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A Commentary on Senate Bill 1: Kentucky's Architecture of Implementation

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Introduction

In 2009, a coalition of states began moving toward fewer, clearer, and higher standards for P-12 education and entry-level courses in postsecondary education. Spurred by the evidence that most state standards were not consistently providing students with the knowledge and skills to be ready for college and careers, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State Schools Officers (CCSSO) began a process of developing standards that would align with college and work expectations; be clear, understandable, and consistent; include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills; build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards; be informed by other top performing counties; and be evidence-based.

As states begin the implementation process for the resulting Common Core Standards, many are beginning to wonder how to shape and drive the implementation of these new standards that require so much more of teachers and students. These states are looking for resources to assist them in this difficult process and are calling on colleagues across states in focusing on this critical work.

In Kentucky, the phone has been ringing off the hook. Individuals and agencies across the country are turning to us to ask how we have moved our schools, colleges, and universities down the path toward implementing these new standards and pedagogies into the curriculum and instruction in all of the Commonwealth's classrooms.

While the process has been far from perfect, and we have experienced challenges

along the way, we were the first state to adopt these new standards in February 2010 and have put in place a comprehensive implementation plan at all levels. We still have a long way to go, but we have developed a process that can serve as architecture for other states that are on the verge of this critical reform. By sharing our experiences, we hope to ease this transition and learn from the work of others as we all move to the next stage of implementation where all students are given the instruction and assistance they need to become college and career ready.

In short, the effort has been one of leadership and facilitation at the state level. With the support of the Kentucky General Assembly, the three primary state agencies responsible for public education (Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), and Education Professional Standards Board [EPSB]) have come together, building upon a long tradition of cooperation and collaboration, to focus the entire state on this important work. The level of reform required to realize the goals of this work would not be possible without the leadership and coordination at this level to keep all eyes on the prize.

The work is a constant process of facilitation, coordination, collaboration, and compromise in order to achieve the best possible results for our children. In order for that effort to be maintained, the facilitators of the work must constantly keep in mind that they do not do the real work. The real work occurs in schools, colleges, universities, and classrooms across the state. The individuals in those classrooms, who are on the front lines every day looking

students in the eye each morning, must have true ownership and buy-in of the process. If they are not the primary component of implementation, having a true and honest say in the progress toward the goals, the process quickly falls apart. Everyone involved must realize that the process is fluid and dynamic, that they must get their hands dirty and be deep within the work, and that at every level they must be willing to make shifts in their plans and processes in order to adapt to an ever-changing landscape so that all goals are reached for all Kentuckians.

Background

A long established culture, that embraced reforms already in place, allowed Kentucky to move at the pace that it has moved. In 1990, the Kentucky General Assembly passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), overhauling the state's entire P-12 educational structure. Kentucky allowed too much of their population to suffer for too long due to no more than the inequities of geography and birth. KERA attempted to change all of that with a renewed focus on accountability and success.

KERA was followed in 1997 by the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act. This bill focused on higher education, creating CPE and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). Ambitious goals were set for raising the level of educational attainment in the state in order to improve the well-being of its citizenry and its economy. Strategic agendas were immediately put in place to address a wide variety of higher education issues, and the focus continued to be on the success of all students.

In 2000, a piece of legislation focusing on adult education was enacted that called upon the state to address the

incredibly low rates of adult literacy with a multi-faceted strategy to address the needs of the undereducated adult population in all areas of the state. Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) was combined with CPE in order to emphasize the importance of education at all levels for the state's success.

Prior to the beginning of the CCSSO-led Common Core Standards Initiative, the Kentucky General Assembly passed legislation in 2009 (Senate Bill 1 [SB1]) requiring a complete overhaul of Kentucky's assessment and accountability system for P-12 education, including the creation of new, rigorous, focused, and internationally benchmarked standards that aligned with introductory postsecondary courses. This legislation was the next logical step in a history of reform. In many ways, all that could have been accomplished with the previous legislation had already been done and it was time for the next phase, which called upon all the resources of the state to work together for the common goal of the education of its citizenry.

In a moment of serendipity, Kentucky was able to attach itself to the Common Core initiative early on as it meshed very closely with the new legislation. A steering team of agency leadership and members of the General Assembly was formed to guide the work. This began a powerful process of collaboration, coordination, and facilitation that led from the creation of standards, to their adoption, to the creation of professional development for educators at all levels, to the overhaul of teacher and principal preparation programs, to the implementation of a new strategic plan, all resulting in a laser-like focus on college and career readiness that will take Kentucky to the next level.

The Standards

CPE, KDE, and EPSB created a comprehensive plan for revising literacy and mathematics standards with expectations aligned from elementary to high school to postsecondary classrooms. CPE convened a series of postsecondary work team meetings (comprised of teacher education and content faculty from all sectors, KYAE, representatives from P-12, and other statewide organizations) to review each draft of the Common Core Standards and benchmarks for college and career readiness. These groups were assembled to create a broad-based understanding of SB1, the progression and alignment of the literacy and mathematics standards from elementary to high school to postsecondary introductory coursework, to ensure that college readiness expectations were met. In order to ensure buy-in and formative involvement, CPE and KDE both formed groups of their respective educators to provide feedback to CCSSO on the standards. Postsecondary faculty, including content and education faculty, met to ensure alignment with introductory postsecondary courses. P-12 educators met to ensure that the standards met the requirements of SB1. Both groups were cross-pollinated in order to ensure alignment and to create "one set of standards" that moved past mere alignment. Kentucky then provided a unified response to CCSSO drafts of the standards.

