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Florida teacher relies on ingenuity and elbow grease to provide students with vibrant activities.

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Simple acts of recognition can energize the efforts of student activities advisers and coaches.

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Activities are the answer to educational reform.

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## Core Values

### Activities Offer an Instant Opportunity to Exceed Common Core Standards

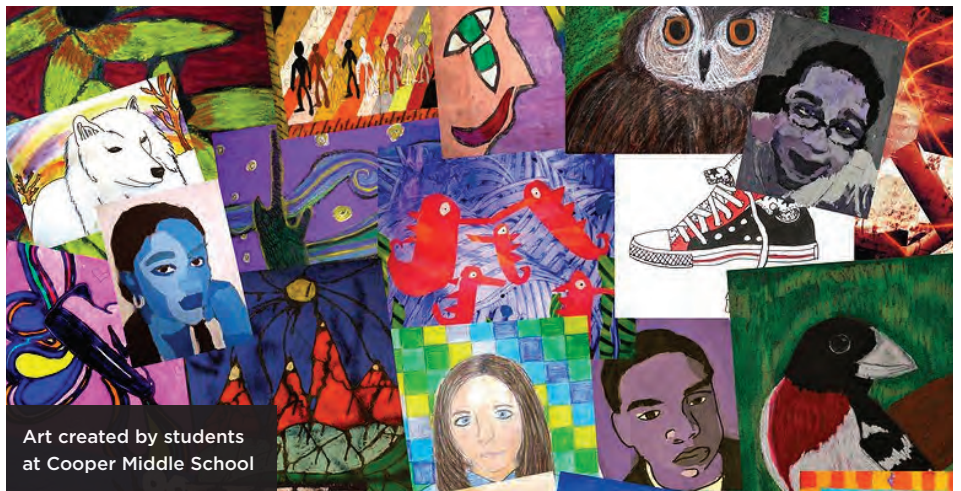
BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

**F**or educators and students across the country, Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are quickly becoming a fact of life. Currently, forty-four states have voluntarily adopted the standards. Unfortunately, previous mandates that required educators to teach to the test at the expense of holistic student development have caused some stakeholders to view the new standards with suspicion. But for many teachers who are currently incorporating CCSS, the Common Core provides a refreshing, realistic framework for preparing students for success after high school. And because these standards focus on critical-thinking skills in addition to academics, the student activities arena offers valuable opportunities for students to practice CCSS-related applications.

Recently, Bill Gates authored a highly publicized article aimed at tackling misconceptions about the Common Core and asking teachers to lobby for reform through CCSS. "Today, 80 percent of students say they expect to go to college, while only 40 percent of adults have an associate's degree or higher. Clearly, the old standards didn't help them achieve their goals. Common Core was created to fix that," said Gates.<sup>1</sup>

Gates outlines key facts that can help parents, teachers, and others develop a better understanding of CCSS:

- **The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, administrators, and other experts**, to provide a clear and consistent framework in preparing students for college and the workforce. According to surveys, 75 percent of teachers support CCSS.<sup>2</sup> →



Art created by students  
at Cooper Middle School

- **The standards won't necessarily add to the number of annual state tests.** States will introduce standards-based math and language arts tests to *replace* the ones they give now. The new tests, rather than being punitive, will help teachers and students improve by providing an ongoing analysis of whether students are mastering the things they need to know.
- **The standards provide a blueprint, not a mandated prospectus.** Local educators have the flexibility to select the curriculum. The fact that the standards will provide consistency from state to state will actually support widespread innovation in education, encourage student and teacher creativity, and allow students to be more competitive across state lines.

**“While Common Core hasn’t been fully implemented yet, speech and debate teachers and their students have been effectively implementing these practices for the last century.”**

### Activities in Action

Many experts view the Common Core’s inclusion of behavioral competencies as a step in the right direction. Michelle McGrath, EdD, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of Student Councils (WASC), explains that the critical-thinking skills included in CCSS are just as important as the recommended math and language arts standards. Her work with local professionals and nonprofit organizations confirms that businesses are actively seeking graduates who possess leadership abilities that can’t be measured through academics alone. “So often, our young people have mastered academics, but their ability to connect with people, communicate effectively, and collaborate on projects is lacking,” said McGrath. “If the goal is to prepare our children to be college and career ready *and* successful, it is necessary for them to be academically and behaviorally competent. Addressing both types of skill sets in our standards is essential.”

