

Raising Expectations One School at a Time

Themes and Implications from Interviews with School Leaders, Teachers and Students on the District's 2013-2014 Citywide Instructional Expectations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2013-14 school year, Eskolta School Research and Design conducted an investigation into implementation of this year's Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) at three elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. Four themes related to successful CIE implementation are explored here: the importance of efforts on the part of leadership to streamline and integrate the CIE into ongoing work at the school, the influence of a coherent instructional focus, the centrality of teacher teams, and the ways in which schools selectively chose and adapted new curricular resources.

Developing Instructional Focus: Messaging and Support. When school leaders succeeded in streamlining new initiatives and integrating them into their school's existing structures and principles, teachers were less anxious about this year's work and more positive about their shifts in practice. In contrast, at schools where teachers felt more anxious and shifts were less evident, leaders said they were still developing their own understanding of the Common Core, thereby hindering their ability to streamline and integrate that expectation. In a related finding, leaders expressed frustration with outside support that focused on understanding general concepts without addressing the realities of implementation.

Maintaining Instructional Focus: Coherence and Impact. The coherence and impact of a school's instructional focus were positively related to teachers' perceptions of their work and shifts in practice. When impact appeared greatest, instructional foci bore two features. They were actionable – that is, they were tied to specific instructional strategies and support – and they were anticipated – that is, they were intentionally integrated into and built from prior years' work.

Teacher Teams: Structures and Supports. Teachers at schools with well structured teams reported being less overwhelmed and more positive about their work this year. At these schools, leaders carefully cultivated teacher leaders and provided modeling and guidance matched to clear expectations for planning and facilitation. Another important finding at these schools was the way in which teacher team leaders worked: these teachers led their teams through a proactive and clear set of responsibilities, pushing their teams to develop a common set of practices aligned to the school's instructional focus.

New Curricular Resources: Choices and Implementation. Alongside the City's established expectations, this year saw the release of City-selected curricular options in elementary and middle schools. The choice between adopting such curricula with little modification or engaging in more adaptation or independent development generally tracked to school level: the elementary schools in the group adapted materials less (and in the case of elementary math, generally adopted), middle schools adapted more, and high schools engaged in more independent development. In most cases, school staff highlighted the need to supplement curriculum to address existing skill gaps for students who were below grade level. Their ability to do so was notably affected by the quality of teacher teams. This work was also influenced by the fact that leaders, teachers, and students associated Common Core-aligned curriculum with high-stakes testing and described a negative impact of such testing on students.

Four Inter-locking Themes. The four themes of this report are tightly intertwined: schools with a strong instructional focus tended also to be schools with strong teacher team structures and leaders who worked hard to integrate new initiatives into existing work. This could be, in part, because these practices build upon and rely on each other (i.e., It is easier to integrate new initiatives if you have a strong instructional focus that has guided rich and diverse work at your school), and could be, in part, because they flow from a common focus on adult learning and development that supports a culture of collaboration. Differences in findings for the elementary schools in the study, in contrast to the middle and high schools, suggest that further investigation may be merited into the differential impact of the Common Core and Danielson *Framework* on schools serving the youngest students.

Methodology. Schools in this study were selected based on New York City Quality Review results that suggested moderate success in implementing the CIE while serving an unscreened population that qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch in numbers equal to or greater than the City average. Structured interviews with 40 teachers and nine school leaders were augmented with semi-structured interviews with 34 students and eighteen informal conversations with teachers looking at student work.

INTRODUCTION

During the 2013-14 school year, the New York City Department of Education's Office of Instructional Support asked Eskolta School Research and Design to conduct an investigation into implementation of the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). Eskolta is a research and design firm that specializes in participant-driven school improvement efforts in New York City. Eskolta had previously conducted similarly focused investigations into the prior two years of the CIE for this office at the NYC Department of Education.

Findings herein are based on a series of rigorously coded structured interviews at nine schools with teachers (40) and school leaders (9), semi-structured interviews with students (34), and informal conversations with teachers looking at student work (18). This set of reports details findings in four key areas: establishment and communication of an instructional focus, maintenance and support to make that instructional focus actionable, use of collaborative teacher teams and teacher leaders as a form of professional development, and decisions regarding the selection and development of curricular materials. These themes emerged from the data and were identified by the Office of Instructional Support as key areas to further the NYCDOE's understanding of how schools are addressing the 2013-14 CIE.

SOURCES

Schools. Eskolta conducted interviews at nine schools, all of which are identified in this report with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. At the time of recruitment, every selected school's population of students whose family income made them eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was equal to or greater than the average such population for all New York City (NYC) schools. All schools are unscreened. Five of these schools were previously featured in case studies Eskolta conducted during the 2012-2013 school year: Bob Parris Moses Elementary School, Autherine Lucy Prep Middle School, Dorothy Cotton Middle School, Harry T. Moore Community High School, and Myles Horton Academy High School. Four schools were newly recruited this year: Howard Gardner Elementary School, Carol Dweck Elementary School, Deanna Kuhn Middle School, and Stephen Pinker High School.

Six schools – the five returning schools and Gardner, a newly-recruited elementary school – were selected for study based on New York City Quality Review (QR) data indicating that they have experienced moderate success implementing the CIE. Specifically, these schools earned scores of “Proficient” on QR indicators 1.1 (Curriculum), 1.2 (Pedagogy), 4.1 (Teacher support and supervision), and 4.2 (Teacher teams and leadership development). The experience of these schools provides insight into how teachers and leaders in schools with mixed success are facing the challenges of serving the non-selective New York City public school population.

Three schools – Dweck Elementary, Kuhn Middle, and Pinker High – were identified based on data suggesting they recently experienced significant success with implementing the CIE (specifically, recently earning a “Well Developed” overall QR rating after earning a lower score on their previous QR). The experience of these schools provides insight into how teachers and leaders in schools that have experienced a recent push towards and acknowledgement of success are facing the challenges of serving the New York City public school population.

Table 1 on the following page provides general details regarding the demographic composition of the participating schools.

| | Grades served | Enrollment | % Hispanic | % Black | % Title I Eligible | % ELL | % IEP |
|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Moses (P) | ES | 700 | >60% | >20% | >90% | >20% | >10% |
| Gardner (P) | ES | 300 | >0% | >80% | >80% | >0% | >10% |
| Dweck (WD) | ES | 600 | >70% | >10% | >70% | >10% | >10% |
| Cotton (P) | MS | 300 | >10% | >80% | >90% | >10% | >10% |
| Lucy Prep (P) | MS | 500 | >80% | >10% | >90% | >30% | >10% |
| Kuhn (WD) | MS | 200 | >60% | >30% | >80% | >10% | >20% |
| Horton (P) | HS | 300 | >60% | >30% | >90% | >20% | >10% |
| Moore (P) | HS | 400 | >20% | >70% | >80% | >0% | >20% |
| Pinker (WD) | HS | 300 | >60% | >30% | >90% | >10% | >10% |

Table 1. Demographic composition of participating schools

Participants. Individual teachers were recruited through the placement of posters and sign-up sheets in the schools' central offices. Principals also communicated directly with their staff informing them that the opportunity to participate was available and voluntary. Once teachers signed up for the study, principals facilitated scheduling of time to conduct the interviews. Forty teachers were recruited and interviewed; specialties spanned core areas like English Language Arts (ELA) and math, content areas like science and social studies, and special education.

