

Web Tools for Common Core

“13-Year-Old Girl Excels in School,” not exactly a newsworthy headline, but if you knew that Mary-Kaylin Linch has a brain tumor that affects her ability to process and retain information, and that—in spite of this—she’s excelling in a school that has implemented the Common Core State Standards, then the story suddenly takes on a whole new meaning.

By Marsha Branch



Since their implementation in 2009, Common Core critics have dismissed the standards as being too difficult, saying they are setting children up to fail. But while supporters agree the work is challenging, they argue the standards are preparing kids for the real world. So it's no surprise that schools experiencing success with Common Core credit real-world tools like apps and the Internet with their success.

"There is always an app for everything you want to teach," said MK's math teacher, Rebecca Riley. "You just need to do the research."

The 7th and 8th grade teacher at eSTEM Public Charter School in Little Rock, Arkansas, is a Common Core supporter and is among thousands of teachers nationwide who incorporate various web tools into their lessons as they teach the standards. These range from websites and apps created specifically for Common Core to general tools used to make teaching more interactive and fun.

Common Core specific apps and resources

It's the interactive element that Mary-Kaylin enjoys most. Being hands-on helps with retention, she said. Her favorite tool is Compass Learning Odyssey, a web-

based K-12 learning solution with programs aligned to Common Core standards.

"It has little videos of teachers teaching you the concepts and its pretty fun to use because they give real-world problems," Mary-Kaylin said.

She uses Compass at least 30 minutes a week with math—the subject critics are most vocal about. In some cases, math concepts are being taught two grades earlier than they were before Common Core, and many say the new curriculum is just too hard.

But Riley says it need not be. With a little creativity, patience, and willingness to do the research, math class can be fun.

"A lot of the textbook companies put apps out," she said. "One I have found that is aligned with Common Core is called HMH Fuse...and it's basically an interactive online textbook that has videos and motion graphics embedded in it [and] the kids can work through it at their own pace."

What Riley likes most about HMH Fuse and other online resources is that they help kids truly grasp math concepts, rather than practice rote learning techniques.

She shared her top ten web tools and resources for Common Core.

Riley's Top Ten Pick of Common Core Tools and Resources

| Name of App | Who Will Use It | Cost | Purpose |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| GCL4s | Teachers/Parents | Free | A copy of the Common Core State Standards |
| Math Ref Free | Teachers/Parents/Students | Free | A reference sheet for formulas and "how to's" |
| Math vs. Zombies | Students | \$4.99 | Fun math practice increases fluency |
| Algebra Champ | Students/Parents | Free | Timed to improve fluency and allow you to set difficulty levels |
| Algebra Expanded | Teachers/Parents/Students | \$3.99 | A great app for reinforcing lessons |
| HMH Fuse Common Core Edition | Teachers/Parents/Students | Free (limited) Paid version available | Great textbook with imbedded videos and interactive activities |
| 5 Dice | Students | Free | Free math practice, increases fluency |
| Class Dojo | Teachers | Free | Classroom management/parental contact |
| Skitch | Students | Free | Cool Projects |
| Geoboard | Teachers/Students | Free | Online Geoboard used for area and perimeter |



“...schools experiencing success with Common Core credit real-world tools like apps and the Internet with their success.”

General web tools used to teach Common Core

Common Core-specific tools and resources aren't the only ones teachers are using to increase comprehension and class participation.



QR Codes: The QR Reader is one of several apps that enable students to use their smartphones and tablets as learning devices. Teachers can generate a free QR Code—a bar code consisting of black and white squares—that contains URLs and other assignment-specific information. The code can be added to a Power Point presentation or a handout as a convenient way to direct students to related resources or collect more information on the topic.

Google Docs: The ever-popular Google suite of apps for education is a classroom favorite. Google Docs, available both as an app and via a web browser, enables students to collaborate on projects from their individual devices. Writing and editing is done in real time, with each student seeing changes as they are made. The app also offers an easy way for students to analyze and share research findings.

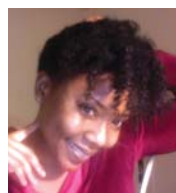
Live Binder: While the Internet is an invaluable tool for students, the information a Google search generates can be overwhelming. Back in the day, a simple three-

ring binder provided a simple way to store and catalog information. However, the electronic age has rendered them obsolete. So, enter Live Binder, the digital three-ring binder that allows students to organize all of their information—webpages, PDFs, documents, images and videos—by tabs and sub-tabs.

