Adding Common Sense Standards to Common Core
It’s Past Time to Revamp Teacher Training

By Ruth Herman Wells, M.S.
Director, Youth Change Workshops
www.youthchg.com, dwells@youthchg.com

As I type this, estimates are that there have been more than 50 U.S. school shootings since the landmark tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School about a year and a half ago. It seems like a good time to stop and take a look at whether that tragic moment in U.S. history has impacted teacher professional development training. During that rough December, many had wondered if the tragedy might serve as a wake-up call, that finally there would be an epiphany, and the world at large would finally see the scope and severity of contemporary problems like school violence, student mental health issues, cyberbullying and classroom disruption. There was a wave of hope that teacher training might finally start to change to include preparation on how to prevent and manage the critical issues that have emerged in the last decade or so.

From my vantage point, providing training workshops to educators, teachers are still constantly telling me that their training never imagined the violent, troubled classrooms where they teach each day. School shootings, drug dealing, cyberbullying and extreme violence didn’t exist when most of today’s teachers were learning their profession. Teachers tell me that in the past year and a half, they have seen a change in their training, but not in the direction many needed.

Rather than seeing an increase in professional development training devoted to managing or preventing violence, cyberbullying, drug dealing and substance abuse, teachers are reporting a distinct increase in courses devoted to Common Core Standards instruction. We have heard from quite a few educators who lament that they have been told by their district or principal that this school year they can only receive training that relates to Common Core. For teachers who are struggling minute to minute
with defiance, truancy and overwhelming classroom management issues, that restriction can make teaching difficult or impossible.

It seems like common sense to assume that efforts to successfully implement Common Core in an out-of-control classroom management environment are doomed to failure. One weary teacher said he felt that as he incorporated Common Core, that he was just “rearranging the seats on the Titanic.” Over and over, we hear from educators who are fighting an uphill battle with extreme misconduct, that it would make more sense to learn how to create a successful learning environment before attempting to fine tune their skills implementing Common Core.

Many educators have long felt that K-12 education spirals from trend to trend. Yesterday’s No Child Left Behind can quickly shift to today’s Common Core Standards. Throughout all the shifts and changes, there has never been a trend to thoroughly modernize U.S. teacher training to address the emotional, social and in-school needs unique to contemporary students. Without that change, Common Core may mean that we are building on a very shaky foundation.

Common Core Standards should include what I’m going to dub Common Sense Standards. No teacher can teach rowdy, late, absent, defiant, depressed and troubled students and simply close her eyes to the rowdiness, lateness, truancy, defiance, depression and sorrow. Yet, Common Core Standards without a counterpart that addresses the foundation skills that all students need to learn, is a formula for continuing the historic pattern of K-12 education spinning from trend to trend without ever really addressing a foundation that may be very shaky at its core.

What could K-12 Common Sense Standards look like? Here is a starting point that would put trained, prepared, motivated, cooperative students into the seats now filled by untrained, unprepared, unmotivated, difficult youngsters.

**Teach Kids How to Be Students, Including:**

- **GETTING TO SCHOOL:**
  Attendance, Punctuality, How to Get Ready for School, When to Stay Home From School, How to Ride the Bus, How to Walk to School, How to Get Prepare for School the Night Before, Managing Your Backpack, Getting and Using an Alarm Clock, Babysitting and Shopping vs. School
- **ARRIVING AT SCHOOL:**
  How to Start a School Day, How to Talk to Teachers, How to Interact with Other Students, What to Wear to School, Hygiene, Grooming, Dress Code, What to Bring to School, When You Haven’t Eaten, When You Haven’t Slept, Hallway Behavior, Campus Behavior, Bathroom Use
- **EMOTIONAL & SOCIAL ISSUES:**
  How to Manage Emotional Problems, How to Cope with Crisis, Managing and Avoiding Substance Abuse, What to Do About Bullying, Personal Displays of Affection, Permitted and Prohibited Behavior and Verbiage,
Anger Management, Self-Control, Creating a Positive Peer Culture, Family Problems, Cliques, Violence Prevention is a Team Effort

• CLASSROOM SUCCESS SKILLS
Class Discussion Skills, Classroom Rules, Homework Management Skills, Peer Interaction, Taking Tests and Quizzes, How to Manage a Desk, Managing School and Classroom Property, Punctuality, How to Pass to Different Classes, Teacher Interaction Skills, How to Walk Down an Aisle, How to Raise Your Hand, What to Do When Called on By Surprise, Managing Frustration, How to Get Help From Teachers, I Have Trouble Learning, Work Refusal and Procrastination

• MOTIVATION & ATTITUDE
Learning Why School is Important, Hazards of Dropping Out, Benefits of Graduating, How Tech Skills Will Be Needed for Survival, Each Degree Doubles Your Salary, Jobs Open Only to Graduates, The Military’s Graduation Requirements, Dropouts Likely Require Two Jobs to Survive, Dropouts Earn Less Than Everyone Else, Grads Earn the Most, So You Think You Won’t Need School Because You’re Going to Be a Sports Star, Actress, Win the Lottery, etc.

If K-12 students were routinely provided the type of Common Sense School Skills Training outlined above, we would be building Common Core Standards on a firm foundation. Common Core instruction would be delivered to prepared, motivated, on-time students, increasing the odds that the instruction that is offered is actually received—even by students who pose behavior problems or face challenges, barriers.

If we do ever revamp teacher training to fit the 21st century, all K-12 teachers need to be routinely trained on student mental health issues, violence prevention, and exactly how to conduct classroom management with today’s extremely hard to manage students. Emerging problems like cyberbullying and older problems like gangs and substance abuse need to be included in any revamp as well. If Common Core Standards were expanded to include these elements, this educational makeover might not just be another round of putting a pretty, new face on old problems. Common Core could finally be the lasting, substantive, thorough K-12 redo that the U.S. urgently needs.

Ruth Herman Wells, M.S. is the Director of Youth Change Professional Development Workshops. Register for her upcoming 2014 Seattle and Portland, Oregon workshops at http://www.youthchg.com or email dwells@youthchg.com. To learn more about School Skill Training and to sample some of Ruth’s lively student worksheets for free, SEEN readers can visit http://www.youthchg.com/handoutpage