About half of participating teachers also engaged in informal conversations about student work. These conversations were arranged with each teacher directly. Each of these teachers also arranged for the researcher to meet with two of his or her students.

Table 2 and Table 3 below show the number of participating teachers, leaders, and students by school level (elementary, middle, or high school) and the number of participating teachers by content area.

| School Level | Teachers | Leaders | Students | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Elementary School | 12 | 3 | 11 | 26 |
| Middle School | 15 | 3 | 12 | 30 |
| High School | 13 | 3 | 11 | 27 |
| Total | 40 | 9 | 34 | 83 |

Table 2. Participating teachers, leaders, and students by school level

METHODS

Structured interviews with teachers and leaders. First-round interviews with teachers and leaders were highly structured. Only questions included in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) were asked in the interviews, only those follow-up questions that were pre-set were used to probe further, and every probe was used if the probing point did not emerge organically. This approach ensured that each participant had the same opportunity to comment on each key point. Structured interviews were then analyzed with rigorous and exhaustive coding: Every participant received a code in every category whether or not an explicit comment was made in that category. Finally, a training set was double coded with high reliability, offering evidence that the scheme is one that can be relied on to provide more objective data and that the coder was well trained to impose the scheme on the data. Though coding schemes are inherently subjective, these steps allowed researchers to make more objective claims about trends and relationships that emerged through coding than could have been offered otherwise.

| Content Area | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| All (Elementary) | 9 |
| ELA | 9 |
| Math | 12 |
| Social Studies | 2 |
| Science | 4 |
| Music | 1 |
| Special Education | 3 |
| Total | 40 |

Table 3. Participating teachers

Informal conversations about student work with teachers. First-round interviews with teachers were followed by informal conversations with a subset of teachers, which included two volunteer participants from each school. These conversations explored the shifts in practice, differentiation strategies, and applications of instructional focus that emerged in the structured interviews through the lens of concrete student work. No formal protocol was in place in order to allow for the students' work to drive organic exploration. Insight notes were written within 24 hours of the interview and were reviewed to support or counter evidence for the major themes explored in this report.

Semi-structured interviews with students. Teacher and leader interviews were followed by semi-structured interviews with students. The two teachers from each school who participated in informal conversations about student work were asked to choose one struggling and one successful student for follow-up interviews. Anchoring on particular insights gleaned from first-round interviews and looking at student work conversations with these students' teachers, researchers asked students their views about how their learning is supported and how they would recommend improving that support (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). Insight notes were written within 24 hours of the interview and were reviewed to support or counter evidence for the major themes explored in this report.

Confidentiality and consent. In every case, participants were notified that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and anonymous and that neither they nor their schools would be identifiable in any of the reports or case studies arising from these interviews. Written consent was obtained from teachers, school leaders, students eighteen and older, and parents or guardians of students younger than eighteen. All interviews were recorded. This work is governed by the New York City Department of Education Institutional Review Board.

FOUR INTER-LOCKING THEMES

The four sections that comprise this report explore practices that impact a school’s ability to a) develop and introduce an instructional focus, b) maintain a strong instructional focus over time, c) collaborate effectively, and d) integrate new curriculum. These four themes emerged from the data and were identified as critical to ongoing work around the CIE. As such, each is explored separately in depth. This individual treatment of each theme, however, should not be taken as a testament to their independence; in fact, they appear highly inter-related.

As an example, findings suggest that when teacher teams are structured such that there are high expectations and transparent routines, teachers have more positive feelings towards their work. Strong teacher teams also appear related to successful adaptation of new curriculum. It seems likely, therefore, that some of the positive feelings we are attributing to strong teacher teams stem from confidence and comfort with new curriculum. Similar instances can be found across any combination of these themes (i.e. strong teacher teams provide a means by which leadership can sustain instructional focus, Instructional foci that are developed out of existing work are easier to sustain over time). Further support for the interlocking nature of these themes comes from the co-occurrence of positive practices within particular schools (see Table 4).

| | The instructional focus felt... | | | | | | | Teacher teams were... | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|------------|----|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------|-------|--------------------|
| | Streamlined & Integrated | Not Streamlined & Integrated | Grounded | Unexpected | NA | Coherent & High Impact | Mixed Impact | Lack of Consensus | Structured | Mixed | Loosely Structured |
| Elementary Schools | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Moses | | x | | x | | | | x | | | x |
| Gardner | x | | x | | | | | x | | | x |
| Dweck | | x | | | x | | | x | | | x |
| Middle Schools | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cotton | | x | | x | | | | x | | x | |
| Lucy Prep | x | | | | x | x | | | x | | |
| Kuhn | | x | x | | | | x | | x | | |
| High Schools | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Horton | x | | x | | | x | | | x | | |
| Moore | | x | | | x | | x | | | x | |
| Pinker | x | | x | | | x | | | x | | |

Table 4. Relationship between themes

Consideration of these co-occurrences provides a richer understanding of how these themes emerged in the field, and can be observed in patterns discussed in the following sections. One particular pattern deserves note at the outset: all three elementary schools in the sample are among the schools that appeared to be struggling consistently; the six middle and high schools, in contrast, had more mixed and positive findings. Due to our small sample size and non-random selection process, our findings cannot be considered generalizable. Nonetheless, the struggles of participating elementary schools suggest further investigation into the differential impact of the CIE on schools serving the youngest students may be merited.

DEVELOPING INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS: MESSAGING AND SUPPORT

In studies conducted during the 2012-2013 school year, Eskolta found that changes in teacher practice arose when leaders highlighted a culture of adult learning that promoted internal needs over external pressures. That is, when leaders perceived the connection between external expectations and the internal needs of staff, and articulated this connection while providing personalized support to teachers, teachers made more positive shifts in practice. While schools in that study made notable progress toward implementing Common Core-aligned curriculum and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* during the 2012-2013 school year, this year presented intensified challenges to school leaders as they worked to manage the rollout of Advance while preparing students for Common Core-aligned State exams.

Because leaders faced multiple important, “for-stakes” initiatives this year, Eskolta was able to examine whether connecting external expectations to the internal needs of staff was once again related to positive shifts in practice, less stress, and a sense of coherence to the teachers’ work. In addition, Eskolta worked to understand how leaders themselves were supported. Four key insights emerged from coding of the structured interviews and through informal conversations with teachers regarding student work. These are outlined below and elucidated in greater detail in the sections that follow.

When school leaders judiciously integrated new initiatives, it eased teachers’ anxieties and facilitated shifts. To manage rollout of Advance and the full implementation of the Common Core, leaders at several schools described efforts to integrate new initiatives into the schools’ instructional foci or existing structures. These appeared to be related to more positive reception from both staff and students.

Principals who knew when to “say no” were better able to alleviate anxiety by streamlining the work. In addition to integrating initiatives into existing work, principals who effectively determined which elements of initiatives to prioritize and to thereby streamline the work appeared to have more success with adoption.

