As was described last week, public education in Colorado is experiencing a change like never seen before as we respond to legislation and the changing nature of our students and society. One of the catalysts for all of this change is the new Colorado Academic Standards.

Back in 1993, we had standards for the first time and our world of public education changed dramatically. For decades, individual teachers and text book companies determined what students would be asked to learn and do.

The unintended side effect was that opportunities to learn content were dramatically different from school to school. Standards were to change all of that by declaring specific outcomes for students in every school in the state.

The standards did start to align expectations for schools. Teachers across the state started to make decisions based on these expectations.

However, what really jolted schools into action was when we were introduced to mandatory state testing, and then CSAP was born (Colorado Student Assessment Program). When educators had our results posted in the newspaper, we even started to get a greater focus on the standards.

The first standards helped us to align expectations across the state. This time, standards are being aligned across the country with the Common Core Standards Movement of which our new standards are aligned. The new standards include an emphasis on thinking skills and application, not just rote knowledge and skills. So after years of work realigning curriculum, we will do it again.

Like before, these standards bring changes that can improve the quality of education for all students. And just like before, they bring a ton of work for teachers and school districts.

A change to the standards has a domino effect, causing a chain reaction of additional change. With these new standards we will see a change to the state testing program. New content has been added and other content has been pushed down. For example, what was once expected of sixth graders will now be expected of fifth graders.

As the standards change, the assessments change. State tests will be moved to different years, including the senior year, and there will be new social studies tests added.

So the work has begun. When the standards and the high stakes assessments change, the local curriculum needs to change. When the tests change, classroom teachers adjust what they test for as well, making sure that classroom tests can be good predictors for how students will do on the state tests.

Next week I will tell you more about an exciting collaborative project involving school districts in our area to align curriculum in light of the new standards and assessments.

Needless to say, teachers will be spending some time focusing on curriculum again and not just focusing energy on their students. We are fortunate to have teachers ready to collaborate and excited about the potential that the new standards and curriculum can bring to the classroom level. In the end, something was added to the plate without something coming off.

Holyoke Enterprise February 28, 2013