

# Research Foundation for Common Core Standards Plus® Instructional Materials

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# Introduction

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## *What is a “research-based” program?*

What is the research that supports the validity of Common Core Standards Plus materials? This is an appropriate question educators ask when they encounter the Common Core Standards Plus materials. Although this same question might be posed by different educators, the questioner’s purpose can vary:

- Some educators are asking for results from randomized, controlled studies specifically aimed at the Common Core Standards Plus materials.
- Some educators are asking for the research-based practices that are embedded into the Common Core Standards Plus materials and implementation model.
- Some educators are asking for data from sites that have successfully implemented Common Core Standards Plus.

In February 2002 the U.S. Department of Education sponsored a seminar where experts presented papers explaining the nature of educational research. Some papers (Reyna, 2002; Feuer & Towne, 2002; Raudenbush, 2002) described the attributes of high-quality scientific inquiry. The papers consistently described randomized clinical trials as the benchmark for educational research.

As educators, our practices must be consistent with the type of high-quality research described in these papers. However, no paper presented at this federal forum advocated that every publisher should submit every program to this level of experimental research.

Although the models described in the forum were consistent, it is not likely many schools have the time or tolerance to participate in randomized experiments with their students. According to Stephen Raudenbush (2002), if we conduct research, “we’d like to do a randomized experiment, (but) we may not be able to.” Raudenbush does not imply that we should not conduct high level research; however, he does acknowledge the practical difficulty of such endeavors.

At the same seminar, Dr. Eunice Greer presented a paper titled “Implications for Scientific Based Research Approach in Reading” (2002). In this paper, Greer stated that a National Reading Panel “sifted through over 100,000 studies” to identify effective strategies for reading instruction. From Greer’s description, there is no indication that any of the studies involved an analysis of a particular published reading program or specific instructional materials. Furthermore, the panel did not appear to identify or condone specific published instructional materials or programs. The studies included in the panel’s research were designed to identify effective instructional practices. Greer concluded, “We need to support and encourage teachers’ use of research-based practices.”

This brings us back to the initial question: *What is a “research-based” program?* According to the NCLB Act of 2001, research-based means “the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities and programs.” According to Feuer and Towne (2002), research is:

“An enterprise that attempts to distill from the cacophony of ideas and anecdotes and impressions, the nuggets of really enduring value, and that kind of knowledge

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you would want to base important decisions about kids, about schools and about, ultimately, ourselves. And, therefore, you have a double challenge. One of your challenges is to encourage the field of research to provide you with better and better useful evidence. At the same time, the challenge is to continue to make reasonably good decisions based on the evidence that you have.”

As the publisher of the Common Core Standards Plus materials, Learning Plus Associates identified an additional challenge: incorporating the effective practices identified in solid educational research into a manageable implementation process supported with high-quality instructional materials that lead to increased student achievement.

Learning Plus Associates believes that the materials and practices we advocate are consistent with the criteria for a research-based program. The Common Core Standards Plus authors built the lessons to be consistent with current, reliable education research regarding effective instructional strategies, and the implementation process is well founded in the effective schools research. Therefore, the remainder of this paper contains descriptions of the research supporting the Common Core Standards Plus implementation methodology as well as the embedded instructional strategies.

To paraphrase Feuer and Towne (2002), the challenge is to continue to make good decisions based on the evidence that you have, and to distill the nuggets of really enduring value. **Learning Plus Associates believes** that Common Core Standards Plus materials are a nugget of enduring value.

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# Common Core Standards Plus Instructional Materials Overview

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## *What are Common Core Standards Plus Instructional Materials?*

Common Core Standards Plus instructional materials follow a direct instruction process that is designed to supplement a school's regular curricula and its instructional program. The foundation of this process is a quality assurance system built on the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle that effectively delivers high level, standards-driven skills to students. The PDCA cycle is the key element of Total Quality Management (TQM), which comes from the work of W. Edward Deming and Walter Shewhart (Fields, 1993). Even though Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle was developed in industrial and business settings, it is also extremely effective in educational settings. Deming's basic philosophy on quality was that productivity improves as variability decreases. Deming's Total Quality Management (TQM) System is based on "14 Essential Points" for improving quality, productivity, and competitive position in all aspects of education. The critical points affecting education include:

- Create constancy of purpose
- Improve continually
- Institute training on the job
- Institute leadership

Another theory behind the design of the Common Core Standards Plus process came from the research work of Ron Edmonds and Lawrence Lezotte (Lezotte, 1984, and Lezotte & Daniel Levine, 1990). They identified characteristics of effective schools which they called the Effective Schools Correlates (Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Norris, 1988; Lezotte, 1984). These correlates are widely supported in research literature and have led to a national organization called the Network for Effective Schools. These correlates include the following:

- School climate
- Instructional focus
- Instructional leadership
- High expectations
- Measurement

The Common Core Standards Plus implementation model employs the Plan-Do-Check-Act and the Effective Schools Correlates through a quality assurance implementation model. The model includes the following elements:

### **Plan**

- Review student achievement data to identify strengths and weaknesses in alignment with local and state criteria.
- Arrange learning topics into an instructional calendar that aligns with students' strengths and weaknesses based on the data analysis.

### **Do**

- Teach daily lessons in Language Arts and Mathematics that are aligned to the instructional calendar each day for four consecutive days.
- Monitor the process to ensure quality implementation.

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### Check

- Administer a Common Core Standards Plus evaluation after a four lesson unit.
- Analyze evaluation results and schedule unsuccessful students into reteach sessions.

### Act

- Teach maintenance and reinforcement lessons as they appear on the instructional calendar.
- Conduct targeted reteach interventions.

The Common Core Standards Plus implementation model requires explicit direct instruction of up to 170 daily lessons and evaluations per grade based on a data-driven schedule. The lessons were written to discrete elements of essential Common Core Standards in Language Arts and Mathematics. The instructional schedule is based on student needs identified by thoughtful analysis of local and state testing results.

When implementing the model, teachers teach one Common Core Standards Plus lesson each day for each subject to supplement their regular curriculum (Language Arts and Mathematics). The lessons contain explicit lesson plans for teachers and the lesson plans identify the focus of the lesson and target key instructional objectives. The lessons also are designed to require minimal teacher preparation.

Four Common Core Standards Plus lessons and one evaluation comprise each week of instruction. Each week of instruction is written to a specified essential standard, and each evaluation is a group of items related to a single concept (Wainer & Kiely, 1987). Teachers teach four lessons, one lesson at a time, on consecutive days. After teaching four lessons, teachers administer the corresponding evaluation on the following day.

An essential element of the process is for teachers to review evaluation results to assess student performance. Based on their analysis, teachers decide whether to reteach the concept to the whole class, or to subsets of the class. Students who do not demonstrate mastery of the skill should participate in a reteach session. This research-based cyclical approach ensures that students who require extra instruction of a given standard are given multiple opportunities to learn the concept (Marzano, 2003; Snow, 2003).

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# Direct Instruction

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## *Why is it important that the Common Core Standards Plus lessons are designed to apply direct instruction strategies?*

Direct instruction is the backbone supporting strong evidence of effectiveness in Common Core Standards Plus lessons. Since 1968, direct instruction has been the most widely scientifically researched and positively validated instructional method in education (Stebbins, 1997; Bock, 1977; Meyer, 1984; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 1987). The Common Core Standards Plus lesson format uses direct instruction related to the multistep lesson plan researched and developed by Madeline Hunter (Cooper et. al., Classroom Teaching Skills, 1999; Joyce and Weil, Models of Teaching, 1972). The quality of data gathered from numerous school sites and classrooms in varied school districts using Common Core Standards Plus lessons further supports the powerful reliability of direct instruction, particularly when the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) compels schools to close student achievement gaps.

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According to Marzano (2004), one in five children come from economically-deprived environments that tend to limit academic achievement. Unfortunately, many economically-deprived students are coming to school without cognitive strategies (Payne, 2001). Children from multiple-disadvantaged backgrounds are not inherently less intelligent, and we should not expect them to achieve less (Barton, 2003; McClelland, 2002). In order to succeed, however, students must learn certain cognitive skills.

In a presentation to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1990), Barak Rosenshine described outcomes from his research that revealed a unique approach to direct instruction. Rosenshine described how effective teachers overtly teach cognitive skills to children. Effective teachers teach problem-solving strategies, and they teach students to contextualize academic content. Direct instruction of cognitive skills helps students build learning scaffolds for these less-structured learning behaviors.