When leaders did not succeed in streamlining or framing new initiatives as aligned to existing structures or practices, teachers’ anxieties appeared heightened and shifts in practice were hindered. At some schools, principals described efforts to streamline and integrate, but these efforts were not always effective. Teachers at these schools often reflected negatively on their shifts in practice this year.

At the schools where teachers felt more anxious and shifts were less evident, leaders said they were still developing their own understanding of the Common Core. Teachers’ negative reflection on shifts in practice and on the impact of the Citywide Instructional Expectations appeared to sometimes connect with school leaders’ difficulty in articulating the expectations of the Common Core.

Leaders expressed frustration with outside support that focused on understanding discrete concepts without addressing the realities of implementation. Participating leaders mentioned drawing upon network coaches, talent coaches, and outside consultants as resources, but expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with their support and a desire for guidance from experienced school leaders.

FINDINGS

Teachers' Perspectives on This Year's Work, by Leaders' Approach to Rollout

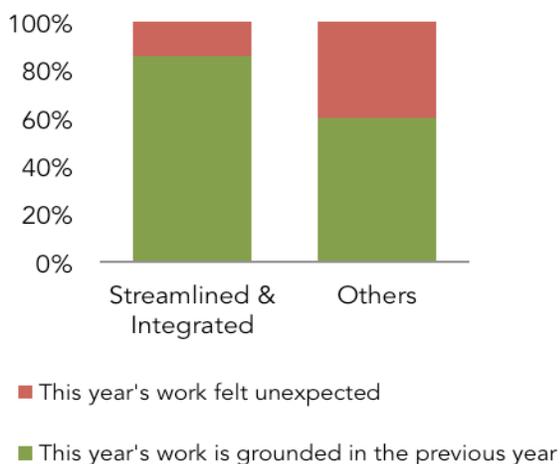


Figure 1. Teachers' perspectives on basis for this year's work, by leaders' approach to rollout

Perceived Impact of Shifts in Practice, by Perceived Basis of Work

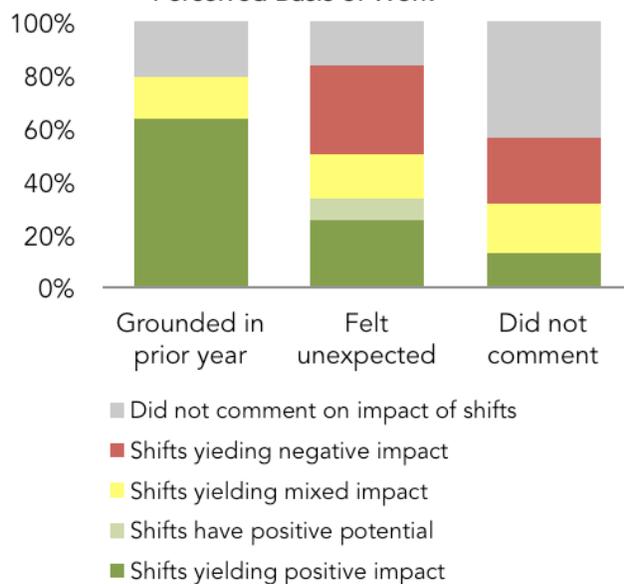


Figure 2. Perceived impact of shifts in practice, by perceived basis of work

When school leaders judiciously streamlined and integrated new initiatives, it eased teachers' anxieties and facilitated shifts.

To manage rollout of Advance and the full implementation of the Common Core, leaders at four of the nine participating schools described efforts to streamline and integrate new initiatives into their school's focus or existing structures. In a testament to the success of these efforts, as shown in Figure 1, 85 percent of teachers at these schools reported that the new initiatives were grounded in work the school had done in prior years, as compared to teachers at schools where principals did not describe a concrete approach for introducing new initiatives this year. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 2, across the nine schools, when teachers believed that the work they were doing this year was grounded in prior years' work, they also felt that their shifts in practice were more positive.

One element of the effort to "streamline and integrate" consisted of leaders making conscious efforts to integrate new initiatives into their school's existing instructional focus and philosophies and to selectively determine which aspects of the varied expectations from the DOE to prioritize, an approach that appeared to help insulate teachers from anxiety about the work. One principal, for example, filtered the introduction of both Danielson and Common Core through the lens of the school's focus on literacy. As a teacher explained, "My experience with the DOE comes through my principal – my principal cares about kids and anything we talk about, it's through the lens of what can we do to improve instruction.... The edict of the Common Core and Danielson has been given to us as a way to help kids think better, and I see evidence of that."

As suggested by this teacher's comment, this leader's efforts to "streamline and integrate" were effective: none of the teachers interviewed at this school expressed negative views with respect to the Common

Core or Danielson (although several described feeling overwhelmed). In addition, every teacher interviewed at this school indicated that their shifts in practice were yielding a positive impact. One teacher said, "I feel like I'm more overloaded..., but I feel like my work is more cohesive...for student achievement." Another added, "It's having a

positive impact...[Students are] thinking more critically, they're questioning themselves, they're questioning their classmates."

Notably (as further discussed in the section on maintaining instructional focus), students at this school described shifts in their own learning aligned to the school's focus on literacy, such as the use of more reading strategies like annotation, suggesting that teachers' efforts had succeeded in reaching students. As one student explained, "We annotate in every class. We have to answer a guided question. We read a lot – it helps me so I don't have to read over, I just look at annotations." Another student added, "I usually use evidence in our writing. [We have to] have enough evidence to support our claim."

The principal at another school took a similar approach by integrating new initiatives into existing instructional plans. He explained, "We're trying not to make it seem disruptive or different.... We were already planning [an] initiative to focus on reading levels more intensively, and it just seemed to already fit when the Common Core came along." He described using the school's teacher team structure to communicate DOE expectations to teachers, and emphasized that he did this only when that language mapped onto the school's overall instructional philosophy and approach:

When we get DOE expectations on the Common Core, we are trying to incorporate them into the same team collaboration structure we already had.... We tell our team leaders to have meetings with every team where they express [these new expectations].... Sometimes we try to keep our teams updated with the language the DOE is using, and sometimes we don't bother if it doesn't seem to match.

These efforts to align new initiatives with existing structures also appeared to have proven effective: all interviewed teachers at this school expressed a positive outlook with respect to this year's work. A teacher explained, "We have a lot of support here..., and the initiatives aren't too different from what we're already doing." Furthermore, teachers who commented on their shifts in this practice characterized their shifts as positive; one said, "I'm much more Common Core-minded [this year].... Even the way I write lessons is [focused on]... 'What do I want them to get from [the lesson]? How does that fit in with what I want from the Common Core?... What skill, what understanding, do I want to strengthen?'" In addition, students at this school provided positive feedback about their teachers, specifically referencing being able to make sense of ideas for themselves and having teachers deconstruct problems step-by-step rather than giving them the answers.

