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Stanford's Jo Boaler and other math and English experts are helping teachers and administrators make the shift to Common Core.

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Common Core: Year One

Silicon Valley Common Core Initiative's **efforts help shift education**.

It was easy to doze off in yesterday's math class. It is impossible to catch any shut-eye in the buzz of discussion at the heart of a Common Core classroom.

In an old-style classroom, kids watched passively as teachers solved a math problem, and then they attempted it themselves. In a Common Core-oriented classroom, students work together to solve problems and discuss why an answer may be right or wrong. Analysis becomes more important than rote memorization.

"We have been teaching an outdated math curriculum that covers a lot of content every single year, but doesn't go into depth on anything," says Jo Boaler, a professor of mathematics at Stanford University. "With Common Core, students will be learning what math should be used for. We want them to be able to think and reason and design things and plan and actually use important mathematics."

However, because new Common Core State Standards in English and mathematics bring such a radically different approach, school districts and teachers need as much help as their students do to adjust. So Silicon Valley Community Foundation created the three-year Silicon Valley Common Core Initiative (SVCCI) to help.

Stanford's Jo Boaler is helping train teachers for the new methods of Common Core.

As it nears the end of its first year, SVCCI has raised more than $2 million, trained teachers and brought together five collaborative groups of educators and school district leaders. Those groups involve 27 of the 54 districts in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, which share $2.8 million in grants as they move Common Core from theory to reality.

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

"We're going through tremendous change, more change than I've seen in my 20 years in education," says Alicia Bowman, director of assessment and program evaluation for the Menlo Park City School District.

With funding from SVCF, Menlo Park has used collaborative days to bring together teachers who work at the same grade level so they can share both what's working well and what needs improvement.

"This kind of shift in implementation takes five to seven years, and we were given three years," Bowman says. "All the teachers are excited as they see this beginning to work, but it's going to take a while to implement everything."

The $1.25 billion the California State Legislature earmarked for implementation scarcely covers the first part of the process, which is assessment. Acquiring the necessary testing technology — even at only one tablet or basic laptop to every four students — can eat into the earmarked funds.

Implementing Common Core means establishing new forms of comprehensive, computer-based assessment testing. This real-time assessment — in which questions get progressively more difficult as a student masters the material — can be pricey. But it's crucial to measuring whether students have developed the critical thinking skills that prepare them for career and college, says Gina Dalma, senior program officer, education, for SVCF, who is overseeing SVCCI. It has short-term implications, too, she notes. "The assessment needs to be technology-adaptive, and the feedback needs to be immediate so that teachers and administrators can make better placement decisions for the following year."

SVCCI has been helping to build the necessary funding bridges, notes Chris Funk, superintendent of the East Side Union High School District, which has joined with the seven elementary districts that feed into its high schools to create the East Side Alliance. But even with such help, districts fear shortfalls in meeting the state's mandate of Common Core assessment testing at the end of this school year. "We know where we're going and what it takes to get there," Funk says. "Will we get there? Well, we have to somehow, because the accountability is right around the corner."

A NEW LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The five district collaboratives have focused on professional development for teachers and school and district leaders, purchasing new digital media and textbooks and ensuring technology is in place for learning and assessments.

Common Core standards don't specify how local districts should meet the standards, only that the first assessment will occur at the end of the 2014–15 school year. Students who took a "no stakes" pilot test in the spring of 2014 did not receive results, but the process foreshadowed some of the changes districts now face.

Students found the new tests "interesting," Dalma says. The assessment required them to answer far fewer questions than on previous standardized tests — 13 total — but it took them as long to complete. It required a higher level of engagement and understanding.

"There's a significant difference in the teaching that needs to take place with Common Core," she says. "Making mistakes has to be part of the learning process. You learn because you understand your mistakes. Before, if you got it wrong, you got it wrong. End of story. Now, mistakes are part of the learning process."

> **"Making mistakes has to be part of the learning process. You learn because you understand your mistakes."**

So is creative thinking. In the end, that's why SVCCI puts so much time and effort into solving these major challenges. When today's elementary school students begin entering the job market, Dalma says, four out of five will move into jobs that don't even exist today.

"We need to make sure they become critical thinkers so they can solve the problems that we face today and those that don't exist yet."

Learn more about SVCF at **siliconvalleycf.org/fall-2014/commoncore.**

4 Core Differences

To understand the need for the Silicon Valley Common Core Initiative, start by understanding the differences between Common Core State Standards and its predecessors.

1 The goal: To provide students with 21st-century skills so they can think critically about each challenge that presents itself. Collaborating with their classmates, they can find creative solutions to novel problems and explain clearly why their solutions will work.

2 Common Core is a set of standards, not curricula. Local educators, parents and community representatives select the books, teaching methods and instructional materials that best serve students.

3 A cross-disciplinary approach requires teachers to integrate different subjects and use technology effectively. Assessment also requires special technology, which can be expensive.

4 Multiple-choice testing — and "teaching to the test" — goes away with Common Core assessment. Instead, students present a solution to a problem, show how they solved it and explain *why* they chose certain answers. This requires a shift in teaching methods.