



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

Moving in the Right Direction

It seems like in the not too distant past there was a distinct segregation of the K-12 and postsecondary communities. Indicative of an evolving way of thinking, references to “K-12” became “K-16,” which later morphed into “P-20.” It’s an entirely logical evolution. Why it took so long escapes me.

Different levels of education are not unrelated. The skills and knowledge one acquires in a lower grade will impact the likelihood of success in subsequent grades. It seems like an obvious concept, but for some reason logical sequencing stopped at the conclu-

sion of grade 12, when the student continuing his or her education seemingly encountered a coordinated curriculum disconnect. Post-secondary didn’t talk to K-12 and vice-versa. On the other end of the pipeline, employers didn’t talk to post-secondary and vice-versa. And then everything changed.

Technological advances moved us toward an information economy that eliminated many jobs, while creating others that require a higher degree of technical skill, many of which could be performed anywhere. Competitors for jobs could be found all over the globe. Welcome to Thomas Freidman’s flat

world. Employers now talk to higher ed, asking for more STEM graduates. Higher ed complains to K-12 about an unacceptably high rate of remediation and the dearth of high school graduates prepared to enter STEM fields at the post-secondary level.

In my opinion the initial reactions to this changing environment were punitive in nature. NCLB punished schools and educators. Race to the top incentivized states to develop test-based

personnel accountability systems designed to remove a segment of educators from the left side of the bell curve from the profession, even without the validity of the student and educator accountability systems being established. Higher ed appeared to be a little late to the accountability party, but

means of measuring higher ed performance. Similar to the K-12 test-based accountability system, the validity of those measures will be determined at a later date, if at all.

The positive is that communication and coordination among educators at different levels is increasing. Educators thinking in terms of P-20 is a good thing, and recently SUNY Chancellor Zimpher actively engaged various K-12 stakeholders, including SAANYS, in a careful and ongoing examination of how teacher and leader preparation programs should evolve. I’m not sure that could have happened in the past, but I think working together in a collaborative fashion is much more likely to yield positive results than the mere production of accusatory instruments. ■

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they too are now in attendance. Student results are back tracked to teachers and principals, which in turn will be back tracked to higher ed teacher prep programs. This will produce data to be added to graduation rates and levels of student debt as

NYS 2014 Released Test Items: Informing Common Core Implementation

Opinion piece by Dr. Bruce H. Crowder, Senior Researcher for Educational Vistas, Inc.

With the August release of about half the 2014 NYS test items for grades 3-8 English language arts and mathematics, teachers and administrators have finally acquired the kind of support the field has requested since the advent of Common Core-based testing. The item-specific information with related scores and annotations provides the

basis for understanding the nature of the new, aligned assessments. In addition, SED has provided invaluable insight into the standards being tested with what students need to know and do to be successful in addressing such items.

Having spoken loudly and publically for such information and data, I am compelled to thank

those who made this possible. This is a moment when schools need to take the time to review the released items for each subject at each grade in examining their students’ performance on each item. Relating school district results to the released test items opens the opportunity to see for the first time why students may have had difficulty in successfully completing these items. The insights gleaned from this endeavor will support the specific curricular adjustments that are needed to be made for effective instruction and assessment.

Aside from gaining insight into multiple-choice and

response items, teachers and administrators will better understand the testing of text-bound reading and responding. This is where student understanding of inference and supporting details may be reinforced in completing constructive response (CR) test items, as many students confused inference with detail. In this light, the released items may serve as a professional development opportunity for the scoring of both two-point constructive response and four-point extended response items with NYS scoring rubrics.

Finally, students would acquire immense insight by reviewing NYS scoring

rubrics for application and personal use, along with anchor papers from the released items. Therefore, the released test items make for great instructional recourses when used in learning situations in which students experience scoring events. Further testing of Common Core will continue to yield disappointing results without taking the opportunity to use this remarkable trove to analyze item-specific responses of their students.

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