



**Common Core Case Study**  
**SUMMIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS &**  
**SUMMIT PREPARATORY CHARTER**  
**HIGH SCHOOL**  
**October 2014**



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## **BACKGROUND**

The National Charter School Resource Center, funded through the U.S. Department of Education, gathers, develops, and makes accessible a wide range of high-quality resources to support the charter school sector; enables successful planning, authorization, implementation, and continuation of high-quality charter schools; and increases the national understanding of the charter school model.

## **COMMON CORE CASE STUDY SERIES**

Implementation of the rigorous, research-based, globally benchmarked Common Core State Standards will significantly impact the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and resources of charter schools.

Charter school leaders and staff need exemplars and resources that offer a wide array of examples targeted specifically toward the diverse student populations they serve. To meet this need, Safal Partners worked with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to profile three examples of successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards in charter schools around the country: [Alain Locke Charter School](#), [Summit Preparatory Charter High School](#), and [Achievement First Bushwick Middle School](#).

## OVERVIEW OF SUMMIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In 2003, Summit Public Schools' flagship school, Summit Preparatory Charter High School (Summit Prep) in Redwood City, California began its first year of operation. The mission of Summit Prep is to prepare a diverse student population to be successful in four-year colleges or universities and to be thoughtful, contributing members of society. Today, the school serves more than 400 students.

Summit Prep serves students in Grades 9–12. Summit Prep is 53 percent Hispanic, 32 percent White, and 7 percent Asian. In 2013, close to 40 percent of students qualified for free and reduced meals. Since its founding, 96 percent of Summit Prep's graduates have been accepted to at least one four-year college or university. Summit Prep is ranked first in the Bay Area and third in the state of California among schools serving students with disabilities according to the California 2012-2013 academic performance index scores and [school rankings](#).

High community demand for seats at the school has led to the opening of more Summit schools across the Bay Area. Summit Public Schools' first Grades 6–12 school opened its doors in 2013. Today, Summit Public Schools is a leading charter management organization serving the Bay Area's diverse communities. Six schools serving 1,600 students are realizing the vision of Summit's founders over a decade ago. Summit Public Schools offer consistent organizational and instructional methods throughout its portfolio and will continue to grow and provide a high-quality public school option to more communities. It opened its seventh school in the Bay Area in the fall of 2014 and its first two schools in the state of Washington in 2015.

## SUMMIT'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Over 96 percent of Summit graduates have been accepted to at least one four-year college or university.
- Summit graduates complete college within six years at double the national average.
- Notable colleges that have accepted Summit graduates include Stanford, Duke, Dartmouth, Brown, Rice, Carnegie Mellon, Tufts, NYU, Brandeis, Middlebury, and West Point.
- Summit attracts faculty from the nation's top teaching preparation programs, including Stanford, Harvard, NYU, UC Berkeley, and Columbia.
- Summit has retained 82 percent of its teachers in the organization since its founding.

## SUMMARY OF CASE STUDY FOCUS AREAS

This case study focuses on the following areas that have been identified as key areas for consideration in the shift to implementing the Common Core State Standards.

### 1. **Aligning the Curriculum and Instructional Practices to the Common Core State Standards**

This section focuses on the key shifts in the academic program. Summit has focused on three key areas to support the transition to Common Core State Standards: assessments, instruction, and coherence. In addition to refining the curriculum and instructional strategies, Summit Public Schools have also made significant changes to its internal assessments.

### 2. **Maximizing Resources Through District–Charter Collaboration**

This section focuses on the Summer of Summit, a professional development program that brings Summit Public Schools’ educators together with other public school educators from charter and traditional schools to work collaboratively. Educators develop “playlists,” or lessons, and other resources they can use in the classroom.

### 3. **Selecting of the Best Common Core Resources**

This section focuses on a software platform, Activate Instruction. The Summit Public Schools Model, tools, and all learning resources are also available to the public on this platform. Although Activate was not an outgrowth of the transition to the Common Core State Standards, Summit Public Schools has been able to leverage this resource to encourage stronger collaboration, innovation, and creativity among educators and those in other districts and states as a result of having the common language of the Common Core State Standards.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The shift to the Common Core State Standards has provided Summit Public Schools and its flagship school, Summit Prep, with many opportunities and much growth. The more rigorous standards, compared with the traditional standards, calls for developing more cognitive skills in addition to content knowledge. Summit Public Schools’ leaders believe this shift will prepare students for the real world. The transition has also provided the opportunity to redesign the role of the teacher in the classroom limiting direct instruction and increasing the role of student engagement through personalized, self-paced instruction. In addition, the Common Core State Standards have provided a common language that can be used among charter and traditional schools, districts, and states. Parental engagement will be the next major focus as Summit continues to make the transition to the Common Core State Standards in 2014–15.

