



7-2013

# The Lived Experience of Standards Implementation in New York City Schools, 2011

Heather Goldsworthy

*University of Pennsylvania*, hego@gse.upenn.edu


Jonathan A. Supovitz

*University of Pennsylvania*, JONS@GSE.UPENN.EDU

Matthew Riggan

*University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre\\_researchreports](http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports)

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Goldsworthy, Heather; Supovitz, Jonathan A.; and Riggan, Matthew. (2013). The Lived Experience of Standards Implementation in New York City Schools, 2011. *CPRE Research Reports*.

Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre\\_researchreports/76](http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/76)

[View on the CPRE website.](#)

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. [http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre\\_researchreports/76](http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/76)

For more information, please contact [libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

# The Lived Experience of Standards Implementation in New York City Schools, 2011

## **Abstract**

The College and Career Readiness Standards, referred to as the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in New York City, are increasingly the focus of educational reform efforts across the United States. Each year for the past several years, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) has created a set of focusing expectations for schools in order to guide their engagement with the CCLS. In the 2011-12 school year, which is the focus of this report, the New York Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIEs) asked schools to engage in two central activities. First, teachers in grade levels or subject areas were asked to collaboratively examine student work and analyze the gaps between current curriculum, instructional practice, and student performance relative to the expectations of the Standards. Second, schools were asked to identify and implement performance-based assessments, or “tasks,” within a CCLS-aligned curricular unit, such that all students would experience at least one task in literacy and one in mathematics. The NYCDOE designed these activities as a set of carefully chosen opportunities for schools to engage with the more rigorous expectations for teaching and learning embodied in the Standards. The hope was that, by engaging with these learning opportunities, school staff would develop a deeper, shared understanding of the Standards, and could begin to address the scope of change necessary to meet the higher expectations.

CPRE’s evaluation of CCLS implementation in New York City in 2011-12 allowed us to examine how a diverse sample of 16 elementary and middle schools engaged with the CIEs.

## **Disciplines**

Curriculum and Instruction | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Educational Methods | Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration | Elementary Education and Teaching | Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching

## **Comments**

[View on the CPRE website.](#)



CONSORTIUM FOR POLICY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

# The Lived Experience of Standards Implementation in New York City Schools, 2011

---

## RESEARCH REPORT

Heather Goldsworthy  
Jonathan Supovitz  
Matthew Riggan



GE Foundation

**GE Foundation *Developing Futures*<sup>TM</sup> in Education**

EVALUATION SERIES

October 2013  
RR-75

## About Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) brings together education experts from renowned research institutions to contribute new knowledge to inform K-12 education policy and practice. Our work is peer-reviewed and open access. CPRE's member institutions are the University of Pennsylvania, Teachers College Columbia University, Harvard University, Stanford University, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Northwestern University.

Since 2010, CPRE has conducted the external evaluation of the *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup> in Education program for the GE Foundation. In addition to this report, CPRE recently published an evaluation on the impact of the *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup> in Education program on mathematics performance trends in four districts.

## About GE Foundation and the *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup> in Education Program

For more than 50 years, GE Foundation has invested in education programs based on a fundamental premise: A quality education ushers in a lifetime of opportunity, which helps build a strong and diverse citizenry to work and live in an increasingly competitive world. The GE Foundation believes that a quality education can help prepare young Americans – especially those in underserved urban districts – for careers in a global economy.

The GE Foundation is addressing this education imperative by supporting high-impact initiatives that improve access to, and the equity and quality of, public education. The *Developing Futures*<sup>™</sup> in Education program is one such endeavor, created to raise student achievement through improved mathematics and science curricula and management capacity in schools. The program has been expanded with a grant investment of over \$200 million in seven targeted U.S. school districts.

School districts use their grants to develop a rigorous, system-wide mathematics and science curriculum and provide comprehensive professional development for their teachers. Working with the GE Foundation, districts have made more efficient management of human resources using GE's Six Sigma, developing educational leaders to coach others and model best practices, implementing GE's process management tools, and developing IT systems and capacity to use data to better inform decision making. More recently, with GE Foundation leadership, partner districts have increasingly focused on implementation of the new Common Core State Standards.



## About the Authors

Heather Goldsworthy is a researcher at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) for which she is working on two projects: a mixed-methods assessment of the nationwide scale-up of Reading Recovery, an early-intervention literacy program; and an evaluation of the GE Foundation's supports for standards reforms in seven select school districts. Goldsworthy's expertise is in qualitative research, particularly as a method for exploring the structures, processes, and impacts of programs and policies implemented by non-governmental organizations. Her research interests include the effects of framing on policy development and implementation, processes of legitimation and institutionalization, and narratives of policy reform.

Jonathan Supovitz is an Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and Co-Director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE). He has published findings from numerous educational studies and evaluations of school and district reform efforts and the effects of professional development on teacher and leader practice. Supovitz is an accomplished mixed-method researcher and evaluator, employing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. He has published findings from a number of educational studies, including multiple studies of programmatic effectiveness; the relationship between data use and professional development, teacher and leadership practice, and student achievement; studies of educational leadership; research on efforts to develop communities of instructional practice in schools; an examination of the equitability of different forms of student assessment; and the use of technology for evaluative data collection. His current research focuses on how schools and districts use different forms of data to support the improvement of teaching and learning. He currently directs an experimental study on the utility to teachers of linking practice data to student performance data and a study of distributed leadership. He also leads the Evidence-Based Leadership strand of the Mid-Career Leadership Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

Matthew Riggan is a senior researcher at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE). Riggan earned his Ph.D. at Penn, where his research focused on evaluation strategies for collaborative, community-based programs. He has conducted extensive research on data use in schools and districts, including a four-year study of how teachers, schools and districts utilize interim assessment data, and an ongoing research and development project exploring strategies for improving formative assessment in elementary mathematics. An expert in qualitative methods, Riggan is co-author of *Reason and rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research* (Sage, 2011). In 2011 he co-founded the Workshop School, a public high school in Philadelphia focused on real-world problem solving.





# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Research Design	4
Sample Selection	4
Data Collection	6
Data Coding and Analysis	7
NYC Theory of Action and CPRE Analysis Framework	8
CPRE Framework for School Engagement with the CIEs	9
<i>Conservation Perspective</i>	10
<i>Transformation Perspective</i>	11
Findings	12
Overall School Distribution on the Continuum of Engagement	12
Engagement with the Citywide Instructional Expectations	13
<i>Looking at Student Work to Perform a Gap Analysis</i>	17
<i>Task Selection and Implementation</i>	20
<i>Looking at Student Work to Evaluate Instruction</i>	27
Understanding and Preparedness Across the Continuum of Schools	31
Conclusion	36







---

## Executive Summary

The College and Career Readiness Standards, referred to as the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in New York City, are increasingly the focus of educational reform efforts across the United States. Education leaders everywhere are grappling with ways to introduce the Standards into schools and engage faculties with both their promise and implications. New York City has taken up the challenge of Standards implementation in a particularly thoughtful and innovative way, especially considering the magnitude of implementing in 1,700 schools across the district with an array of experiences and capacities.

Each year for the past several years, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) has created a set of focusing expectations for schools in order to guide their engagement with the CCLS. In the 2011-12 school year, which is the focus of this report, the New York Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIEs) asked schools to engage in two central activities. First, teachers in grade levels or subject areas were asked to collaboratively examine student work and analyze the gaps between current curriculum, instructional practice, and student performance relative to the expectations of the Standards. Second, schools were asked to identify and implement performance-based assessments, or “tasks,” within a CCLS-aligned curricular unit, such that all students would experience at least one task in literacy and one in mathematics. The NYCDOE designed these activities as a set of carefully chosen opportunities for schools to engage with the more rigorous expectations for teaching and learning embodied in the Standards. The hope was that, by engaging with these learning opportunities, school staff would develop a deeper, shared understanding of the Standards, and could begin to address the scope of change necessary to meet the higher expectations.

CPRE’s evaluation of CCLS implementation in New York City in 2011-12 allowed us to examine how a diverse sample of 16 elementary and middle schools engaged with the CIEs. The sample of schools came from all five boroughs across New York City and represented a range of student demographics and performance. Teams of two researchers visited each school for one day, and conducted interviews with school leaders, teachers, and coaches. When possible, researchers observed teacher team meetings. Interviews were also conducted with Children First Network (CFN) support providers. We then developed case studies of each school that described their experiences and perspectives.

Through these analyses, patterns emerged that seemed to explain how different schools interpreted and implemented the CIEs. We saw that schools could be placed on a rough continuum of perspectives from which they engaged with Standards implementation, with schools ranging from a “conservation-oriented” perspective to a “transformation-oriented” perspective. Conservation-oriented schools were primarily focused on preserving existing structures and practices and, relatedly, minimizing disruption of the status quo. While this could be because a school’s practices were already aligned with the rigor reflected in the CCLS, all but one of the schools in our sample that typified this perspective had a large gap between their current practices and the expectations of the CCLS and primarily interpreted the challenge of implementation as finding ways to reduce teacher anxiety and conserve energy. Consequently, they tended to modify the curricular and instructional expectations of the Standards to fit their current practices rather than the reverse. In minimizing the scope of change, these schools limited their engagement

with the CCLS, and their level of understanding of the expectations inherent in the Standards appeared to be less developed. Such a conservationist approach may be a rational response to the turbulent environment of school reform, where changes are continuously and rapidly introduced. Transformation-oriented schools, by contrast, interpreted the scope of change differently; they tended to believe the best way to meet future expectations was to make more significant changes sooner rather than later, even if this involved more immediate disruption. Consequently, transformation-oriented schools tended to engage more deeply with the CIEs, which led them towards a more robust understanding of the CCLS and their implications for teaching and learning.

Importantly, how schools engaged with the CIEs and the CCLS was not correlated with their performance levels or student demographics. Instead, responses seemed to represent schools' cultural proclivities to engage with change. High-performing schools that saw little need to do something differently were just as likely to preserve the status quo as lower-capacity schools with fewer resources to coordinate a response. Both kinds of schools were also equally likely to embrace change they felt fit their needs and capabilities. Thus, we view a school's response to the CIEs as a reflection of their leadership and cultural orientation, not a consequence of their demographics.

In this report we trace the ways that conservation-oriented and transformation-oriented schools engaged with different components of the CIEs. We found that the different orientations led schools to engage in looking at student work differently, to have different experiences with task selection and implementation, and to take different learning away from their experiences. We concluded that, at the end of the 2011-12 school year, the schools with more conservation-oriented perspectives that focused on more superficial or incremental changes did work that constrained their learning opportunities which, in turn, resulted in more shallow engagement with the CCLS compared to schools with more transformation-oriented perspectives. Transformation-oriented schools capitalized more on the learning opportunities offered via CIE engagement, which led to a deeper, more collectively-developed understanding of the expectations for teaching and learning embedded in the Standards. Overall, we determined that schools with a transformation-oriented perspective made more progress towards the kinds of practices that will be required in the coming decade. These findings have important implications for schools and districts across the nation as they seek to grapple with Standards implementation.

