The Big Picture

Although it took us a while to find the right one, we’re using a metaphor to illustrate the Big Picture of the Race To The Top expectations and how they fit with educational practice. The word “illustrate” in the previous sentence was chosen deliberately – because our metaphor for The Big Picture is a big picture.

Start with the canvas and imagine 21st Century-ready graduates. In a kind of paint-by-number fashion, in the center of the canvas is the college, career, and citizenship ready student. The buckets of paint that districts will use to paint their picture of their college, career, and citizenship ready student are the initiatives and efforts that are underway. Districts already have their buckets of paint from which they are already using to paint their masterpiece. With the Race To The Top agenda, several other big buckets are being given to all districts.

One big bucket of paint can be labeled “Standards.” We always have standards (and goals and objectives) for students and we always will. Right now, the color of that paint is the Common Core. A second big bucket of paint can be labeled “Data,” with the current hue being data-driven instruction and an emphasis on common interim assessments being used to inform instruction. The third, big bucket of paint we all share is labeled “Professional Practice.” The shade of paint inside that bucket is the APPR.

The brushes? Well, the big brush is the superintendent who paints the broad strokes with the Board of Education. Medium brushes are wielded by principals who lead their schools. Teachers, armed with their instructional palettes, employ the finer brushes to flesh out the details of the students.

That’s our big picture: the big picture is the college, career, and citizenship ready student. The Race To The Top principles are the primary colors for painting the picture. Districts have their own buckets of paint, too, that are necessary to complete...
In my previous position as a principal, I had the good fortune of working with a superintendent and a district leadership team that had a vision for moving the district forward in a way that unified staff while resulting in improved student learning. One of the ways we moved forward was by learning and using the common language surrounding the initiatives we were implementing.

One of our earliest forays into this process was our work with David Hyerle’s *Thinking Maps*. In previous years teachers had used a wide variety and number of graphic organizers when working with students. Graphic organizers that were a favorite of one teacher were not necessarily the same ones used by another. This was true from grade to grade in elementary school or among grade level teachers in the middle and high school. For many students this was potentially confusing. In our district-wide implementation of Thinking Maps, all teachers and administrators were trained in understanding and using the maps, and the maps were then applied to all classrooms across the district K-12. The initiative gave all of us a common language and allowed students to move from grade to grade and from teacher to teacher with a clear understanding of which map best fit any kind of thinking in which they were engaged.

The work we will be doing in the months and years ahead (the Common Core Standards, data driven instruction, and the APPR process) involves a common language we all will be speaking. This is very much what happens in the world of other professions. In the medical field doctors across the country speak the same specialized language. Airline pilots and law enforcement officials speak a common language that is universal to their professions. The New York State Teaching Standards will provide us with a common language. The more we immerse ourselves in the language, the better we will understand each other and the concepts we are using to ensure student readiness for college and career in the 21st century.

-Lee Carulli
Education blogs have been on fire ever since the Common Core (CCSS) were introduced in draft form in 2010 and the chatter will certainly be on an uptick as schools across the state begin the Herculean task of implementation.

The CCSS are packaged in two sets: P-12 ELA & Literacy in History/SS, Science, & Technical Subjects and P-12 Math. Content area literacy expectations are now embedded across the disciplines in a move that guarantees a shared responsibility in the literacy development of all students. Hayes Mizell, associate with The Leadership and Learning Center, made this observation:

>The Common Core State Standards are not stand-alone reform. They are simply statements that describe what students should know and be able to do as a result of their public education. The standards are a challenging vision, but that is all they are. Without more effective curricula, professional development, and instruction, students will not develop the knowledge and skills necessary to perform at standard.

Mizell’s simple but telling insight begs the larger question: If our previous attempts at standards-based instruction have not culminated in higher student achievement, what makes the CCSS different?

David Coleman, an original member of the committee that wrote the CCSS, answered the question by focusing on the following twelve common core “instructional shifts” – see the sidebar.

Giselle Martin-Kniep and Joanne Picone-Zocchia, partners in Learner Centered Initiatives (LCI), advise educators to recognize CCSS implementation as a progression: moving from awareness to connections, and ultimately to integration. Logically, a beginning step in the process would be to build shared knowledge amongst staff concerning these twelve shifts and their potential impacts on assessment. EngageNY, the official website for the Regents Reform initiatives, offers a downloadable resource entitled Instructional Shifts for the Common Core that can be shared and discussed with staff.

As you begin the work of addressing the CCSS in your district, think about the headlines you’d like to create as a result of your planning. Are they sensational? Gloomy? Matter of fact? Remember, your headline is your one chance to capture the attention of your audience, so make it a good one.
Lead Evaluator Training

The first two days of Lead Evaluator training are complete. Nearly 200 educational leaders from twenty school districts worked diligently during those two days, learning about the state’s expectations for teacher evaluation. One thing was uniformly clear at all four of the cohorts: we can do a better job of providing teachers with growth-producing feedback than we’ve been doing in our current models. The fundamental “gates” to a growth-producing system of evaluation have to be “open” if we are going to fundamentally improve upon our systems. Those gates are: fairness, reliability, and validity. If we can’t achieve these qualities then little else we do matters in a system of evaluation.

On the second day of the training we practiced collecting evidence rather than jumping to conclusions and passing judgment. That work will continue at the next (and subsequent) sessions of Lead Evaluator training. The remaining training dates are listed here (half-day sessions that are repeated in the morning and afternoon so that participants can attend the session that best fits their needs and district capacity):

Half days for all are as follows (Rodax 8 Large Conference Room):

September 27    *November 7    February 7    April 10 (cancelled)
October 27      January 10    March 13      June 5

*Note, this date has been rescheduled from November 8th.

engageNY

“\textit{This is a great new way to improve learning as we go. We’ve never had a learning tool like this before.}”

At first glance, one might think engageNY is the latest online dating site for New Yorkers, but think again. Sponsored by NYSED, engageNY is a collaborative platform designed to be a repository of resources associated with the reform initiatives (Common Core, Data Inquiry, & Teacher/Leader Effectiveness) currently being pursued across the state.