

Roundtable News

Whither the Common Core?

Superintendents plan implementation.



Bernard Josefsberg, Easton-Redding, CT (r) listens as panel members (l to r) from SBAC, Pearson, and PARCC outline plans for the Common Core and related assessments at Roundtable Summer meeting in Chicago.

It's not impossible to find parallels to the scale of change that implementation of the Common Core is likely to bring to American schools, but the national models are few and far between. Legislatively, enactment of the *Elementary and Secondary Education in 1965* and *Public Law 94-142*, signed into law by presidents Lyndon Johnson and Gerald Ford, respectively, come to mind. Judicially, *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954) and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) transformed American schools.

But unlike each of those, the Common Core State Standards were developed not by legislators or courts, but by governors and state superintendents, acting through their national associations with the active support of the

business community and the U.S. Department of Education. This coalition is on the verge of pulling off something that the first President George Bush (under the leadership of Assistant Secretary Diane Ravitch) could not achieve: the adoption of a set of educational standards that will be common across the various states.

What the Common Core approach has in common with those earlier efforts (including standard-setting) is that it has set off wide range of polemical political attacks. To hear critics from the Right and the Left, says PBS newsman John Merrow, one would think the world is about to come to an end because the Common Core is a "plot ... that is dangerous to our liberty and prosperity," ac-

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- Raise your hand, says Gary Plano, Mercer Island, WA, if some prior effort to lead change went sideways (See p. 4)*



cording to Kentucky Senator Rand Paul. This *News* explores school change and districts' experience with it, along with the case for and against the Common Core and how districts are gearing up.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

It's not easy but it's relatively straightforward at the national level to mandate that something be done. But on the ground, the challenges of designing, implementing, and assessing change are formidable. There's the challenge of understanding the nature of the required change. There's also the need to understand what it means in a large institutional setting such as a school district.

And as a school leader, you have to take your staff and teachers where you find them and help them make the leap of faith required to move forward, said Gene E. Hall, of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas.



Gene Hall (l) chats with Paul Ash, Margaret Hayes, and Diana Bourisaw

Change a Process not an Event

"We have just one word for change," Hall observed, "but the Japanese have several terms. They describe change that is predictable. Change that is unpredictable. And change that should be predictable if only we were clever enough!"

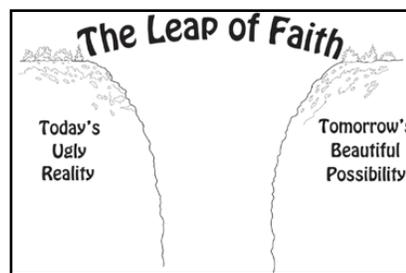
Change is a process, not an event, noted Hall, and there are several principles associated with it (see sidebar). It begins with innovation, the change you are trying to implement, and moves to implementation through interventions,

such as workshops, training and the like. "Don't ignore plain talk in the hallway. These are important interventions. The more people talk about their concerns, the more their anxieties are reduced. Without talk, small concerns become big mountains."

The Leap of Faith

Hall describes the gap separating where we are in education today and the wonderful future awaiting us in the Promised Land of school reform as a yawning chasm. Under most policy prescriptions, a leap of faith is required to get from today's ugly realities to tomorrow's beautiful possibilities (see figure). What explains the resistance to most school reforms is the practical reality that most people aren't willing to take the risk of making that leap of faith.

Organizations don't change until people change, he emphasized. Implementation has to be approached in such a way as to provide people with bridges to get from where they are to where we want them to be. And the bridges have to be designed to meet individuals at the level where they are



most concerned — uninformed about the pending change, informed but anxious, concerned about self or concerned about the task.

Principles of Change

- Change is a process, not an event.
- Developing and implementing an innovation are different things.
- An organization does not change until the individuals within it do.
- Innovations come in different sizes.
- Interventions are the actions and events that are key to the success of the change process.
- Top-down and bottom-up are fine, but horizontal is best.
- Administrator leadership is essential to long-term and successful change.
- Mandates can work.
- The school is the primary unit for change.
- Facilitating change is a team effort.
- Appropriate interventions reduce the challenges of change.
- The context of the school influences the process of change.

Implications for Principals

Even in a relatively small districts, a superintendent has to rely on principals to implement change. Here superintendents need to understand the people they are dealing with.