CPE also convened another series of meetings with campus college readiness representatives to create an understanding of Kentucky's revised standards as well as SB1 and its impact on colleges and universities. These discussions led to a review of the literature of practices that impact student success, retention, and graduation rates. In addition, individual institutions identified and discussed evidence-based college readiness programs and services supporting high school and adult students entering

college underprepared for credit-bearing coursework.

KYAE adopted the Common Core Standards and is aligning curricula to the standards to improve GED scores and, in turn, increase the potential for GED graduates to transition into college credit-bearing coursework. KYAE's professional development model will be focused for the next two years on aligning curricula to KYAE Common Core Standards and preparing instructors to teach the higher-level skills required by the standards.

Professional Development

As the standards were being completed, Kentucky was also designing professional development for all of its P-12 teachers. A group was formed that included education agency staff, P-12 teachers, and postsecondary faculty. A system was designed that played off the strengths of the cooperatives of superintendents already in place. KDE funded a Leadership Network design that would place teams of experts, including university faculty, at each of eight regional cooperatives in order to train teachers to return to their districts and schools. There they would share with their colleagues the important elements of the standards.

Each network provides participants the opportunity to meet regularly throughout the year to develop their own content and pedagogical competencies as well as the leadership skills necessary to work with and provide feedback to other educators in their own schools and districts. The network concept reflects foundational research on professional learning that says the best professional development is practically based on what educators must do on a daily basis and is sustainable over time to encourage a "learn, do, reflect, revise" cycle. Educators develop relationships with skilled facilitators and other participants in the

network so they can safely share problems of practice and seek solutions — not just during the time of the network meetings, but on an as-needed and ongoing basis.

After signing a Memorandum of Understanding with CPE and KDE, universities committed the equivalent of at least two full-time faculty members to the work of the Leadership Networks, using institutional resources and faculty expertise as appropriate and consistent with the missions and the faculty personnel practices of the individual institutions.

Perhaps more important than the standards themselves, is the assessment for learning embedded in KDE's Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning. The goal is to adjust the methods of instruction, based on the new more rigorous standards, so that teachers and postsecondary faculty are more prepared to use methods of formative assessment to meet students where they are, adjust instruction, and improve learning throughout the course of the year. The idea is to use information to cure the patient, not just do an autopsy after it is too late.

On the postsecondary side of implementation, CPE proposed a plan for implementation and went to the legislature to ask for funding. In a demonstration of the General Assembly's commitment to this work, a significant portion of funds, in very difficult budgetary times, was provided. CPE then began the following multi-pronged implementation strategy:

- Five online modules were developed to provide postsecondary faculty information in a timely manner. The modules were an introduction to SBI, the common core, mathematics, language arts, assessment for learning, and best practices.
- Four university entities were contracted to provide workshops across the state to faculty: the

Collaborative Center for Literacy Development, the Kentucky Center for Mathematics, the Kentucky Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, and the University of Kentucky P-20 College and Career Readiness Lab.

- Funds were provided to each public university, KCTCS, and the independent colleges to do this work on each of their campuses based on approved plans. Independent college funding was approved since 30% of Kentucky's teachers are trained on those campuses.
- An evaluation system was created to ensure the fidelity and effectiveness of this work.
- CPE is working with one institution to provide follow-up professional development across Kentucky. These funds were split between small proposals to meet the needs of individual campuses and a statewide effort to ensure continued alignment and implementation of the standards and their related assessments.

The P-20 Partnership

To ensure cohesiveness and thoughtful approaches to the myriad issues that would arise, KDE and CPE developed a Unified Strategy for College and Career Readiness. This strategy was created by a cross-sector group with input from all constituencies and stakeholders. Beyond focusing the Commonwealth on college and career readiness, the strategy has led to the development of a set of common college readiness indicators, including common learning outcomes and placement indicators that all public postsecondary institutions will use. Four goals were identified to reduce the need for remediation of recent high school graduates by 50 percent by 2014 and to increase college completion rates of students

entering underprepared for credit-bearing coursework. The defined unified strategies include

- accelerated learning opportunities,
- secondary intervention programs,
- college and career readiness advising, and
- postsecondary college persistence and degree completion.

This work led to the signing of the Commonwealth Commitment for College and Career Readiness by the presidents of all public colleges and universities. In addition, each superintendent and school board in Kentucky signed the Commonwealth Commitment to improve rates of college and career readiness in their districts by 2015. This initiative expanded efforts to

- build stronger linkages between P-12 schools and postsecondary education;
- improve student transitions from high school to college;
- support an ongoing model of collaboration; and
- lead the postsecondary system in the successful implementation of Kentucky's Unified Strategy for College and Career Readiness.