## Introduction

In December of 2010 the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania contracted with the General Electric (GE) Foundation to evaluate the work of the school districts receiving support from the GE Foundation Developing Futures™ in Education initiative, including New York City. Supported by the GE Foundation, the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) has put in place a long-term strategy for implementing the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) citywide, and this report focuses on that strategy in practice. In a separate report (Supovitz, 2013) we examine the design of the NYCDOE reform strategy.

This report is organized into four sections. Following this introduction, Section II provides a brief overview of the research design, data collected, and data analysis procedures used to inform this work. Section III presents the research team's findings about how the sampled NYC schools engaged with the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIEs) and CCLS implementation in 2011-12. Section III includes a discussion of the implications of different modes of engagement for a school's level of CCLS understanding and feelings of preparedness for continuing implementation. Section IV briefly summarizes the overall findings, and outlines what we believe are the important lessons that can be learned from New York City's experience that provide insight and guidance for other districts going forward with Standards implementation. The report concludes with a brief discussion of the findings.

## Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways that a range of New York City schools were responding to the City's efforts to engage with the Common Core Learning Standards. In this section we present an abbreviated version of our research design and sampling procedures.

Our overall investigation was guided by four central research questions, which were developed in conjunction with leaders of the New York City DOE, who facilitated our work by welcoming us to conduct interviews with DOE staff, facilitating access to data for our sampling process, introducing us to network leaders, and providing expertise and support for our research in multiple ways. They were:

1. How did school faculties understand the purpose of their work implementing the Common Core Learning Standards?
2. How were schools structuring and organizing to engage with the Common Core Learning Standards and their demands?
3. What factors, both internal and external to schools, were facilitating and/or impeding Common Core Learning Standards implementation?
4. In what ways were the Standards-driven adjustments changing practices in schools?

## Sample Selection

Our school fieldwork was designed to be conducted in a representative sample of elementary and middle schools in New York City. We omitted high schools from the sample because we felt they were too complex to add to this exploratory study. To select the sample we instituted a three-phase sampling procedure. First, working with the NYCDOE's Division of Academics, Performance, and Support, we developed a representative list of 18 of the 61 Children First Networks. Children First Networks (generally called simply "networks") in the NYC system have no authority over schools, but rather are structured to provide schools with administrative and instructional support and services. Schools select their network based on best fit with their needs. Our purposeful sample of 18 networks excluded specialty networks and high school networks. Second, we selected a stratified random sample of six of the 18 networks, using input from experts at the NYCDOE, based upon the varied levels of support the networks provided to schools. Third, from each of the six networks we picked a sample of schools that varied in student performance. We then worked with network leaders of these six networks to select three schools to visit in each network, for a total sample of 18 schools. We succeeded in gaining access to 16 of the 18 selected schools. Table 1 shows demographic information of the final sample of schools upon which this report is based.

The final sample of 16 schools consisted of 10 elementary schools (those serving students through grade six), four middle schools (serving students from grades five through eight) and two schools with grades Kindergarten through eight. Across the sample, school size ranged from a small K-5 of 150 students to a middle school of over 1600 students; the average school size was approximately 750 students. The sample also included a mix of low- and high-poverty schools, as represented by the range of lunch assistance. On average, 58 percent of students in the sampled schools were receiving free/reduced price

lunch. In a quarter of the schools, over 75 percent of students received lunch assistance, while in three schools under 33 percent of students received free/reduced price lunch. Students in the sampled schools were predominantly English-speaking, with only two of the schools having more than 20 percent of their students identified as English Language Learners (ELL). On average, approximately 15 percent of the students in each school were classified as Special Education (SPED) students.

**Table 1: Demographics of Final School Sample**

School	Grade	Size	% ELA Proficient	% Mathematics Proficient	% Free & Reduced Lunch	% ELL	% SPED	% Black	% Hispanic	% White	Borough
1	6 - 8	491	85	95	27	1	20	27	21	40	Brooklyn
2	PK - 5	208	82	80	42	2	16	29	33	26	Manhattan
3	6 - 8	946	77	95	33	5	14	5	9	21	Queens
4	PK - 5	708	74	85	19	4	13	7	16	65	Brooklyn
5	5 - 8	1617	67	81	52	5	14	16	41	29	Queens
6	PK - 5	432	62	70	76	13	12	27	61	2	Manhattan
7	K - 5	147	59	64	52	9	18	4	38	52	Staten Isl.
8	6 - 8	1494	57	77	74	21	15	2	52	3	Queens
9	K - 8	503	56	68	40	8	12	8	21	66	Bronx
10	PK - 5	1344	51	64	65	17	7	2	19	46	Brooklyn
11	K - 5	635	46	50	58	15	16	27	52	16	Manhattan
12	K - 8	821	44	62	72	3	10	78	10	2	Manhattan
13	PK - 5	1040	44	55	75	22	11	10	56	4	Brooklyn
14	PK - 5	230	38	27	82	15	24	25	54	3	Manhattan
15	K - 5	1044	30	48	72	12	12	51	41	4	Bronx
16	3 - 6	326	27	56	88	15	35	29	64	6	Manhattan
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>24</b>	
	<b>SD</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	

Teachers in all of the schools in our sample met in at least one teacher team, and some met in multiple teams (e.g., subject, grade, or other specially designated groupings). Subject teams were less common, and were present in only seven schools. Five schools had some sort of team specifically formed to address the CIEs and CCLS implementation. Some of these teams consisted only of classroom teachers, others

were “cabinets” created by principals that comprised designated “lead teachers” and administrators. Less than half of the schools in the sample were served by an embedded coach – a subject specialist with a dedicated position at the school. Four schools had a mathematics coach, six had a literacy coach, and three schools had both.

## Data Collection

School visits occurred in the spring of 2012 by a group of 11 CPRE researchers. Teams of two or three researchers visited each school for one day. Visits were preceded by a phone interview with a school administrator (usually the principal or assistant principal), during which the researcher explained the purpose of the visit, learned about the basic context of the school, and identified whom we hoped to interview to help prepare a schedule in advance. During school visits we sought to interview (a) the school principal; (b) individual teachers that were particularly engaged or successful in working with tasks and implementing the CCLS; (c) individual teachers who were “typical implementers” of the CCLS in their school; and (d) one or two individuals on the school’s team that was taking leadership for the implementation of the CCLS, where available. If possible, we also sought to observe a CCLS leadership team meeting, a regular teacher team meeting, or both. Teachers and teams interviewed and observed were chosen by principal recommendation, based on these categories.

Interviews were slightly different depending on the interviewee’s role, but they generally focused on seven major topics:

- How school staff learned about the Common Core Learning Standards, and how information was communicated to them;
- The different sources of knowledge and support, both internal and external to their school, that staff accessed to help them implement the Common Core Learning Standards;
- Barriers and supports to Common Core Learning Standards implementation in the school;
- Specific experiences implementing the 2011-12 CIEs: collaboratively looking at student work with their grade-level or subject-alike counterparts, and implementing a performance-based assessment within a Common Core -aligned curricular unit;
- Alignment between the city’s efforts to implement the Common Core Learning Standards and other major initiatives and emphases, including the concomitant implementation of the Danielson classroom observation frameworks, high stakes testing, and other City initiatives
- The school’s network and the support it provides;
- Other specific supports the faculty was receiving from external support providers in literacy or mathematics (e.g., The Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, or the Australian United States Services in Education - AUSSIE).

Each schools visit typically included five to eight interviews with school leaders and teachers. A total of 93 school-level interviews were conducted by the research team across the 16 schools. Most interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed.

## Data Coding and Analysis

Data coding and analysis were conducted by five team members. Based on our interview protocols and fieldwork, we developed a coding framework that ultimately consisted of five Common Core codes (understanding, communication, scope, utility, and feasibility); four CIE codes (understanding, communication, strategy, and accountability); two performance task codes (selection and implementation); four support codes (NYCDOE, network, school, other); a series of codes for fit with other city initiatives (teacher observation, high stakes testing, other); and a set of modifiers that cut across codes (successes, challenges, collaboration, mathematics focus, literacy focus). To both refine these codes and develop inter-rater reliability, we conducted two rounds where all five analysts read and coded a common transcript. We then discussed the results, refined the codes, and repeated this process.

After this inter-rater reliability activity, individuals were charged with coding the transcripts for a set of schools. Ideally, but not always, these were schools in which they had conducted fieldwork. Based on the coded output, each researcher wrote a five- to eight-page memo that summarized the school's process of implementing the CIEs; the school's leadership of this process; the resources they used, including external support for CIE implementation; their within-school collaboration to implement the CIEs; their relationship to, and support from, their network; and other factors. Based on this analysis, the memo writers were asked to rate the school on an early version of the conservation-transformation continuum. Finally, the lead authors of this report used the school memos to conduct a cross-site analysis, reading and re-reading the memos to inductively identify patterns, and to look for themes that seemed to explain emerging relationships. These patterns were tested in on-going discussions with the school memo writers, and theories of relationships were expanded or rejected in an iterative process.

## NYC Theory of Action and CPRE Analysis Framework

The NYCDOE approached the work of rolling out the Common Core Learning Standards reform as a staged process of incremental introduction and continuously increasing expectations. In 2010-11 schools were first formally introduced to the CCLS. At that time, staff were asked to familiarize themselves with the content of the standards, and to do collective inquiry work to broadly assess the alignment of their current curriculum to the CCLS. In 2011-12, schools were expected to “deepen [their] efforts”<sup>1</sup> and engage in the next stages of alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The CIEs were created by the NYCDOE specifically to guide school staff through these next stages.

A primary component of the 2011-12 CIEs was inquiry work to strengthen “the instructional core”<sup>2</sup> in schools. School staff were asked to engage in two distinct activities: 1) Examine student work, and 2) administer performance-based assessments and analyze the ensuing results. Looking at student work involved two aspects. First, at the beginning of the year, school staff were asked to collaboratively examine existing student work in order to perform a gap analysis, and to articulate where student performance, instructional practice, and rigor of curriculum stood in relation to the high expectations of the CCLS. Then, between winter 2011 and spring 2012, schools were expected to collectively examine student work following a performance-based assessment (described below) in order to evaluate both student performance and teacher instruction. The primary goal of this activity was for teachers to examine their classroom practice in order to make adjustments to rigor and pedagogy that would increase alignment with the expectations of the CCLS.

The second CIE was that teachers would organize to ensure that each student experienced two “rich and rigorous”<sup>3</sup> performance-based assessments (“tasks”) – one in mathematics, and one in literacy. These tasks were expected to be embedded in a Common Core-aligned unit, either one they already had or newly created themselves, or one they adopted from externally-prepared materials provided by NYCDOE or a support/consultant group such as Teachers College or Aussie. The literacy tasks could be administered through ELA units, or in other subjects with literacy components, such as social studies or science. The purpose of the tasks was less to assess students, per se, than to achieve two other goals: 1) to expose teachers to the level of work expected by the CCLS and, 2) to produce student work that teachers could use to practice with rubrics and become comfortable recognizing different levels of student proficiency.

