



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

Theatre of Reform

Here we go again, another reform committee (the governor's committee) has begun public hearings regarding the common core implementation. This comes after the commissioner's "listening" tour, after Senate Education Chair John Flanagan's statewide reform tour, after the governor's Education Reform Commission conducted statewide hearings (not to be confused with his common core implementation committee), and after the Regents' sub-committee on common core

implementation issued its recommendations. It comes after Assembly Speaker Silver and Assembly Education Chairwoman Nolan called for a delay in the use of state assessments for high stakes consequences for students and staff, and after senate co-leaders Skelos and Klein, and Senator Flanagan, urged a delay largely along the same lines as their assembly colleagues. Quite a contrast from May 2010 when the APPR law was passed without any hearings whatsoever, in order for the RTTT round II application to be submitted so that we would have the benefit of

all this. Lucky us.

I recognize that it is far easier to critique than to do. That to aspire to higher standards and deeper learning is worthy, but that aspiration should not render us delusional. The common core standards are aspirational – and untested. That doesn't mean they are necessarily a bad thing, nor does it necessarily mean they will in fact help generate deeper learning and more college and career ready (for now let's skip the debate about what that means) high school graduates, but, to be fair, they might. I think much of what we aspire to gets lost in the maelstrom of the debate about education. A debate that is sometimes about standards, sometimes about curriculum, sometimes about testing or evaluations... and oftentimes intermingled. The only clarity that I

have recently observed has come from the governor.

After the Regents' sub-committee on common core implementation suggested several actions (or non-actions – see related story on page 1) the governor weighed in. One thing the Regents proposed was allowing teachers and principals to raise as a defense to a poor evaluation, the poor implementation of the common core. I don't believe teachers or principals need SED's permission to do that in any event, but the proposal prompted the governor to suggest that we might need to revisit the purpose and effectiveness of the Regents altogether. He also went on public radio citing the "teacher" evaluation system (the same one he lauded in his State of the State Address) as progress after years

of dogged resistance. The Regents, promptly and obsequiously, withdrew its proposal to seemingly give teachers and principals a defense which they likely have anyway.

Why does the governor feel so strongly about an evaluation system constructed upon an uncertain foundation? His support for this evaluation system is crystal clear and forcefully asserted. I believe it is the appearance of having forced upon allegedly resistant "teachers" a test-based evaluation system with its presumed objectivity. It is something to cite as an accomplishment, regardless of its real validity. It reduces the teacher and principal evaluation system to a prop in the on-going theatre of the reform. ■

Relating Common Core Testing to New Curriculum

Opinion piece by Dr. Bruce H. Crowder, Senior Researcher for Educational Vistas, Inc.

Although schools were warned that the initial testing of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) might display a decline in student performance, the actual results still turned out to be alarming. Nearly 70 percent of students in grades 3-8 failed the 2013 NY state assessments in English language arts and math. These tests were designed to measure deeper understanding of both subjects and were developed on new frames not encountered

by teachers and students before. The new formats and contexts measured evidence-based content knowledge.

Further testing of Common Core will continue to yield disappointing results without the opportunity of teachers and administrators to examine and analyze item-specific responses of their students. This is particularly important as Common Core is transformed into curriculum. The transformation alone will not do the job. In

fact, the advent of higher expectations related to Common Core requires in-depth analysis and disaggregation. If teachers teach in one context and their students are tested in another context, it is no surprise that proficiency is eluded.

A single CCSS standard, e.g., 4.RI.3. describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions) may generate a full range of test items with varying depths of knowledge (DOK [rigor]). To measure student acquisition of these standards, those items must be text-bound and appear within new formats and contexts.

Experienced item writers are challenged with developing these new tests, and it is no wonder why classroom teachers who are beginning to understand CCSS find it extremely difficult to create test items to the new frames.

Access to item-specific test information and data, as was provided by SED in the past, is absolutely crucial in promoting the implementation of CCSS. Such an analysis would examine the

nature of each test item to determine the skill set needed to address it and how to teach it. In addition, teachers wish to know where their students did well and where they are being challenged.

In this era of high-stakes accountability, it is even more important to make this critical information available, as it will inform all aspects of instruction, curriculum, professional learning, and future classroom testing. ■

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