The push for 21st-century skill development through the Common Core validates the importance of real-world applications that organizations like WASC have been providing to students for years. “Our programs offer real-life experiences where kids are not only taught necessary soft skills, but are also empowered to utilize these abilities,” said McGrath. “Schools have so many things on their plate at this time. Quite frankly, they don’t have the time or resources to exercise due diligence in the area [of soft-skill training]. Not only do organizations like WASC have the expertise, but they also have the resources to provide opportunities for students who are in desperate need of building these skills.”

Cherian Koshy is the director of development and assistant national tournament director at the National Speech & Debate Association. His experiences as a former debate student and coach were essential in providing him with the research, public-speaking, and writing skills that many of today’s graduates seem to be missing. He sees CCSS as an opportunity to spotlight parallels between Common Core goals and the benefits of speech and debate participation. “In every speech and debate event, performance and increased reading are directly correlated,” said Koshy. “Preparation is grounded in evidence from texts, and students are immersed in

the texts they are using to formulate conclusions and recommendations. Successful debate participants are effective readers who are constantly expanding their knowledge and vocabulary.”

In addition, the interactive nature of speech and debate can actively engage students who were previously struggling. In Broward County, FL, where almost 60 percent of students qualify for federal assistance, the National Speech & Debate Association has implemented a Common Core–aligned initiative that places a speech and debate class in every high school in the county. After-school programs are also offered. The data indicates that thousands of students are participating and that the performance of these students is improving in every metric.

Koshy shares the story of one young man whose participation was life changing. Nick was homeless and often took multiple buses to get to school and debate practice. Koshy explains that Nick’s motivation and grades improved because of his involvement on the debate team, and he poured himself into the activity. He graduated from high school with a full college scholarship in speech and debate. This spring, Nick will graduate from college and is prepared to launch into a lucrative career. “There are many examples of students who have been impacted significantly by their participation in speech and debate,” said Koshy. “While Common Core hasn’t been fully implemented yet, speech and debate teachers and their students have been effectively implementing these practices for the last century.”

### Opportunities in the Arts

At Cooper Middle School, a Title 1 facility in Austell, GA, art teacher Amy Zschaber views CCSS as an opportunity. “As fine arts educators, we already understand the inherent value of interrelated learning. It is how we learned as artists, and it is how we teach as educators,” said Zschaber. “The CCSS provides us with a familiar and excellent structure within which we can collaborate and build positive relationships between the fine arts and core subjects.”

Zschaber is deliberate about providing educational experiences that prove to students—and teachers—that art is about much more than topical learning. By familiarizing herself with the curriculum and working in tandem with teachers in math, science, and language arts, Zschaber creates engaging lessons that help students expand their knowledge and make connections with what they are learning in core classes.

When Zschaber learned that students lacked ruler and compass skills in math, she asked students to use these tools to explore radius and diameter while creating a piece of art. She also posts language-arts vocabulary words in the art room and incorporates the terms into classroom discussions. When an integrated math and science project required students to build birdhouses, Zschaber suggested that students paint their creations during her architectural unit. A history lesson about the Trail of Tears was used as a backdrop for designing both a piece of art and a written response. Teachers report that the integrated lesson plans have been invaluable. “The students return to their core classes and are able to articulate even more about the topics they are studying,” said Zschaber. “What they are accomplishing in my class isn’t just art. It’s an experience.”

### Athletic Achievement

Like arts-based activities, athletics provide chances for students to develop CCSS-specified skills. The Women’s Sports Foundation supports the premise that sports participation is one of the most important learning experiences a girl can have, and that the benefits extend beyond the playing field. “CCSS is grounded in preparing US

high school students for college and setting strategic benchmarks for achievement in language arts and math,” said a spokesperson for the foundation. “Our 2009 report, “Her Life Depends on It II,” includes research that links classroom success with participation in team sports.” The study indicates that students who participate in activities like physical education classes and team sports are 20 percent more likely than sedentary children to earn an A in math or English.<sup>3</sup>

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) also promotes the value of sports and activities in helping students achieve standards-related skills. According to Mark Koski, director of sports, events, and development for NFHS, “Sports help students learn communication skills and develop habits that will apply to their future roles in community, business, and family. These are skills that are relevant not only to Common Core but to everyday life.”

Mark’s brother, Bob Koski, shares the view that athletics should provide students with opportunities to develop mentally as well as physically. As the physical education teacher, strength and conditioning instructor, and head track and field coach at Pojoaque Valley Schools near Santa Fe, NM, Bob Koski has created training programs that rely on practical math applications. The combination of math and critical-thinking skills, such as those recommended by CCSS, has been a part of his lesson plan for two decades.