Figure 1 shows the progression of CIE activities, and the end they were intended to achieve. The NYCDOE’s theory of action was that by planning, executing, and reflecting on these activities, staff would: 1) develop a deep, collective understanding of what Common Core-aligned curriculum, assessment, and instruction look like, 2) be able to recognize different levels of proficiency in student work, and 3) be prepared to make instructional decisions that would move students along “the continuum of college

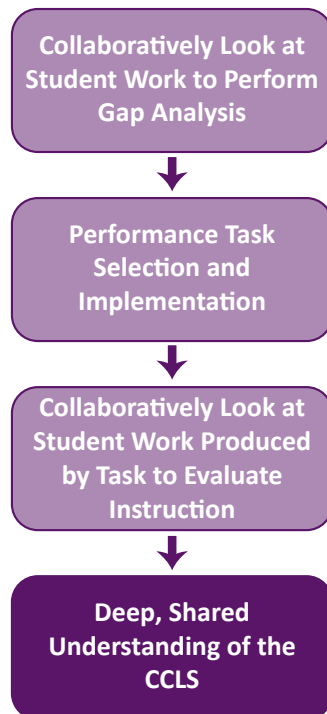
---

1 NYC Department of Education Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011-12  
2 NYC Department of Education Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011-12  
3 NYC Department of Education Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011-12



and career readiness.”<sup>4</sup> The NYCDOE’s hope was that a deeper, shared understanding of the CCLS would position teachers to make the instructional shifts and curriculum modifications in 2012-13 and 2013-14 that would move the school toward alignment and preparation for new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments due to be implemented in New York state in 2014-15.

**Figure 1: 2011-12 CIE theory of action**



### CPRE Framework for School Engagement with the CIEs

The NYCDOE put few restrictions on how schools should perform these central activities, hoping this freedom would encourage schools to think about what course of action best fit their unique needs and capacity, and that the experience would engender support for the initiative as teachers took ownership of the work. In looking closely at the decisions schools made when engaging with the expected activities, we saw that the actions they chose to take were influenced by many related conceptions of different aspects of the work. These aspects included the scope of change associated with the implementation of the CCLS, the effort required to match the scope of change, the goals they considered appropriate, what resources they engaged, and what they thought of as the suitable role of a teacher. Schools can be distinguished by their ways of thinking about these aspects of CCLS implementation, and the practices that seem to be associated with different ways of thinking.

---

4 NYC Department of Education Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011-12

Here we call the combination of conceptualization and practice a “framework for engagement” (see Figure 2). Schools enacted the framework for engagement with the CIEs, and the Common Core more broadly, from different perspectives. In general, these different perspectives led to different results in terms of developing a deep, shared understanding of the Common Core, and feeling prepared to meet expectations going forward. With respect to the schools in our sample, two overarching perspectives on engagement emerged through inductive analysis of the practical and conceptual approaches staff at the sample schools took to the CIEs, and preparing for full Common Core implementation more broadly: a conservation perspective, and a transformation perspective.

It is important to note that these two perspectives do not represent a strict dichotomy, but two zones on a continuum. It is also important to note that the perspectives are not necessarily correlated with student performance, instructional quality, or level of effort to meet the CIEs. For example, there were schools at both ends of the continuum that chose to create customized performance-based assessments for their students, feeling they best understood how to make the CIEs fit their unique context. These schools felt that, by making this effort, their engagement with the CIEs would be more substantive than if they had adopted externally-prepared materials. Significant effort to address the CIEs was present in both perspectives. However, it must be acknowledged that, in the schools in our sample, some efforts to address the CIEs were better informed than others, and these efforts tended to be found in transformation-oriented schools. The following analysis will explore the reasons for this pattern.

**Figure 2: Framework of school engagement with the CIEs and CCLS**



### *Conservation Perspective*

Underlying the conservation-oriented perspective on school engagement is a particular way of thinking about the challenge of meeting the CIEs and preparing for broader Standards implementation. In this way of thinking, the goal is to meet expectations while minimizing disruption to the status quo. For schools this means preserving existing structures and practices by making what a school already does fit with the new Standards. By modifying current curriculum and instructional practices to accommodate the CIEs and the CCLS, disturbance to teacher routines and teacher anxiety can be minimized, to the extent that this is possible.

From the conservation-oriented perspective, one way to construct the work of engaging with the CIEs is to frame the disruption to existing practices as minimal. This means framing the scope of change to curriculum and instruction that accompanies the CCLS as limited and manageable. For a school already close to CCLS-aligned work, conservation means high quality business as usual. For a school whose practice is far from what is expected by the Standards, conservation is a means of minimizing engagement. For the latter type of conservation schools, a reasonable conclusion is to take advantage of prepared materials provided by external sources, or to make minor changes to existing internal materials. This minimizes the energy that must be expended to develop resources. Included in this

type of conservation-oriented perspective is also a particular way of thinking about the role of teachers. Generally a school's interest in conserving structures and energy includes viewing the role of teachers as instructors rather than curriculum experts, and not diverting their attention to curriculum development.

Adoption of a conservation-oriented perspective may stem from many circumstances. For instance, a conservationist approach may be appropriate if a school is having trouble managing its challenges. In such cases the school may have minimal energy they can dedicate to revising practices, and small changes may be all a school can successfully muster. Conservation would also make sense in a school where administrators or teachers are concerned that the Common Core reform may not persist, and are therefore hesitant to dedicate energy to reshaping their structures without confirmation. Another possibility behind conservation is that a school is already doing high-level, rigorous work that lends itself to meeting the CIEs and the expectations of the CCLS. In such schools, existing structures and routines would already be aligned with the CCLS, and overhauling curriculum and instruction would be an unnecessary use of energy and resources.

### *Transformation Perspective*

The transformation perspective encapsulates a particular way of thinking about the work of Standards implementation. From this perspective, the best way to meet current expectations and prepare for the future is to make more significant changes now rather than later, even though this may be difficult. Transformation is a more disruptive and energy-intensive process than conservation; the changes to structure and practice are bigger, and the end result is something new rather than a small alteration to existing form. Schools engaging with the CCLS from this perspective were less likely to believe that they “already do this,” or that they can continue to work in largely the same way they always have and still effectively implement the CCLS reform. For some of these schools the changes to curriculum and instruction demanded by the Standards truly are significant, and are understood as such. For others, the changes required may be less dramatic (perhaps they have always taken a more aligned approach), but administrators and teachers choose to frame the shifts as consequential enough to warrant thorough examination of all that they do. In this way of thinking, the work of Standards alignment and implementation is acknowledged as uncomfortable and difficult, and teacher fear and stress are recognized as part of the challenge rather than avoided.

As with the conservation perspective, part of transformation is a way of thinking about the role of teachers. In this case, the role of the teacher evolves with the curriculum, and “curriculum developer” is considered a valid and important part of teacher professional development. The assumption is not that teachers are necessarily experts in curriculum development, but that engaging in the process of design is the best way for them to gain a deep understanding and appreciation of the new expectations of the CCLS. While this increases the effort required, it is considered time well spent as it is expected to result in a teaching staff that is more knowledgeable about the CCLS.

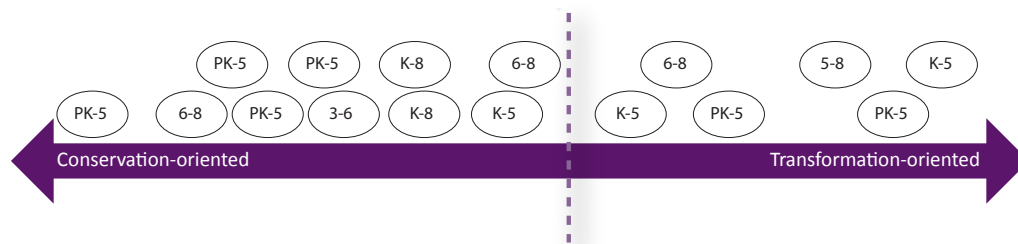
## Findings

In this section we report the findings of our investigation. First we present the overall distribution of where schools fell on the CIE engagement continuum. In the second, and major, part of the section we detail how schools engaged with the various components of the 2011-12 Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIEs), including looking at student work to perform a gap analysis, performance task selection and implementation, and collaboratively looking at the student work produced by the Task to evaluate instruction. As we describe each of these activities, we point out ways of engagement that distinguished conservational and transformational approaches.

### Overall School Distribution on the Continuum of Engagement

The schools in our sample engaged with the CIEs in very different ways. Figure 3 shows the distribution of schools along a continuum of engagement. With the exception of one school, all of the schools we visited fulfilled the City's expectation conducting a student work examination activity in the fall and implementing two performance tasks in the spring, one in literacy and one in mathematics.

**Figure 3: Distribution of school sample on continuum of engagement**



In one outlying school, administrators were aware of the CIEs and what they were asking schools to do, but chose not to engage in those activities. This school was a solidly performing small progressive-oriented school that was already regularly using performance assessments, portfolios, and other authentic measures of student performance. While the school was disengaged in respect to the CIEs, it may represent an example of a school with practices already closer aligned with Standards-aligned work. Thus its conservation-oriented response may reflect its minimal scope of change with respect to aligning itself with CCLS expectations. Thus, its conservation focus may have reflected its status as close to CCLS-aligned rather than a reluctance to engage with the Standards. Since this school did not engage with the CIEs, and our analytic frame is a scale of CIE engagement, the rest of our analysis will set aside this case and consider the ways in which the remaining 15 schools which engaged with the CIEs in different ways approached their efforts to fulfill the CIEs.

The remaining 15 schools in our sample spanned the conservation- to transformation-oriented zones of the continuum of engagement. The schools located toward the outside edges of those zones most clearly demonstrated the practical and conceptual approaches of each perspective. Those schools falling toward

the indicated midline may lean toward one perspective, but also reflect aspects or practices of the other perspective. For example, these schools may have shown variation in teacher perspectives across grade levels, with most teachers of one mindset, but a few showing inclinations toward the other perspective that influenced the overall outcome of the school's work to meet the CIEs. The remainder of this report will describe how the different schools in our sample responded to the 2011-12 CIEs, which led to our judgment of where they were located on the continuum of engagement.

We conducted some simple statistical analyses to see if where a school fell on this continuum was related to its demographic or performance characteristics. We found that where schools were located on this continuum was generally not a reflection of either their demographic characteristics or their student performance level. As shown in Table 2, a school's position on the continuum of engagement had only a small correlation with school performance and school size, and virtually no correlation with school poverty or the proportion of minority students. As you will see from the qualitative evidence presented in the rest of this report, we have concluded that schools' responses to the CIEs were a reflection of attributes of their organizational cultural rather than student demographics, and that these cultural attributes led schools to adopt a conservation- or transformation-oriented perspective on Common Core implementation.

**Table 2: Correlations between school demographic factors and school position on the conservation-transformation continuum**

	Correlation
Correlation between school size and position on the conservation-transformation continuum	0.20
Correlation between average mathematics and ELA percent of students at proficiency and position on the continuum	0.19
Correlation between percentage of students in school receiving lunch assistance and position on the conservation-transformation continuum	-0.01
Correlation between percentage of non-white students in school and position on the continuum	-0.06

## Engagement with the Citywide Instructional Expectations

The schools in our sample that completed the CIEs can be distinguished by the perspectives from which they engaged with them and the Common Core Learning Standards more broadly. The different perspectives they took led schools to look at student work differently, to have different experiences with task selection and implementation, and to take different things away from their engagement with these expected activities.

