



Common Core implementation going well

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The *CABE Journal* recently had the opportunity to touch base with Connecticut Chief Academic Officer **Dianna Roberge-Wentzell** and teacher **Cay Freeman** of Sage Park Middle School in **Windsor** to get two different but equally important perspectives from the frontlines of Common Core implementation.

According to Freeman, who teaches 6th, 7th and 8th grade math intervention classes using the SRBI model, the conversion has been going well. “Now, more than a year into the new standards, I can say that it’s definitely been a change for the better,” she said.

“To be sure, these new standards are more cognitively demanding,” Freeman furthered. “They require a lot more frontloading of learning about number concepts and the value of numbers as a foundation for later higher level math. But I see the potential for greater and truer math learning. It’s not so much about memorizing rules and learning tricks anymore – it’s all about understanding what’s happening with the numbers as you do the math problems. And for my students, who’ve always struggled to memorize rules and learn mathematical algorithms that made no sense to them, this is finally a way to be successful.”

At the state level, things are also going well. A Governor’s taskforce – made up of 25 people, including teachers, parents, administrators and, board members – met about a dozen times from March to June in order to examine the Common Core implementation and make recommendations for improvement, according to Roberge-Wentzell, who was also on the taskforce.

“It was a great experience,” she recalled. “And we learned so much from studying districts where it was going well; it was such a great way to really think of what we could do differently.”

East Hartford Superintendent **Nathan D. Quesnel** was a co-facilitator of the taskforce and noted that he also

found it to be a valuable experience. [Area 2 Director **Donald Harris (Bloomfield)** and State Relations Chair **Elizabeth Brown (Waterbury)** represented CABE on the Task Force.]

“The Common Core Task Force was a great opportunity to work together with teachers, parents, administrators and board members to do what Connecticut educators do best – problem solve and find solutions,” he said. “We are all extremely proud of both the product we delivered and most importantly the process we went through to get to this results.

We believe the CCTF Report is a clear 16-page document that provides a tight and extremely relevant road map for Connecticut as we move forward with implementations.

I am extremely appreciative for the efforts of my fellow taskforce members, State Department and Governor’s office for the opportunity to participate in this learning experience.”

Some of the takeaways for the task-force centered on the importance of communication and exceptional leadership, said the Chief Academic Officer. “Community matters tremendously and helping the community understand big changes in education is a critical role,” she said.

Districts that had a “well-articulated communications plan” seemed to have an edge. “The few districts that seemed to know how to do that seemed to be dealing with a lot less pushback,” said Roberge-Wentzell.

Another “big learning” of the taskforce was that “leadership matters tremendously,” said Roberge-Wentzell.

With that in mind, the task force vetted districts where the superintendent’s leadership style was “very inclusive of the community,” and these included **Wallingford** and **Norwich**.

“Both Wallingford and Norwich reported planned

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programs that brought the community in, and in Wallingford, they brought in the senior citizen community, and I really hadn't heard of a superintendent intentionally cultivating a relationship with the seniors before," said Roberge-Wentzell. "They definitely had all the stakeholders engaged."

Another taskforce takeaway was that planning is of utmost importance. "And that was one of the other big learnings of the taskforce: having a plan matters tremendously and some of the districts we studied, some were smaller and some were large, but we were able to really see that planning was a critical component of teachers feeling supported," said Roberge-Wentzell.

Back up in Windsor, Freeman said she has found an abundance of CCSS resources as well as support from other teachers online. "I found a lot of online resources – webinars, blogs and articles – as well as books that helped me to 'unpack' the standards and realize what they should look like in my classroom," she said.

"One of the most significant advantages of the Common Core State Standards has been that teachers all across this country have been able to share resources, lesson plans and best practices – we have a national professional learning community."

Freeman compared the CCSS to a "roadmap," explaining, "The standards are a roadmap from Kindergarten to Grade 8, laying out the essential skills and concepts with a clear coherence both within a grade and between grades."

Freeman added of students learning from the CCSS, "They'll be better prepared to make a mid-trip adjustment, will appreciate the route more, will arrive with a greater understanding of what it took to get there, and be better able to take a different journey on their own the next time.

This is 21st Century learning, and this is what the Common Core Standards are all about."

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