

# NNSTOY CONFERENCE COMMON CORE MESSAGING

# What is PIE Network?

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Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) Network connects leading state-based education reform voices working to change education policy in their respective states.



# Who is in PIE Network?



# What is PIE Network?

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There's a growing backlash to the Common Core standards.

Our members bring crucial, credible voices to help defend the standards in state capitals and to promote their importance in local communities.

# What we tell our members:

- For most parents, the most credible person at a school is their child's teacher.
- We need teacher voices as partners if the Common Core is going to survive the political backlash that's growing across the country.

# Our approach

- We have confidence that those passionate about the Common Core can sell the standards as policy.
- We wanted to make sure they could also sell *the value* of common standards among the broader public.
- We hired top brand marketing specialists—people who specialize in talking to hearts, not heads—to help us discover what excites regular people, mostly importantly, **parents and teachers**
- We tested our message findings with parents and teachers in Miami, Denver and Minneapolis from high and low performing schools.

# What learned from expert branders:

- In every profession, insiders want to talk about the process. But, in any profession, the only people who are about process are those insiders.
- Customers—in our world, parents and the public—care about results. “Are my kids going to be okay?”
- We need to learn to start conversations with parents and the public by talking about values and outcomes before process and programming.

# BRANDING BEST PRACTICES

- 1 Battles take place at the attribute and functional level. Differentiation and loyalty deepen as you move up the emotional spectrum.

**EXAMPLE** When Target competes with Walmart on price they lose, but they compete with their differentiators — design and experience — they win.
- 2 When you go at the opposition head to head, point for point, it can be easy to get lost in the weeds and miss the emotional opportunities.
- 3 Messages that ring a high, human, emotional bell are harder to dislodge, forget and oppose.
- 4 Don't dismiss universal truths just because they're simple. Sometimes the most simple ones are the most powerful.
- 5 Think like real people, talk like real people, write like real people.
- 6 There are hot spots, but they're just that — spots. Don't sound an alarm if there's no fire.

# COMMON CORE MESSAGING HIERARCHY

SOME-  
THING  
BIGGER  
?

EMOTIONAL  
?

## FUNCTIONAL

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn.

The Common Core ensures that

every student graduates high school prepared for college/career/future/success.

We need to be able to explain standards at this level, but we don't build confidence if we stay here!

## ATTRIBUTES

- Clearer, fewer, deeper, standards
- Designed for understanding, not memorization
- Internationally benchmarked
- Developed by teachers and experts across the country
- Adopted by forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense

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PEACE OF MIND

**EMOTIONAL**  
The Common Core allows you to know how your child is doing in school today, and trust the information.

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# Communicating with parents

*What would you say if you bumped into a parent in a **grocery store aisle** and they said, “Hey, I heard our school is changing its standards? Should I be worried?”*

*Conversations that work would work in a grocery store aisle.*

# Communicating with parents

- Most parents are unfamiliar with Common Core. A majority of parents who know something are still undecided on its value.
- Parents are more concerned about immediate family needs than “systemic reforms”, which is how we often talk about the Common Core.
- Keep things personal and in real time: “This is about you and your kids, today” vs. “preparing all kindergarteners for college and career” (For most kids, that’s too far away!)

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# Translating rational arguments to emotional benefits

## FOR KIDS

- Functional: practical skills, learning that sticks, being held accountable
- Translates to: **safe future, prepared for life, engaged learners**

## FOR PARENTS

- Functional: less time shopping schools, clear about standards
- Translates to: **sense of relief, confident about child's future**

## FOR TEACHERS

- Functional: More resources, time to teach, opportunity to focus
- Translates to: **sense of accomplishment, sharing passions, pride**

# Starting with peace of mind

“I want to know how my child is doing in school right now. And I want to trust that the information is accurate and meaningful.”

We need to start these conversations with ideas that make sense to parents:

What is the most commonly accepted form of discussing student ability level used across the country today?

# “My kid reads at a 4<sup>th</sup>-grade level.”



“When I say that my kid reads at a 4th-grade level, I need to know that means the same thing across the country.”

Right now, there are 50 different ideas about what “4th-grade level” means.

**Without common standards, it means nothing.**

(No peace of mind.)

# Parents and high expectations

- We saw differences in conversations with parents from lower performing schools and higher performance schools about the degree of comfort with higher expectations for their kids.
- In lower performing schools, parents wanted those schools to expect more. They were comfortable with pressure, testing, and the idea that schools should lead to good jobs.
- We also know that parents understand that all kids won't go to college, but they believe schools should prepare kids to have that option in their future.

# Parents and testing

- Parents share some concerns with teachers about how frequent and stressful testing has become in many schools.
- At the same time, the idea of "standards" don't make sense to parents without the idea that's there's some kind of standardized test to measure them.
- Any initial enthusiasm for common standards was lost if we took common tests out of the equation.

# Common standards without a common test is a complete disconnect for parents

## The language:

- *These new standards have been voluntarily adopted by almost every state, but each state has the flexibility to develop and administer its own assessment tests. There won't be one single national test, but states will have the advantage of sharing and comparing best practices...*

## The learning:

- *Oh, now you just lost me!*
- *We're back to what we have now*
- *This dilutes the solution*
- *This says they couldn't agree after all*
- *Some states will give kids easier tests*

# Preparing parents for a potential drop in scores

Parents were understandably concerned that score might drop:

- *We can't afford a drop in scores*
- *You're going to do that to my kids?*
- *Have we been artificially boosting kids' scores?*
- *This will increase the dropout rate*

Teacher voices are crucial in helping parents prepare for the drop in scores many anticipate with the Common Core.

# Preparing parents for a potential drop in scores

Here was the only idea that helped redirect concerns about score dropping: *We Americans are at our best when we come together to achieve something big. Really big. Like declaring our independence and putting a man on the moon. And now we have to step up again...*

- *Scores will go down initially but don't be discouraged*
- *Positive message and a wake-up call*
- *These standards prepare your kids for a future in today's changing economy*
- *American education system needs a collective boost - we need to pull together*

# Values that showed some promise with teachers

- States can share best practices, teachers will have more resources and not have to reinvent the wheel, smart way to save money. Faster test results means timely adjustment, test results that are more meaningful
- New standards designed to go deeper into fewer topics, mastery not memorization, hands-on, a focus on what they will use in life.
- With fewer and clearer standards, teachers can focus on the kids and add their own spin to lesson plans.