Aligning their curriculum to the CCLS has not been one of the NYCDOE's formal expectations of schools.

However, schools did appear to begin their work in 2011-12 with different perspectives on how well their current curriculum aligned to the CCLS, and how much change would be necessary to increase alignment. These different perspectives on alignment also tended to correspond to the perspectives on engagement enacted by schools, and are worth discussion as they set the stage for how schools did the work of the CIEs in 2011-12.

In the conservation-oriented schools, the most common approach to curriculum alignment and mapping was to examine the existing curriculum to determine what adjustments could be made - what could be kept as is, perhaps focused or resequenced, and what needed to be reduced or cut entirely. The CCLS were generally overlaid onto existing curriculum maps, but did not themselves become the clear basis of lessons or units. Instead, standards were identified as applicable or not on a unit-by-unit basis, meaning it was possible that some standards never matched any of the existing curriculum:

So what we've decided on was we went back, especially [in 2010-11], we were really looking at our literacy maps at that point and looking at the standards and then trying to insert the standards into the maps. And then we found that, okay, we have to start moving things around, so things were moved around. (Elementary School Teacher)

[O]ur professional developments have been very directed to the idea of Common Core standards. Here's this unit, how is it different now that we're talking about the Common Core standards? What does it look like? And then we've added into our units routines and daily activities that continue to push on these ideas that the Common Core standards have kind of put into play. (Elementary School Teacher)

These conservation-oriented approaches generally corresponded to school staff perceptions that the gap between their current curriculum and that necessary to align with the CCLS was relatively narrow; they described the scope of change as "increasing the rigor" of what they were already doing rather than doing something different. A good example is a comment by the literacy coach in an intermediate school, who remarked that when curriculum maps were the focus of teacher team meetings, a recurring question was: "What other materials could we use to salvage rigor?" (Middle School Support Teacher). In such an example the priority was modifying what already exists to meet the new standards.

The issue of "rigor" is a good example of what it means to take a conservation-oriented perspective in a school with less CCLS-aligned practices. As mentioned, the concept was often referenced by teachers and administrators in conservation-oriented schools, generally when explaining what changes the Common Core reform brings to curriculum and instruction. More precisely, "rigor" was often used to explain why substantial change was unnecessary. As an assistant principal explained, "It seems like [teachers] have to change something or add something [with the CCLS], but really I think it's that they just need to change the rigor probably" (Middle School Administrator). In this case "chang[ing] the rigor" was understood to be a small change to existing form, and an alternative to dramatically modifying current practices. In this and other similar comments, "rigor" was cited (implicitly in some cases, explicitly in others) as something

already present in existing curriculum and instruction. "I don't feel like it's much of a change for us," another assistant principal in a conservation-oriented school explained. "I feel like we've always had rigor within our curriculum" (Elementary School Administrator). What "rigor" meant was not unpacked, and became a vague code for "good practices":

I think a big component of the Common Core is this idea that the depth of knowledge creates rigor – the new five letter word. Everyone has a different opinion or definition of the word "rigor," but the reality is, it's nothing than any good teacher isn't doing. (Elementary School Administrator)

I don't really think the Common Core is this big new, completely different thing that we now have to do. I think it's a lot of common sense... So I think in terms of certain strategies and the way you do certain things, it may look slightly different and I think that teachers who know their students, who know how to use data to drive their instruction, who basically know how to teach their children... are really not doing anything different. (Elementary School Teacher)

These teachers and administrators in conservation-oriented schools interpreted implementation as a more intensive application of what they were already doing, rather than a more fundamental rethinking of what they do and why they do it. By not examining the concept of rigor more closely, these school staff did not precisely articulate what about their curriculum or instruction may not meet the expectations of the CCLS. When it remained vague, rigor was a characteristic that could be amplified to meet rising expectations, and "good teachers" would not need to make dramatic changes to their practice to align with the CCLS.

Teachers, administrators, and coaches in transformation-oriented schools, by contrast, frequently collaborated to rewrite parts, or even all, of a curriculum, especially in English Language Arts (ELA), rather than modifying what they already had. This decision did not seem to be related to a perception that the existing curriculum was poor, but an effort to treat the transition to the CCLS as a significant enough change to warrant starting fresh. In schools where the work of curriculum alignment was going particularly well, substantial "crosswalking" had occurred early in the year. Crosswalking is the process of comparing and contrasting existing state standards and the new CCLS side by side. Administrators and teachers commented that while crosswalking was sometimes difficult as people were first becoming familiar with the standards, the process resulted in a clearer understanding of the CCLS as unique and substantively different from existing NY state standards:

At the beginning, the crosswalk – looking at the old [NY] standards and the new [CCLS] standards – not that it didn't work, there was something to gain from it – but what I felt was that teachers would try to make it fit... So they were looking at the Common Core and then they would look at the old standards, and they were trying to make it 'Oh, this is this one, and that's that one.'... But it's not exactly the same thing. And then we kind of shifted to say 'Okay, we have to look at [the new standards] for what they are and not just try to make it connect'. (Elementary School Administrator)



In this school, and other a transformation-oriented schools, faculty did more than simply bridge from old to new standards in terms of the content they cover. While they may have begun in this way, they eventually took a step further and examined the CCLS to understand the expectations for teaching and learning embedded within them. With this step, they went past trying to fit new standards to old practices, and began thinking about how their practices would need to change to meet the new expectations.

Some transformation-oriented schools decided from the outset that they would use the introduction of the CCLS and the CIEs as an opportunity to create a new, aligned curriculum in at least one area. One motivation for this response was the absence of a common, vertically-aligned curriculum across the school in a particular subject. Another was a conscious effort to push past the commonly heard “we already do this” attitude, which some leaders felt could breed complacency and lower expectations of how much work there was to do. As one middle school principal stated:

The first thing [I heard] was ‘Well we do this, this is not so different.’ There are still some people, my lower teachers, who are not as well prepared or as on board as some others. They say ‘Well what’s the big deal? We’re doing this already.’ This is a major overhaul in education, so we need to talk about that a little bit.

Transformation-oriented schools perceived the arrival of the Common Core reform as a major change, and leaders were taking anticipatory steps to generate teacher understanding and buy-in for that change. In an elementary school that began from the CCLS to write an entirely new ELA curriculum for the fourth and fifth grades, the principal explained the decision this way:

I thought [the CCLS] were easy to read, but I did think that it could be dangerous. That they were so easy to read that people might say ‘Oh, that’s it?’ And not pick up on the real nuances that are in there and the depth that you’re supposed to put into it... And that’s dangerous. ‘Oh, this is it? We do this.’... [I]t’s been a really good experience trying to put [the units we designed] into practice this year, even though we didn’t have to. I felt like ‘We need to. They don’t have a curriculum; we may as well give it a try.’ And is really helped all of us grow from doing it. If we had just talked about it, read about it, I don’t think it would have happened. (Elementary School Administrator)

Other schools arrived at the decision to rewrite curriculum through their initial experiences. Some used pre-tasks to gauge the need for change. In such cases, teachers and administrators generally interpreted poor student performance on the tasks as an indicator that existing curriculum was inappropriate. Others discovered through evaluating their existing assessments that their plan to fit the CCLS into the current curriculum would result in scattershot coverage of standards:

The error – it was not even an error it was more of an ‘aha’ moment - where we were taking the standards and kind of making them fit into units that we thought they would fit into instead of thinking ‘This is the standard. How are we going to meet



that standard?'. . . So then we had to rethink our work and that's where we are at currently this year in terms of now looking at standards and rewriting curriculum so that we know the work we are doing is to meet the standards. (Elementary School Administrator)

From these experiences schools learned they must face the CCLS as a new canon, not a reorganization of existing state standards. This required schools to assess their alignment, internalize the new expectations, and use the Standards as the basis for their curriculum.

Before continuing, we should reiterate that rewriting their curriculum was not an explicit expectation placed on schools, nor was it strictly necessary to address the CIEs at this stage of implementation. The exercise of rewriting curricular units was a way for transformation-oriented schools to grapple with the new Standards in substantive ways. This learning opportunity, coupled with these schools' willingness to engage the Standards and honestly assess their own practices, allowed them to develop a better understanding of the higher expectations that are embedded in the CCLS. As we shall see in subsequent sections, transformation-oriented schools often engaged with the CIE activities in ways that created and capitalized on opportunities to thoughtfully rethink, and possibly reformulate, current practices in light of the expectations of the CCLS.

### *Looking at Student Work to Perform a Gap Analysis*

The first CIE activity schools were asked to undertake in the 2011-12 year was to gather existing student work and collectively examine it through the lens of the CCLS, articulating where student performance, instructional practice, and rigor of curriculum stood in relation to the high expectations of the Standards. This activity was a continuation of the familiarization process schools began in 2010-11, this time using student work as the entry point rather than general standards or the broad curriculum. The NYCDOE expected that by doing this close comparison of current work to the CCLS, school staff would improve their understanding of the scope of change the Standards bring for both teaching and learning.

Staff at all schools reported that the gap analysis helped them realize the substantive changes in the quality of work students are expected to perform to meet the CCLS. Many teachers expressed initial shock at the change in expectations, feeling that, as one teacher put it "some will be able to handle it, and some won't" (Middle School Teacher). A common sentiment expressed by teachers was that, though the CCLS are difficult, they are necessary. Many commented that the idea of the Common Core is a good one – they agree that heightened expectations are integral to preparing students for college and career – but that holding all students to the same standards may set unrealistic goals:

The notion that you're going to put kids in a scenario where they are now going to have to attain information two grades, possibly, above what they were doing previously doesn't set, to me, realistic expectations for students. Particularly those that are special education and ESL, who already have barriers that they need to overcome. . . . But the overall idea of the standards I love. I like the idea of pushing kids. I like the idea of holding them accountable to higher standards. But doing it with kind of a snapshot. . . it's hard for the kids to attain. (Middle School Administrator)

Others raised questions about the feasibility of transitioning all students, particularly ELL and SPED students, to the new standards on the same schedule. Their concern was not that fixed standards for all students would be inappropriate, but that students of different abilities would need different lengths of time to meet them, and the current timeline for national college and career readiness assessments (2014-15) does not allow for such variability:

I definitely believe we should hold such high standards [for ELL students] and challenge them and expose them to high level language, but at the same time I feel that there needs to be an adjustment time for them to be able to meet those standards. They should not have to meet them at the same time and at the same grades that a regular education native speaker would have to. I think that's an unrealistic expectation.  
(Middle School Teacher)

I think with ELLs we're getting kind of shafted, because it is like we are throwing this stuff at them and they are not having given time to scaffold them. But as a whole I think it's like making kids be smarter and holding them accountable for thinking.  
(Elementary School Administrator)

Teachers generally welcomed the higher ambitions of the Standards, but were quick to identify the implications for current students, particularly non-native speakers and those in Special Education. This indicates that the gap analysis activity was successful in signaling to school staff that expectations for students are increasing with the transition to the CCLS. However, when focusing the gap analysis on their own building- and classroom-specific practices, conservation-oriented and transformation-oriented schools seemed to emphasize different aspects of the CCLS in their analyses, and drew different conclusions about the scope of change the reform brings.