## FOCUS AREA I: ALIGNING THE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES TO THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

In the spring of 2012, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium released Common Core State Standards test items. Summit organized a one-day professional development for all four Summit Public Schools campuses. In addition to studying the test items in their own content areas, the English teachers took the mathematics test, and the mathematics teachers took the English language arts test to calibrate and cross-collaborate. This activity yielded three key takeaways:

- The Smarter Balanced assessment items released were the types of assessments Summit wanted.
- Summit students were not ready to take these types of assessments due to the increased cognitive demand.
- This transition would require a concerted effort among administrators, teachers, students, and families.



*The Common Core State Standards provided the opportunity to rethink and redesign the whole school experience.*

*– Diane Tavenner,  
Founder and CEO*



Summit Public School focused on three key areas to support the transition to Common Core State Standards:

1. **Assessments**—assessing big skills are different than assessing content knowledge. Assessing cognitive skills requires more time.
2. **Instruction**—Identifying and using appropriate best practices and resources and revisiting the use of teacher time.
3. **Coherence**—developing a coherent experience in and after school.

### **Assessment**

The transition to the Common Core State Standards built on Summit Public Schools' work in the areas of cognitive skill development (organizing writing, research, and problem formulation) and content knowledge. Summit Public School had previously identified [Four Elements of College Readiness](#) which included the acquisition of Content Knowledge, development of Cognitive Skills, growth in Habits of Success (Non-cognitive Skills), and exposure to Expeditions (real-world experiences that bring together multiple skills). The transition to the Common Core State Standards provided Summit the opportunity to continue to strengthen the academic program in these areas, especially in the areas of content knowledge and cognitive skills development.

### **Summit Public Schools' Cognitive Skills Rubric Development**

To date, there are few standardized assessment instruments that hold students accountable for the development of cognitive skills or that hold teachers accountable for the explicit teaching of these cognitive skills. That is changing with the coming of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment and Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) assessments. In order to be ready for this change in standardized assessment, Summit Public Schools staff identified the need to create a shared assessment tool that will allow students to demonstrate their growth on cognitive skills. Summit Public Schools believe these skills form the foundation of learning across every subject area, as well as at each stage of a student's cognitive development. A shared assessment tool also supports educators across the nation in building assessments with the same expectations, ultimately allowing for cross-state, district, school, and discipline collaboration, all aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

Summit Public School has a long-standing partnership with Stanford University's Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE), the group responsible for creating all Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) performance tasks. Summit Public Schools leveraged this relationship to work with SCALE to finalize a common Cognitive Skills Rubric based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) framework.

The [rubric](#) is designed to assess students' in Common Core State Standard-aligned cognitive skills across subject areas, from Grades 6 through 12. Students, teachers, and parents can track student growth in every skill. All written projects are assessed using the SCALE rubric.

### ***Ensuring Coherence***

Summit Public Schools developed a new position, Director of Innovation, in the organization to manage the transition to the Common Core State Standards and other work related to the New Generation School Model... The Director of this area is responsible for gathering relevant data, communicating the status to leadership, identifying possible challenges, meeting daily with the chief executive officer to check in and course correct as needed. In 2012–13, this position was part time. In 2013–14, the position is full time; in 2014–15, the position will continue to be full time, though the responsibilities will shift to a focus on school culture and parental engagement.

The Common Core State Standards provide the breadth and depth necessary to balance the demands of content knowledge acquisition and cognitive skill development. By re-designing the internal assessments and ensuring the appropriate human resources to manage the transition, Summit Public Schools was able to continue to build on the strengths of their academic program to address the growing demands of the Common Core State Standards.