Principals who knew when to "say no" were better able to alleviate anxiety by streamlining the work. In addition to integrating new initiatives into existing school structures or practices, school leaders in this group sought to streamline the new initiatives, making them easily understandable to their staffs. A high school leader, for example, explained her efforts to streamline, saying, "I'm trying to figure out: How can we take this very complicated language of the DOE and break it down into language teachers can understand so teachers don't feel like there's this whole other thing.... We just have to refine how we're doing it." Similarly, an elementary school leader sought to insulate staff from feeling overwhelmed about the process of introducing Common Core-aligned curriculum. She explained, "My success here has been that I simplify for them. I don't throw all these things at them." All but one interviewed teacher at this school offered a positive outlook on the Common Core without qualification; one, who expressed some reservations, said she liked the Common Core in theory but worried about the gap between expectations and reality, saying, "I feel there's this huge gap between what the kids know and what we want them to know."

Notably, however, staff at this school appeared to be having more difficulty adjusting to the use of the Danielson *Framework*, perhaps because they had less exposure to it than to the Common Core. This led to some apparent anxiety and skepticism, albeit not at the heightened levels evident in other schools. One teacher commented, "I

guess over time we'll get to know it better but right now I don't feel that comfortable with it." Three of four interviewed teachers from this school described feeling similarly uncomfortable.

When leaders did not succeed in streamlining or framing new initiatives as aligned to existing structures or practices, teachers' anxieties were heightened and shifts in practice were hindered. At other schools, principals described efforts to streamline and integrate, but these efforts were not always successfully communicated or aligned to existing structures and practices within the school. At an elementary school, for example, the principal said she sought to align the Common Core to existing schoolwide foci, saying, "I don't like to add to teachers' work, so... you have to do something that is already embedded. They should be doing questioning and discussion anyway, and we should be doing more writing." However, staff at this school said they felt school leaders had not received adequate training with respect to new initiatives; one teacher reflected, "I don't think administration received on their end the materials on time, the training, and thus they weren't able to provide that for us." As a consequence, while the school leader made efforts to frame new initiatives as aligned to work that should already be happening, a perceived lack of detail and support in implementing the initiatives appeared to result in staff feeling overwhelmed (this is addressed further in the ensuing section on maintaining instructional leadership). Indeed, teachers at this school described feeling negative about the rollout of the Common Core and Danielson *Framework*, and their perceptions of the impact of their shifts in practice were mixed, with one teacher describing shifts as negative, one as mixed, and another as positive.

Furthermore, at three of the participating schools, leaders did not describe a concrete approach for framing new initiatives as integrated in the school's prior work, and their staff members, in turn, seemed to feel more negatively toward their work. Specifically, of the nine interviewed teachers who expressed overwhelmingly negative feelings about their work this year, six came from these three schools. One teacher characterized the sentiments of her peers, saying, "I feel as though, as far as the quality of the work with the kids, it's not nearly as... good as it has been in the past because of all of the... getting used to the new testing and the curriculum. You kind of see it's been thrown at us all at the same time."

This sense of sudden change appeared to carry over to students' experience at these schools. For example, one elementary school student commented on his sense that curricula were constantly changing, saying, "When we start a lesson since third grade, a month later the curriculum changes. We have to change to another book to learn another lesson and leave another one aside because it's the curriculum." Students at these schools appeared more prone to stresses around upcoming State exams, discussing these tests more frequently and with greater trepidation than their peers at other schools. One elementary school student captured the anxieties of his fellow students when he commented, "I think [the Common Core is] really hard. I see a little of what the test is going to have and what we need. Some kids [are] not to that capability."

At the schools where teachers felt more anxious and shifts were less evident, leaders said they were still developing their own understanding of the Common Core. At some of the same schools described in the previous section, leaders appeared to feel uncertain with respect to the value of the Common Core or how best to introduce it, suggesting that, to an extent, staff were simply reflecting leaders' perspectives regarding the work. An elementary school principal captured her own uncertainties in her comment:

I think we need more clarity in terms of Common Core in the classroom, clear models, this is the Common Core standard, this is what it should look like in a lesson, because we're being left to make those decisions on our own.... Everyone has their own program, so... if I have Teachers College, you have ReadyGen, we're both supposed to be Common Core Standards, we're both supposed to be meeting that, but we don't know what it's supposed to look like.

The other leaders in this group also described feeling that they still had an emergent understanding of the Common Core Standards; one high school principal who appeared more focused on the Regents said, “Common Core is too complicated for me right now to really dive into.” A middle school assistant principal elaborated:

We didn’t teach this way. When I stopped teaching, the Common Core had just started to emerge. So you as an administrator really have to immerse yourself in Danielson and Common Core because you weren’t held to that standard, [but] if you give a teacher... feedback and you don’t know what’s happening, you lose credibility really fast.... I don’t know how the DOE could rectify that, but they need to do something.

Nonetheless, as further described below, leaders focused on a need for support with implementation of new initiatives, not just with understanding the initiatives themselves.

Leaders expressed frustration with outside support that focused on understanding discrete concepts without addressing the realities of implementation. Participating leaders mentioned drawing from network coaches, talent coaches, and outside consultants as resources, but expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with that support and a desire for guidance from experienced school leaders.

With respect to talent coach support, for example, many principals said they wished the assistance focused more on the day-to-day realities of school leadership. One principal expressed frustration that her talent coach lacked insight into how to implement new systems within a school. Another noted that initial visits on the use of a rubric were valuable but contrasted this with follow-up visits that continued to focus on the same work of understanding the rubric, highlighting that “it was like taking the initial course over again.” These suggested the need for principals in this study to move more quickly from initial introduction of concepts quickly into the practical challenges of implementation.

With respect to the need for support with managing implementation, some leaders felt that they “don’t need the content support,” but, rather, were grappling with, “How do I get all of this done and still help everyone?” Two school leaders described struggling to make time for actual instructional support along with the increased demands and many other duties attendant to the role of principal or assistant principal. Several principals lamented the amount of time they spent documenting teacher observations, noting it took away from time they want to spend supporting teachers. In a typical comment, one principal reflected that she needed support with “how to manage all of this, and manage the budget, and manage all the other thousands of things I need to do, in a real time way, not some imaginary schedule.”

In keeping with this emphasis on the importance of understanding the day-to-day needs of principals, a middle school principal described how valuable it would be to have more structured opportunities to connect with other school leaders:

It would be nice... for school leaders to come together and have a conversation around what their experience had been, what they think could possibly work in a school community around the implementation. But... I feel that people have retreated into their respective schools and no one is talking about too much of anything... and people are kind of suffering in silence.... It’s really isolating.... As a principal, in general, it is lonely. However, with all of the change that has really taken place over the past six months, this is new, this is something else.

The same principal also expressed a desire to receive support from “folks that are clear across the QR rubric, Danielson framework, as well as the CIE and the Common Core.” She went on to explain, “We have pockets of excellence. We have people that may really, really know the QR or really, really know Danielson, or really, really know the shifts in Common Core, but it’s tough to find one person or a network of people that can come in and

support, that know all of those things.” As such, leaders were eager for support with expertise in school leadership as well as fluency in various instructional and evaluation tools linked to new initiatives.

