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EDU 320

Artifact #4

The education system today is constantly discovering more efficient ways of teaching and the best means for student learning in all schools. Several states have now made the transition from the previous state content standards to the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). There are multiple reasons for this major shift.

The previous content standards used in each state described what students should know and be able to do within each subject area. Content standards grade students using performance-based assessments. Students complete homework and tests that reveal their overall score in each content area on an A-F scale. The problem with content standards is that each state is free to have their own set and the content being taught widely varies from state to state. This poses problems when students move from state to state and when the test results are reported on the national level, they cannot be compared to one another.

The Common Core Standards, on the other hand, are a set of standards that remain the same from state to state. The primary goal of these standards is to prepare students for college and career readiness. They are geared towards preparing students for success in the 21st century as well as success in our society and global economy. The Common Core Standards consist of fewer standards, but an increased amount of rigor placed on each benchmark. The purpose of this is to teach students to dig deeper into content and use higher order thinking skills.

American schools have been substantially affected by the Common Core Standards. There has been more of a focus put on the reading and writing standards which now supplements all other subject area standards. These standards very closely align with standard-based assessments, which most schools have now adopted. For teachers, Common Core puts a great deal of emphasis on leadership, extensive training, and evaluations linked to student performance. As a country, it provides nation-wide feedback as to where, how, and what the education system needs to improve on for the success of its students.

Along with the Common Core Standards are the common core aligned assessments, PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium). The state of North Dakota has chosen the Smarter Balanced assessment for its schools. This assessment requires testing within the last 12 weeks of each school year. The test is tailored to each individual student, which speeds up the process of identifying exactly which skills students are mastering. It consists of a wide variety of test questions, including performance-based tasks. The testing needs to be performed every year during grades 3-8 and once during grade 11. This computer administered test will provide a more comprehensive picture of the areas that students are skilled or need extra help in, which provides teachers with the information they need to best differentiate their instruction. With this assessment, states will have the option to administer a paper version of the test. This is allowed for up to three years for schools who do not currently have access to the technology resources.

As more and more states are adopting the Common Core Standards, many schools are also making the move to standard-based report cards. These report cards are much more clear and thorough than traditional report cards. Traditional report cards give one grade for each subject area, while standard-based report cards give one grade for each standard or skill. When teachers write report cards in this way, it shows exactly how every student is performing on each specific skill. This more detailed overview of a student’s performance will determine where they need help within each content area. Several schools are also moving to project-based learning in the classroom. This allows students to actively engage in what they are learning using hands-on activities that are based on real-world experiences and/or problems.

A majority of districts are moving from state content standards to the Common Core Standards along with standard-based report cards and project-based learning. These changes are slowly and surely making for a better and more thorough education system in America.