In conservation-oriented schools the primary emphasis of the gap analysis was the broad standards, with less stress placed on evaluating instruction. This allowed teachers to externalize the changes expected of them to materials or students, rather than their individual pedagogy. As previously discussed, a common sentiment heard in conservation-oriented schools was about the minimal changes required to bring current curriculum in line with the CCLS. This sentiment was also clearly present during the initial gap analysis in many of these schools. This is an interesting combination of perceptions to consider. On one hand, most teachers described the CCLS as asking students to do work that is more difficult than they are used to – perhaps too difficult. On the other hand, many teachers also commented that the changes to the curriculum or instruction that would enable students to meet the new higher standards were not overwhelming. Two comments by the same fifth grade teacher are a good example of this perception. In discussing the change in expectations for students brought by the CCLS, she said:

It's like you know that trickle down of 'Test this, test that! Push them on this! They have to learn this faster!' We're pushing curriculum but the human brain isn't developing any faster. We can't... we're not growing brains faster just because we're now teaching our kindergarteners more advanced things.

However, in describing the changes she and fellow teachers were making as they learned to implement the CCLS, she explained, "I mean we haven't changed the way we do stuff, it's just tweaking it a little bit. It's just kind of molding it to fit something a little bit better."

Other teachers and administrators agreed that, though student expectations were increasing, existing curriculum and instruction would not need to change significantly – they needed "tweaks" rather than overhauls:

We're already basically teaching to grade level standards, and it's a matter of tweaking how we teach it and the types of activities that our kids do. And so there is part of me that sort of thinks that we can relax on this, and we can do this, and do it with all our heart, and we'll be able to do it if we put our energy there and our kids will follow. (Middle School Administrator)

In terms of the things that the Common Core was asking for, we were pretty much doing already. It was really a matter of tweaking what we were doing and adjusting it towards those Common Core standards. (Elementary School Teacher)

These comments suggest a discontinuity between perceptions of the scope of change the Standards reforms brings for students, and the scope of change it brings for teachers.

Teachers at transformation-oriented schools more commonly described their gap analysis as emphasizing both curriculum content and teaching strategies; they compared what they currently teach and how they currently teach it to the expectations of the CCLS. Many teachers described the pedagogical demands of the Common Core as different enough from their current practices to demand a shift, though this was not immediately apparent to everyone in the first stages of the gap analysis. For some it was the continued "deep dives" into the CCLS that generated this understanding:

So it kind of overwhelmed me at the beginning... It looks so simplistic. But then you're thinking well, this is not what it seems. We need to really look deep into this, read between the lines. Because when you first look at it you're like "oh wow, I understand this." But then when you really start learning and thinking about what this really means for your classroom and your instruction, you're like "I can't do this in one lesson. I'm going to need to really build upon this"... When I first started I was like 'oh this is easy.' But then you really take a look at it and think about it and you have to develop your thinking about it. (Elementary School Teacher)

Many described an uncomfortable – though ultimately productive – struggle to learn new practices, or to rethink the practices they had used for years:

It's difficult from a teaching standpoint to step back because your initial reaction when a student doesn't know what to do is you go over and you tell them... But I think for me, personally, it helped me realize what kind of students and what kind of work I

was actually implementing to them, and what kind of teacher I was, and maybe I did give them too much right away. Maybe I need to pull back and let them learn for themselves. (Middle School Staff Support)

I think, this thing about being a 'helicopter teacher' - you know like a 'helicopter parent?' Because you want to help these kids. So what we're learning to do is if you're changing philosophy you have to let them take chance... But then when you see the light bulb go off in that child's head it's like that's what teaching is all about. I've seen it here where teachers are really trying to work on that. They're trying not to be the helicopter just hovering around... Let them make a mistake and think about why did this happen and what can I do differently? (Elementary School Teacher)

Contrasting the comments by teachers in conservation-oriented and transformation-oriented schools revealed different interpretations of the purpose of the gap analysis activity, and different implications the activity subsequently had for aligning curriculum, instruction, and student assessments. Conservation-oriented teachers tended to see gaps between the expectations of the CCLS and their curriculum, but were less likely to extend this analysis to their pedagogy. Transformation-oriented teachers, by contrast, had more expansive analytic experiences; they explored gaps in both their curriculum and instruction.

### *Task Selection and Implementation*

With only one exception, all schools in the sample met the City's expectation that every student would experience one literacy task and one mathematics task.<sup>5</sup> Though it was left up to schools to decide where students would experience their literacy task (in ELA, or perhaps social studies or science), all schools we visited chose to administer these tasks in ELA. Several schools administered tasks pre- and post-unit in both ELA and mathematics, and many also did tasks in multiple units though only one in each subject was required. Figure 4 shows the sources of tasks across the entire sample of 15 schools for both literacy and mathematics. The NYCDOE Common Core Library was the most popular source for mathematics tasks, but was rarely a source for literacy tasks. Most schools modified externally-prepared literacy tasks to fit their classrooms, or designed their own in-house. Many schools also did this for mathematics tasks. Other sources (e.g., The Reading and Writing Project, AUSSIE, various websites) were more commonly sources for literacy tasks than mathematics.

Development of a Standards-aligned instructional unit was not one of the CIEs for the 2011-12 school year; it was expected, however, that tasks would be embedded in CCLS-aligned curricula.<sup>6</sup> Schools went about choosing and syncing tasks and units in ways that fit their perspective on the framework for engagement. More precisely, the choices schools made with regard to tasks seemed to reflect different ideas about the purpose or value of the performance-based assessments, and different understandings of the role of the instructor.

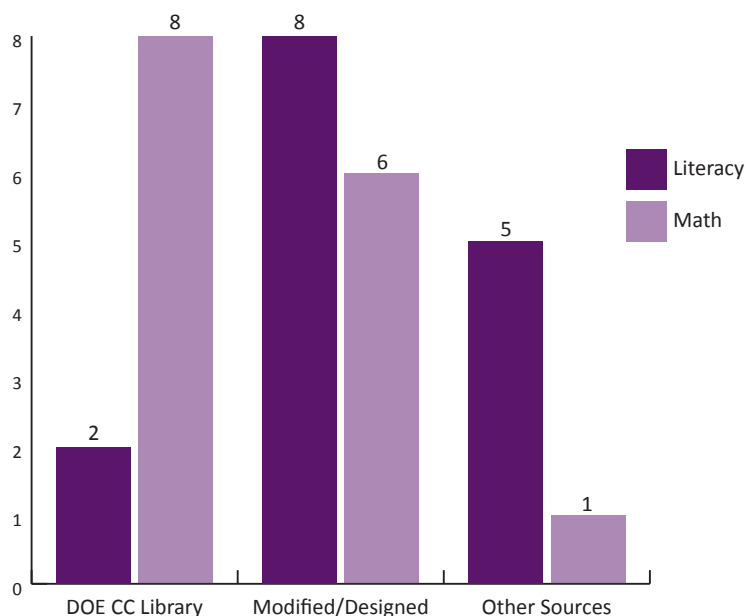
In the conservation-oriented schools that administered tasks, the tasks for both literacy and mathematics were almost exclusively adopted from externally-prepared materials with little or no modification. Literacy tasks were most commonly selected from the NYCDOE's Common Core Library, or from Teachers

5 One school in our sample chose not to address the CIEs, and did not administer any tasks during the 2011-12 year.  
6 NYC Department of Education Citywide Instructional Expectations for 2011-12

College materials at schools so affiliated. In most cases, the decision to use externally-prepared tasks was made by the school's administrators. This decision was based on several factors, including a feeling that teachers should avoid duplicating efforts or spending energy on creating materials that already existed elsewhere. As one principal explained:

I have some colleagues that were trying to design their own. I didn't want to do that. I said 'Let the City do something.' I said 'It's a lot of work.' And I said 'The City will at least come up with one that they feel is representative of what it should look like.' Why should we go crazy on that? (Elementary School Administrator)

**Figure 4: Sources of Tasks by Subject**



For some conservation-oriented schools, the decision to adopt externally-prepared tasks was based on an understanding that the purpose or value of the tasks was primarily to be compliant with the CIEs; as one teacher explained, "At the time it just felt like something else you had to do" (Elementary School Teacher). For many teachers, tasks for the sake of compliance were not only an additional responsibility, but an additional source of anxiety:

[I]t's kind of like we're being set up to fail... There's a lot that's expected, 'Well, the teacher could do that, the teacher could do that,' without the amount of time. And then it becomes like it's really enforcing this negative kind of martyr environment... I think whoever does [the CIE writing] just doesn't know what it's like to be in a classroom. (Elementary School Teacher)

I think that to me [the task] was like the nail in the coffin for inquiry. It was depressing. Because first of all you're never going to get through these and I don't care about them to be honest and they're not useful and I don't understand. It seems like an exercise. The network told our AP to do this and our AP told us to do it and no one really understands what's the purpose or what's going to happen besides somebody's going to go over to a computer some place and go 'Check, yeah they did it,' and nothing actually even happened with it. (Middle School Teacher)

Statements like these convey an interpretation of the task component of the CIEs as an externally imposed obligation, rather than a learning opportunity for teachers.

In most conservation-oriented schools there was little perceived value for teachers or students in designing their own performance tasks. Instead, design was thought of as a stress rather than a way to increase familiarity with the CCLS. Administrators and teachers commonly expressed the feeling that it should not be the role of teachers to also be curriculum developers, not because they were not capable, but because they already had too much to do:

I believe that it would be helpful if the central offices had a team that created bundles that were truly school friendly so that the time that we're talking about with regards to writing curriculum could be used towards the implementation and more conversations about best practices as opposed to best curriculum. Curriculum design really is a full time position if you want it done properly. (Middle School Administrator)  
[T]hat's giving me too many jobs to kind of be a curriculum developer and also and just like figure it out. That's too many jobs. How am I supposed to teach and develop curriculum at the same time? (Elementary School Teacher)

Adopting externally prepared tasks is not in itself a problematic choice. It may be a reasonable response when teachers have limited time and energy to devote to developing new materials. However, the choice could become problematic if it eliminates the opportunity for teachers to focus deeply on understanding the Standards themselves, and to practice developing assessments that accurately reflect student understanding of the Standards. In the conservation-oriented schools we visited, the lost learning opportunity that came with designing materials was not generally replaced by other activities that afforded them with deep engagement with the CCLS.

Two conservation-oriented schools merit particular notice in the way they engaged with externally-prepared materials. One school decided from the beginning of the year that they were going to develop their own tasks, but did so in a way that demonstrated a limited understanding of the purpose of tasks. This decision was based on two judgments: 1) that the school staff "knows [their] kids best," and 2) that the NYCDOE-prepared materials they examined were too difficult for their students. One fifth grade teacher at the school explained:

We found [the NYCDOE tasks] were a little overwhelming to jump right into, but we tried using some of them. But then we just decided that we were going to go off with

.....

some of the stuff that we already had used and make them a little bit more multi-stepped, or more challenging for the students. (Elementary School Teacher)

This decision led teachers back to old mathematics textbooks as sources for task materials. These tasks were not built from the CCLS, and can therefore be presumed to not be CCLS-aligned. The implications of these tasks for curriculum and instruction at this school are discussed later in this report. By taking the initiative to design context-specific materials, but doing so in a way that did not prioritize deep understanding of the Standards, this school demonstrated elements of both a conservation- and transformation-orientated perspective, reflecting the fluidity of the continuum of CIE engagement.