Challenging, yes, Mary-Kaylin says. Common Core work definitely is, but all of the resources at her fingertips make learning Core work fun.

Her advice to students who find it too hard is to “Get online. That would probably help them out a lot if they are having trouble grasping the concepts of the Common Core Standards.” ■

This article originally appeared on insight.com. Mary-Kaylin is pictured with her mother, AAE's state chapter Arkansas State Teachers Association Executive Director Dr. Michele Ballentine-Linch.



Marsha Branch is a writer and an independent producer. Her professional experience spans almost two decades and includes stints with some of most prestigious names in global media. Some of these include the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), United Nations and CNN.

Getting Involved and Going Back to School

Back-to-School is a reaffirming time for teachers—a reminder of why we love to teach kids. This annual fresh start provides a professional gift, allowing all teachers to start anew and begin implementing new ideas and projects. It's one of the best reminders of why you chose the field of education. You can implement new ideas and tweak good lessons to make them great. The possibilities are endless.

Here at AAE, we share your excitement for a fresh start. Like you, we are determined to make this the best year yet; and we need your help to be the premier professional association. After a year of unprecedented social media growth, we hope you will join us in building an even more robust online community for our members by interacting with us online via these three options: (1) follow AAE on Twitter; (2) comment on our daily blogs; (3) share your views on our Facebook page.

Take another step to support AAE and get involved with our advocacy and media relations efforts by sharing your thoughts on legislation or new trends in education in your state. Take advantage of AAE's professional development opportunities by applying for an AAE Foundation scholarship or grant.

Most importantly, let others know about the professional association you belong to so your colleagues know about AAE as a professional option. Which of these Back-to-School suggestions have you saying to yourself "I can do that"?

• Back-to-School Fairs

Most school districts have some sort of beginning-of-the-year meeting, sometimes called an Opening Day, a Benefit Fair, or Orientation. With new and veteran teachers coming together to discuss the new school year, fellow teachers, clubs, and associations are often allowed to set up tables to answer questions and distribute information. Set up a table for AAE. Contact your administrators for the details and AAE can send you materials and promotional items!





- **Faculty Meeting**

There's always that first Back-to-School faculty meeting for your school. It only takes a few minutes to tell your fellow educators about AAE and to pass out information. Just let your principal know, and you can ensure your colleagues are protected and supported this school year. We will help you along the way by providing you with suggestions about what to say and answers to frequently asked questions.

- **Mailboxes**

When you're at the front office for your daily routine visit, take some AAE materials, with a personal note included, and place them in the mailboxes of colleagues you believe would be receptive to AAE. Share your experience as a member or why you are a member because a few words of encouragement and your testimonial can make all the difference.

- **Personalize the Discussion**

What topics do you and your colleagues discuss? Consider how those conversations are related to being an AAE member. Next time the topic arises, casually mention that you are a member of AAE and share with your colleagues how AAE helps you with that specific issue.

- **Discuss the Issues**

As a member of AAE, each member has the opportunity to take policy surveys and comment on the issues. Let them know that with AAE, their voice is heard!

Make one new school year resolution to share AAE with your colleagues. We need you and your example to put AAE's best foot forward. Let's make this AAE's best year ever. Visit aaeteachers.org/ **GetInvolved** for more ideas today! ■

Major Teaching Mistakes to Avoid This Back-to-School Season

There's a certain class of mistakes that all educators can eliminate with conscious effort. They range from habits of practice to habits of thought, but all of them have one important thing in common: they make your job harder.



We all make healthy mistakes, every class period of every day. The point is to recognize the difference between these mistakes and mistakes that can become larger problems if they aren't monitored. Some of the following blunders you may be guilty of, some of them you may have already eliminated, and some of them you may never have encountered.

As we begin anew this back-to-school season, consider the following:

1. Not learning from colleagues

Effective instructional strategies change with time; what you learned in teaching school may no longer be relevant to the students you're currently dealing with. The best way to improve your own instruction is to watch what others do. If you have a free period, ask another teacher if you can sit in on their class. Film your own class, hand out copies, and ask for feedback.

2. Assuming a lesson taught is a lesson learned

We all know there's a difference between giving a presentation and actually teaching. But how do we achieve more of the latter? The answer really lies in Blunder 7, as you'll read in a moment, but a good first step is to never assume (or hope wildly) that you've gotten your point across.

