4. ORGANIZE TO IMPLEMENT

Getting the Message Out

Part of **IMPLEMENTING**
Common Core
State Standards and **Assessments**

A Workbook for State and District Leaders

To download the full workbook, go to
www.parcconline.org/CommonCoreImplementationWorkbook

Achieve

EDi
U.S. EDUCATION
DELIVERY INSTITUTE

IN THIS SECTION

4. Organize To Implement:
Getting the Message Out

> **Diagnostic questions to guide your team's reading of this chapter:**
>
> • Is there a group of key people outside the state education agency or school district who are actively committed to the success of the implementation effort? Is this group organized to influence key groups in the delivery system? How strong is its influence?
>
> • Does the state education agency or school district regularly communicate with key stakeholders about the overall goal as well as the implementation of the goal? Is there a compelling message tied to different stakeholders?

One risk faced by any change effort is "undercommunicating by a factor of 10, or even 100."[1] The communications effort should receive the same amount of attention as the implementation effort. Often the best communications strategy is simply having a clear and easily articulated implementation strategy that provides transparency and ensures open dialogue with critical stakeholders. Communications will never be effective if simply tacked on to the end of your implementation strategy; you need to communicate and engage with key stakeholders early, often and throughout to build the necessary statewide support for these major reform efforts.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) raise expectations for student performance. Maintaining popular support for this effort is essential. A **guiding coalition,** consisting of 7–10 key external stakeholders, can help. Beyond this small group, you must also have a plan for **communicating** the message to the field, to parents, to students and to the public at large, who should all know what to expect and why. School leaders, for example, need to understand the effort's aspiration, the path to successful implementation, and how related policies such as school accountability and teacher education will be affected. Likewise, teachers of English language arts and mathematics need to adjust the scope and sequence of what they teach. In essence, communications efforts help widen the circles of leadership beyond your department so that the transition to the CCSS has the support it needs.

Build a Base of Support by Establishing the "Guiding Coalition"

Flagging public support can push implementation off the rails. Pressure to water down student expectations may build, for example, once new assessment results show that students are not as prepared as once believed. Inevitably, state and district leaders need help in keeping rigorous expectations for students at the heart of their agenda. Though the strategic implementation team plays a key role in supporting this agenda, a small group of highly visible and credible leaders are needed to sustain effort in the face of pushback.

The role of this "guiding coalition" is to remove bureaucratic barriers to change, exert influence at key moments to support implementation and offer counsel to the strategic implementation team. The guiding coalition might include a head of a university, key businessperson, state legislator, leader of a professional content association, teachers union leader or vocal parent. ***You can learn more about establishing a guiding coalition <u>here</u>.***

CASE STORY: TENNESSEE

Leaders in Tennessee knew they needed to mobilize core support from across government, business and the political sphere to successfully compete for federal Race to the Top funds. The mission of Tennessee SCORE, a nonpartisan organization chaired by former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, is to encourage sound policy decisions in public education. Tennessee SCORE has played an important role in helping form and coordinate the state's guiding coalition. The results are impressive. State leaders have consistently supported a set reform agenda. In fact, all seven 2010 gubernatorial candidates signed on to support the state's Race to the Top proposal. More recently, the group launched a campaign called "Expect More, Achieve More" in support of the state's new, higher academic standards. The work of SCORE offers a compelling lesson about how to build support for education reform efforts by partnering with an intermediary organization.

Achieve

COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION WORKBOOK

EDi
U.S. EDUCATION
DELIVERY INSTITUTE

4.4

EXERCISE: BUILD THE GUIDING COALITION

Purpose: To identify a guiding coalition, determine how you will build trust and alignment among its members, and prepare for opportunities that exist for the group to reinforce the importance of this implementation project to your state.

Who should participate? The strategic implementation team should complete this exercise, with the input of the system leader.

Directions:

1. Brainstorm possible members of the guiding coalition.

2. Narrow the list by excluding those who would be unlikely to ever support the aspiration.

3. Complete the top portion of the template below, describing each possible member.

4. Evaluate your list using the following criteria, and make any necessary changes.

    a. Diversity

    b. Balance

    c. Potential to work together

5. Check for overlap, make any necessary changes and finalize your guiding coalition members (suggested: six to eight members).