For track and field and conditioning, Koski collects baseline data from each athlete. Throughout the training cycle, performance is monitored and goals are established. Each week, variables that include volume, recovery time, and intensity are analyzed to ensure an appropriate training regimen. Students are asked to solve equations about speed, distance, and how much weight they should lift. Results and goals are posted to help students stay motivated. “Calculating percentages and ratios demonstrates to my students how much we use math on a daily basis,” said Koski. “Athletics should not be a place of mindless activity. Our program includes math and science skills that can be practiced every day. By implementing a numbers-based system, I am able to show students their weekly, monthly, and yearly progress. And the students are taught to train their brains as well as their bodies.”

Like it or not, Common Core State Standards are making their way into schools across the country. Many educators who have incorporated CCSS have discovered that the standards support the creative learning that helps students to thrive. And teachers,

advisers, and coaches with ties to the arts, activities, and athletics are finding new opportunities to share their knowledge of applications that have been helping their students develop college- and career-readiness skills for years.

An integrative approach that stresses teacher training and collaboration is essential. “We need to be more aggressive about giving teachers focused time for collaboration with peers, so that it’s not just happenstance,” said Zschaber. She recommends that teachers become familiar with the myths and realities surrounding CCSS and embrace the standards as a chance to connect with colleagues who are experts in their own fields. By actively collaborating with others and integrating the curriculum into the arts, activities, and athletics, educators can provide students with enriching learning experiences and opportunities to develop the comprehensive skills necessary for success after high school. ●

**TO READ** Bill Gates’s article about CCSS, go to [a4sa.org/Gates-CCSS](http://a4sa.org/Gates-CCSS).

**TO LEARN MORE** about Common Core State Standards, watch this three-minute video from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers: [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org).

**READ MORE** about the link between effective student leadership programs and the Common Core in this article by Michelle McGrath from the February 2014 issue of *Leadership for Student Activities*: [a4sa.org/WASC-Leadership](http://a4sa.org/WASC-Leadership).

**FOR CREATIVE IDEAS** about arts integration, visit Amy Zschaber’s website at [amyzschaber.com](http://amyzschaber.com).

**TO REVIEW INFORMATION** about the role of sports in developing successful students, see “Her Life Depends on It II” from the Women’s Sports Foundation: [a4sa.org/WomensSports](http://a4sa.org/WomensSports).

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Bill Gates, “Commend Common Core,” *USA Today*, February 12, 2014.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 “Her Life Depends on It II” (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2009), [a4sa.org/WomensSports](http://a4sa.org/WomensSports).

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS) RESOURCES [a4sa.org/resources](http://a4sa.org/resources)



**“THE CASE FOR HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES”** from the National Federation of State High School Associations is filled with facts from experts in the field about the value of student activities in enriching a student’s high school experience and providing skills for college and career.



**COMMON CORE AND THE ARTS** Arts Education Partnership has collected a diverse array of resources designed to help arts educators, school leaders, and other stakeholders understand and implement CCSS.



**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS** The official home of the Common Core State Standards is hosted and maintained by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. It provides parents, educators, policymakers, journalists, and others with easy access to the actual standards, supporting information, and resources.



**HER LIFE DEPENDS ON IT II (SPORTS)** This comprehensive report from Women’s Sports Foundation emphasizes the vital roles that sports play in the physical and social health of girls and women. The report also links sports participation to success in areas stressed by CCSS, including math and language arts.



**NATIONAL SPEECH AND DEBATE** This document by the National Speech & Debate Association details the many ways that speech and debate meet CCSS in the following areas: reading for informational text, reading for history and social studies, writing, speaking and listening, and language.



**NEA CCSS TOOLKIT** This toolkit from National Education Association provides links to information about CCSS, as well as practical assistance and planning. Users can download materials and presentations. Video resources are also included.



## Meet Kathy Kelly: Creating Out-of-the-Box Solutions for Student Enrichment

**WHEN THE MUSIC PROGRAM** was cut from the schedule at Atlantic Technical High School (Broward County, FL), the school's piano ended up in Kathy Kelly's classroom. Kelly is not a music teacher; she is actually the physical education instructor and Student Government Association (SGA) adviser. But the placement of the piano was by design. As an enthusiastic advocate for the arts in education, Kelly is keeping music alive for her students.

