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Changing Landscapes and Paradigm Shifts: Integrating the Common Core with Educator Preparation *COMMENTARY*

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Educator preparation and P-12 education are on a trajectory of changing landscapes and shifting paradigms to meet the needs of providing a world-class education to our children and youth who will be prepared to thrive in their personal and professional lives in this century. This shift moves from the “yesterday of schooling and educator preparation” involving a system of good intentions that worked for a percentage of learners to a holistic structure designed for *all* students and stakeholders. Currently, we are in the middle of this shifting paradigm focusing on “today’s system of intentional practice,” which involves collaborative research and best practice efforts to improve educator preparation and student achievement with P-12 learners.

The future landscape is a “unified, intentional system” that incorporates a common set of challenging standards, provides a focus on research-supported practices, uses statewide-integrated data, and embeds a continuous, professional learning cycle from preservice through inservice committed to P-12 student achievement at high levels. With the onset of practices evolving around the implementation of the Common Core Standards, an established unified and intentional system emerges influencing current educator practice in the field and the preparation of future educators and leaders.

Common Core Standards: A Changing Landscape for P-12 and Educator Preparation

What has contributed to this changing landscape for the profession and a shift in the paradigm of teaching and learning? Shifting the focus from teaching to learning has resulted in redefining the profession. Repurposing the expectations of the profession and its impact on student achievement created a series of actions at the national and state levels to move toward providing an improved teaching force. Among the efforts, federal assistance to states, and now to districts, in the form of *Race to the Top* grants helped to quickly elevate this endeavor, which coincided with the standards work. States adopting and implementing College and Career Readiness Standards supported the reframing work. The design of the Common Core Standards and the adoption by 46 states and the District of Columbia created a unified effort for curricular design and implementation for P-12 learners. Although this is only a highlight of influences, this work reflects a deep and longstanding commitment to changing the current practices within P-12 schools and in professional preparation.

The initiatives by the states around the Common Core have resulted in a more united network that crosses state and federal agencies and institutions of higher education. As of 2012-2013, more than 20 states have begun implementation of the Common Core Standards with the remaining adoptees to move into these processes in 2014-2015 (CCSSO Spotlight, 2012). Multiple statewide initiatives have ranged from communication and engagement activities to systemic changes involving curriculum alignment, changing requirements in educator preparation, and continuous improvement support for the profession (CCSSO Spotlight, 2012). All of these state enterprises are focused on providing a rigorous educational experience for P-12 students enabling them to be college- and career-ready through an effective professional education workforce.

Kentucky's Response to the Integration of the Common Core Standards

Given the context of these statewide endeavors, Kentucky was the first adopter of the Common Core as it coincided with the legislation of Senate Bill 1, which became known as *Unbridled Learning*. As legislated, *Unbridled Learning* focuses on the implementation of the Common Core Standards and College and Career Readiness for all P-12 learners. For Kentucky, this launched a second era of reform that enhances the extensive P-12 work of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and more uniquely mandates the involvement of postsecondary education in supporting the transitions for college- and career-readiness and implementing the Common Core Standards across P-12 and educator preparation curricula.

With the onset of legislation of Senate Bill 1 or *Unbridled Learning*, and the concurrent adoption of the Common Core Standards, known as the Kentucky Core Academic Standards, Kentucky's educator preparation institutions became integral to the process of ensuring greater college preparedness and completion. Supported by the work of multiple state agencies and legislative funding, colleges and universities joined together in fulfilling the charge of integrating the Kentucky Core Academic Standards within all teacher preparation programs to ensure that preservice educators were prepared to teach P-12 learners the knowledge and skillsets to be college- and career-ready. Statewide efforts encompassed the creation of modules by the Council of Postsecondary Education (CPE) to quickly assist higher education faculty in acquiring the needed introductory information on the Kentucky Core Academic Standards and related best practices of assessment and instruction (DeAtley & Cain, 2012). In addition, four institutions provided a number of workshops statewide to assist faculty in higher education. Multiple colleges and universities collaborated creatively in offering a variety of workshops to their respective faculty.

Much of the collaborative effort at colleges and universities focused on preparing faculty from both the professional and the arts and science areas in the concepts supporting the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. In addition, teacher preparation programs joined with the arts and sciences to provide the following: 1) more in-depth knowledge on assessment for learning (formative assessment) strategies; 2) an understanding of differentiated instruction focused on student acquisition and mastery of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards; 3) an increased effort to redesign P-12 learner tasks around performance-based learning; and 4) an emphasis on performance assessment of preservice educators within the context of clinical-based preparation.

