A STEEP CLIMB:
One Classroom’s Journey
INTO THE COMMON-CORE ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS
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Series author and lead common-core reporter, 
*Education Week*

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A Steep Climb: One Classroom’s Journey Into the Common-Core English/Language Arts Standards

Expert Presenters:

**Brian Pick**, chief of the teaching and learning office, District of Columbia Public Schools

**Dowan McNair-Lee**, 8th grade English/language arts teacher and department chair, Stuart-Hobson Middle School, District of Columbia
An on-demand archive of this webinar will be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24 hrs.
DCPS Overview

45,000 Students

4,000 Teachers

113 Instructional Coaches

49.5% of students proficient on the 2013 Math DC CAS

47.4% of students proficient on the 2013 Reading DC CAS
Guiding Principles for Common Core Implementation

Focus
- Fully support a few key priorities
- Thoughtful implementation

Alignment
- Student experience (PS-12 and Ward-to-Ward)
- Structures, supports, and resources

Quality / Unleashing Greatness
- Raise the floor without creating a ceiling
Embedding the CCSS in our Work: The DCPS Teaching & Learning Framework

**PLAN**

1. Develop annual student achievement goals
2. Create standards-based unit plans and assessments
3. Create objective-driven lesson plans

**TEACH**

1. Lead well-organized, objective-driven lessons
2. Explain content clearly
3. Engage students at all learning levels in rigorous work
4. Provide students multiple ways to engage with content
5. Check for student understanding
6. Respond to student misunderstandings
7. Develop higher-level understanding through effective questioning
8. Maximize instructional time
9. Build a supportive, learning-focused classroom community

**INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS**

1. Assess student progress
2. Track student progress data
3. Improve practice and re-teach in response to data

*All children, regardless of background or circumstances, can achieve at the highest levels. Achievement is a function of effort and individual talent.*

All decisions at all levels must be guided by robust data.

District of Columbia Public Schools | August 21, 2013
Common Core Rollout Across the Framework

- Close Reading Modules
- District-Wide PD
- Instructional Coaches
- Learning Cycles
- Data Cycles
- Paced Interims
- Unit Overviews
- Scope and Sequence
- PLAN
  - INSTRUCTION
    1. Develop annual student achievement goals
    2. Create standards-based unit plans and assessments
    3. Create objective-driven lesson plans
  - LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
    4. Adopt a classroom behavior management system
    5. Develop classroom procedures and routines
    6. Organize classroom space and materials
- INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS
  1. Assess student progress
  2. Track student progress data
  3. Improve practice and re-teach in response to data
- TEACH
  1. Lead well-organized, objective-driven lessons
  2. Explain content clearly
  3. Engage students at all learning levels in rigorous work
  4. Provide students multiple ways to engage with content
  5. Check for student understanding
  6. Support student misconceptions
  7. Develop higher-level understanding through effective questioning
  8. Maintain instructional time
  9. Build a supportive, learning-focused classroom community

DCPS Common Core Implementation
Common Core-Aligned Curriculum
DCPS’ Curriculum Strategy

Unit Assessments

Scope and Sequence Documents

Units of Study

Resources
Common Core ELA Resources

Resources by Year

- **SY11–12**: Fundations, CCSS Units and Texts, Guided Reading Launch
- **SY12–13**: Morphology Curriculum, EBSCO, Anchor Texts and Document Cameras, Guided Reading Libraries
- **SY13–14**: Writing Curriculum, Writing PD
Curricular Materials Overview

Scope and Sequence

Unit 1    Unit 2    Unit 3    Unit 4    Unit 5

Close Reading Modules
Connections to the Core (1/3):
Scope and Sequence

- Themes at each grade level that reflect social studies and science content
- Many standards appear in every unit:
- Thoughtful placement of remaining standards
- Alignment of standards in grade bands
Connections to the Core (2/3): 
Unit Overviews

- Combination of informational text and literature in each unit
- Wide range of complex texts
- Focus on academic language (Tier 2 words)
- Focus on evidence-based response writing
Connections to the Core (3/3): Close Reading Modules