Discussion questions:

- How will you build trust and alignment among the group?

- What opportunities exist for your guiding coalition members to reinforce the importance of the CCSS/Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers?
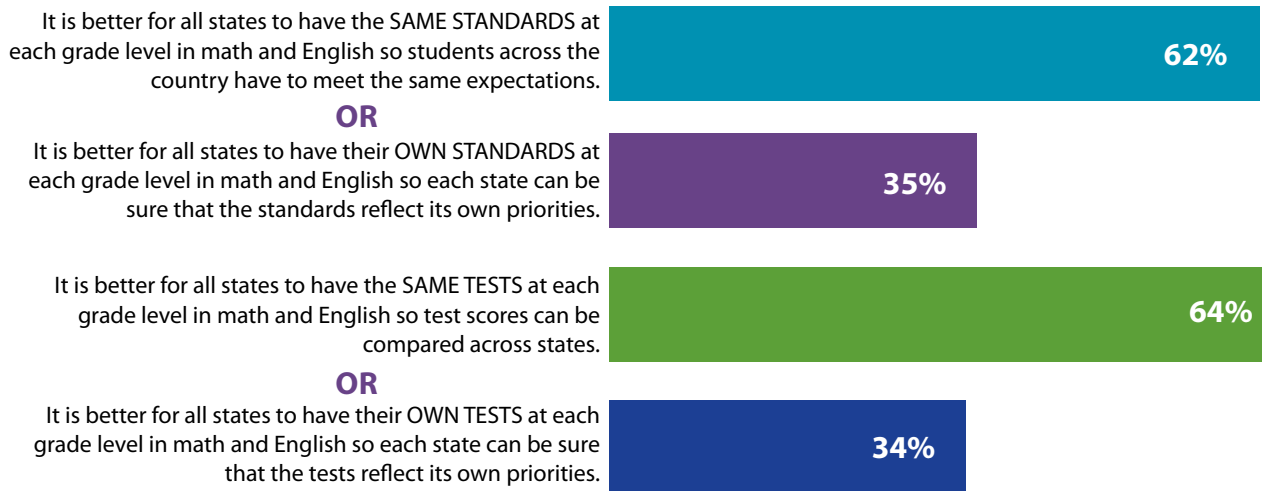
Person	Alignment with aspiration *(very low, low, high, very high)*	Potential for alignment with aspiration *(very low, low, high, very high)*	Relative power *(very low, low, high, very high)*	Type of power *(position, credibility, leadership, etc.)*	Sphere of influence *(legislature, teachers, department of education, etc.)*	Potential for difficulty with others

Communicate the Delivery Message and Widen the Circles of Leadership

Alone, the guiding coalition is insufficient to maintain public support. For the CCSS to improve pedagogy, teachers, principals and the broader public need to understand the "why" behind the effort: Why are the new standards and related assessments important? What is their moral purpose? They must also understand your system's strategy, how it will be carried out and, crucially, what it means for them.

Research suggests that registered voters have broad, but not necessarily deep (or intense), support for common standards and common assessments.[2]

Percentage of respondents who say this statement is closer to their point of view

It is better for all states to have the SAME STANDARDS at each grade level in math and English so students across the country have to meet the same expectations.
62%

OR

It is better for all states to have their OWN STANDARDS at each grade level in math and English so each state can be sure that the standards reflect its own priorities.
35%

It is better for all states to have the SAME TESTS at each grade level in math and English so test scores can be compared across states.
64%

OR

It is better for all states to have their OWN TESTS at each grade level in math and English so each state can be sure that the tests reflect its own priorities.
34%

Messages about the need for consistent expectations across and within states and high standards — and therefore equal opportunity — for all students should build off this base of support. The lack of intense support, though, also suggests that the public may be swayed by opposition messages, especially given the discomfort many already have with standardized testing and a reform program incentivized by the federal government. The best way to ensure that this does not occur is to play offense — make sure your messages and goals reach key audiences first and are regularly reinforced by credible messengers. In fact, don't be afraid to communicate even if your implementation plan is in flux. Rather than say nothing, be honest but clear about the decisions already made and the decisions still to come. All of this can be done via a communications plan.