Adding to the collaborative efforts on college and career readiness, high school teachers and postsecondary faculty developed transitional courses for writing, reading, and mathematics during the spring of 2010 and 2011. High school students, who successfully complete the transitional courses or other intervention programs and score at pre-defined college readiness levels, will be guaranteed placement into credit-bearing courses in college. Additionally, an advising toolkit for all middle and high school teachers was developed that focuses on the skills and attitudes needed to enter college and to be 21st-century workplace prepared.

CPE then created three assessment academies that were each a collaboration of two public universities, a private institution, a community college, local school districts, and an adult education center. The goal of these academies is to create a sustainable feedback loop between postsecondary and P-12 schools to improve student achievement. The academies will work with districts within their region to determine what the needs for professional development are based on analysis of data and will then work together to design and provide professional development that meets the needs of students.

Placement and readiness work teams were also created to define learning outcomes for developmental, transitional, and supplemental courses that align with the Common Core Standards and entry into college credit-bearing coursework. Furthermore, these teams have made decisions on common placement assessments and benchmarks for college readiness. Small grants were provided to each institution and community college to address assessment and placement needs created by implementing new readiness standards. Free online placement exams were also created to be used consistently by each campus and by students completing transitional courses at the end of their senior year in high school. By fall 2012, students across the Commonwealth who meet the defined learning outcomes through placement testing or coursework will be guaranteed placement into college credit-bearing coursework without need of remediation.

Educator Preparation

Nowhere is the P-20 partnership more evident than in the preparation of Kentucky's teachers. Only through teacher improvement will the promises of new

standards and professional development be realized.

The three education agencies and several representative teacher groups are working together to design a new statewide teacher evaluation rubric. All aspects of teacher performance will be included, most particularly growth in student achievement. The goal is to create an instrument that better allows administrators to work with teachers to improve overall performance. CPE is working closely with EPSB to design and review teacher leader master's degrees for in-service teachers. Among other requirements, programs must collaborate with districts in the design of programs and must focus on student achievement, provide job-embedded professional experiences, allow for multiple career pathways, easily transfer across institutions, emphasize differentiated learning and classroom management, and emphasize leadership development.

Principal preparation programs are also being revised. Programs must focus on instructional leadership, student achievement, and gap closure; provide access to ongoing mentoring services from successful school leaders; include successful school and district practitioners as faculty members; provide ongoing professional development for program faculty; and provide a structure for continuous program review of graduates' success as school leaders.

Following that continuum, superintendent programs are being revised to include high-quality clinical experiences, alignment of superintendent preparation with teacher leader master's programs and principal programs, and the review of programs that prepare supervisors of instruction and directors of student personnel.

CPE, KDE, and EPSB worked together to implement key changes to

educator preparation programs. These include requiring all new teacher candidates to pass rigorous basic skills tests, raising the required GPA for admission, requiring teacher candidates to demonstrate the essential teacher dispositions and 21st-century skills, supporting the Kentucky Teacher Internship Program (KTIP), and ensuring a sufficient number of high-quality clinical experiences across the program.

Finally, CPE is working with EPSB to design an evaluation process of teacher preparation programs that will include, but is not limited to

- redesigning the current seven-year cycle of accreditation;
- providing a continuous electronic program review and approval of all preparation programs;
- developing a Quality Performance Index (QPI) for teacher preparation programs;
- inclusion of a value-added measure of teacher preparation programs that uses P-12 student performance data; and
- evaluating the effectiveness of teacher leader and principal preparation programs.

Conclusion

The crux of this work is that all of Kentucky has joined together to make sure that our children succeed and that the future of the Commonwealth is bright. The General Assembly has made a long-term and focused commitment to the improvement of education at all levels, including supporting the effort financially. The three education agencies worked as one to make sure that this effort was unified.

The lessons learned are fairly straightforward in concept, but are much harder in practice.

Be prepared to lead. For this initiative to work, the individuals whose job

it is to implement this kind of reform at the state level must facilitate, coordinate, and compromise. A focus on reform that is unwavering and continues to move all players toward the goal is mandatory.

All players must be involved and own the process. Though a mandate can be given from the General Assembly and passed through the state agencies to facilitate the work, for the effort to be successful, it must take root in the hearts and minds of those on the front lines every day with students at all levels. That ownership can be achieved with powerful data artfully used to demonstrate areas of need and then the facilitation of a process to address those needs together.

No one person or group can do this alone. Students do not experience silos of education and they must not exist in order

for the reform to succeed. All agencies and groups must remember that the goal is success for students and work together to eliminate barriers for students and educators and ensure a quality experience for students and educators.

Be prepared to get your hands dirty. The process isn't clean. It is dynamic and constantly in flux. Often the target moves. It is pertinent to continue to move everyone ahead while always making progress toward the goals, but with the understanding that in order to do that, leadership is required and it must be leadership that embraces the true difficulties of the work.

When all of these lessons come together and individuals become teams with the singular focus of success for the students, remarkable things are possible.

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