



Common Core preparation continues

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With just a year to go before the full implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2014-15, school districts around Connecticut – as well as the State Department of Education (SDE) – are preparing in earnest for the dramatic conversion.

In **Middletown**, Superintendent of Schools **Dr. Patricia Charles** said that preparations are going well in her district. “We have been working on this for quite a while and certainly a lot of work was done over this past year and again over the summer,” she explained.

For example, much of Middletown’s summer curriculum work for K-5 centered on revising its common formative assessments and making sure “that alignment is there,” said Charles. “And in 6-12 we are creating performance based assessments,” she added.

Middletown has also been working on subject integration, according to the superintendent. “The other thing we are really working on is integrating science and social studies into a lot of our other units that we are doing K-12 for English Language Arts; that’s been a focus this summer,” said Charles.

Over at the State Department of Education, **Dr. Dianna Roberge-Wentzell**, the state’s Chief Academic Officer, noted that 2013-14 will be a big year in the lead up to the CCSS. “We are still in our implementation transition; by this year the majority of our districts have at least time aligned content, so it’s really getting at the deep changes in the instruction,” she explained.

Indeed, CCSS professional development for educators will be a major focus of SDE in 2013-14, according to Roberge-Wentzell. “I think that will be the majority of our focus [this year],” she added. “There are some really deep changes that we need to be making and we have to help our teachers know what that looks like.”

Roberge-Wentzell said the professional development from the state would be available to teachers, coaches and principals beginning this fall. She explained, “There’s already been a significant amount of what I would call awareness type professional development by the state, but what we are going to be moving into is supporting sort of the deep

instructional changes that are needed and some of the really instructionally focused professional learning that will really help beyond just the content of which things you teach in which years.”

As with any new initiative, challenges are sure to pop up. This past spring, SDE heard concerns from school systems regarding tech readiness when practice assessments were done, according to Roberge-Wentzell. “We heard a lot from them when we did the practice assessments and initially we were hearing a lot of concerns around tech readiness,” she said. “And, in response to the tech readiness concerns, we have been able to get access to some bonding money from the state that we have made available to the districts.”

Districts are now applying through a grant process for financial support to improve their tech readiness for the new online assessments, explained Roberge-Wentzell. “And I do think the tech readiness remains a big concern for districts, although in Connecticut we are very fortunate because we are much further along than a lot of other states,” she said.

SDE has been utilizing a technology readiness tool that’s been provided by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, noted Roberge-Wentzell. “Our districts input all of their data and then we are able to constantly monitor kind of a dashboard of tech readiness for the state,” she said. “And we are very close to 100 percent tech readiness in Connecticut—we are lucky. But some communities still have some investments that need to be made and this will help us support them in bridging that gap.”

Roberge-Wentzell highlighted two key aspects of tech readiness— bandwidth and device readiness— that districts have been focusing on.

“Bandwidth is one factor because the new assessments will be delivered online, and then the other is device readiness [meaning having] enough devices that are compatible with the test,” she said. “There’s a wide range of devices that are compatible but districts are looking at making sure they have enough.”

Fortunately, school districts don’t need to worry about having to deliver the online assessments all at once, she noted. “When we did our practice assessment this spring, I think it really helped districts feel better about that because I

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think a lot of us, when we first heard about this movement to the online assessments, imagined just transitioning from our current assessment program, where everyone takes the test at the same time, and thought, ‘I’m going to have to have a computer for every child.’ I know the first time I heard it years ago I thought that,” said Roberge-Wentzell. “But it’s really not as burdensome as it at first appears.”

Roberge-Wentzell added that she has also heard some concerns from districts around the area of content readiness but stressed that the conversion to the CCSS is a process and one that will take some time—multiple years, in fact.

“There is some anxiety about content readiness, like, ‘Will our kids really be ready?’ ‘Have we fully made that transition in our curriculum and instruction?’ And I think that people need to recognize that this is a multi-year transition,” she pointed out.

Despite all of the hard work it has required, Roberge-Wentzell believes the conversion to the CCSS is well worth

the effort. “I really think of educational standards as a promise we make to our students and their families and their communities; and we want our promise to be of the same quality and rigor that the kids in all those other states [who have adopted the CCSS] are getting,” said Roberge-Wentzell.

“So we want to make sure kids in Connecticut are being promised an education at the level they need,” she added. “And for years we have talked about preparing them for their futures but we tended to focus on continuing to provide what we provided traditionally and we do recognize that the demands of the workplace, and post-secondary life in general, have changed significantly and we need to make sure our rigors in the classroom are really giving them the experiences they need.”

Charles echoed that sentiment, observing, “This is an important thing we know we have to do and ultimately once all this hard work is done it’s going to pay off for our students,” she said.