The second case of note was a conservation-oriented school trending toward the midline between conservation- and transformation-orientation. Teachers at this school began the year feeling they could easily have used externally-prepared materials, and proceeded with that choice. Through their use of those materials, however, teachers realized how disconnected the tasks were from their existing practices. They began to see good reasons for designing their own tasks going forward, including feeling more invested in the work. One teacher explained:

I feel like the fact that it was made by them and not by us, even though I know it's lot of extra work to make the task yourself. I think we were all happy to not take that on. But I also feel like I probably would have felt more connected to it and more invested in it if I had created it myself. It did feel a little bit like "Okay, now we have to give this thing." But if I had made it, or if we had made it together, it wouldn't have felt that way because we would have been like "I want to see how they do on this thing I made." I don't know what that will mean for next year but I think that if we had the time and the support to create one of the tasks ourselves, or work more closely with them when they were creating the tasks, maybe that would also make it feel a little more connected and not on top of what we're already doing. (Elementary School Teacher)

This interest in deep engagement and creation of learning opportunities may represent future movement of the school across the continuum toward a transformation orientation.

Other schools located around the midline between perspectives on the continuum were also demonstrating aspects of both conservation- and transformation-orientation. Though some of these schools had taken the initiative to design their own tasks, others were using externally prepared materials. What they all had in common was their focus on developing a coherent curriculum that was horizontally and vertically aligned - a common indicator of a transformative perspective. What led to these schools being located in the middle of the continuum, however, was the extent to which they were engaging with the CCLS themselves in order to deeply understand what the Standards meant, and what skills they asked students to demonstrate. Without this foundational knowledge, the steps they chose to take to increase alignment (e.g. writing materials, embedding tasks) could not be assumed to be well-grounded in a deep understanding of the expectations of the CCLS.



Across conservation-oriented schools, tasks were rarely embedded in a unit, and units generally were not written or revised specifically to align with the CCLS. Instead, tasks were inserted into existing units. One principal explained “[W]e just took or adapted very slightly the [tasks] that were given to us and pretty much gave them to the kids whole” (Elementary School Administrator). The assistant principal at another school described a similar method: “[The tasks] basically were done in isolation... It was like just stop what you’re doing now, do this [task], and then look at the scores” (Middle School Administrator). For many teachers this resulted in frustration at having to interrupt their units to do an unrelated performance-based assessment. Several commented that they did not see the value of the task as it was not integrated with what they were doing in the classroom. In a team meeting, two teachers remarked on the way they were asked to administer tasks:

My only thing about the task was the timing of it. It would be helpful if it was given at a time when we were working with whatever it is so we’re using it for multiple purposes not just “This is another thing I have to give.” Now I have to grade it but I already did this, so why am I doing it again? What am I going to use it for? (Elementary School Teacher)

What is this really telling me? It shouldn’t feel like I have to teach this now so that they can do [the task]. I think especially with math, also writing, it’s a process... It shouldn’t have to be that in third grade, ‘Oh I’m going to have to teach it this way so that they pass this task.’ That’s what I didn’t like about the task at all. (Elementary School Teacher)

These statements illustrate the decontextualized way tasks were adopted in these schools. Rather than integrating tasks into the curriculum, these schools chose to drop them in, a move teachers consequently viewed as ill-designed. An important consequence of this approach, in addition to teacher frustration, was a lost learning opportunity for teachers in conservation-oriented schools.

In cases where teachers were using externally-prepared materials from The Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, or using a NYCDOE-developed unit with an included task, teachers and administrators assumed the units were Common Core-aligned and expected the tasks to be properly embedded in the unit. However, a recurring comment from teachers was that, even after engaging with these materials, they did not understand what an aligned task should look like were they to design their own, or how a task should be connected to the unit. The prepared materials were not considered instructive in this regard. “One criticism our team had of this [NYCDOE-prepared task] was that the summative piece assessment didn’t relate to anything, it didn’t really connect,” explained a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher (Elementary School Teacher). Another teacher agreed:

As a teacher I’m still trying to find the connection within the units, like the essay units, and the performance tasks because [the students] are essentially doing some kind of research-based work looking at different articles, looking at videos and applying it to the task at the end. We would do that throughout the unit, but the connection from the units to the task still isn’t there, and as a teacher I’m still trying to figure out how to connect those units to the performance tasks. (Elementary School Teacher)



It was rare for teachers to use the prepared materials as a way to engage with the CCLS. As mentioned, in some conservation-oriented schools tasks were viewed as an issue of compliance with the City's requests, not as a robust tool for understanding student thinking and informing instructional decisions. In other cases there may have been some recognition of the value of performance-based assessments - for instance, in conservation-oriented schools that trended toward the midline between perspectives - but the tasks were not integrated into the curriculum and therefore had little power to engage teachers in thinking about the connections between their instruction and expectations for student learning.

All of the transformation-oriented schools administered multiple tasks in ELA, and most did multiple tasks in mathematics. In all of these schools, the literacy tasks were designed in-house by groups of teachers, often in collaboration with administrators and coaches. These tasks were built following the Understanding by Design method: starting with an essential question and target skills, grouping applicable standards, and building tasks around those standards. Mathematics tasks were most often adopted from NYCDOE-prepared materials and modified to fit existing units. Though these mathematics tasks were externally prepared, they were successful at signaling the heightened expectations that accompany the CCLS:

We gave the task to the kids, much harder than what they were expected to see in September. And at first I thought should we give an entry level task, or should we give this higher level task? And I battled with this. I thought 'why are we giving them something that is so hard?' And now I see the logic in it because [up] here is where Common Core is, and we've been [down] here. Not that our expectations are low, we always do well, but we have to raise the level of expectation. And that's the whole point of starting [up] here. (Elementary School Staff Support)

Teachers and administrators explained that the decision to design literacy tasks in-house was based on many factors. For some it was a prioritization of contextually relevant materials combined with the perception of externally-prepared materials as in some way inappropriate for their students (e.g., the materials were too difficult, not difficult enough, or required background or cultural knowledge their students did not have). For others, it was a feeling that for teachers to deeply understand standards and grasp the magnitude of the CCLS reform, they needed hands-on experience designing aligned materials from scratch. As the principal of a PreK-5 school explained:

What we gain here is the teachers go through this process and learn why they're teaching what they're teaching, and why this makes sense in one case and it may not make sense somewhere else. So it's that hands-on process that helps me move the school. Just purchasing a program - that would probably help the kids, but it wouldn't help my staff because they're just basically technicians that are just putting out a lesson. But if they're going through it they're actually experiencing the development of these lessons, I think you move the faculty to a different place. (Elementary School Administrator)

A K-5 school in our sample provided a good example of how creating task-related materials themselves helped teachers deepen their understanding of the CCLS. For most of the year this school used tasks

taken from either the Common Core Library or another Common Core-related website. Both teachers and administrators assumed these materials were Common Core-aligned, but did not consult the CCLS to determine what made them appropriate tasks. In the spring, however, mathematics teachers worked in collaboration with Aussie consultants to design a unit with an associated task from scratch, building up from the CCLS. “We looked at the standards,” explained a first grade teacher. “We developed a performance-based task, and then from there we discussed which skills and lessons needed to be taught” (Gr 1 Teacher ES4). Several teachers at this school commented that the process of creating the materials was valuable because it forced them to examine the standards in a way they did not have to when using externally-prepared materials:

We’re now consulting the standards. We’re working backwards, essentially, from the standards and then developing our performance-based task and we’re figuring out the lessons together that we’re going to really teach or need to teach in order for them to reach this expectation. (Elementary School Teacher)

I think we were very productive. This unit [we developed] was really the first time that we looked at the Common Core standards. I think that was really important for all of us. It was really the first time where we made a checklist together. It was really the first time where we made a rubric together... I thought it was the most successful because it was, not necessarily the execution, but the planning. (Elementary School Teacher)

Designing their own tasks was also described (largely by administrators) as a way to produce student data that teachers would consider reliable, valuable, and clearly relevant for evaluating practices. Data that came from unfamiliar tasks that did not dovetail with familiar lessons were more easily dismissed - something principals wanted to avoid. “I’m not just assessing them so I can get some arbitrary score,” explained the principal of an intermediate school. “That’s always the biggest concern. Am I getting out of them from those assessments what I want to get out of them?” A middle school teacher expressed similarly, “I have the ownership in my classroom and that’s why the [design your own] tasks are so important. Because now when I grade them, it has its importance to us. Because we made up the test, not the City. They don’t know what I’m doing in the classroom.”

Beyond generating reliable student data, many administrators in transformation-oriented schools also talked about designing materials as a way to generate teacher buy-in to the changes taking place. “I really felt that they needed to engage in that process, and that they could design their own units,” commented one principal. “Then they would see the need, they would buy into it, and say ‘this is mine’” (Middle School Administrator).. In schools that engaged most thoughtfully in designing tasks and units, administrators were able to acknowledge the difficulty of the design process and validate teacher frustrations:

One productive mistake we made was when the City rolled out the initiatives... we launched into ‘You know what? We can do this. We’re going to do more.’ I think that was a mistake, but it was very productive... because it was something new to us and we were asking more of the teachers when in essence we didn’t really know what lies

ahead... but then along the way as we're going and we're receiving PD and we're learning more, now we have to come back and tell the teachers 'Hmm, this wasn't quite there, you have to...' It's a learning process. (Elementary School Administrator)

I think that was the biggest thing. That it's okay, this is going to be uncomfortable. Even yesterday they said well are they going to give us... and I said once again 'We're a little bit ahead of other schools and cities.' To be honest, I attended a PARCC meeting and they haven't even worked up the PARCC assessments yet. So I said, I have to be honest with you and that we have to be pioneers once again. I think we have to be confident in what we believe right now and I'm okay and I think you should feel okay with knowing that. (Middle School Administrator)

Embracing the difficulty of the design process, rather than minimizing it, enabled teachers and teams to push forward rather than waiting for an outside entity to provide the answers to their questions. For these schools, the struggle was framed as productive rather than paralyzing.

In transformation-oriented schools, unlike in conservation-oriented schools, tasks were almost always described as embedded in units and, at least in ELA, these units were built from the Standards and often specifically designed around the tasks. This generally required rewriting much of the ELA curriculum, but allowed for thoughtful differentiation of instruction to prepare students for tasks. Some schools administered tasks both pre- and post-unit, but the integration of tasks with units did not make this disruptive:

We made ours fit in seamlessly. Like the kids didn't miss a beat. It's not like you said, we just stopped everything and did the bundle. We didn't do that, but like you said it took a lot of planning on our part. (Elementary School Teacher)

What's interesting though is even as the team is planning these units and we're thinking of assessments, although it's not being mandated that every unit have a PBA, they're being embedded. So the thinking is there. (Elementary School Teacher)

While many transformation-oriented schools did adopt externally-prepared tasks in mathematics, teachers in these schools felt those tasks could be integrated into their existing curriculum without significant disruption. Teachers explained that mathematics concepts felt more fixed - or open to less interpretation - than literacy, so any mathematics task could be made to fit existing curriculum as long as the task was covering the same content and skills as the unit. Literacy tasks, however, needed to match not only the content or theme being covered, but also the vernacular of the individual classroom. This was one reason teachers felt externally-prepared literacy tasks were not appropriate for their students, and chose to develop their own materials. This decision was borne of careful deliberation about what path would lead to the most valuable and reliable student data.

