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To: WWSU Faculty, Staff and Administrators
From: Sheila Rivers, Director of Curriculum
Date: February 1, 2011
re: Common Core Standards

As you may know Vermont is beginning a transition to Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). States were given the option to choose to participate in the CCSS initiative. Our Vermont State Board of Education elected to adopt these standards August 2010. The purpose of this memo is to share some of the background information regarding the CCSS initiative, and give you some additional details about our goals around this transition in WWSU.

The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce. These consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live in today's mobile society. These standards define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs.

The standards:

- Are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based.

For an informative introduction to the standards, I recommend the following Webinar (archived) by Susan Gendron, Senior Fellow for the International Center for Leadership in Education, and policy coordinator for SBAC. <http://www.leadered.com/ImplicationsCCSSWebinar.html>

Along with these new standards Vermont will transition to a new assessment system. There are two consortia developing the assessments tied to these new standards- Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Again, States were given the option which consortia to join. Vermont has joined SBAC as a governing state, which will allow Vermont to have a voice throughout test development process. Over the next several months the assessment consortia will work to develop an assessment framework based on the Common Core standards that will provide us with specific guidelines about expectations for student learning related to the new standards. This assessment framework will provide us with information we will need to align or redevelop our curriculum over the next two years. Key components of the SBAC system, which will become fully operational in the 2014-2015 school year, include:

- Strong focus on application, problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills in relationship to broader contexts
- A coherent set of formative, interim and summative assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards and designed to determine students' career and college readiness;
- Multiple measures that combine results from teacher-directed performance tasks with standardized, on-demand testing;
- State of the art assessment technology that will include Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT), technology enhanced test items, and computer scoring of constructed response test items;
- Interactive analysis and reporting of assessment results;
- Professional development for educators with a focus on formative, performance and other effective classroom assessments.

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This transition can be a catalyst for change to achieve our broader goals around transformation and reform. We have an opportunity to provide a larger context for these expectations that will allow us to focus on learning opportunities, student understanding, and engagement. This can be achieved by our purposeful development of curricula that can be implemented through a broad range of learning experiences such as Service Learning, Project-based learning, research projects, and problem solving. I am involved in this transition work with the CCSSO as a representative from Vermont and will be working with the VT team at the national level to work through these challenges.

Within WWSU we have just begun to consider how to best allow for this transition to bring about our most desired goals. We will be asking for teacher leadership to support us with this challenge. Our short-term goals are to:

- Build a container for the change to occur
- Identify so as to keep the “best” of what we have
- Maintain the focus on student outcomes so as to provide a foundation of common experiences for teachers in discussing student work and best instructional practices
- Continue to support the various teams throughout our district focused on learning opportunities and expectations for students (Transformation Committee, Expectations for the Harwood Graduate (HUGE), 21st Century Teaching and Learning opportunities, development of content based assessments, and Service Learning/Project-based learning)

In the long-term we will also need to align our curriculum with the expectations and continue to support teachers through this transition. I would expect the alignment work will begin during the 2011-12 school year however there may be some earlier opportunities to begin some of the transition work. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have about the Common Core.

Where to go for more information:

<http://www.leadered.com/ccs.html>

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

<https://sites.google.com/site/commoncoreinvermont/home/general-resources>

<http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/default.aspx>

http://education.vermont.gov/new/pdfdoc/pgm_curriculum/common_core/sbac_executive_summary.pdf