An effective communications plan should answer five basic questions:

➤ Why are we making the change to the new standards?

➤ What is our aspiration?

➤ How do the CCSS differ from our state's current standards?

➤ Why choose this course?

➤ What does this mean for you?

The last question, in particular, may raise pressing concerns about possible changes to course requirements, instructional materials, and your assessment and accountability system.

Internal Communications and Coordination

An obvious, but important, first step is to assemble the core communications team of people you need to promote and gain support for the CCSS. While a compact team makes sense early on, over time you want to include policy and communications specialists from the governor's office, state education agency, higher education system/community, business community, and other public and third-party advocacy organizations. You may also want to add a district-level or a school-level leader to round out the team. Because this team is intentionally cross-sector, you will want to assign an individual or agency as the lead coordinator, ultimately responsible — and accountable — for executing the communications plan.

Before any efforts are taken to formally engage key stakeholders and local actors, states and districts need to recognize that communicating internally — among yourselves and your team members — is where all efforts must begin. The key to the **internal then external** communications strategy is to prevent any surprises. You never want one of your internal team to read about something you have done in the morning newspaper or first hear about it from a supervisor in his or her office.

States can make a number of efforts to coordinate their internal communications efforts:

➤ Host regular in-person meetings with your core communications team;

➤ Schedule conference calls when you cannot meet in person to allow for information-sharing and brainstorming as a team;

➤ Send a regular update to your core team, which can be as simple as an e-mail news alert or electronic newsletter; and

➤ Establish an e-mail distribution list of those internal people whom you must reach out to frequently to ensure that they are informed and on board with your efforts. Send them relevant news coverage, new studies and reports, and other related materials. Using an e-mail listserve is a no-cost way to keep other team members engaged and in the loop.

Having this cross-sector, core communications team in place also provides natural "ins" into critical organizations and stakeholder groups. Each team member, at a minimum, should make use of his or her existing networks and lines of communication within the person's organization.

Know Your Audience/Stakeholders

The first questions the core communications team should ask are: Who are the critical stakeholders in your state? What organizations or individuals have the ability to make or break the successful implementation of these education reforms? What organizations or individuals are critical to the long-term success and sustainability of the CCSS and related assessments?

Stakeholder mapping offers a natural starting point to answer these questions. By prioritizing the most critical stakeholders and identifying specific strategies for engagement, you can focus your outreach efforts — and identify potential champions among those already engaged and supportive. It is tempting to identify a large number of stakeholders to engage — such as educators, school administrators, district administrators, legislators, the state board of education, parents, students, higher education leaders, higher education faculty, community leaders, civil rights organizations and so on. But with limited resources and time to devote to communications and outreach, it is more useful to identify those individuals and organizations with the most to add — or detract — from the reform efforts and focus your efforts there.

Reaching Your Audience/Stakeholders: The Message

Developing **three key messages** around the CCSS and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is the core of the communications strategy. Typically, the first message defines the issue, the second outlines the problem and the third explains the solution. The key three should be distributed to all internal team members and communicated consistently, without variation, at all times. Repeat, repeat, repeat these messages across all communications channels and by all public messengers. Discuss the transition to the CCSS as a comprehensive reform, albeit one with many moving parts.

Key Three Messages

Example A:

- Existing standards and assessments put an undue burden on educators, students and the education system as a whole — and rarely provide the information needed to have a positive impact on any of those stakeholders.

- In addition, state standards and assessments have historically been set too low, offering an inaccurate view of how well our students are truly achieving.

- The Common Core State Standards and aligned common assessments are more rigorous than what we have in place now and will provide an honest picture of how well our students, schools and system are achieving on the most critical knowledge and skills in mathematics and English.

Example B:

- With nearly every state having adopted the Common Core State Standards, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform education across America and improve our global competitiveness.

- Currently, far too many students drop out or graduate from high school without the knowledge and skills required for success, closing doors and limiting their post-high school options. In our state, *XX* percent of students are dropping out before earning a high school diploma, and *XX* of first-year college students are enrolled in remedial (non-credit-bearing) courses.

- Implementing the Common Core State Standards is a critical step toward ensuring that all students receive the education they need for success in life.