3. Failing to establish relevance

Establishing relevance doesn't mean filling your lecture with analogies to the interests of every individual student in your class. Not only would that take an eternity, but it would be counterproductive. Establishing relevance requires a bit of creativity on your part. It can come in the form of a lecture, an assignment, or a chosen text. But it's not in the details—it's in the bigger picture. It's in the difference between allowing and banning cell phones in class, in the relationship between topic and motivation, in choosing to teach *Catcher in the Rye* or *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

4. Teaching without empathy

I'm not talking about emotional empathy; I'm talking about the ability to put yourself in a student's shoes and



imagine what they want, like, and think (or don't want, don't like, and don't think). You were a skeptical, self-interested, fickle-minded student once. Don't forget it.

5. Immediately calling on volunteers to answer a question

When you do this, more often than not, few students will even bother to think about the question, since they know that eventually someone else will provide the answer.

Instead, ask students to write down questions they have on a notecard as your lecture progresses. You can either collect them at the end of class or save ten minutes for Q&A time, where students are free to bring up any point covered in the last forty minutes. This is a great way to offer a re-cap before the bell rings.

6. Failing to provide variety in instruction

It's a good moment when you realize you've got a solid enough cache of lessons to last you the whole year—and then some! However, be sure that part of your routine includes breaking the routine. Variety is the spice of the classroom and also proven to enhance learning and memory.

7. Testing 2-3 times per term

Some of us only administer two tests a semester—the mid-term and the final. This is the absolute worst assessment design ever invented. It encourages cramming, reduces retention, and places immense pressure on students and teachers alike to cover a huge amount of material between testing rounds. You should be testing students EVERY WEEK.

Giving a short, 10-question quiz every Friday will help students remember what they've learned, become better test-takers, and allow you to gather weekly feedback on your own effectiveness.

8. Setting low student expectations

Generally, students will perform at a level consistent with performance expectations. This means we have to consciously treat students equally, make our expectations clear and applicable to all, and constantly encourage improvement. Know the difference between a lazy student who claims a concept is “too hard” and a motivated student who is truly challenged by the concept.

9. Not preparing for silence

You know the feeling—when you ask a question and receive absolute radio silence. Many of us often fail to anticipate that many students will not share our enthusiasm for a lesson. What happens now? We answer the question ourselves, make an ironic joke, move on.

The best way to deal with silence is to not be phased by it. Smile to yourself and move on, show you are still in control, and your students will feel more comfortable and be more willing to volunteer the next time.

10. Not getting to know your students

Getting to know students too often comes second. The truth is, whether you learn anything about their learning preferences (which you probably will), the gesture itself is powerful enough to increase student motivation, self-expression, and performance. ■

Saga Briggs has taught and tutored writing at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Her educational interests include psychology, creativity, and system reform. She earned a B.A. in Creative Writing from Oberlin College and lives in Portland, Oregon, USA.



The Association of American Educators Foundation
 27405 Puerta Real, Suite 230
 Mission Viejo, CA 92691-6388

Presorted Standard
 US Postage Paid
 #400
 Laguna Niguel, CA

Education Matters is a publication of
 the Association of American Educators Foundation (AAEF)

aaeteachers.org • editor@aaeteachers.org • 800.704.7799

Gary Beckner, Executive Editor
 Alexandra Freeze, Managing Editor
 Debbie Brown, Editorial Assistant
 Diane Meyer, Editorial Assistant

AAE's New Teacher Publication

Are you a new member? Are you new to the classroom? Do you have colleagues who are beginning their first year of teaching? Check out AAE's newest publication, *New Teachers Matter!* Email profdev@aaeteachers.org to receive your free copy.



AAE Job Bank

AAE's new Job Bank is about quality, not quantity! Unlike most job listings for teachers that list any and all openings, this member-only exclusive benefit seeks to connect our members with schools and districts that match our ethics. We recognize and commend your commitment as an AAE member to professionalism, and strive to connect you with the best fit possible. Visit is.gd/aaejobbank to subscribe to this member-only benefit.



AAE Member Discount Program

Don't forget to register for AAE's Discount Program. Visit aaeteachers.org/discounts now to register. This month's registration code is **teacherssave**.

Top August Discount:



Office Depot
 15-30% off

