact educational performance. ASD consultation will now be divided between Low Incidence and Social Behavior Collaborative Planners.

SCRED's Social Behavior team is also going through significant changes! With Holly Grams stepping into the ULM role and Christine Matthews moving onto exciting new adventures in Colorado next year, this team will be brand new! Tiffany Goodchild (Chisago Lakes and Federal Setting IV), Liz Deen (Pine City, East Central, and Hinckley-Finlayson), and Molly Bishop (North Branch and Rush City) – we are very excited to welcome this new team!

In addition to these changes, we are welcoming several new school psychologists to SCRED member districts next year: Jennifer Eldred (Sunrise River Elementary School in North Branch), Amy Carlon (Hinckley-Finlayson), Katie Goulet (East Central), Beth Sowden (Chisago Lakes Middle School), Angela Christenson (Chisago Lakes High School), and Maddie Sutton (Taylors Falls Elementary). In addition, Kaitlin O'Shea, who has been serving in the northern districts this past year, will be joining the Chisago Lakes team as the school psychologist at Primary School. Amber Zank, who has been serving Chisago Lakes Middle School, will take over program coordination and school psychologist duties at the Fairview Education Center (Pathway to Change and Fairview Treatment School) in Chisago Lakes.

The 2014-2015 school year will certainly be a time of change for us at SCRED – we're saying goodbye to some of our most long-standing staff and welcoming several new faces to the team! While we'll miss so many of our friends, we're also elated to welcome our new staff - it's sure to be a great one!!

*Instructional Services Update*  
*By Adam Lekwa,*  
*Instructional Services Coordinator*

The school year passed quickly, and the calendar for the 2014-15 school year has already taken shape. Compared to this school year, we are happy to be able to offer a greater number of opportunities for professional development in topics ranging across instruction and assessment. Keep an eye on the Professional Learning tab on the SCRED web page for registration to become available.

As you browse through catalogs for the August and 2014-15 school year sessions you might notice a new acronym: Universal Design for Learning, or UDL (our apologies for one more acronym...). The main idea behind UDL is that instruction can be designed and implemented so that students with a diverse range of instructional needs can benefit. It is a way to think about how the needs of students and elements of the instructional environment relate to the objectives of instruction.

The broad concept of “universal design” came from the world of architecture when designers started to implement building features that could serve the same purpose (achieve the same objective) for as many people as possible (who do not have the same physical abilities). This is the logic behind side-walk cut-outs and ramps into buildings—they are accessible and useable by far more people than just stairs or curbs alone.

This same logic is applicable in education and can guide planning and decision making. One application of this logic was developed by staff at the Center for Applied Special Technology in Massachusetts (CAST). The CAST UDL guidelines are organized into three broad categories: (1) Representation (how information is presented), (2) Expression (how students communicate during instruction), and (3) Engagement, or elements of instruction that can be used to help students remain engaged in learning. Specific examples of instructional elements which we can (and often do) change to meet diverse needs are provided within each of these three broad categories. A diagram of the categories of UDL created by CAST and descriptions of options within each is included at the end of the August and the 2014-15 professional development catalogs.

## *Outcomes Services Update*

*By Kindle Perkins Kabat,  
Outcomes Manager*



The SCRED Outcomes Services had a successful Spring 2014 MAP and GOM testing window! MAP data is now auto-loaded into TIES at the end of each day of testing. Once a student completes a “valid MAP test”, scores are available in iCue by 9am the next day and in Cognos within 48 hours. In March and April, staff in each district were trained on how to use browser-based scoring and direct entry into Aimsweb. The majority of buildings participated, and this spring GOM data was available in Aimsweb immediately using this data entry process. Likewise, GOM data was loaded into TIES before the spring deadline!

The Outcomes Services Manager and the Instructional Services Team will be meeting with administrative teams in each district throughout June to review the spring data.

Over the past few months we have been having discussions with each district regarding the testing window dates for next year. Benchmark testing windows for next year are listed below:

- Fall:      K-8+ GOM – Sept 8 - 19  
               2-8+ MAP – Sept 8 – Oct 3  
               **\*\*Note: the Fall MAP window is a 4 week window**
- Nov:        K-1 GOM (Early Literacy) – Nov 3 - 14
- Winter:     K-8+ GOM – Jan 12 - 23  
               (OPTIONAL MAP testing) – NWEA Winter Window: Dec 1 – Feb 28  
               **\*\*MAP data will not be loaded into TIES**
- Spring:     K-8+ GOM – **TBD** (either April 27 - May 8, OR May 4 – May 15)  
               2-8+ MAP – March 11 - April 8  
               **\*\*Note: the Spring MAP window is earlier than the GOM window**

Over the summer Outcome Services will be working on target analysis projects, Early Childhood data, cleaning up databases, and many other exciting projects, while gearing up for the 2014-15 school year. Have a great summer!