Hall described three principal change facilitator styles and thought they might usefully be applied to school principals:

Initiators have clear and strong visions for their schools. They get people across the leap of faith and keep moving.

Managers are organized and efficient. They will get people across the bridge but then stand in place.

Responders tend to let others take the lead. They are least likely to get people across the bridge.

A more complete summary can be found on the Roundtable's website at www.superintendentsforum.org

KANSAS GOVERNOR RECOGNIZES CONCORDIA'S CTE PROGRAM



Gov. Sam Brownback (r) presents check to Concordia's Beverly Mortimer

When Gov. Sam Brownback of Kansas helped push SB 155 through the state legislature, Concordia superintendent Beverly Mortimer was delighted. SB 155 was an aggressive plan to improve career and technical education (CTE) in the state and the legislature put \$18.8 million behind new CTE initiatives.

But, Mortimer wrote to Governor Brownback, Concordia USD 333 succeeded with a new high-tech welding program only in partnership with the community. Local corporations provided the equipment, services, training, and supplies; USD 333 provided instructors and the facility.

If SB 155 was to do the job intended, Mortimer told the governor, these partnerships needed to be encouraged by examining licensing impediments, limits on credits, regulations requiring seat-time for credit, constrained technical education pathways, and the attitude that learning takes place in schools only between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm.

One result was a June visit from the governor where Mortimer and her team proudly showed off their state-of-the-art \$250,000 welding shop (which will soon add a robotics component), and Governor Brownback presented a \$14,000 check to the district, representing \$1,000 for each of 14 graduates of the new program. Some graduates entered the workforce immediately, earning \$21 an hour or more; others used their welding skills to help pay for college; and one young woman enrolled in an underwater welding school in Florida.

Writes Mortimer: "It is the Roundtable gatherings that inspire me to come home and find unconventional ways to give kids from rural areas great opportunities."

ROUNDTABLE HONORS JANET ROBINSON

The emotional heart of the Chicago meeting occurred when co-chair Gloria Davis (Decatur, Illinois) presented Janet Robinson (Stratford, Connecticut) with a plaque acknowledging Robinson's heroic role as superintendent in Newtown, Connecticut, in helping heal that community following last December's Sandy Hook catastrophe. On December 14, a gunman murdered 20 small children and six staff members in Sandy Hook Elementary School, a tragedy evoking global outrage.

In a somber and poignant presentation, Davis evoked the shock of the day and the shared pain of the profession, while expressing her colleagues' admiration for the manner in which Robinson had conducted herself during this ordeal. Robinson said she did only what anyone in the room would have done, that she valued Roundtable support during the crisis, and that educators everywhere still await a policy response addressing gun violence.



Gloria Davis (l) presents citation to Janet Robinson.

MANY A SLIP BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE LIP

Against the backdrop of a firehose of information directed at the attendees, the Roundtable broke down into small group discussions. Led by Gary Plano, Mercer Island, Washington, Roundtable superintendents discussed not so much the Common Core but their experience with other changes, large and small, in their districts. It turns out that grandma’s adage holds more than a grain of truth; there’s many a slip between the cup and the lip.

Challenges

Challenges were easy to identify. Among them: dealing with courtesy busing for students close to school, preferential benefits treatment for the most highly paid, and church opposition to a year-round school initiative. Also on the list: Failures of referenda and student report cards developed by management instead of school staff, and the need to let union leaders save face around negotiations while getting more productive people to the table.

Success stories

Yet, positive outcomes were also cited aplenty: The challenge of reconfiguring two neighboring elementary schools was solved by turning one into a K-2 school, leaving the other to cover Grades 3-5. Asking board members to literally put laptops into the hands of teachers in advance of a new technology initiative avoided a lot of headaches. Senior citizens opposed to a levy in one district were turned around by crediting seniors at the county assessor’s office with minimum wage payments for the time they volunteered in schools. Advancing the Danielson model of professional development by handpicking teacher opinion leaders to move the agenda along also worked well.

