The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), also known as college- and career-ready standards, are voluntary K-12 learning goals in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The goal of the CCSS is to provide a clear, consistent understanding of what students are expected to learn. They were developed in 2010, by the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

The standards reflect the knowledge and skills required for successful entry into college and 21st century careers. CCSS provide a strategy to meet NEA’s goals of equitable education and developing a nation of children who are globally competitive in the future.

**CCSS Overview**

The CCSS are voluntary and consistent standards—not mandates. The Standards emphasize critical thinking and analysis and promote greater and equal opportunities for all students. With common learning goals for all students, CCSS are intended to help students become college and career ready and increase international competitiveness.

NEA firmly believes that no matter what your job category, education support professionals (ESPs)—who make up one-third of the school workforce—play an important role in positively impacting the whole student. All ESPs should have a basic understanding of the CCSS. ESPs should have enough knowledge to defend the goals of the CCSS and dispel myths about them. The Standards provide a clear and consistent framework and foundation to prepare all students, regardless of zip code, for college and the workforce.

“I consider myself a part of the team of educators. Every day in my role as a bus driver, I provide students opportunities to learn on the bus by reading books, playing word and math games, help with spelling words, social studies and language arts subjects. I believe that involvement (in CCSS) for all school staff members is essential to students’ success. I want to figure out ways to help by keeping activities I do on the school bus in alignment with what and how it’s being taught in the classroom” - Donna Nielsen, school bus driver in Indiana

ESPs, especially paraeducators, need to understand the CCSS and learn about its impact from your district. ESPs should then advocate for training that is tailored to their jobs from their school or district. The Standards have the potential to offer every student in America access to the same high standards that promote critical thinking skills to help students graduate prepared for college and careers.

“I make a difference in student learning, too, so let’s work together to implement CCSS so that each child is truly successful. I do think that all employees that are making a career in a school setting should be included in the standards and implementation. It would give ESP’s a better understanding of what is required.” - Mary Shelton-Kelly, Kitchen Satellite Lead

**ESPs and CCSS**

Whether you are interacting with students in the classroom, cafeteria, hallways, on the bus, or during recess, you can apply critical questioning strategies—open-ended questions used to promote critical thinking. They typically start with “why?”, “how?”, or “to what extent?” For example, you can ask something as simple as, “Why is math your favorite subject?” If you see a student reading, ask “how can you relate stories from the book
you are reading to your own personal life?” These questions are designed to help students develop their critical thinking skills, deepen comprehension, and stimulate original thinking.

**What can you do?**

Urge parents, students, other educators, and community members to encourage policymakers and elected officials to:

- Focus on student-driven solutions
- Ensure equity of opportunity for all educators and students
- Advocate for high standards with common-sense accountability
- Provide training and learning opportunities for all educators

The CCSS are important for ESPs as they are a vital part of every student’s education. The Standards and implementation will be more effective if all school personnel reinforce the skills needed to meet the goals of CCSS.

Stephone Avery, head custodian, in Arkansas, “We haven’t received any common core training, and want to help. Even though all of us are not in the classroom, it would be good for all ESPs to be included in CCSS and its implementation so we can enhance the role we play in the larger picture to make it successful”.

**Additional Ideas for ESPs**

ESPs who work directly with students require a more in-depth knowledge, but all ESPs should have a basic understanding of the CCSS. ESPs should advocate for relevant training and professional development opportunities. All ESPs could benefit from understanding elements like critical questioning strategies.

Think about ways you can get involved. You may want to participate in or develop before-or after-school games and math clubs, encourage students to read on the bus ride to and from school, or develop lunchtime book clubs. Apply your knowledge and have conversations with other ESPs and teachers to promote student-centered practices around the CCSS. Jane-Anne Sykes, a school nurse in St. Louis feels CCSS training would be helpful in her work. “I would like to understand CCSS so that I am informed and can help support its implementation. I want to know how I might be able to apply it to my job and help in student learning.” ESPs want to figure out ways to help. Start conversations with your district to see how you can align your interactions and practices with students to what is being taught in the classroom.

**Resources**

NEA CCSS Website
http://www.nea.org/commoncore
Achieve the Core
http://achievethecore.org/
Families and Educators Working Together for Student Success
http://www.nea.org/home/56829.htm
National PTA
http://www.pta.org/