



BEYOND THE NUMBERS CONVENING 2014

Breakout Session Summary

Creating Coherence | The Common Core, Teacher Evaluation, and New Assessments

Teacher evaluation and support systems are undergoing sweeping changes at the same time that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are being implemented. To accurately and effectively evaluate and support teachers in ways that align with CCSS, these initiatives should be implemented as a coherent effort. This session focuses on the requirements for effectively executing the Common Core. These include breaking down silos between different teams working on implementation of the standards, and connecting instruction, observation, and assessment with the standards and each other.

Lisa Towne, director of organizational knowledge at Education First, began by providing a high level orientation to the Common Core and the politics surrounding its implementation. Two perspectives have emerged: the far right, who perceive government interference, and the far left, who are concerned on behalf of teachers' unions. Concerns raised include the loss of local control, conflating of standards and curriculum, federal overreach, prioritization of corporate interests, backlash against testing, and—of particular interest to this audience—data privacy. Currently 83 bills in 32 states are treating the issue of data privacy. All of these are distracting from talking the discussion about college and career readiness, supporting teachers, and reinforcing reforms including teacher evaluation.

The Common Core includes instructional shifts in English language arts (ELA), such as building knowledge through content-rich non-fiction and drawing evidence from the text, and math, such as narrowing and deepening content and increasing rigor. Two main consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC), have been working to develop CCSS-aligned assessments, but some states are switching between them or pulling out altogether. Both groups are now piloting tests with millions of students. Both are also working to identify a meaningful cut score to designate college and career readiness. The Common Core requires smart execution, which might require adjusting (but not abandoning) the standards and breaking down silos between teams working on implementation. Instruction, observation, and assessment all can and should be connected.

Sarah Barzee, chief talent officer at Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), spoke about the work that the CSDE is doing in induction and development. With induction, the goal is to recruit the right people, prepare them well and rigorously, and give them a “soft landing” in the field. With development, the goal is to use evaluation to build teachers' and leaders' capacity. The state can keep teachers in the profession using career ladders, hybrid roles, and new opportunities in the field. It is challenging to create systems that are organizationally coherent, including by providing consistent messaging to educators and connecting people from different teams talking about the same thing. Coherence matters because changing systems (curriculum, evaluation, and assessment) is difficult, and but it makes more sense to keep the others in mind when changing one of them. While moving too far

toward coherence can threaten innovation, good coherence involves vision, clear outcomes, a theory of action, focus, time, and attention to timing.

Meghan Zefran, senior technical assistance consultant at American Institutes for Research (AIR), spoke about her work at the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders (part of AIR) providing technical assistance to state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs). They have created a process for engaging stakeholders to help them grapple with core questions. Called the “Core Instructional Practices” (CIPs), AIR identified these based on CCSS to facilitate system alignment work by grounding everyone in common language.

Meghan lead the session through an abbreviated version of training she usually provides over the course of an entire day. The first step is to identify instructional practices that support CCSS implementation. Working in groups, participants identified CIPs that are generic and can be applied to all teachers (not just CCSS teachers). Participants observed that these represent what has been good teaching practice for a long time. Everyone completed an exercise to make connections between an observation rubric and the CIPs, recognizing that this process is difficult and messy. The reward is that aligning observations and collecting data can help districts prioritize and target professional learning—“forward align, but use data to look back.” Working through the CIPs, districts will start to see gaps in practice, which helps show people on the ground what is happening, rather than just telling them.