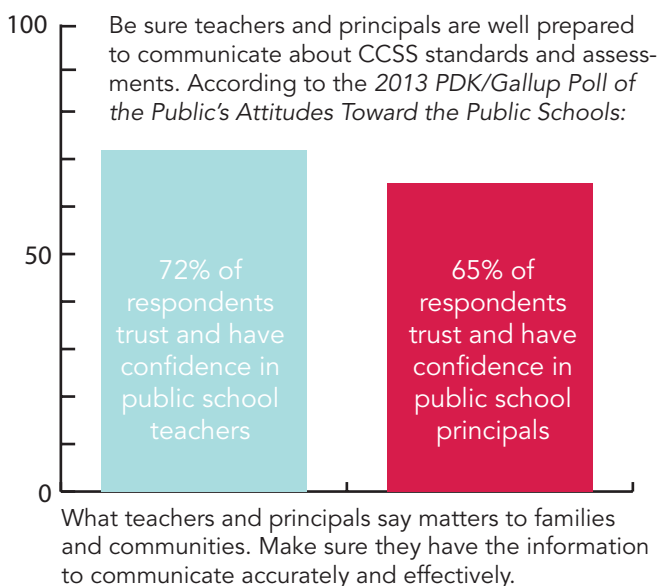


Focus on internal communications and consider everyone a messenger

Before reaching out to other groups, it is critical that all members of school systems — from the deputy superintendent to administrative support staff — are knowledgeable about the initiative and prepared to explain the rationale behind the implementation of new standards and assessments.



Perhaps the most important messengers are those people closest to the children and families — teachers and principals. When parents have a question or concern, they naturally look to their child's teacher or principal for answers — and what say really matters. Ensuring teachers and principals are well informed and have effective and clear materials on hand are essential to articulating efforts to improve student achievement.

When Florida made changes to their state-wide assessments in 2011-12, state education officials provided district superintendents with specific talking points during their monthly conference calls to use with teachers and principals. One district superintendent in the state developed a similar protocol with her principals, providing them with talking points about the assessment changes to share with parents during parent-teacher conferences. While the talking points were the right idea, an important lesson

learned by Florida state officials was the need to follow up after these types of tools are circulated. Without follow up, Florida education officials were unclear if questions arose or if the materials were being used consistently to reach all teachers and parents.



TOOLS AND TACTICS FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Offer sample talking points to teachers and principals that they can use when interacting with parents and caregivers.
- Share messaging and materials with teachers and principals through existing structures — e.g. professional development days, regional and local training centers, e-newsletters.
- Encourage school-based educators to leverage parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, classroom and school newsletters, and the like to educate parents and caregivers about the impending changes.

Many states, including Texas and New York, utilized existing structures to provide teachers and principals with the information and tools they needed to help parents, caregivers and others better understand the impending changes in statewide assessments. Called Education Service Centers in Texas and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services in New York, these regional offices provide training and information to local educators throughout their respective states.

The New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the statewide teachers' union, was also instrumental in getting information into the hands of local educators about changes in the state's assessments. To reach its 600,000 members, NYSUT used their newsletters and other established communications channels. Teachers' unions are typically viewed as a trusted source by their members, making them valuable outreach partners.