- Based on a complex “anchor text” from unit overview
- Builds toward one culminating question - evidence based writing
- A focus on reading closely and deeply: multiple rereads for different purposes across multiple class periods
- Text-dependent questions at multiple levels that build to key understandings
- Tier 2 target words and daily follow-up activities
- Multiple opportunities for students to actively engage in reading, writing, speaking and listening
Common Core-Aligned Professional Development
The Cycle of PD Through the Instructional Window

Unit 1

PD Day 1
- AM: Data Cycle
- PM: Literacy Shift

Collaborative Learning Cycle
- A “deep dive” on topics launched on PD day
- Led by a coach for 6-8 teachers

Unit 2

PD Day 2
- AM: Data Cycle
- PM: Math Shift

Unit 3
## Secondary ELA District-Wide PD Roadmap, 2011-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>PD Day #1</th>
<th>PD Day #2</th>
<th>PD Day #3</th>
<th>PD Day #4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2011-2012</strong></td>
<td>Text Matters: Complex Text and the Common Core</td>
<td>Differentiated Reading</td>
<td>Vocabulary Development</td>
<td>Analyzing Text</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence-based Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>Planning with Complex Text</td>
<td>Close Reading Modules and Student Evidence Based Responses</td>
<td>Module-Based Data Analysis: Student work as teaching &amp; learning tool</td>
<td>Gradual Release: Moving towards Independence with Complex Text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructional Coaching and PD Best Practices

Professional Development is most effective when it:

- **is sustained over time**
- **includes follow-up**
- **is specific and intensive**
- **fosters collaboration**
- **includes active learning experiences for teachers, such as planning, discussing, and practicing**
- **is job-embedded**
- **connects to a framework or curriculum**

Collaborative Learning Cycles At a Glance

- Focus on the **Common Core State Standards in ELA** and the **instructional practices** that best support them
- Address key ideas taught on **PD Days**
- Intensive **cohort-based** learning experience designed to foster collaboration and develop teacher capacity
- Includes weekly **cohort meetings, classroom support, and debriefs**
Learning Cycles Survey: Responses of 900+ Teachers

On a scale of 1-5, how effective was the Learning Cycle in improving my teaching?

- 5: 50.5%
- 4: 33.0%
- 3: 11.0%
- 2: 3.6%
- 1: 1.6%

On a scale of 1-5, how effective was the Learning Cycle in improving my students' learning?

- 5: 44.7%
- 4: 35.0%
- 3: 13.8%
- 2: 4.6%
- 1: 4.5%

Over 80% of responders agree or strongly agree the Learning Cycle has improved their teaching and student learning (scoring it a 4 or 5)
Common Core-Aligned Assessments
An Assessment for Each Instructional Window

IW 1 | PIA 1 | IW 2 | PIA 2 | IW 3 | PIA 3 | IW 4 | PIA 4 | IW 5 | PIA 5

*Note: the final PIA is PIA 5, to align with the name of the Instructional Window
SY 2012-13 Interim Assessment Results (1/2)

Literary Text Performance by Lexile Level for Students Proficient on TRC (PIA/ANET 1–4, Stds. 1 and 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>380 (#1)</td>
<td>430L (#3)</td>
<td>530L (#3)</td>
<td>540 (#1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>420L (#1)</td>
<td>590L (#2)</td>
<td>620L (#2)</td>
<td>650L (#2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>650L / 620L (#4)</td>
<td>570L (#3)</td>
<td>690L / 700L (#4)</td>
<td>730L / 860L (#4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>700L (#4)</td>
<td>620L (#3)</td>
<td>800L (#2)</td>
<td>880L (#3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>800L (#2)</td>
<td>760 (#1)</td>
<td>700 (#1)</td>
<td>800L (#2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>980L / 910L (#4)</td>
<td>980L (#3)</td>
<td>980L (#3)</td>
<td>800L (#2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average % Correct

Lexile (PIA #)
### Performance on Literature Text by Content Strand for Students Proficient on TRC (PIA/ANET #1–4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Key Ideas &amp; Details</th>
<th>Craft &amp; Structure</th>
<th>Integration of Knowledge &amp; Ideas</th>
<th>Key Ideas &amp; Details</th>
<th>Craft &amp; Structure</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>57%</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<td>56%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>53%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Strand** (Key Ideas: Stds 1–3, C&S: Stds 4–6, IK&I: Stds 7–9)