## **Current Challenges Facing the Future of Secondary Special Education and Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities at St. Croix River Education District**

Local school districts have been challenged to improve student achievement, graduation rates, and the successful transition of students to postsecondary education, employment, and other aspects of community living. St. Croix River Education District has a role to provide research and leadership for staff development and interagency collaboration services. One research source is The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET). NCSET first held a leadership summit in 2003 to address how state teams would expand or complement their state improvement plans to ensure that youth with disabilities who transition from school to adult life have increased opportunities for independent living by providing for non-institutional options in care and services. This was in response to the July 1999 Supreme Court Olmstead Decision. Ten years have passed since that leadership conference. Many changes were implemented over the past ten years to provide increased opportunities for youth with disabilities a more independent life. Are today's youth with disabilities better prepared for non-institutional options in care and services?

Just over ten years ago, there were eight challenges identified as a result of several combined national commissions on excellence in special education and published in the NCSET January 2004 Discussion Paper. The challenges each have outcomes based measures that each state agency monitors. SCRED also measures many of the outcomes selected for improvement areas in staff development plans. This article summarizes the identified challenges and gives information about what programs SCRED put in place to improve outcomes for the goal of a more independent life after high school. Included are the continuing needs and plans for further staff development.

### **Challenge 1: Promote students' self-determination and self-advocacy**

Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. Students who have self-determination skills are prepared to participate in decision making about their lives. Self-determination skills include self-advocacy, social skills, organizational skills, community and peer connection, communication, conflict resolution, career skill building, career development, and computer/technological competency.

Programs implemented at SCRED to address self-determination and self-advocacy:

- Starting in early childhood decision making strategies are employed to support children to express their preferences and make informed choices.

- Social skills curriculum is implemented to teach students to develop an internal locus of control.

- Work based learning and career exploration opportunities are available to students. SCRED and

County Transition Committees support local projects to increase work based learning activities for students.

### **Continued Need**

Students with disabilities often develop more external locus of control. There is a tendency to intervene with too much prompting and less promoting self-advocacy skills. Students need to develop the self-advocacy skills needed to direct their post-secondary planning. County Transition Committees have identified increased needs to prepare youth for today's competitive employment future. Students need to be more active in their participation at Individual Education Planning meetings.

### **Staff Development Plan**

SCRED will offer staff development courses for Self Advocacy Skills this August.

Improve activities in an RTI model to offer more activities for post-secondary planning and employment development, career development in high school general curriculum course work.

*Low Incidence Update - continued***Challenge 2: Ensure students have access to the general education curriculum.**

One of the landmark changes impacting the improvement of independence for students is the increased access to general education curriculum for secondary students with disabilities. Instruction practices now include differentiated instruction. Students with disabilities are achieving the standards set for all students. The Response to Intervention Model (RTI) and tiered approach to interventions helps ensure a greater level of independence. Curriculum for students with more severe disabilities has improved to align with state standards in core instruction areas. SCRED districts have set ambitious instruction target goals for all students.

**Continued Need**

There is continued need to improve instructional strategies in the core instruction curricula and methods for mathematics. The gap increases and is especially evident for secondary students with more significant disabilities. School districts also continue to be challenged to offer the variety of instructional skill levels needed to meet the needs of all students adequately. General education teachers need support to implement a universal design for learning in order to accommodate learning for all.

**Staff Development Plan**

Support all teachers in understanding and developing a UDL (Universal Design for Learning) approach to their instruction planning and delivery.

**Challenge 3: Make high school graduation decisions based on meaningful indicators of students' learning and skills and clarify the implications of different diploma options for students with disabilities.**

Graduation changes include the addition of alternate assessments. The MCA Mod came and went. MTAS is still in place. Both however require students to meet the standards expected and aligned with requirements for all students getting a diploma. At this time in 2014, most parents and students are familiar with graduation requirements in the state of Minnesota. Understanding the indicators helps schools identify the critical skills students need to be successful at gaining independence. Minnesota is one of the states that has adopted policy not to award different diplomas for students with disabilities.

**Diploma options in MN**

MN does not have a varied diploma. There are 3 ways a decision is made to consider earning a diploma. By credit and graduation rule completion. By a combination of credit/rule completion and IEP decision, or by IEP decision only. All students receive the same diploma in MN.

**Continued Need**

Continued support for research and development of outcomes based measures is needed. Continued support and services for measuring student progress based on meaningful indicators of performance.

**Staff Development Plan**

SCRED Unique Learner Conference and ongoing professional development plans include a focus on progress monitoring techniques for instructional decisions and program analysis.

**Challenge 4: Ensure that students access to and full participation in postsecondary education and employment**

During the past ten years the interagency committees for Transition have initiated a number of services to provide parents with essential information for student planning for post high school education and employment training. The committees have hosted information fairs, set up web site links, and offered specific training sessions for SSI, Guardianship, and Preparing for College. Efforts were made to increase participation of appropriate agencies at student planning meetings. Changes in compliance regulations help support a coordinated set of services. Schools added specific work based learning evaluation curriculum that assist the student to identify their skills and interest for future employment. Mentorship and On the Job Training Work Based Learning activities were increased. More employers became involved in partnerships with Work Based Learning experiences. Summer youth employment experiences are offered that include instructional supports for work skill development.