MAINTAINING INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS: COHERENCE AND IMPACT

In its 2012-13 report on schools efforts to meet the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE), Eskolta highlighted the fact that schools with a coherent instructional focus tended to better integrate the Danielson *Framework* and Common Core Standards into practices and thinking across the school. This year's CIE also emphasized the importance of establishing an instructional focus. To further examine this theme, Eskolta asked teachers and leaders a series of questions about their instructional focus, including how it had been introduced and maintained and their perceptions of its impact. Three general groups of instructional focus types emerged from coding:

Coherent and high impact. This group was comprised of three schools at which *every* interviewee identified the same instructional focus for the school (coherent) and described that focus as having a positive impact or positive potential (high impact). We refer to these schools as having a coherent and high impact instructional focus. One middle school and two high schools fit into this category.

Mixed impact. In a second group were two schools at which interviewees identified the same instructional focus but *some* teachers characterized the focus as having a positive impact while others did not. We refer to these as having a mixed impact instructional focus. One high school and one middle school fell into this category.

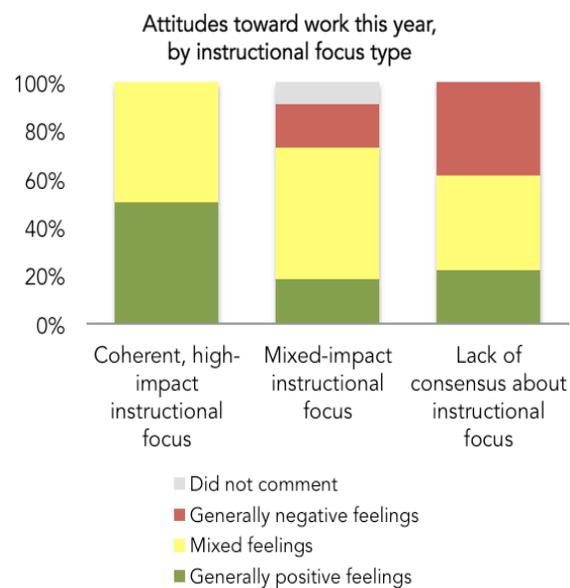
Lack of consensus. In a third group were four schools in which interviewed leaders identified a schoolwide focus, but teachers identified multiple other foci. We refer to these schools as those with a lack of consensus about the school's instructional focus. Of particular note, all three of the elementary schools fell into this category, as well as one middle school, regardless of overall Quality Review rating.

In this report, we focus in particular on areas of contrast between the three schools with coherent, high impact instructional foci and the four schools with a lack of consensus around instructional focus. Our key findings are summarized here:

- **The coherence and impact of the instructional focus were related to teachers' overall perceptions of the work this year.** At schools with a coherent, high impact focus, teachers described feeling more positive about their work this year. At schools with a lack of consensus, in turn, morale appeared lower and seemed to translate to students who appeared more overwhelmed.
- **The coherence and impact of the instructional focus appeared linked to teachers' perceptions of their shifts in practice.** At schools with a coherent and high impact instructional focus, teachers reported feeling their shifts in practice were having a positive impact, and students corroborated these positive shifts. Conversely, at schools with a lack of consensus around schoolwide focus, teachers reflected more negatively on their shifts in practice and students described feeling anxiety with respect to Common Core-aligned State exams.
- **The coherence and impact of the instructional focus seemed linked to whether the focus was actionable.** Specifically, teachers at schools with a coherent and high impact instructional focus reported developing and using concrete instructional strategies aligned to the school's focus. At schools with a lack of consensus around instructional focus, in turn, teachers appeared to struggle to hone in on concrete strategies.
- **Coherent, high impact instructional foci were anticipated.** Leaders grounded the focus in prior years' work, introduced the focus in depth, and reinforced it through a variety of mechanisms and structures. In contrast, at schools where there was a lack of consensus, teachers were more likely to report that this year's work "came out of left field."

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The coherence and impact of the instructional focus was related to the teachers' overall perceptions of their work this year. At schools with a coherent and high impact focus, teachers described feeling more positive about



this year's work. To open the structured interviews, Eskolta researchers asked teachers how they were feeling generally about their work this year. As shown in Figure 3, none of the teachers at schools with coherent, high impact instructional foci reported harboring entirely negative feelings about this year's work, and approximately half said they felt generally positive about the work. One such teacher, for example, connected her positive attitude to her school's focused efforts on literacy this year, saying, "I'm feeling overwhelmed by my work so far, but I'm really excited.... This year, we came back with even more organized drive."

Conversely, at schools with a lack of consensus around instructional focus, morale appeared lower. Indeed, around 40 percent of these interviewees described overwhelmingly negative feelings about this year's work. Reflecting a common tone at these schools, one interviewee stated, "I haven't been able to get my

Figure 3. Attitudes toward work this year, by instructional focus type

students to perform how I want them to be. So I'm not feeling too good, right now." This seemed to translate to perceptions among teachers that they must focus on the Common Core and Danielson *Framework* writ large, without specificity. One assistant principal said, for example, "Right now, our instructional focus is Danielson, it's all been taken by Danielson." A teacher at another school indicated, "No, [we don't have a focus].... We are Common Core, we are Danielson, and we are ReadyGen, and just follow all of that."

As further explored in the accompanying sections of this report, students at these schools seemed more overwhelmed by the prospect of Common Core-aligned State tests than their peers at schools pursuing coherent instructional foci. Three of the four students interviewed at one elementary school, for example, expressed concern about the difficulty of State tests, and one asked if the Department of Education "bosses" could "give the kids more time to get ready."

The coherence and impact of the instructional focus appeared linked to teachers' perceptions of their shifts in practice. During structured interviews, teachers were probed about shifts in practice they made this year and the perceived impact of those shifts. As shown in Figure 4, the majority (78%) of teachers at schools with coherent, high impact instructional foci described their shifts in practice this year as at least partly positive, with 58 percent describing their shifts as yielding wholly positive effects. In contrast, at schools where there was a lack of consensus about the school's instructional focus, responses were almost evenly split: nearly half (46%) deemed the shifts to be at least partially positive while 40 percent said they found the shifts to be generally negative.

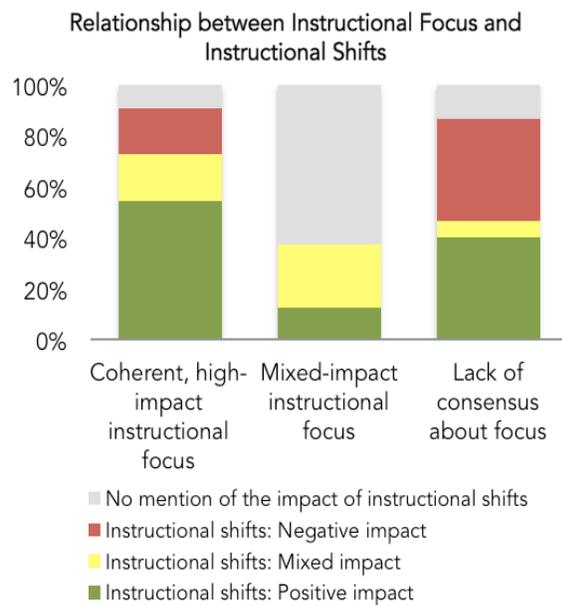


Figure 4. Relationship between instructional focus and instructional shifts

Interviews with teachers and students reinforced the relationship between a coherent, high impact focus and positive shifts in practice. At a school with a coherent, high impact focus on literacy, for example, a teacher reported:

Having a focused schoolwide effort to improve literacy... is hard work, but it is having a really meaningful impact.... We're having conversations around, what does it mean to be a good reader? What does reading mean to you?... We have some kids whose reading levels have increased one or two... levels since being on Reading Plus over the summer, and not only has it helped them improve, but they can articulate how reading can help them do better at school.... They're putting in an effort, and they can say, "If I persevere, I can be a better reader and go far in life...." It's not just a dialogue with staff; it's with students as well. We're all going to be better readers, and what does that mean for your future?