A professional triumph and career adjustment

One district triumph turned into a personal crisis: In that district, an inherited legacy of different contracts with several dozen different individual bus operators was expensive and difficult to change. Driver-operators fought standardization. The district looked to be in the upper third of state LEAs in per pupil expenditures, but if transportation costs were elimi-

nated, the district was at the bottom of the state barrel. Routes began at the driver’s home; some drivers were making \$85,000 annually; and although the district was supposed to put any contract over \$30,000 out for bid, the bus contracts had not been bid in decades. This superintendent went ahead and issued a contract to a single provider that saved the district \$800,000 amidst a national recession and cutbacks in schools across the country. Board elections, fought in part over this issue, forced the superintendent to move to a new district.



In small groups, Roundtable members learn from each other about their triumphs and challenges

Reflections

Several lessons emerged from all this. Bring stakeholders into the discussion on take off; don’t wait for the landing. Communication is essential. You need to explain the “why.” Continually circle back and remind people of “why” -- you’re dealing with a parade, not an audience. Take time -- all the successes included a process. Timing is everything, sometimes it’s as important to be lucky as it is to be right. Finally, you need the right people on your team; in the terms of Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, you have to get the “right people on the bus” before you start out on a change journey. All of these are important lessons as districts move forward with implementing the Common Core and associated assessments.

THE COMMON CORE AND ITS ASSESSMENTS



(l to r) Sue Gendron, Steve Ferrara, Jeff Nellhaus, and Bernard Josefsberg

As a boy in Ireland, said Roundtable director James Harvey, he listened as priests at Mass mumbled in Latin with their backs to the congregation. Today’s educational high priests are assessment experts mumbling psychometrics with their backs to the school community. Here was a panel with an opportunity to explain what to expect in the new Common Core.

Supporters of the Common Core State Standards view them as providing a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn so that teachers and parents can know what they need to do to help students. Two major groups are developing assessments tied to the Common Core: the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)..

Here are highlights of the panel:

Sue Gendron, SBAC. SBAC is a consortium of 26 states hoping to develop assessments for a changing world. It intends to develop formative resources and interim

and summative assessments that help all students leave high school ready for college and careers. State and district options can also provide for end-of-course and graduation requirements and teacher/principal accountability. Implementation is expected in 2015. Presentation available at:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Gendron.pptx>

Jeff Nellhaus, PARCC. PARCC had a similar story to report. It is made up of 21 states and the District of Columbia and designed to measure the full range of Common Core standards. It will provide summative assessments and optional diagnostic and mid-year assessments. Tests are being examined in the field in 2014, with implementation scheduled for 2015, reported Nellhaus, who also thought it important to distinguish between the administration of the assessment, definitely scheduled, and the use of the assessment for accountability purposes. Presentation available at:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Nellhaus.pptx>

Steve Ferrara, Pearson. There are many demands for Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in the new assessments, acknowledged Ferrara, who heads up a next generation learning and assessment

team at Pearson. HOTS are both general in all areas of learning and specific to content areas as well (i.e., mathematical, literary and scientific reasoning are distinct from each other.) Current state assessments are at relatively low levels in terms of HOTS, he reported, and SBAC and PARCC are likely to be much more demanding. Pearson looks to a future in which assessment moves away from bubble tests toward a continuum ranging from short constructed responses to online games and simulated environments. Presentation:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Ferrara.pdf>

Bernard Josefsberg, superintendent, Easton-Redding, Connecticut, was noticeably unimpressed with all of this. Fifteen years ago, he reported, Connecticut educational leaders understood that student learning improved when teacher evaluation was grounded in educators working collaboratively together. Today it is all about numbers and, although his district does well on the numbers, Josefsberg is convinced the numbers barely scratch the surface of the intricate processes involved with learning. Josefsberg is alarmed to find literacy and writing instruction “crimped to conform to standardized test schemas... In too many cases, teachers functioned as technicians, implementing purchased instructional scripts.” He concluded: “I worry about how trivial and meaningless numbers often substitute for the good thinking we owe our children.” Presentation at:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Josefsberg.doc>

DISTRICTS GET READY

Then it was time for a discussion of where four different districts— one each in Illinois, Washington, Pennsylvania, and Iowa—are with planning and implementation.

What emerged was a mixed bag about district (and state) readiness to implement the Common Core. The picture ranged from one district that has been trying to get ready for this change since 2010, to another state tied up in political knots about which assessment to use. In between were districts struggling with limited state leadership and, in one case, a state consumed with budget politics that has taken most of the air out of the room in the school discussion.