### ***Monitoring Progress***

Summit Public Schools is able to monitor the transition through established organizational structures. There is a cross functional team which includes school leaders and representatives from the CMO team leads (i.e. Academics, Information, Technology, Finance, and Communications). This team meets weekly to review the plan and performance data to determine the effectiveness of the plan and to identify any areas that need to be addressed to ensure success. Additionally, each school's faculty meets twice a week as a Leadership Team, and this is part of the work they do together. We also have a Director of Innovation, which I think you mentioned in the case study.

## FOCUS AREA II: MAXIMIZING RESOURCES THROUGH DISTRICT–CHARTER COLLABORATION

In the fall of 2013, Summit Public Schools' [Next Generation School Model](#) debuted across Summit schools. Summit Public Schools' Next Generation school model is designed to ensure that every student is prepared for success in college and career by focusing on four elements of college readiness – Content Knowledge, Cognitive Skills, Habits of Success, and Real World Experiences. Summit Public Schools partnered with several foundations to fund the 2013 Summer of Summit program including The Schusterman Family Foundation, The Schwab Family Foundation, and Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC).

*Really great teachers need great professional development.*

*– Caitlyn Herman, Principal*

During the summer of 2013, Summit Public Schools developed the Summer of Summit program to aid in its transition to its Next Generation School Model and alignment of curriculum and instruction to the Common Core State Standards. In designing the Summer of Summit experience, Summit staff set the following goals:

- Develop a world-class curriculum that is publicly accessible [online](#) to educators worldwide
- Engage in meaningful professional development with peers across organizations
- Shift curriculum writing to the summer to allow teachers to focus on students during the school year
- Contribute to the enhancement of a bold school model to advance public education.

The Summer of Summit served more than 60 educators who committed a combined 7,200 hours of work over the summer. Summit Public Schools staff were joined by educators from Intrinsic Schools, San Francisco Unified School District, New York City Public Schools, Hillside High School, Foundations College Prep, City Bridge, and Educurious among others. Over 85% of Summit staff participated in the program. Summit staff were paid to participate in the training through additional philanthropic support specifically raised to support stipends for Summit teachers and other expenses of the summer program. Educators worked in teams to develop a Grades 6–12 curriculum-aligned to the Common Core State Standards to propel every student toward college and career readiness. The curriculum includes:



- **Content Guides** for content knowledge in five core subject areas as well as college knowledge, academic literacy, personal finance, and health and wellness.

- **Content Knowledge Playlists** that correspond to the Content Guides and allow students to drive their own learning. Summit created multimodal playlists to provide students with a diverse array of learning resources to meet their individual needs.
- **Content Assessments** that correspond to each playlist and give students immediate feedback and give teachers specific data with which to inform instruction and intervention. Summit created on-demand content assessments that give students instant feedback and a different version of the quiz every time. Each content assessment is paired with a diagnostic assessment that allows students to self-assess before working on a focus area.
- **Projects** that lead students through rich, project-based learning experiences, with corresponding performance tasks that assess students' growth in cognitive skills.

#### **CORE COMPONENTS OF THE SUMMER OF SUMMIT PROGRAM**

- Participants met on-site at least 20 hours every week for face-to-face collaboration.
- Every Tuesday and Wednesday, teachers organized and participated in discussion sessions on topics such as writing quality multiple-choice questions and building a self-directed student culture.
- All of the products created went through a detailed peer review process that involved collecting feedback from other teachers inside and outside of the department.

Teachers grew to trust the ongoing process of revising and iterating that continued into the school year, measuring student data and learning from it, and then improving products as needed. Summit Public Schools staff created a structure of Teacher Project Implementation Notes for teachers to record, update, and collaborate on instructional strategies aligned with each project.

Participants continued to refine instructions and protocols for authoring and reviewing assessments and curriculum, compiling all resources into Summit Public School's [Common Assessment Plan playlist](#). [Trello](#), an online project management system, was used to organize the workflow.

By bringing Summit Public Schools teachers and educators from around the country together, Summer of Summit was able to leverage the vast expertise and resources of participants, provide professional development, and ensure the alignment of curricular materials and instructional strategies to the Common Core State Standards. Teachers continued to contribute to the playlists throughout the school year. Summit is planning to continue the Summer of Summit program in 2014. The program will be open to Summit educators as well as educators across the country. Participation of non-Summit educators will be limited to designated sessions to assist with continuity.