Interviews with students at this school indicated that the focus on literacy helped expose students to a variety of reading strategies across classrooms, yielding benefits for their reading skills. One student noted that he was expected to annotate in all of his classes and reflected on the benefits of this practice, saying, "We annotate – that helps me... understand the text better. We could just read over the text and answer the questions, but when [I] go back into the passage and underline, it helps me to understand questions. We annotate in every class." Other students at this school described being held accountable for supporting claims with evidence and learning new vocabulary, further suggesting that the school's focus on literacy had positively affected student experiences.

Similarly, at a school with a coherent, high impact focus on differentiation, a teacher described how this focus helped him meet individual student needs. "I have... a closer relationship... not with the kids [necessarily], but with what they're capable of doing," the teacher explained. "I know exactly where each kid is, where they need to be, and how to get them there." Interviewed students at this school affirmed this characterization. They appeared to feel known by their teachers, and expressed that teachers genuinely seemed aware of when they needed help. One student explained, "After [the mini-lesson], we do guided practice, [and my teacher] goes to each table to see if you understand. She has that teacher sense and knows if you need help." She contrasted this experience with her previous school, saying, "I didn't know how to divide until sixth grade, [my] old school wasn't good. [They were] focusing on the whole class, not on individuals."

Conversely, at schools with a lack of consensus around instructional focus, teachers and students tended not to report positive shifts in instruction this year. At one such school, where the principal answered a question about instructional focus by saying, "My instructional goal... is I want my teachers to truly believe... that all children can learn," each interviewed teacher described a different schoolwide focus (two cited different components of the Danielson *Framework*, one mentioned literacy, and another discussed socioemotional learning). Notably, at this school, none of the interviewed teachers described their shifts in practice as yielding a positive impact, and half described their shifts as wholly negative. One teacher said she felt she had less time to devote to "deep work," saying, "[There's] less time to do the other things, like the grading, looking over... the students' work.... I think it

takes time away from that because you're having to implement all of these different expectations into your lessons."

The teachers' seeming dissatisfaction at this school appeared to have been internalized by interviewed students. Every interviewed student at this elementary school discussed upcoming State tests with great anxiety. When asked for their advice about how to make schools better, three of four interviewed students specifically expressed a desire for more preparation for State tests. One asked for "a little bit more homework with a little more questions on the State test;" others mentioned "teach[ing] the children more about what's going to be on the State test so they'll be ready" and "prepar[ing] you for things that [are] going to happen on the State exam." In sum, at schools with coherent, high impact instructional foci, students described positive classroom experiences aligned to the schoolwide focus, while students and teachers at schools that lacked consensus around a focus appeared overwhelmed and did not describe positive shifts in instruction.

The coherence and impact of the instructional focus seemed linked to whether the focus was actionable. At schools with a coherent, high impact focus, the focus appeared to be more actionable, fostering the development and use of concrete instructional strategies across content areas. At the school focused on literacy, for example, teachers described developing strategies to support students in building comprehension skills. One math teacher related:

Everyone is working on building literacy within the classroom, even in math class. Our first strategy is annotation, we're using... annotation... in every single class.... In math, we focus on marking up our word problems, annotating important words and numbers.... We also work on rephrasing the question in your own words.... We're also thinking of looking for other literacy strategies, anticipation guides, graphic organizers to help the kids better access the text.

As noted in the section on shifts in practice, interviewed students at this school described using these strategies, particularly annotation.

Similarly, at a school focused on differentiation, teachers described developing concrete approaches to reinforcing this focus across the school. One teacher described using small-group instruction and feedback in service of the school's focus, explaining, "Our schoolwide goal is always to get the students to the next level, and we do that through small-group instruction and feedback, and it's been repeated [in every class]. In [most] classroom[s], we have two teachers, so we have focus groups... and give them feedback weekly." An interviewed student described how all his teachers used grouping and conferencing strategies to support students, saying:

I think she teaches us equally. She might conference with the... kids who need help.... For kids done with science, she [gives] them more work. For kids struggling through, she [sits] with them, [helps] them, [asks] them questions. For ELA, two groups [have] guided reading.... Two teachers switch to help those groups. To start a new book, teachers will help.... For math, we sit at the same table with kids of different levels.

Overall, at schools with a coherent, high impact focus, teachers and students alike indicated the focus was grounded in concrete instructional strategies that advanced the focus and supported student learning.

At schools where there was a lack of consensus around instructional focus, teachers' focus on the Common Core or Danielson *Framework* writ large appeared to hinder their ability to hone in on specific practices. At one such school, the principal described the schoolwide instructional focus as "building comprehension." Teachers' responses, however, did not align to this characterization. While two teachers mentioned literacy, they also discussed "Danielson critical thinking," differentiation, and family engagement, and two others said the school did not have a focus at all. These teachers, in particular, when asked about the school's focus, responded with answers about the *entire* Common Core and the *entire* Danielson *Framework*; as one explained, "What the school is looking

for [is] based on Danielson and based on the Common Core, and there's... a framework they expect to see when they walk into our classrooms, so I would say yes, [there is a focus].... Everything is Common Core."

Students at this elementary school seemed similarly overwhelmed by the demands of the Common Core. Interviewed students, all of whom were in upper grades, highlighted that they spent more time testing and less time engaged in "activities" this year. One commented, "Traditions [have] changed.... We [have] less celebrations now," and concluded, "We're older; we don't deserve more entertainment and [we] need to learn more." Another affirmed this perspective, saying, "We do more work [now], more tests, [there is] more pressure for [us].... We do so many tests and want to do them all correct. On the lower grades, [they] can just relax." Overall, a coherent, high impact instructional focus appeared to allow teachers to prioritize specific instructional strategies aligned to the focus. At schools without this focus, teachers struggled to focus their efforts on specific strategies.