Concurrent with the work of the educator preparation institutions integrating the Common Core, the Kentucky Teacher Internship Program (KTIP) made changes to the lesson and unit design as well as the observation instrument as an alignment to the practices presented by the *Unbridled Learning* legislation. Since institutions typically implement the KTIP instrument somewhere in their programs, it provided a framework for the alignment of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards, integrating assessment, addressing differentiation, and assuring appropriate instructional design practices. Multiple educator preparation providers used this information as a guide to backward design these principles into their programs.

All Kentucky institutions made a number of efforts to embed this work into the educator preparation curricula. Integrating the Kentucky Core Academic Standards into instructional and unit design highlighted a concerted effort across institutions. Educator preparation programs emphasized in courses more formative and summative assessment practices around the Kentucky

Core Academic Standards with a focus on monitoring student progress through assessment *for* and *of* learning practices. Efforts focused on best practices in differentiation in instruction and assessment in the professional curriculum. In many instances, institutions engaged in alignment practices with the Kentucky Core Academic Standards that became apparent with revised syllabi, redesigned authentic preservice performance projects, and greater collaboration with arts and science faculty in teacher preparation.

One Institution's Response to the Integration of the Common Core

The following example will help illustrate the type of integrative work by educator preparation institutions with the Common Core: Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) engaged in an extensive effort of content alignment with the Common Core over a 20-month period from January 2011 through August 2012. The process, entitled Curricular Alignment for Retention and Transition at Eastern (CARTE), embraced models for building Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within the College of Education and across the related disciplines in the College of Arts and Sciences. The work focused around five content areas including math, English, social science, natural science, and teacher education. Three different types of PLCs were employed to guide the work: 1) The Executive PLC organized the work, addressed needs of other PLCs, and provided evaluation processes for project outcomes. 2) Super PLCs were comprised of project leaders for each content area and focused on maintaining the perspective of the work. 3) Disciplinary PLCs worked with faculty on aligning syllabi to standards, addressed assessment *for* and *of* practices, redesigned courses, extended outreach to P-12 secondary schools, and focused on retention in educator preparation. As a result of the work, more than 200 faculty were trained on the Common Core, 50+ syllabi were realigned in general education, developmental, and teacher preparation courses, and more than 60 faculty were highly involved in the alignment process. This work increased the cross-disciplinary discussions, gave value to collaboration with colleagues, and provided a model of collaboration through PLCs that could be transferred to preservice educators (Fair, 2013).

Where are we today?

The work of the integration of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards continues both at the P-12 curriculum level, transition to postsecondary, and educator preparation. Since the legislation of *Unbridled Learning*, more efforts arose to impact P-12 student achievement and the higher education models for preparing teachers and leaders. In 2010, the seminal release of the Blue Ribbon Panel Report, "Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers," set the stage for embedding the work of the standards and shifting educator preparation to prepare professionals who align with the industry of teaching and leading. Since then, the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board has implemented regulations around more extensive time in the schools, up to 200 hours, prior to student teaching, and co-teaching as a model for the professional semester. The profession of education, as of this year, will have one accrediting body – the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) – that poses rigorous expectations for institutions in order to prepare educators and leaders who are equipped to teach the Common Core and help P-12 learners meet college/career goals for transitioning to postsecondary education.

With the integration of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards, P-12 schools and educator preparation institutions have moved forward with the theory and practices of standards-

based learning including: 1) Curriculum Alignment, 2) Assessment *for* and *of* Learning, 3) Monitoring of Student Progress by Standards and Targets, 4) Instructional Practices of Differentiation for ALL learners, 5) Standards-Based Reporting, and 6) Standards-Based Grading. This continues to expand the collaborative work between educator preparation and P-12 leadership.

All of these efforts focus around the work of the integration of the Common Core Standards. In the midst of all of this work, it is important to remember that the most precious resource we have as a state and nation is the learning potential of our children and youth. The development of the Common Core is indicative of the commitment to helping our children and youth compete globally in professional endeavors and engage in meaningful relationships and skills for personal growth and development. As we continue with this most important work in educator preparation, we are reminded that it is essential to produce learner-ready teachers and school-ready leaders (Luna et al., 2012) in order to supply the instructional and schooling environment needed for providing P-12 learners a world-class education.

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