Kelly's dedication to the arts stems from her belief that a combination of arts, activities, and athletics helps students thrive. "I have this theory that our teens are always in a box. They wake up in a box, go to school in a box, communicate through boxes, and come back home to a box," she said. "They are missing out on important opportunities to socialize, think creatively, and experience the great outdoors."

The desire to get kids "out of the box" has motivated Kelly to provide her students with enriching pursuits that increase engagement, build social skills, and encourage familiarity with the world around them. Through PE-based and SGA-sponsored events, students at Atlantic Tech learn water-safety skills, go kayaking, practice archery, and attend after-school wellness sessions. And as Kelly promised, music is flourishing through lunchtime open-mike sessions and campus-wide talent shows.

A key to the success of these programs is Kelly's can-do attitude and willingness to expand her horizons. When expenses became an issue in securing reliable bus transportation, Kelly earned a commercial driver's license. She now drives her students to activities, including musical productions at the Broward Performing Arts Center. When she realized that more than 60 percent of her students did not have the skills to save themselves in a water emergency, she obtained a lifeguard certification so that she could teach them how. In order to involve students in diverse outdoor activities, she acquired certifications in kayaking and archery.

Kelly encourages teachers to stand strong in the midst of time and budget constraints, saying that the rewards are



Educator Kathy Kelly (in Dolphin's gear) integrates creative learning with engaging activities.

worth the investment. She recommends starting small and identifying areas of student interest that currently do not have an outlet. Since shifting her activities program into high gear, Kelly has seen increases in student engagement and academic test scores. In addition, Kelly believes that activity involvement improves student-teacher communications, especially when teachers show a willingness to learn alongside their students. "The view from the classroom can be so one-dimensional. By participating in activities, we show our students that we are human, just like them," she said. "We bring student engagement back to school." ●



## Creative Problem Solving Intersects with Common Core Standards

**ODYSSEY OF THE MIND** ([odysseyofthemind.com](http://odysseyofthemind.com)) is an international program that provides problem-solving opportunities for students from kindergarten through college. Alan Strohmaier, Odyssey's state association director for Iowa, describes how students use creativity to solve problems that range from building mechanical devices to presenting their own interpretation of literary classics. Throughout the process, young people build valuable 21st-century skills and exercise competencies stressed by Common Core State Standards.

### What benefits do you see when students are engaged in hands-on learning through Odyssey projects?

My wife and I once coached a team consisting of five typical boys. Since then, each has grown into a talented and successful adult who gives back to the community. The group includes a highly creative and much-loved teacher, a veterinarian, an international businessperson, a physician, and an actuary. Each of them would tell you that Odyssey of the Mind gets much of the credit for their success.

Once students participate in Odyssey of the Mind, most never look at classroom assignments or life in the same way. They don't just think outside the box, they think without the box. They have more self-confidence and don't look for the easy way out when given classroom assignments. They are not afraid to talk with people and are more comfortable presenting their ideas to a group.

### How does the program work?

Each year, there are five open-ended problems. Teams of five to seven students select one problem to work on throughout the school year. All problems require skills in technology and the arts, and all problems meet or exceed Common Core standards. The interesting thing is that these problems can be solved on numerous levels from basic, literal answers to advanced solutions that incorporate ideas most people would never think of.



### What advice do you have for educators who would like to incorporate Odyssey of the Mind?

The main thing is to just try it. Start small and watch in amazement as students grow throughout the year. This is not a program you can fully establish in a short time. It takes a year just to understand the concepts. During the second and third years, teams begin to flourish, the word spreads, and more and more students want to be involved. In addition, Odyssey of the Mind provides the opportunity to teach numerous skill sets within the formal classroom that will help students in Odyssey competitions as well as in general studies. Odyssey of the Mind is also one of the most cost-effective programs a school can offer.

### Tell us about the World Finals, being hosted in Iowa this year.

We will be hosting more than 800 teams from 45 states and 20 countries. In addition, more than 700 professionals will take vacation time from their jobs and pay their own way to serve as volunteer officials, because they believe so strongly in this program and what it can do for our kids.

All Odyssey competitions are free and open to the public. A good way for teachers to get a feel for the program is to attend a state competition or World Finals. I would suggest they contact their state's association director in advance in order to receive information about the program.