In addition to the key three messages, your state will need to communicate critical information to certain groups, based on their role in the implementation process. Largely based on previous experiences with standards and assessments, certain pressure points are already clear. Think through the standard messaging and associated advocacy materials you need to develop to address such issues. For example:

➤ **Educators and school and district administrators** need to understand clearly what the transition will look like and how it will affect their day-to-day work:

- Where are the biggest changes in instruction? How do the CCSS differ from the state's current standards?

- What does full implementation look like? What is the final vision?

- What will the new standards mean for curriculum and instructional materials?

- What are the implications of implementing the CCSS before aligned assessments are in place?

- What is the technology transition plan? (Or what steps are being taken to prepare for the transition to computer-based assessments given school-based and student-specific challenges?)

- What does this mean for state and/or federal accountability?

➤ **Parents and community members,** on the other hand, need to know what this means for their kids:

- What are the benefits of the reforms? How do they represent a step forward for the U.S. (and your community's) education system?

- Will the new assessments be high stakes (with college-ready cut scores)?

- What are the higher education incentives attached to the new standards and assessments? Which local institutions of higher education are engaged?

- What supports will be offered to help students meet the raised expectations?

- What supports will be offered to help educators teach the raised expectations?

- What might happen if we don't embrace common standards and assessments?

➤ **Policymakers** might have more questions about how implementation will be paid for, but they also need to be prepared (and engaged enough) to respond to high-level concerns from educators and parents (aka their constituents):

- Why are we making the change to new standards and assessments?

- What are the upfront costs, and what are the costs (and savings) over time?

- How can we use existing funds to cover the implementation costs?

- What has been the level of involvement from the federal government? What will be its level of involvement moving forward?

- What implications do the new standards and assessments have on career and technical education? On STEM education? On charter schools? On graduation rates?

As often as possible, relay exactly how the education community — and educators in particular — have been involved in the development of the new standards and how they will be involved in the development of the new common assessments. Teachers had a seat at the table and were engaged every step of the way in the CCSS development process, including drafting standards and providing feedback on various public drafts. The American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association were involved throughout. Those organizations plus the American Association of School Administrators and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, for example, all endorsed the final CCSS.

Reaching Your Audience/Stakeholders: The Messengers

Your cross-sector core communications team and the guiding coalition are all advocates throughout implementation. In addition, though, you need a broader set of engaged and informed messengers at all levels. Part of your communications plan must include the identification and development of **"ambassadors"** within key stakeholder groups who can serve as peer-to-peer messengers in support of the reforms.

For example, PARCC states will convene cadres of K–12 leaders from across the 25 PARCC states. These convenings will provide an opportunity to engage K–12 educators around a set of instructional tools developed to support the CCSS and PARCC assessments (e.g., content frameworks, professional development modules, etc.). These educator leaders — be they classroom teachers, school administrators or district leaders — will then be equipped to go back to their states and train other educators using the tools so that understanding of, support for and ownership of the implementation of the new CCSS and related assessments will grow throughout districts and schools. These same K–12 leaders can also serve as ambassadors for the CCSS and PARCC assessments.

Similarly, there are strategies for developing peer advocates in the state legislature, among community-based organizations, in the civil rights communities and among other critical voices for education reform. What is most important is that these messengers are engaged often, are kept in the loop as decisions are made that affect the implementation process, and are armed with the information and support they need to be successful peer advocates. ***You can learn more about communicating the delivery message*** <u>***here***</u>***.***

CASE STORY: INDIANA

<u>***The Indiana Department of Education***</u> has made a wide range of instructional resources available to help educators understand the new CCSS and what the transition to the new standards will require. In addition to the state-developed curriculum maps, instructional transition guidance documents and implementation timelines, the department's CCSS web page also includes a series of short videos from state leaders explaining the new standards, including a number of videos that explore the connection between the new English language arts/literacy standards and other disciplines, such as science, history/social studies, agriculture, health science and fine arts.