Coherent, high impact instructional foci were also anticipated. Leaders grounded the focus in the prior year's work, introduced the focus in depth, and reinforced it through a variety of mechanisms and structures. As shown

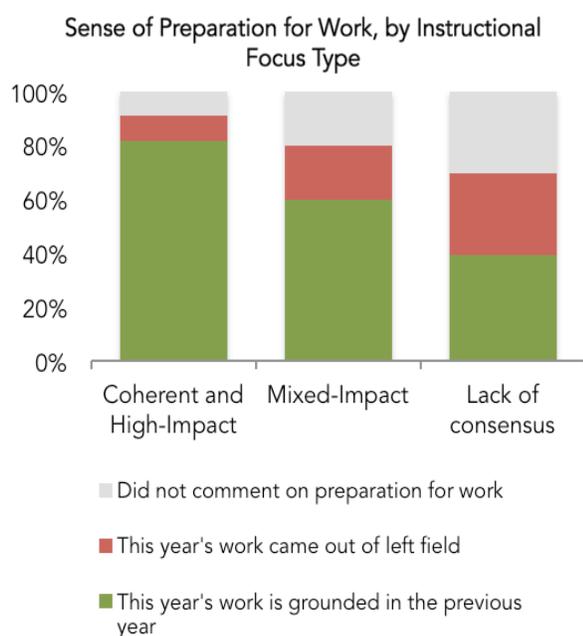


Figure 5. Sense of preparation for work, by instructional focus type

in Figure 5, the higher impact a school's focus, the more teachers reported that their work was grounded in the prior year's efforts. Specifically, more than 80 percent of teachers at schools with a coherent, high impact focus characterized their work as grounded in previous years. "The initiatives aren't too different from what we're already doing," one teacher said, characterizing this viewpoint. Conversely, at schools where interviewees lacked consensus about a focus, just 40 percent described their work as having a basis in prior years.

Similarly, teachers at schools with coherent, high impact instructional foci tended to report that their schools introduced the focus in depth, typically through an all-day professional development (PD) session, and maintained the focus regularly through feedback, PD sessions, and teacher teamwork. In contrast, teachers at schools with a lack of consensus around a focus reported surface-level maintenance that consisted of occasional PD sessions or mentions in feedback with little consistency or follow-up. Figure 6 on the following page shows how teachers described the introduction and

maintenance of their school's instructional focus. Notably, of all the interviewees at schools with a coherent, high impact focus, only one offered no comment on the way the instructional focus was maintained, compared to between 30 and 40 percent of interviewees for the other two groups.

Interviews with leaders and teachers further indicated that high impact, coherent foci tended to be grounded in prior year's work. For example, the principal at the school focused on differentiation explained that she had been pushing her teachers in this area for several years, saying, "We're getting much better; I think if you visit[ed] our classrooms from 2009 until now, you'll see the kids are very used to it." Similarly, at the school focused on literacy, teachers had made some concentrated efforts to support students in reading during the prior year. Notably, at both schools, teachers were already familiar and fluent with a schoolwide approach to lesson planning – the workshop model at one, Understanding By Design at the other – and able to integrate new efforts around differentiation and literacy into an already familiar lesson structure and instructional approach.

With respect to the introduction of coherent foci, leaders and teachers described spending significant time at the beginning of the school year introducing the focus and developing related instructional strategies. At the school focused on literacy, one teacher explained, “In the beginning of the year, we fleshed out the philosophy behind [the focus]... at a daylong PD... We talked about... techniques... that would move along in that direction [toward improving literacy].” Teachers at the school focused on differentiation were also afforded time at the beginning of

the year to think about ways to group their students. Similarly, teachers at another school in this group broke out into content areas at the beginning of the school year to discuss the school’s focus on rigorous, open-ended learning and how to integrate that focus into their practice in each subject area.

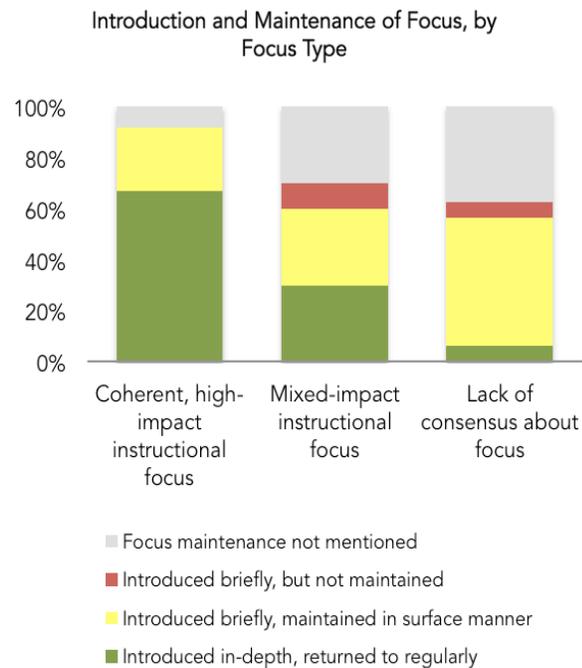


Figure 6. Introduction and maintenance of focus, by focus type

Teachers highlighted ongoing PD, feedback, and the work of teacher teams as mechanisms to reinforce the schoolwide focus. At the school focused on literacy, for example, a teacher explained, “We have [PD sessions] dispersed throughout [the year on] ways to introduce reading in our classes..., different techniques and ways to get kids to own those techniques.” This teacher also highlighted observations, saying, “[The principal has] come in quite a lot... just to see implementation and help us improve.... [It’s] not for stakes..., observations that help us get at those techniques before they become part of our rating.” In addition, at all three schools in this group, the work of teacher teams (explored in another section of this report) centered on implementing the school’s instructional focus.

Conversely, at schools where there was a lack of consensus around instructional focus, teachers described a lack of structures to carry the focus through the year. At one of these schools, a teacher explained:

We do [have a focus] because in the beginning of the year, my principal says... “This is what we’re going for this year.” We definitely start out with the best intentions every year.... There [are] definitely attempts made to get us to focus on to one thing. What I’m realizing now... about principals..., the same way we completely feel bombarded, they’re overwhelmed too.... You come up with all these great ideas, and it’s just hard to follow through.... I don’t remember [the instructional focus].

Notably, schools with weaker teacher team structures (explored further in the section of this report on teacher teams) evidenced less capacity to implement and maintain a coherent schoolwide focus.