The following direct instruction strategies are consistent with Rosenshine's scaffold concept, and they are incorporated into the Common Core Standards Plus lessons:

- Anticipate difficult areas and directly teach appropriate problem-solving strategies.
- Model learning behaviors by discussing how to apply problem-solving strategies.
- Provide procedural facilitators (tools to help students learn strategies).
- Provide appropriate problem-solving practice in varied contexts.
- Regulate lesson difficulty (escalate after the learner "gets it").

Unfortunately, many learners have not acquired basic and less-structured learning behaviors (Snow, 2003). Rosenshine's strategies are effective for teaching the less-structured skills because they help students build contextual scaffolds, learn procedural steps to apply problem-solving strategies, and acquire discrete learning behaviors. In "Classroom Strategies for Helping At-Risk Students" (2003), David Snow calls this concept "strategic instruction" and he states that it is designed to teach students how to learn.

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**The Common Core Standards Plus lessons** were designed to teach explicit content skills, and the lessons conform to the concepts described in the mainstream, direct instruction research. However, the Common Core Standards Plus program also includes direct instruction strategies and guided practices to strengthen Rosenshine's "less-structured skills." These include:

- Problem solving skills
  - Embedded in many lessons
  - Consistent with Common Core expectations
  - Consistent with DOK levels
- Oral and written language skills
  - Emphasis on academic language
  - Explicit instructions in functional reading skills
- Learning skills
  - Modeled in teacher scripts
  - Emphasis on context of the content

Common Core Standards Plus practitioners frequently comment that students (and teachers) achieve unanticipated benefits from their interaction with Common Core Standards Plus lessons. Often these benefits refer to unstructured learning behaviors similar in concept to those defined by Rosenshine (1990). The anecdotal reports are validated by Rosenshine's research in direct instruction, and data from schools that properly implement the Common Core Standards Plus program.

# Research Basis for the Plan-Do-Check-Act Model

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## *Plan - Why should educators review student achievement data?*

Findings from a study conducted by EdSource and researchers from Stanford University; the University of California, Berkeley; and the American Institutes for Research, indicate that, on average, higher performing schools report using data extensively from a variety of student tests and for a variety of school improvement purposes. These schools report that they use assessment data to identify struggling students and to address the students' academic needs. The survey polled approximately 5,500 teachers and 257 principals in 145 school districts, an extraordinarily large sample that bolsters the study's key findings.

Research consistently indicates that assessment information should be used to adapt instruction to meet student needs (Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & William, 2005; Barton, 2004). An unattributed report from the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2001) revealed that the purpose of assessment is to provide, "the most appropriate learning opportunities for students; provide feedback to students and identify their next learning." In a similar report to the U.S. Department of Education, Pamela Frome (2001) asserted that student assessment data must be used to continuously improve instruction and advance student learning.

Frome's advice is consistent with research from W. James Popham, Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Los Angeles and a noted expert on educational testing. Popham states that data from an array of sources should help answer the question, "What is next instructionally?" (Popham, 2006). Accordingly, Jay McTighe, the former Director of the Maryland Assessment Consortium, indicates that learning requires timely, specific, and understandable feedback from formative evaluations (McTighe, 2005).

Data analysis is a critical element in the PDCA cycle, but data are useless unless they are applied to drive a decision-making process (Fraser, English, & Poston, 2000). Common Core Standards Plus relies on data analysis for two important reasons: One is to build an instructional calendar to determine the sequence in which the lessons will be taught (Denton, 1999); the other reason is to analyze evaluation results to identify students who master, or do not master, a concept. This information is used to determine who should be eligible for additional instruction (Popham, 2006; Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & William, 2005; McTighe, 2005; Pamela Frome, 2001).

**An effective Common Core Standards Plus implementation** requires analysis of formative evaluation results to plan future instruction. Teachers' analysis of student performance data determines the lesson priority and creates space in the limited amount of time teachers have to teach their students. In the article "Assessment for Learning," W. James Popham (2006) succinctly describes the desired purpose of formative assessment. Popham writes: "This innovative approach to classroom assessment is based on a careful analysis of the enabling knowledge that students must first acquire to master a higher curricular aim." Popham's analysis is also a succinct summation of the Common Core Standards Plus application of formative assessment and data analysis.