CASE STORY: UTAH

Utah is organizing a series of <u>***Common Core Academies***</u> to provide professional development to the state's educators around the CCSS. Starting in summer 2011, the academies, offered at 14 sites around the state, will focus specifically on K–12 English language arts and 6th and 9th grade mathematics and will involve about 5,600 teachers. In addition, while the Utah State Office of Education has a well-developed <u>***CCSS page***</u> on its website, it also has partnered with the Utah Education Network and Higher Ed Utah/Utah System of Higher Education to develop a robust <u>***CCSS site***</u> that includes resources such as CCSS crosswalks, a sample letter to parents about the CCSS, suggested student

course progressions, an explanation of the assessment transition schedule, videos from the CCSS writers explaining the standards in English language arts and math, and sample student work and performance tasks (excerpted from the CCSS). This joint endeavor represents one way in which state education agencies can leverage partners and existing networks to communicate about the CCSS and related assessments.

CASE STORY: VERMONT

The Vermont Department of Education has created a ***"Common Core in Vermont" wiki*** to disseminate an assortment of tools and resources related to the implementation of the CCSS in Vermont, ranging from an updated implementation timeline to resources for educators to familiarize themselves with the new standards. The department continually updates the wiki with resources presented at state and regional meetings, as well as those created by local education leaders. This simple tool helps keep everyone on the same page.

Achieve

COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION WORKBOOK

EDi
U.S. EDUCATION
DELIVERY INSTITUTE

4.11

EXERCISE: IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS WHO ARE MOST CRITICAL TO SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY

Purpose: To identify and map those stakeholders who are most critical to successful implementation so you can prepare a communications plan for engaging their support.

Who should participate? The core communications team should complete this exercise.

Directions:

1. Brainstorm stakeholders who will need to be involved at all levels of implementation of the CCSS and related assessments. Be sure to consider those at the state, district, school and classroom levels, as well as external stakeholders, such as professional organizations.

2. Using the 2 x 2 matrix template below, place each of your key stakeholders according to the degree to which they contribute to CCSS implementation and their level of support.

High ┌──────────────────────────┬──────────────────────────┐
     │   │   │
     │   │   │
     │   │   │
CONTRIBUTION TO IMPLEMENTATION │
     │   │   │
     │   │   │
     ├──────────────────────────┼──────────────────────────┤
     │   │   │
     │   │   │
     │   │   │
     │   │   │
Low └──────────────────────────┴──────────────────────────┘
     Low   LEVEL OF SUPPORT   High

3. Identify the stakeholders most critical to your goal. These are those individuals or groups who fall into the top half of the matrix and who present the greatest challenges in terms of engagement.

4. For each priority stakeholder you have identified, complete the mapping template on the next page. You can repeat this exercise specifically for the PARCC assessments.

(continued on next page)

		Stakeholder 1	Stakeholder 2	Stakeholder 3	Stakeholder 4
Stakeholder	Who are the key groups/individuals who need to be engaged in the implementation of the CCSS to ensure broad buy-in and shared ownership across the state?				
Contribution to implementation	How critical is the stakeholder to the success of the CCSS? • **High:** *Is critical to the success of the CCSS in the short and long terms* • **Medium:** *Has the potential to be a critical ally for the successful implementation of the CCSS* • **Low:** *Is not necessarily critical to the implementation of the CCSS at this time, but is an important ally for long-term success*				
Level of support	How supportive of the CCSS is this stakeholder? • **High:** *The group is very supportive of the CCSS* • **Medium:** *The group (or some individuals) are supportive, but this support can grow* • **Low:** *The group does not appear to support the CCSS at this time*				
Objective	Ideally, what would the engagement of this stakeholder look like?				
Outreach/engagement activities	What are ways in which states can engage the stakeholder? Sample activities include: • *One-on-one briefings* • *Scheduled presentations at group meetings* • *Partner to identify leadership cadre educators* • *Feedback on instructional and curricular tools/products*				
Outcomes	How will you know when this stakeholder is effectively engaged in your implementation project?				
Lead contact	Who should take the lead on engaging this stakeholder (be it someone inside or outside the government)?				

EXERCISE: DEVELOP A CORE SCRIPT AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Purpose: To identify key messages and create a strategic communications plan for engaging key stakeholders.

Who should participate? The core communications team should complete this exercise.

Directions:

1. Examine the Sample Strategic Communications Plan on the next page, and think through the key messages and communications that might apply to your key stakeholders.

2. For each of the key stakeholders you identified in the prior exercise, complete the blank Strategic Communications Plan template, defining your key messages and detailing your plan for the communication of those messages.