### FOCUS AREA III: SELECTING THE BEST COMMON CORE RESOURCES

Summit Public Schools has a long history of collaborating with educational technology start-ups. Its founders and faculty believe that by sharing their perspectives with these companies they are better able to contribute to the development of the technology companies' platforms, enhancing their capabilities and readying the platforms for use by Summit schools and faculty.

*"CCSS gave a framework to think about bringing resources to scale."*

– Jon Deane, Chief Information Officer

Summit partnered with [Illuminate Education](#) and the [Girard Foundation](#) to create [Activate Instruction](#), an innovative platform that houses playlists for students to learn content in a personalized manner and at their own pace. This robust platform is free and accessible to everyone. The Summit Model, tools, and all learning resources are also publicly available. As a part of Summit's commitment to inspire change in public education, it actively shares and collaborates with educators, parents, and students across the country and around the world.



district, or state.

Activate Instruction publicly launched at the beginning of August 2013, providing all teachers with a platform on which to find and store the best curricular and instructional resources. Activate Instruction's goal was to build a framework to store and organize easily searchable files tagged by Common Core State Standards. The transition to Common Core State Standards provided the motivation to build something that would not only be aligned to Summit's standards but be accessible to all teachers and students regardless of school,

Below is a screenshot of Human Impact on the Environment lessons in Activate Instruction. Students are able to engage with the playlists which includes a diagnostic assessment, interactive lessons, reading materials, videos and a check for understanding. Teachers and students can rate each component by selecting thumbs up or thumbs down. These selections are then recorded in the system.

## **CONCLUSION**

The shift to the Common Core State Standards has provided Summit Public Schools and its flagship school, Summit Prep, with many opportunities to strengthen and refined existing systems and practices and to strengthen the academic achievement of its students. The revisions to the curriculum reinforced the networks' shift towards a more cognitively demanding academic program. The transition has also provided the opportunity to redesign the role of the teacher in the classroom and to share a common language that can be used among charter and traditional schools, districts, and states.

The transition to the Common Core State Standards will support Summit Public Schools in meeting its mission to prepare a diverse student population to be successful in four-year colleges or universities and to be thoughtful, contributing members of society.

## RESOURCES

### Focus Area I: Maximizing Resources Through District–Charter Collaboration

Summit Public Schools. (2013). Summer of Summit—A Look Back.

<https://app.activateinstruction.org/playlist/resource-sview/id/524ca7f413131c46725c7fe5/rid/5256ea8913131cff7bfccea9/bc0/search/bc1/playlist>

### Focus Area II: Aligning the Curriculum and Instructional Practices to the Common Core State Standards

Summit Public Schools. (2013). Cognitive Skills Rubric.

<https://app.activateinstruction.org/playlist/resource-sview/id/524ca7f413131c46725c7fe5/rid/524cabaf13131ceb760a55db/bc0/search/bc1/playlist>

Summit Public Schools. (2013). Common Assessment Plan.

<https://app.activateinstruction.org/playlist/view/id/51b8fe8707121cd178000006/bc0/search>

Summit Public Schools. (2013). Elements of College Readiness.

<https://app.activateinstruction.org/playlist/resource-sview/rid/52549ccf13131cc46efec66f/id/524ca7f413131c46725c7fe5/bc0/search/bc1/playlist>

Summit Public Schools. (2013). Personalized Learning Plan Tool.

<https://app.activateinstruction.org/playlist/resource-sview/id/524ca7f413131c46725c7fe5/rid/524cb5ff13131cb87d54f4ed/bc0/search/bc1/playlist>

### Focus Area III: Selecting the Best Common Core Resources for Your School

Summit Public Schools (2013). Activate Instruction Overview.

<https://app.activateinstruction.org/playlist/resource-sview/id/524ca7f413131c46725c7fe5/rid/5254ac2f13131ca871eb4cd1/bc0/search/bc1/playlist>.

## INTERVIEWEES

The following individuals were interviewed as part of this case study:

- Diane Tavenner, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Summit Public Schools
- Adam Carter, Chief Academic Officer, Summit Public Schools
- Jon Deane, Chief Information Officer, Summit Public Schools
- Caitlyn Herman, Executive Director, Summit Shasta, Summit Public Schools
- Mira Brown, Chief External Officer, Summit Public Schools