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## *Plan - Why is it necessary to arrange the daily lessons into an instructional calendar?*

Multiple research sources prove that the most important factor in students' ability to master key concepts is to provide appropriate opportunities to learn (Marzano, 2003; Frase, English, & Poston, 2000). Quantitative research also indicates that teachers do not have time to teach all the topics identified in their curricula, and most districts do not control the content each teacher actually teaches (Hirsch, 1996). These unproductive and unsustainable circumstances can be ameliorated by systematically organizing the essential content in ways that provide students with ample opportunities to learn it (Mehrotra, 2006; Marzano, 1993). Prioritizing learning topics, sequencing the topics, and placing the topics on an instructional calendar are appropriate methods that guarantee students have the opportunity to master key skills (Cotton, 1995).

Most educators do not teach an articulated curriculum, and teachers arbitrarily emphasize or omit instructional topics at their will (Li & Fuson, n.d.). This makes it "impossible to know what has been covered" (Marzano, 2003). In "The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them" (1996), E. D. Hirsch summed up the situation: "The idea that there exists a coherent plan for teaching content within the local district, or even within the local school, is a gravely misleading myth." Additionally, there is not enough time for teachers to teach all the standards and concepts typically required by most states (Marzano, Kendall, & Gaddy, 1999; Lezotte, 1997). Therefore, building an instructional calendar is essential in all educational settings because it is difficult to find time to teach important skills (Marzano, 2003; Frase, English, & Poston, 2000).

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) periodically reviews and synthesizes educational research literature. The review reveals classroom, school, and district practices that foster positive student achievement. A recent NWREL review (Cotton, 1995) condensed research from multiple sources across several years. The following are four findings about effective practices:

- Use a pre-planned curriculum to guide instruction.
- Prioritize learning goals and objectives, sequence them to facilitate student learning, and organize them into units or lessons.
- Establish timelines for unit or lesson objectives so the calendar can be used for instructional planning.
- Arrange daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly activities on the calendar to assure that resources are available and instructional time is used wisely.

**Common Core Standards Plus lessons** are aligned to a refined set of essential standards with multiple lessons written to each of these standards. Students who do not master content should be placed in multiple reteach interventions. It's clear that the Common Core Standards Plus process provides students with multiple opportunities to learn. Prioritizing topics and placing them on a calendar, as required by the Common Core Standards Plus process, ensures that topics will actually be taught.

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# Research Basis for the Plan-Do-Check-Act Model

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## *Do - Why is it important to teach the daily lessons according to the instructional calendar?*

Meta-analysis is a statistical process that combines the results of several studies which address a set of related research hypotheses. Robert Marzano and colleagues analyzed thirty-five years of education research through meta-analysis processes and extracted the most effective educational strategies. Marzano et al. found that providing appropriate opportunities to learn is the most important factor for student success (Marzano, 2003).

It's also obvious that teachers do not have time to teach every concept (Frase, English, & Poston, 2000; Lezotte, 1997), and that most teachers are not required to teach a specified curriculum (Hirsch, 1996). Additional research reveals that effective schools manage these two issues by identifying key concepts, building an instructional calendar, and ensuring that teachers follow the calendar (Cotton, 1995).

**The Common Core Standards Plus lessons** are written to address the essential Common Core standards, and there are multiple lessons for each of these standards. The Common Core Standards Plus implementation model requires an instructional calendar that incorporates a cyclical system that emphasizes the standards. Additionally, each lesson includes detailed directions that recommend research-based instructional strategies.

## *Do - Why is it necessary to monitor a Common Core Standards Plus implementation?*

A collaborative monitoring process is part of a continuous cycle of inquiry and improvement. It is focused on effective practices and involves collaboration among teachers, administrators, and staff (Blatt, Linsley, & Smith, 2005; Lezotte, 1992).

School staffs must be familiar with their data, and they must have deep conversations about what they will do to improve student achievement. In those discussions, teachers must share ideas about what is expected to happen in their classrooms, and principals need to ensure that teachers are provided with support to help them implement a program (Richardson, 2001). Monitoring program implementation in this manner provides schools with an opportunity to frequently adjust how the program impacts classroom instruction and student learning (Blatt, Linsley, & Smith, 2005).