### *Looking at Student Work to Evaluate Instruction*

The last step of the CIEs asked school staff to return to looking at student work, this time the work produced by the tasks they administered within a CCLS-aligned unit. The goals of this activity were to:

1) again expose teachers to the heightened expectations of the CCLS for both teaching and learning; 2) encourage teachers to think about what the student work revealed about their instruction, and; 3) encourage discussions about what instructional next steps would be appropriate for students at different levels of proficiency. An important tool for this activity was a detailed grading rubric. For schools that used externally-prepared materials these rubrics were usually provided. Schools that designed their own tasks generated their own rubrics. The collective use of rubrics to look at task-generated student work was intended to increase teacher understanding of different levels of proficiency - a key step in norming teacher grading across classrooms.

Teachers and administrators across the conservation-transformation continuum of schools reported mixed experiences with this activity. In conservation-oriented schools, some teachers and administrators described looking at student work as helpful for thinking about where specific students were on the spectrum of proficiency, and what level of differentiation they needed:

Looking at student work in that way forces us to kind of slow down. It allows us to get to know our students. Again, not just look at did they get the right answer, but look at the process. I think that does benefit us because we begin then to see really where the needs lie and be able to address those particular areas in order to move the children. I think it is a big part of the answer. (Elementary School Administrator)

Others, however, described problems revealed by the process of collectively grading student work in teacher teams. As one elementary school teacher put it "there were sort of competing interests between [teachers when we were] trying to look at student work together as a team, and trying to get ourselves aligned as far as how we norm our grading of pre-assessments." Other teachers described the same sentiment of "competing interests" as a problem of first having to interpret the standards and the rubric before they could be used to assess student work - something teachers each did differently:

What she thinks that the Common Core wants out of the fourth-grader might be different than what I think it wants. And rubrics are rubrics, but... there's a lot of room for interpretation. (Elementary School Teacher)

Sometimes it's very subjective. Maybe she thinks that's a four, but for me maybe it's still a three. So where's the judgment? Like which side should we go to? That's hard to say, it's subjective. (Elementary School Teacher)

In some cases the perceived ambiguity seemed to reflect a limited understanding of how the student work that was produced through performance-based assessments related to understanding the higher expectations of the CCLS. In these instances, the rubrics were not effective tools for reflecting on instruction or gauging levels of student proficiency, because teachers themselves did not understand precisely what quality of work the Standard was asking students to perform, or what skill it was asking them to demonstrate. Without a clear understanding of what was expected, teachers could not gauge the levels at which students met the expectation:

There's a lot of educational buzzwords out there, but then what do you specifically want? What do you want? What is the true objective that at the end of this unit the students should be able to see? We're responsible for assessment, so a lot of it is our own interpretation. Students should be able to do what? We're taking some liberties here on what that means. (Elementary School Teacher)

We want to teach it. We want to teach effectively. And we're going to differentiate based on our students' needs. But what is the true objective in each of these [standards]? Some of them are general. (Elementary School Teacher)

These kinds of questions reflected teacher frustrations, but also revealed genuine engagement with the crucial issues at the crux of standards, assessments, and instruction. The extent to which teachers and administrators channeled this uncertainty into constructive engagement with these hard questions, or skirted the questions to stay on safer ground, reveals in what direction schools were moving along the conservation-transformation continuum.

The purpose of looking at student work was not just to see how students handled the more difficult performance-based assessments, but to give teachers a platform to discuss their instructional practices, particularly how they would differentiate for students that performed at different levels based on the rubric. For some teachers in conservation-oriented schools this was clearly an outcome of the activity:

Common Core just kind of makes you more aware of your teaching. You're always self-reflecting like 'Am I prompting them enough? With enough prompting will they be able to talk about the characters in their book?' So I think for me it just makes me more aware. I always have that little voice in the back of my head. (Elementary School Teacher)

What the kids do always makes me think about my teaching. What am I teaching my kids? How am I teaching? What are my kids saying? What does that say to me? (Elementary School Teacher)

I learned a lot from what I saw in the kids' work. I would do more work introducing how we pull information from a video, pull information from the pages of the work. It helped us develop some main idea lessons and detail lessons. (Elementary School Teacher)

However, several administrators in conservation-oriented schools commented that this self-reflection was not as widespread among their faculty as they had hoped. When thinking about what the student work revealed, teachers focused on the content of the task, or on the broader standards, and many resisted considering changes to their instructional practices. An assistant principal commented that the teachers in her school are "struggling with the shift in mindset that there really is around Common Core, the shift in instruction" (Middle School Administrator). Other administrators agreed:

The buy-in for the standards is certainly different for some than for others, you know, because it's new... You have to rethink how you've been teaching. Because that's really what it is. It's not just about higher level texts or higher level tasks. It's rethinking how you're teaching, you know? That's not something that's going to happen overnight. (Middle School Administrator)

There's sometimes a mindset that students can't do it... but I've seen students do it across the City.... So there's that kind of reluctance to let the students try it... But [to let them try] lends itself to revising your pedagogy, so it all ties together. (Middle School Administrator)

[A big challenge is] the acceptance that there would be another way of doing things. The hardest part is to say particularly to an experienced teacher, this is another way of doing it. They might sit back and say 'But I've been successful for the last 20 years.' ... You know you're asking teachers to shift because we have something that is supposed to be better and it's getting them to believe that this is actually going to be better. (Elementary School Administrator)

These comments suggest that, in order for teachers to critically examine and shift their pedagogy, they must be willing to critically analyze their own practices, and they must feel comfortable that they will be supported as they make changes. This point is important for thinking about the utility of looking at student work as a professional growth activity. Looking at student work is most beneficial when teachers internalize what the work reveals. Some teachers saw their students perform poorly on an assessment, or realized they are using a scoring rubric very differently than other teachers, and focused on the materials as the source of the trouble. They looked to change the task, or the rubric. This was a pattern among teachers at several conservation-oriented schools. Other teachers, however, internalized the problems they noticed in their students' work. In addition to questioning the tools they used, they also looked at what practices they used, to think about what produced the range of student work they saw. These teachers who reflected the work back on themselves were in a better position to learn from student work in ways that improved their pedagogy.

A good example of such internalization by teachers in transformation-oriented schools was how often they described looking at student work as valuable for reflecting on their role as an instructor, and how that role is shifting with the Standards reform. This reflects a clear recognition that, as a 7th grade teacher explained, "it's methodology, too, like how a teacher delivering the Common Core standards needs to be fundamentally different than teacher-led instruction." Both teachers and administrators commented that a main benefit of looking at student work produced by the task was professional growth:

What happens is when you look at the student work and you see that they're not mastering the task you go back to the actual task itself and you say what was the ask of the task, was it clear, was there a part missing... So it just gives you like a different lens in looking at your role as an instructor. Is there something that I could have done? (Elementary School Administrator)

When we met after they gave the test with this checklist, and everyone was a novice, they said 'What's the point of this? Everybody's at the same level.' And I said, 'The point is... it's not about what the kids know. This is not about the kids. It's not about - I don't care if he knows fractions. It's October. What we care about is that we're all sitting down looking at this work, growing as professionals. That's what it's about.'  
(Elementary School Support Staff)

For these people, the CIE activity of looking at student work was not only a window into student performance, but a lens through which to view their fit with the curricular, pedagogical, and learning expectations of the CCLS.

## Understanding and Preparedness Across the Continuum of Schools

It was the hope of the NYCDOE that substantive engagement with the CIEs would result in teachers and administrators developing a deeper and more collective understanding of the CCLS. In doing so, teachers and administrators would not only better understand the substance of the Standards and what specific work or skills the Standards were asking students to demonstrate, but would also recognize the connection between the expectations of the CCLS and what adjustments they would need to make in their own practices. Further, the NYCDOE hoped that a deep and collectively shared understanding of the CCLS would translate to teachers feeling more prepared to make the instructional shifts necessary to help students meet the new expectations. The different perspectives schools had on the framework for engagement with the CIEs helps explain the ways in which they interpreted the challenge they faced and the way in which their actions aligned with the theory of action.

In conservation-oriented schools, there was a wide range of experiences. In the most retrenched conservationalist schools, teachers appeared to share a collective understanding of the CCLS, but one that was not particularly deep. Their understanding of the Standards and their concomitant expectations, though collaboratively developed, was limited, and they expressed little connection between the expectations of the CCLS and their own practices. These schools did limited crosswalking of the NY State Standards and the CCLS, minimized the scope of change required for curriculum and instruction to reach alignment, and focused on adjusting their existing routines in ways that met the form, but not the deeper spirit, of the CCLS. In other conservation-oriented schools, while there were individual teachers who had developed a deep understanding of the Standards, but there was no mechanism for sharing that understanding across teachers, resulting in isolated pockets of expertise in these schools. Additionally, there was one elementary school in our sample which had an inquiry orientation towards learning and regularly used performance assessments, but did not engage with the CIEs. Thus, we determined this school to be essentially conservationalist, in that it needed to only incrementally change its already more reform-oriented practices.

In general, teachers and administrators in conservation-oriented schools expressed some level of anxiety about moving forward with the next phases of Standards implementation without knowing what the



high stakes assessments would look like, or if aligned materials would ever be provided. The concern did not seem to be around their ability to do what was required of them (as previously discussed), but around not having clear guidance about what specific steps to take next. A common sentiment in these schools was “Tell me what to do, and I will do it”:

For them to keep saying ‘Common Core, Common Core, Common Core’... we know the words Common Core now. We know what it is. We know it’s important. But just them saying ‘Common Core align! Common Core align!’ to us doesn’t really show us or tell us how. (Elementary School Teacher)

[T]hey’re just giving you the skeleton and you have to add the meat which is fine for teachers who can. But what about those teachers that can’t or don’t want to? They don’t have anything so that’s where you see the kids falling behind. (Elementary School Teacher)

I think there is an understanding for this school. There’s an understanding of the expectations of Common Core. There’s an understanding of rigor, they know what rigor looks like. But as far as putting it into action I think they struggle with it and it’s at that point that I think they’re afraid. (Middle School Administrator)

These comments reveal an important distinction between depth of understanding of the CCLS and feelings of preparedness to move forward with implementation. The feelings of hesitance expressed in the above quotes do not seem to stem from teachers feeling that they lacked understanding of the Standards or the necessary instructional shifts. In these cases the feeling of being unprepared was due to lack of concrete materials to enact.