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Looking Ahead

School Year 2013–2014

What’s next for DCPS?
Four Focus Areas to Increase Literacy Achievement

Elementary Focus Areas

- Phonics & Word Morphology
- Close Reading
- Small Group Literacy Instruction
- Writing

Secondary Focus Area
Aligned Professional Development

Focus Area
- Phonics & Word Morphology
- Close Reading
- Small Group Literacy Instruction
- Writing

Audience
- Teachers
- Instructional Coaches
- School Leadership

Professional Development
- Teacher Institutes
- District-Wide PD
- Collaborative Learning Cycles
- Coach Training
- Academic Leadership Team Meetings
- Leadership Academies
- Cluster Meetings
Aligning Assessments to Focus Areas

Focus Areas

- Phonics & Word Morphology
- Close Reading
- Small Group Literacy Instruction
- Writing

Aligned Formative Assessment

- DIBELS
- PIA
- TRC
- Student Work Samples
## Putting it All Together: SY13–14 Calendar

### October 2013

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>PIA 1 Window</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Coach Training</td>
<td>Leadership Academy</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIA 1 Window</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbus Day No School</td>
<td>Academic Leadership Team Trainings (by focus area)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>PD Day 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Instruction window 2 begins</td>
<td>Learning cycle 2 begins</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Institutes</td>
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Putting the Common Core Standards In English/Language Arts Into Practice:

One Teacher’s Experience
The Class of 2013

- This group was a mixed bag of ability and motivation.
- I looped with the students from 7th to 8th grade.
- They required more external motivation to be successful.
Common Core Implementation

- Initial implementation of the Common Core Standards was difficult.
- SY 2012-2013 was a smoother transition but not without its share of headaches.
- Key changes in our building made it easier to facilitate learning.
Scope and Sequence

- I was familiar with the 8th grade scope and sequence prior to SY 2012-13.
- The scope and sequence for 8th grade during SY 2012-13 gave a guideline.
- It was also a good tool to use with parents.
Units

• My co-teacher and I would take a look at the units and take the time to figure out what the timing would look like according to our school calendar.

• Then we would look at the standards and kind of establish our own power standards and secondary standards based on our kids’ assessment.

• We would then look at the suggested summative assessment and modify it and create further modifications if needed for our students with special needs.
Close Reading

- So I became involved in the article because of my attendance at a conference during SY 2011-12.
- I was one of two teachers in the room and we both were struck because no one in the room seemed to have a clear idea of what we really should be doing when we close read.
- Their confusion seemed to mirror my own as I struggled through close reading during the 1st year of CCSS implementation.
- Therefore, I was really impressed when the district provided close reading modules for teachers during school year 2012-2013.
Interim Assessments

- As Brian pointed out, the district takes the PIA (Paced Interim Assessments) at the end of each unit.

- While I remained personally conflicted about the abundance of assessments that our kids took, I had my students look at this assessment as a way of helping me to help them.

- The one standard that seemed to elude us on these assessments was RI 8.1

- We finally saw a dramatic improvement during the 4th PIA and this was very comforting because it was right before the DC CAS.
Professional Development

- Professional Development in the district has been a mixed bag for several years.

- This year finally saw some continuity with teacher training.

- I was particularly impressed with a training that I attended in the Spring.

- This training addressed the close reading modules and questions that we should ask during close reading to assist students with comprehension.
Glows and Grows

- There was significant growth with our struggling students.
- Proficient students retained status.
- Several advanced students moved to proficient this year.
An on-demand archive of this webinar will be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24 hrs.
A Steep Climb: One Classroom’s Journey
Into the Common-Core English/Language Arts Standards

Required Reading from *Education Week*:

**Common Core: A Steep Climb**
How school districts move the Common Core State Standards from the central office into classrooms can make or break the undertaking. *Education Week* spent six months reporting on how the District of Columbia’s vision of the common-core English/language arts standards is being put into practice in one 8th grade classroom. The process is documented in this four-part series.

**Spotlight on English/Language Arts and the Common Core**
The Common Core State Standards are beginning to influence English/language arts instruction. This Spotlight focuses on reading and writing across the subjects, a greater emphasis on nonfiction texts, the debate over prereading, and criticisms of the standards.