



April 17, 2014

Common Core – Moving Forward Isn't Easy!

RE: Current Public Conversation about the Common Core

In the ongoing “buzz” about the Common Core, it’s time for educators to refocus the discussion on what matters most – teaching and learning. We cannot allow the politics and protests to drive the conversation. Our students deserve better and our families expect more. It is clear that in classrooms where our teachers and students are engaging in the Common Core, meaningful learning is occurring. The reality lives in the day-to-day experiences of our students – both challenges and successes – NOT in the headlines and Facebook posts.

Most of us will admit that our students – all of our students – could do better, must do better. Only about 3 out of 4 students who enter high school graduate on time – if at all. Only about half of these graduates are ready for college or the world of work. The numbers are worse in our cities and for students with special learning needs. Even in high performing schools, we all know of kids who go to college, struggle, and drop out. The truth is we need to do better.

But how will we know if and when we do better? Just as teachers give classroom tests to all students, we need a common measure of progress across all school districts to know if student learning is meeting these new expectations for teaching and learning. The simple truth is NYS has always used a state-wide testing system to measure student performance across all schools so we can know how our students compare to other students in nearby schools and across the state. We need to know for ourselves and for our collective efforts across the state.

The Common Core standards are more rigorous than the previous state standards. The assessments designed to measure student progress on these standards are comprised of questions that are more challenging because the standards are more challenging in order to ensure that students are prepared for college, careers, and life.

People talk about the unfair consequences of these “high stakes” assessments. What are the implications for students? “Failing” is not a measure on state assessments in Grades 3- 8 – the level of proficiency in meeting standards is the measure. The student may not yet have mastered the grade-level standards, but that means they have room for growth. These assessment results are used by educators as feedback to better support a student’s future growth AND adjust curriculum to better prepare students moving forward.

The only tests that carry long-term consequences for students are the Regents Exams – they always have and very likely they always will. Students in the Class of 2022 are the first that will need to demonstrate proficiency on a Common Core Regents Exam for graduation. I believe in the ability of our teachers to help our students – this year's fourth graders – reach this important milestone in eight years.

The truth is we live in an age of greater accountability and expectation for our students, our teachers, and our schools. Determining whether or not we're moving forward to meet the increased rigor of the Common Core Standards doesn't end with individual student performance. Measuring our progress must assess and provide feedback on both teacher and school performance. It is important to pragmatically and holistically identify specific ways our teachers and schools are succeeding in moving students forward AND provide actionable feedback in the areas where improvement needs to be pursued. The changes in our statewide assessment system for students, teachers, and schools provide an opportunity to celebrate our efforts and craft goals for improvement.

Yes, change is stressful. So is dropping out of high school. So is not being able to get a good job. So is not getting into college or having to pay for extra "remedial" courses in college. We need to come together to focus our energies and resources on helping all students get better. Moving forward isn't easy - that's the truth.

Related Links:

Educator Perspectives on New York State Assessments -

<http://www.engageny.org/resource/educator-perspectives-on-new-york-state-assessments>

Why the New Common Core-aligned Math Tests are Better for Our Kids -

<http://www.engageny.org/resource/why-the-new-common-core-aligned-math-tests-are-better-for-our-kids>

Parents See Opportunities with Common Core –

<http://www.engageny.org/resource/parent-sees-opportunities-with-common-core>

What Parents Should Know About Common Core –

<http://www.engageny.org/resource/what-parents-should-know-about-common-core>

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