Monitoring also includes compliance because "systems that do not demonstrate consistency cannot be improved" (Frase, English, & Poston, 2000). Consequently, systematic programs that are not consistently implemented will not be effective. Monitoring for consistency is an important element of the equal opportunity to learn issue (Frase, English, & Poston, 2000). Teachers tend to arbitrarily emphasize or omit instructional topics (Li & Fuson, n.d.). In this environment, it is impossible to know what topics are actually taught (Marzano, 2003), and unless teachers and administrators monitor what is happening instructionally, and moderate their behavior, they cannot ensure quality, consistency, or rigor.

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**An effective Common Core Standards Plus implementation** requires that site administrators are continuously involved in the teaching and learning process. As the instructional leader, the administrator monitors Common Core Standards Plus implementation success by:

- Conducting walk-throughs regularly
- Monitoring classroom and school-wide progress through data analysis
- Meeting with individual teachers, teacher teams, and students
- Ensuring that priorities remain clear and the school's academic mission stays focused
- Continuously supporting the implementation of the teaching and reteaching process
- Providing parents with information regarding the implementation of the Common Core Standards Plus program

### *Check - Why should a school analyze evaluation results and schedule reteach sessions?*

Placing a topic on an instructional calendar and teaching it once, does not guarantee that all students have mastered the topic (Marzano, 2003). Many students come to school lacking cognitive skills, and these students do not have efficient strategies to learn concepts with one encounter (Payne, 2001). Research proves that it is important to teach cognitive skills to these students. Accordingly, it is also important to give these students additional time to learn through repeated instruction (Lezotte, 1997). Providing ample time to learn is an issue embedded in the research regarding opportunity to learn (Marzano, 2003).

Diagnosis and data-driven remediation are necessary strategies to “bring about significant improvement in education” (Guskey, 2005). Creating tutorial groups based on current performance data is effective and efficient (Snow, 2003; Payne, 2001). Timely assessment data should assist teachers as they target specific deficiencies (Barton, 2004), and regroup students for additional instruction (Shellard, 1999).

**An effective Common Core Standards Plus implementation** requires that teachers administer weekly evaluations, systematically analyze the results, and assign students to reteach tutorials based on assessment results. Specific reteach topics are identified during systematic data analysis.

### *Act - Why does Common Core Standards Plus include Performance Tasks and Integrated Projects?*

Performance tasks and integrated projects allow students to crystallize and demonstrate their knowledge at deeper levels of rigor. They provide applied demonstrations of content skills and real world contexts.

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# Summary

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## *Why is it important to have a systematic approach to instructional reform?*

In her report to the U.S. Department of Education, Pamela Frome (2001) described essential elements of a successful instructional program. Within her description, Frome clearly defined a systematic approach where schools have organizational structures and processes in place that ensure continuous involvement by school administrators and teachers to plan and implement strategies to achieve effective practices.

There is ample research evidence to support that schools should systematically organize their instructional practices. Effective educational policy requires a systematic approach where the essential elements include, “analysis and action that contribute to the ability of the learner to fulfill their potential” (Unattributed, The National Literacy Trust, 2002). Peter Senge said, “Vision without systems-thinking ends up painting lovely pictures of the future with no deep understanding of the forces that must be mastered to move from here to there” (National Literacy Trust, 2002). Neil McClelland (2002) said educational policies that are not systematic tend to reduce issues to discrete parts without considering the sum of the parts.

Quantitative research proves that inconsistent educational systems cannot improve (Fraser, English, & Poston, 2000). Research also proves that most schools do not control their regular classroom instruction or their curriculum content (Li & Fuson, n.d; Marzano, 2003; Hirsch, 1969). Systematic models inject into schools effective approaches to instruction and curriculum management (Cotton, 1995) that spill over into other aspects of school management. Common Core Standards Plus helps ensure the following:

- Students systematically learn content skills, academic language, and behaviors that allow them to efficiently master their required curriculum.
- Teachers learn to systematically instruct learning behaviors as well as content skills.
- Teachers learn to analyze data and plan their instructional program to meet student needs.
- Administrators learn to implement, lead, and monitor an efficient instructional model.

Common Core Standards Plus is a research-based, systematic instructional model that helps schools link the random activities that often serve as their instructional program. Common Core Standards Plus helps schools blend their random activities into, as Senge said, “A deep understanding of the forces that must be mastered to move from here to there.”

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