Politics also entered the picture, with two superintendents reporting on backlashes against the Common Core in their districts.

Members nodded in agreement as **Gloria Davis**, Decatur, IL, said: “Telling teachers the standards have been adopted and expecting tremendous results is not going to work.” She described intensive work beginning in 2010 and planned through 2015 to implement the Common Core. Presentation at:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Davis.pptx>



Carl Bruner, Mt. Vernon, WA, describing a district with 6,300 students, 366 teachers, 11 campuses, a count of FRDL students of 72%, and

substantial migrant population at times, mentioned the political challenge of getting the Evergreen State to live up to its constitutional obligation to make education “the paramount duty” of the state. Mount Vernon has been concentrating on training of principals and teachers and curriculum alignment. Presentation at: <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Bruner.pptx>

Marianne Bartley, Lebanon, PA, pointed to massive budget cuts in Pennsylvania as dominating school discourse in the state. Common Core implementation challenges involve time and resources, competing priorities (e.g., evaluation systems), and technology requirements. Things were moving along fairly smoothly until June of this year, when fears about states’



rights and local control emerged. The state is re-framing its standards as the Pennsylvania Core Standards, which are likely to fit with the Common Core.

Tim Grieves, director of Iowa’s Northwest Area Education Agency, which serves 35 public school districts, had a tangled tale to tell. The



state has had its own Iowa Core since 2005. Iowa is *sui generis*, the home of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills as well as ACT. Although the state department decided to adopt SBAC, the legislature insisted in 2012 that the Iowa assessments be used—a position reemphasized in the 2013 legislative session, which required that successor assessments originate in Iowa, be aligned to the Iowa Core, and field tested in the state. Grieves also pointed to highly emotional political opposition to the Common Core from both the left and the right. Presentation at:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Grieves.docx>

In short, in terms of implementation readiness, states and districts across the United States present a mixed picture, with the substance of the Common Core sometimes at the mercy of politics and budgets.

SCHOOL SYSTEMS THAT LEARN

During the Roundtable’s visit to the French Ministry of Education in Paris in June 2012, Paul Ash (Lexington, Massachusetts) asked one of the twelve ministry officials who briefed us, “What are the Finns doing that’s so different from what you do?” The response from Chantal Manes, the Inspector General responsible for English language learning in French secondary schools, was instantaneous: “The Finns,” she said, “give all children what they need, when they need it.” And, she continued, “All the testing and accountability we insist on here from Paris has just brought us to mediocrity.”

Imagine an American system that provides “all children what they need, when they need it.” That’s what Ash and his co-author John D’Auria have done in their seminal new book *School Systems that Learn*. It’s a markedly different approach from the education reform approaches championed by *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*. In his presentation, Ash argued that school systems as currently designed have reached the limits of their capacity to educate all students at high levels. The authors call for responding in real time to student needs.



We know what won't work, says Paul Ash

Think about how school systems are designed not to change, urged Ash. A lot of it is laws and regulations

and inherited mindsets. Standardization and isolation replace personalization and collaboration. Why do achievement gaps exist even in well-funded districts? It’s because even the best districts have “maxed out their capacity,” he argued.

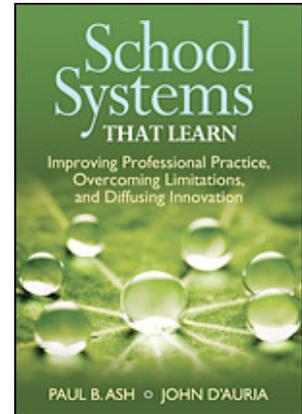
We already know what won’t work, stressed Ash.

Firing all underperforming people ... hiring more outstanding teachers ... increasing teacher evaluation—these are all seductive palliatives that won’t move the achievement needle. What will work is a commitment that’s in short supply today to a set of values that make up four key drivers of student achievement: trust, collaboration, capacity building, and leadership at all levels. It’s collaboration as the art of leading. The synergy of these four drivers is what moves the needle. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