It was in conservation-oriented schools that teachers most commonly expressed major frustration over not having a prepared curriculum or materials made available to them. For some teachers the problem was a feeling that the Standards were written and presented in a way that was difficult to understand and, in the absence of a prepared curriculum, required significant interpretation, and resulting uncertainty, on their part:

I want the materials. I don’t want you to come and tell me ‘try this, do this’ and then I have to scurry and try to find something and try to see if it’s going to align, if it’s going to be perfect, is it going to meet the needs I want. You want me to try this strand on the Common Core? You want me to do this? No problem. But provide us with some concrete [curriculum]. (Elementary School Teacher)

The Common Core standards are written a little like an academic, kind of higher level way, which is fine. You want me to get my PhD? Then I will, but then you can pay me more... Less is more, like just kind of simple language, and just making it really clear. (Elementary School Teacher)



Teachers and administrators at transformation-oriented schools tended to express both deeper understanding of the CCLS and their implications for practice, and less anxiety about moving forward with the implementation of Standards-based reform. Though the work of the year was hard, they generally ended the year feeling prepared to work on the next year's CIEs, expressed understanding of the next steps, and felt well supported by their school community and network. Often, the understanding of CCLS and the feelings of preparedness expressed by teachers and administrators in these schools was explicitly linked to their hands-on experiences:

I think the most important part of it was having the teachers experience this transition. I think that's where the growth really is. I mean we could have waited maybe and purchased a program that had the units already embedded, but I felt that, and strongly, that we needed to have the teachers involved in this process so that they became familiar with the work. That it was their work and not just the publisher's work that they'd have to follow. (Elementary School Administrator)

I feel like I've learned this year to be that person who just accepts the idea that you have to go into something not fully understanding exactly what you're doing until you're actually in the moment, and then kind of improvise a little bit as you're in there, and then that's a calmer transition... I think understanding that nobody has the answers, and you just kind of have to go with the flow. (Middle School Teacher)

In some cases the CCLS reform served as a catalyst that brought teachers across a school together in a way they previously had not experienced. In some of these schools it simply had not been part of the organizational culture to collaborate. "We started off and they didn't want to meet," explained one principal of a transformation-oriented school. She went on to say:

The culture of the school was you did your plans and I'll do my plans and you close your door and I close mine and at the end of the day we'll meet for lunch or something. But getting them together to talk and have a conversation about teaching and learning... that's been the biggest [success]. (Elementary School Administrator)

In other cases, collaboration was occurring in the school, but there was some division between teachers that led people across the building to feel like there were different expectations for different groups. "Everyone has the same standards now," explained one elementary school teacher. "And it's nice to know that as a school we're all going toward the same goal. That hasn't always been the case." The administrators at a middle school agreed:

[I]t's almost like the Common Core was a galvanizing for the school because it basically gave us an excuse to say 'we have to change.' We weren't saying we had to change. We were saying 'The City, the state, the nation is saying we have to change.' And when [teachers] feel like we're all doing the same work, we're all being held to the same high expectations, it's not just one department, I saw a different attitude.

In these situations, having a common purpose and developing a shared approach to the work at hand helped teachers and administrators feel more prepared to proceed with Common Core implementation.

This is not to say no one in transformation-oriented schools perceived challenges. There were many teachers in transformation-oriented schools that also requested examples of Standards-aligned curriculum and instruction. But unlike many teachers in conservation-oriented schools, who were hoping for materials they could use off the shelf, teachers in transformation-oriented schools were asking for examples that would serve as guides as they tried to judge whether they were “on the right track” designing their own curriculum and tasks:

What a performance task is in terms of a Common Core is a lot richer and there’s very, very limited sources that we’ve found for good examples of performance tasks. We’re having a hard time even understanding what it means. There are performance tasks available for certain domains that are easier to write performance tasks for, but we need to really see more examples of that and have stuff that we can use to practice with our kids. (Middle School Teacher)

One reason such materials were not handed to teachers along with the CIEs was that the NYCDOE hoped that by giving each school the latitude to choose their own path to CCLS implementation, the flexibility would lead them to choose practices that fit their specific context, and would engender buy-in for the changes as teachers took ownership of the work. While some school staff seemed to appreciate having this autonomy, others in both conservation- and transformation-oriented schools perceived that this move by the NYCDOE created a vacuum of support. Many teachers and administrators across the continuum felt they had been given a directive without guidance, which was impeding their ability to move forward with CCLS alignment and implementation:

One of the frustrations of the ELA teachers is that there is no curriculum provided by the City or any institute. That it’s almost we have to develop it. And so there’s an argument that says well, that’s part of the flexibility within the schools. But what I’m seeing here is these teachers don’t want so much of that particular flexibility. They want to be guided. (Middle School Administrator)

The bottom line is your kids have to pass those exams and they have to do well in them. That’s because you have a progress report, you have a report card. And the performance and the progress of your students are a big factor in that. So there’s no one to talk to [at the NYCDOE]... I just think that one of the flaws with the NYCDOE is that they roll out things and they roll it out and they just keep moving. (Elementary School Administrator)

While teachers in both types of schools wanted examples or ready-at-hand materials, they wanted them for different reasons. This distinction is a good way to summarize the depth of engagement reached by schools of different perspectives, as well as the issue of understanding versus preparedness. Teachers in most conservation-oriented schools were more often requesting prepared materials that would help them move forward with implementing the CCLS without diverting energy to develop them in-house, or

spending time they felt they didn't have to extensively examining the CCLS and their associated skills. Prepared materials would also substitute for self-directed pedagogical shifts. These teachers wanted materials that would tell them what to do and how to do it, meaning they would not need to spend time examining their current practices in-depth. This perspective was not necessarily based on a desire to avoid work, but an attitude that the problems they saw in meeting the CIEs or implementing the CCLS (e.g., confusing standards, unclear expectations, significant time commitment) could be bypassed if exemplary materials were available. These teachers felt that, were they to have materials provided, they would know what to do and feel prepared to do it.

While the idea of using prepared materials off the shelf may help reduce teacher anxiety and help them feel prepared. It did not necessarily facilitate a deep understanding of the new Standards. In focusing on prepared materials, conservation-oriented schools could easily miss the opportunity to unpack the concept of rigor, or to look carefully at how their current practices related to the expectations of the CCLS. While it is possible that conservation-oriented schools could have used prepared materials as tools to deepen their understanding, for instance by analyzing how the materials aligned with the CCLS, this was not the pattern observed in the conservation-oriented schools in our sample. In our sample, conservation-oriented schools tended to request example materials in order to feel more prepared, not necessarily to challenge themselves to deepen their understanding of the Standards.

Teachers in transformation-oriented schools were also hoped for example materials, but were not describing them as a way to decrease the effort they expended meeting the CIEs or preparing for Common Core implementation. For these teachers, the materials were not a way to skip over energy-intensive work and go straight to preparedness, as was hoped for in conservation-oriented schools. Instead, exemplars would be signposts that indicated whether or not they were making the right moves in designing their own materials to fit their school context. In transformation-oriented schools, the work of examining the CCLS in depth and critically evaluating instruction was not considered a roadblock to effective implementation, but a path towards it.

Examples of CCLS-aligned materials, from the transformation perspective, would reduce teacher anxiety and help them feel prepared precisely because they were tools for facilitating engagement with, and deeper understanding of, the CCLS. These materials would be useful for determining what constituted a rigorous task, for understanding how Standards were linked to the skills students should be able to demonstrate, and how current instructional practices fit (or did not fit) the expectations of the CCLS. Transformation-oriented schools were requesting example materials not to lighten their work load, but to generate learning opportunities to increase their depth of understanding and feelings of preparedness.

## Conclusion

The goals of the College and Career Readiness Standards movement are audacious and far-reaching; they seek to fundamentally transform the way instruction is organized and delivered in schools across the nation. We know from the past, however, that promising and ambitious education reforms have often been stymied when they fail to reach the instructional core, or when those ideas that do reach the core lose their original heft along the way. Will this Standards reform be able to break this pattern? Thousands of educational leaders across the United States are determined that they can make this happen, and the stakes are the highest in a generation.

To seriously engage with the new Standards requires that schools take both a leap of faith and a leap of action. The leap of faith requires trust that this reform is here to stay, that the education establishment has the will to persist and support schools to achieve the Standards over time, and that the new assessments planned for 2014-15 will reward those who invest in preparation now. The leap of action is that the Standards reform will require schools to work in fundamentally different ways in order to get substantially different results. To meet the ambitions inherent in the Standards, schools must deeply rethink what educational experiences teachers deliver to children, and how they deliver them. Unless a school is already emphasizing curricular depth over breadth, is focused on building students' conceptual understanding, and is regularly engaging students in reasoning from complex texts, the new College and Career Readiness Standards represent a substantial shift from current practice. In this era of test-based accountability, few schools are truly doing these things in significant and sustained ways. Thus, the transition to the new Standards is a leap of faith and action for most schools across the country.

In this report we have chronicled a range of ways New York City schools responded to the City's expectations for school change. After two years of NYCDOE-planned opportunities for deep engagement with the CCLS, some schools have fully embraced the challenge while others have given it but a handshake. While we saw a range of school responses to the CIEs, we have categorized them into two types: conservation and transformation. Both are rational responses to different circumstances, but differ in the magnitude of their leaps of faith and action. Conservation-oriented schools took smaller steps. They interpreted Standards alignment as requiring only small-scale, incremental changes to their current practices, and therefore tried fit the challenges of the CCLS into their existing routines to minimize disruption to the status quo. They were particularly conscious of teacher anxiety, and took steps to reduce it by modifying the CIEs to fit their current practices. Consequently, their overall levels of engagement with the CCLS, and the scope of change they undertook during implementation, were less substantial. That said, our analyses were based on school perspectives at one point in time. Many of the responses we heard from generally conservationist schools indicated both a variety of perspectives within the schools and the potential for change over time. Thus, while a consistently conservationist approach may be a rational response to the turbulent environment of school reform, such a perspective will only serve the few schools that are already doing Standards-aligned work should the new expectations of the Common Core become the accepted standard for practice and performance.

Transformation-oriented schools, by contrast, were more willing to take the leaps of faith and action into the future expectations represented in the new Standards, even though this involved a more immediate

disruption of the status quo. These schools judged that doing CCLS work would require significant changes in many areas of their practice. Consequently, transformation-oriented schools tended to take on more energy-intensive activities to meet the CIEs, for instance by designing new, Standards-aligned curricular units and performance-based assessments. These schools also used the CIEs to catalyze conversations about the relationship between their curricular designs and instructional practices and current levels of student performance, and to raise questions about what kinds of materials and practices would be necessary to help different students meet the new expectations. While transformation-oriented schools did not have all of the answers, they made substantial progress by being more willingly to grapple with the questions, and this resulted in a more robust understanding of the Standards and their implications for teaching and learning.

The longer the latest reforms persist and hold together, and the closer the education system gets to aligning accountability measures with the more ambitious Standards, the more perilous it will be for teachers and schools to avoid more fully engaging with the new expectations and their implications for curricular and instructional choices. At some point the leap of faith and action will carry less risk than standing still. As schools continue to scan the educational landscape for both cues and information about whether and how to fruitfully engage with the College and Career Readiness Standards, we believe the lesson of this report provide some useful guidance.