**FOR A GLIMPSE** into creative learning, watch this video: [a4sa.org/OdysseyVideo](http://a4sa.org/OdysseyVideo). ●

## MAKE THE TIME

## “If All Else Fails, There is Always a Starbucks Card!”

**THEY ARE NOT IN IT** for the accolades, and certainly not for the pay. In fact, most student activities advisers, coaches, and mentors prefer to fly under the radar. Because the success of any activities program is directly reflected in student accomplishments, we often forget about the educators who serve so diligently behind the scenes. But making the time to recognize these indispensable adult guides is essential in validating the importance of the advisers' role—and in nourishing a vibrant program.

“Advisers, coaches, and other educators sacrifice time with their own families in order to invest in their students,” said Vicki Gray Carstens, executive director of the Iowa Association of Student Councils. “Pay is disproportionate to the time they spend. While the intrinsic rewards of the job are important, advisers receive little recognition unless it comes from students, parents, or other faculty members.”

*continued on page 6*



Doug Erickson, executive director of the Minnesota Association of Student Councils and Honor Societies, believes that recognition can help advisers recharge their batteries when the going gets tough. While formal rewards offered through the school or state associations are appreciated, it is gifts of time and words of affirmation that mean the most. “Simply recognizing the sacrifice is impactful,” said Erickson. “Offering to babysit so that an educator can have a night out with his or her spouse or helping an adviser with tasks in the classroom can be invaluable.”

And always, validation makes a difference. Erickson describes a would-be senior prank that turned into a watershed moment for a well-respected principal. On the day of the “prank,” the administrator emerged from the school to find his vehicle covered in hundreds of yellow sticky notes. As he began removing the offending Post-its from his car, the principal discovered that each note included a carefully composed sentiment advising him of the positive difference he had made in the lives of his students. The principal carefully collected each note and proudly displays the collection in a notebook on his desk.

Carstens describes a recognition event in which personal messages from students proved powerful. Before the event, students were given pieces of paper printed with the phrase “Because of you.” Each student was asked to complete the phrase by describing a special educator who had made an impact in the student’s life. Staff members were then presented with the students’ comments during a surprise assembly.

Effective recognition does not have to be complicated or expensive, but validating the contributions of adult advisers is a necessity—and it helps students see the importance of acknowledging those who work on their behalf. “We all know that no one who is a student adviser does it for the money,” said Erickson. “They stay in it because they believe it makes a difference. Recognition validates advisers and encourages them through the difficult times. It lets them know that all of their efforts are worth it. Simple forms of recognition such as a handwritten note, a mention by the local media, or even an e-mail are all positive ways to express gratitude. And, if all else fails, there is always a Starbucks card.” ●

 **PROMOTE THE VALUE**

# ZEN

AND THE ART OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES

**we know** that participation in arts, athletics, and activities programs lowers dropout rates, increases test scores, promotes college and career readiness, and develops social and emotional skills.

**yet** the average school district spends less than 3% of its operating budget to support these programs. source: “The Case for High School Activities,” National Federation of State High School Associations

**we know** that participation in more than one activity can statistically eliminate the risk that a student will choose to drop out of high school and that the United States would save \$300 billion if just one year’s dropouts were converted into graduates.

**yet** the average tenth grader spends less than one hour a week participating in student activities, more than a million students continue to drop out every year, and 82% of our nation’s prisoners are high school dropouts. sources: National Dropout Prevention Center and Money, Mandates and Local Control in American Public Education (Shelly, 2011)

**we know** that when students with low socioeconomic status have high exposure to the arts, they are five times less likely to drop out of high school and twice as likely to go to college.

**yet** federal funding for the arts and humanities is only \$154.5 million a year compared to the \$7.2 billion allotted to the National Science Foundation. sources: National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation

**we know** that student athletes are absent less often and that they are four times more likely to go to college. Research also shows that they are better at managing emotions, resolving conflicts, and resisting peer pressure.

**yet** researchers estimate that by the year 2020, 27% of public high schools will not offer sports programs. sources: Sports Matter, Dick’s Sporting Goods Foundation and Up2Us.org

**“To know but not to do”  
is not really yet to know.**

– ancient proverb





Promote the Value.

Alliance for Student Activities

a4sa.org

## THE ADVOCATE

*The Advocate* is published ten times a year by the Alliance for Student Activities, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the value of student activities through advocacy, training, resources, and networking.

**a4sa.org**

Submissions of student activities research and other inquiries are welcome. Contact [advocate@a4sa.org](mailto:advocate@a4sa.org)

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