**Continued Need**

Students with disabilities have traditionally been placed with institutionalized job placement primarily in the career area of cleaning/building maintenance services. There is continued need to find employment experiences for youth in a variety of career interest areas. It is important to consider a variety of career interests if the goal of moving toward more independent community employment.

**Staff Development Plan**

SCRED will offer a training day for Secondary Special Education Teachers. TRAX, a system to measure needs for Transition, is in the second year of training implementation.

Staff consultation services from SCRED Collaborative Planners will continue to support work based learning activities and training support for staff.

**Challenge 5: Increase informed parent participation and involvement in education planning, life planning, and decision-making.**

Families are valuable resources in establishing cultural relationships with the community and contributing to work readiness. SCRED provides parent education resources and services to support informed participation in planning meetings and decision making for life after high school.

Both the Chisago and Pine Transition Interagency Committees have parent representatives. Their participation is valuable to understand the perspective of parent needs when developing projects to support parent education.

**Continued Need**

The current parent members of the Transition Committees will soon “retire” from their role as parents because their children will successfully graduate and transition to adult independent life. The committees are looking for volunteers. Please contact the SCRED office if interested.

*Early Childhood Update*  
*By Karen Wolner,*  
*Early Childhood Collaborative Planner*

Spring is finally here! Early childhood special education teachers are wrapping up evaluations, and holding transition conferences in preparation for our students moving on to Kindergarten in September. There is much to accomplish in the short time remaining.

We are in the process of our spring data collection and staff will soon be analyzing their data to see the final outcomes from the past school year. The five literacy areas we collect data on are: Picture Naming, Rhyming, Alliteration, Letter Naming Fluency, and Letter Sound Fluency. In Math we collect data on: Oral Counting Fluency, Number Naming, One to One Correspondence, and Quantity Comparison. We will review the data to see what areas of learning most of the children were/were not close to target on. We know that in the classroom the Language Environment, Repeated Read Aloud, and Print and Early Writing impact the child data. If we do not get the outcomes we wanted, we then discuss what instructional changes we can make to achieve the outcomes we want next year.

We have taken a big step in our Math data analysis this year by having early numeracy age-based norms. We are now better able to make informed decisions regarding individual child progress. Children not meeting performance benchmarks may be in need of further intervention or instructional support. While there is not much research yet on math interventions for early childhood, we are waiting to hear about a possible pilot next year for an intervention being developed by Dr. Robin Hojnosi at Lehigh University. More to come!

## *SCRED Announcements: Upcoming Events*

You are invited to attend two American Cancer Society's Relay for Life events coming up in June and July.

**The first event is Saturday, June 21<sup>st</sup> in North Branch during the North Branch Midsummer Festival, 12:30-5:30 pm.**

*Take a FREE test drive and the Ford Motor Company/Anderson Koch of North Branch will donate up to \$6,000 to the Chisago County Relay for Life. The Relay earns \$20/test drive. One per household.*

*Where: Lake State Credit Union parking lot in North Branch, Highway 95, across from Central Park. This is an easy thing to do ~ free but you are really giving \$20 to the Relay for Life. No pressure - no sales people.*

**The second event is Friday, July 25<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 pm at the Almelund Threshing Grounds on Highway 95, east of Almelund.**

*If you have not attended before, this is a beautiful experience watching all the survivors be celebrated, walk the luminaria adorned pathway, enjoy games, supper and a great night supporting the fight against cancer. The theme this year is Carnival for Life and Finish the Fight.*

*Please invite your friends and family to both of these events ~ cancer is a disease most of us have been touched by some time in our lives.*

## *DAPE Challenge: May 2014*

### **DAPE CHALLENGE**

**By Darla Beckmann DAPE SCRED/Chisago Lakes**

For the third time in four years students from Chisago, North Branch, Rush City, East Central, and Pine City met for the Developmental Adapted Physical Education (DAPE) Challenge. Four years ago the DAPE teachers that are a part of the St. Croix River Education District (SCRED) decided that they wanted to create a non-competitive event designed specifically for their students.

It's about doing their best; it's not about competing against others. The smiles and the laughter tell the story.

When students were asked about their favorite activity replies ranged from "everything," to the long jump, soccer kick, softball throw, bowling, bean bag toss, Frisbee throw, and the baseball hit.

National Honor Society students from Pine City High School volunteered to help run the activities. They had fun working with the participants and did an excellent job of supporting and encouraging them. The teachers and staff assisting the participants also brought a lot enthusiasm to the Challenge.

The day after the Challenge one of my students asked me if we were going to have the Challenge next year. I asked him if he thought we should. His response "I think it should go on forever!"