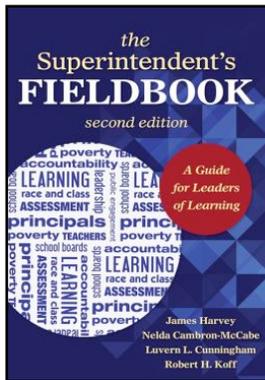
1. Ash spoke of the “fractal” nature of schools, a mathematical term describing recurring, complex patterns throughout systems. What is needed is a commitment to taking advantage of the fractal nature of school systems by strengthening the adult learning culture to benefit students. The idea is to create a culture in which school board members learn, central administrators learn, schools and departments learn, and individual teachers learn. It’s a way of creating “school systems that learn.” And what stands in the way are five big fears (on the part of students, parents, and adults in the system): fear of making mistakes, fear of looking like a fool, fear of having a weakness exposed, fear of not being liked, and fear of failure. The keys to moving ahead, he suggested, include creating a climate encouraging vulnerability and trust, promoting psychological safety, managing conflict within the organization while encouraging dissent, and cultivating effective teamwork.

Presentation at:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/45362102/Ash.pptx>

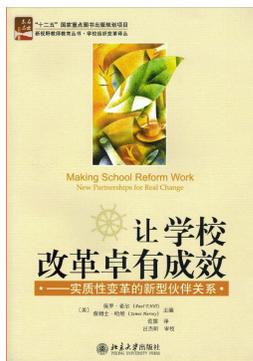


HERE AND THERE



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Chinese print director's book

Making School Reform Work, edited by Roundtable director James Harvey and the University of Washington's Paul Hill, was published by the Brookings Institution in 2005. In the summer of 2013, Peking University Press, under an agreement with Brookings, translated the text and reprinted it for a Chinese audience. Many thanks! (多谢!)

Calendar & Contact

October 4-6, 2013

Fall Meeting, Washington, DC
Education in Europe

February 2014

Teacher Morale article in
ASCD's *Educational Leadership*

July, 2014

Summer Meeting, Chicago, IL
Agenda: Developing School Principals
Dates: TBD

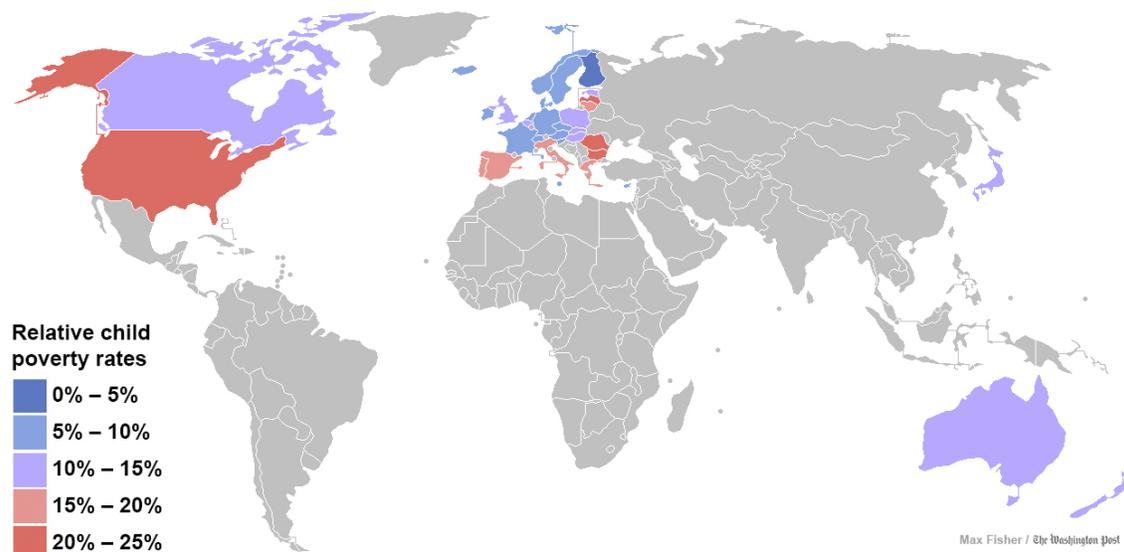
October 2014

Fall Meeting, Seattle, WA
Agenda: Total Quality Management
Dates: TBD

The Roundtable:

National Superintendents
Roundtable
9425 35th Avenue, NE, Suite E
Seattle, WA 98115
206-526-5336
harvey324@earthlink.net
www.superintendentsforum.org

CHILD POVERTY IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD



Source: UNICEF, May 2012 (US ranks 34 out of 35 nations)