Achieve

COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION WORKBOOK

EDi
U.S. EDUCATION
DELIVERY INSTITUTE

4.14

Strategic Communications Plan (EXAMPLE)	
Target audience/ stakeholder	**Define the target audience with specificity:** DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS
Objectives	**Define the outreach objectives:** To engage, over the course of the next six months, at least 75 percent of all local superintendents around CCSS implementation
Key target messages (which fit under the key three messages)	**Outline the tailored submessages for this target group:** • The CCSS directly address the common complaint that academic standards are "a mile wide and an inch deep" and will allow teachers to focus on the most important concepts rather than try and teach too many topics in one year. • With nearly every state in the nation working to implement the CCSS, the opportunities for leveraging best practices and fully vetted instructional materials will be greater than ever.
Channels/vehicles/ tools	**Identify the kinds of earned, paid and new media channels and/or outreach tools used to reach this audience:** *Superintendents will be targeted through:* • Putting CCSS and common assessments on the agenda at already-scheduled (and to-be-scheduled) statewide meetings. • Smaller briefings with superintendents representing urban, suburban and rural districts to address their geographic-specific concerns about implementation. • Asking superintendents (and educators) to sign on to a letter — or compact with the state department of education — committing to working together to see through the full implementation of the new standards. For some, this could take the form of a Race to the Top Scope of Work. • Monthly conference calls or webinars (which are recorded and made available online) about progress (and modifications) made on implementing the CCSS and developing the common assessments. • Fact sheets about the implementation timeline for the CCSS, which superintendents can personalize and share with their administrators, district staff and teachers. • Suggested initial boilerplate language/links for district websites.
Timeline	**For each channel/vehicle/tool, define the timeline for implementation:** Template for stakeholder communications plan Stakeholder: District Superintendents Objective: Engagement *What specific tools will we use to achieve our objective with this stakeholder and when?*

Communications tools	**January**	**February**	**March**
Convenings		Statewide meeting	
Individual briefings	Establish schedule	20 briefings	20 briefings
Compact to work together on the CCSS	Notify districts	Deadline to sign compact 2/28	
Webinars		Run webinar	Run webinar
Distribution of fact sheets and boilerplate language		Develop materials Consult with key superintendents	Distribute materials

Measuring success	**Define what actions the target audience could take to show success:** • At least 75 percent of urban, suburban and rural superintendents demonstrate support for implementation through a compact or some other means. • At least 50 percent of districts have a web page dedicated to the CCSS and/or PARCC, with relevant details about implementation, links to resources and contact information for state department of education staff.

Strategic Communications Plan

Target audience/ stakeholder	**Define the target audience with specificity:**
Objectives	**Define the outreach objectives:**
Key target messages (which fit under the key three messages)	**Outline the tailored submessages for this target group:**
Channels/vehicles/ tools	**Identify the kinds of earned, paid and new media channels and/or outreach tools used to reach this audience:**
Timeline	**For each channel/vehicle/tool, define the timeline for implementation:** Template for stakeholder communications plan Stakeholder: Objective:

What specific tools will we use to achieve our objective with this stakeholder and when?

Communications tools	January	February	March
Speeches/presentations			
Convenings			
Individual meetings			
Notes/letters/e-mails			
Others?			

Measuring success	**Define what actions the target audience could take to show success:**

Achieve

COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION WORKBOOK

EDi
U.S. EDUCATION
DELIVERY INSTITUTE

4.16

Conclusion

You should now have a solid communications plan to accompany the CCSS implementation effort. The plan contains key messages and messengers, a stakeholder engagement strategy, and how a guiding coalition can be used to support the transition to the CCSS and the related assessments. It is time now to plan for the first transition that states and districts will face — how to ensure that every mathematics and English language arts teacher has in his or her hands instructional materials and curricula aligned to the CCSS.

ENDNOTES

1 Kotter (1996). *Leading Change.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

2 Achieve (2010). *Achieving the Possible: What Americans Think About the College- and Career-Ready Agenda.*

NOTES

Achieve

COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION WORKBOOK

EDi
U.S. EDUCATION
DELIVERY INSTITUTE

4.18