TEACHER TEAMS AND LEADERSHIP: STRUCTURES AND SUPPORT

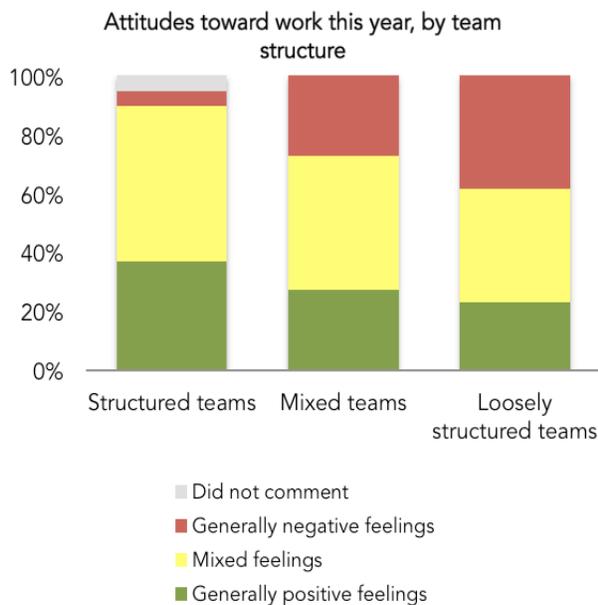


Figure 7. Attitude toward work, by team structure

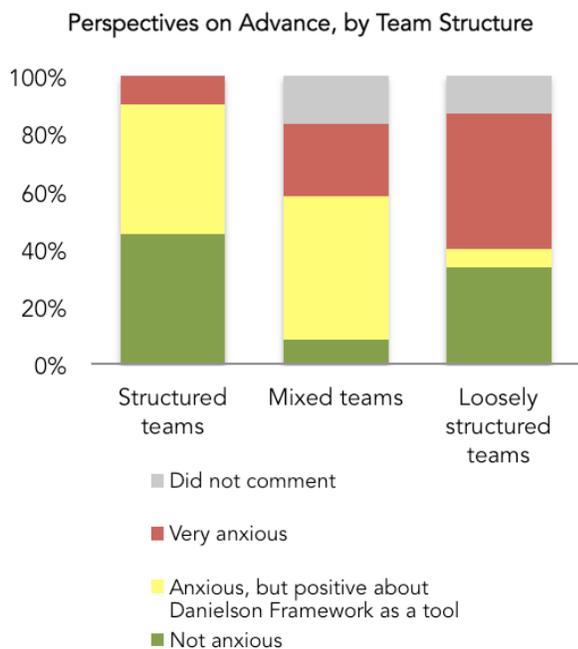


Figure 8. Perspectives on Advance, by team structure

Two years prior to this report, when Eskolta staff interviewed 119 educators to examine how they were implementing the 2011-12 Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE), findings suggested that schools with teacher teams led by teacher leaders tasked with significant responsibilities around planning and facilitation played a key role in implementing the expectations. In its 2012-13 report on schools' efforts to meet the Citywide Instructional Expectations, Eskolta highlighted how collaborative inquiry became central to teacher practice when leadership provided objectives and focused schedules on a common curricular area. This report builds on those findings to more deeply examine how teacher teams have facilitated schools' efforts to meet the CIE in 2013-14. To shed light on this theme, teachers were asked how they collaborated with their colleagues, how they were supported in doing so, and how collaboration could be improved at their schools. Responses were analyzed with a focus on understanding the elements of successful teacher teams. Three general collaboration structures emerged from coding:

Structured teams. In the first group were schools in which teams had proactive sets of responsibilities, and were shepherded by teacher leaders held to high expectations and provided with robust support. We refer to these as schools with structured teams. Two middle schools and two high schools comprise this group. As shown in Figure 7, teachers at these schools reported being less overwhelmed and more positive about their work this year than those in the other two groups, described below. Indeed, across all four of these schools, only one person expressed feeling generally negative about the work this year. Teachers' feelings about the Danielson *Framework* were also more positive than in the other groups; as shown in Figure 8, almost forty percent of teachers in schools with structured teams reported that they did not regard the new teacher evaluation system with anxiety. Similarly, across these schools, nearly one-third of teachers said collaboration could not be improved at their schools, a far larger proportion than in either of the other two groups; this is shown in Figure 9.

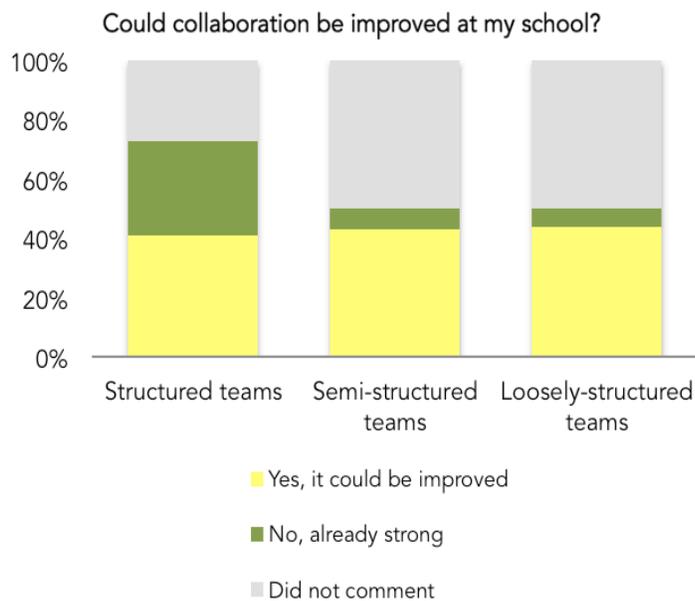


Figure 9. Potential for improvement of collaboration

arrangements. These schools, by and large, did not have a designated team leader, or the team leader's role was unclear. Teachers' descriptions of their work on these teams typically lacked specific details about the teams' activities or objectives. We refer to these schools as those with loosely structured teams. The three participating elementary schools comprise this group. Of all the teachers interviewed at these schools, only one felt that collaboration could not be improved at their school. Forty percent of the teachers who worked at these schools felt negatively towards the work this year, a notably larger percentage than in the other groups.

It is important to note that because the loosely structured group is comprised exclusively of all the elementary schools in the sample, direct comparisons between this group and the other groups confounds the specifics of the finding with the school level; any comparison between the loosely structured group and the structured group, for example, is in part a comparison between elementary schools and high schools.

This report is organized around the following findings, which are explored in greater detail in the pages that follow:

- **At schools with structured teams, school leaders carefully cultivated teacher leaders and provided modeling and guidance matched to clear expectations for planning and facilitation.** In contrast, schools that did not have a defined role for designated teacher leaders appeared to have less effective teacher teams.
- **Structured teams had a proactive, clear set of responsibilities such as department teams serving as a vehicle to advance instructional goals and grade teams intended to meet individual student needs.** Conversely, when teams' responsibilities were less structured, work appeared less effective.
- **In particular, structured teams pushed teachers to develop a common set of practices aligned to the school's instructional focus.** Teachers on loosely structured department or grade level teams, in turn, rarely, if ever, offered concrete examples of how they used their teacher team time.

Mixed teams. In a second group were schools in which collaboration was conducted with team leaders, but the teams either lacked autonomy or, conversely, were afforded so few supports that teachers were unsure what to do with the time. We refer to these schools as those with a mixed team structure. One middle school and one high school comprised this group. At schools with mixed teams, feelings leaned towards the negative. In relation to perceptions of the Danielson *Framework*, for instance, only five percent of educators in this group reported feeling positive. Of all the teachers interviewed at these schools, only one felt that collaboration could not be improved at their school, while many more felt it could be improved.

Loosely structured teams. In the third group were schools in which collaboration was conducted via largely informal teaming

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At schools with structured teams, school leaders carefully cultivated teacher leaders, and provided modeling and guidance matched to clear expectations for planning and facilitation. Teacher leadership appeared key to the success of structured teacher teams at participating schools. At every school with structured teams, school leaders reported intentionally developing systems to cultivate teacher leadership. One principal, for example, explained that he culled leaders from the population of teachers who had worked within his school's team structure for at least three years, saying, "We have a system where once someone has been here for at least three years, usually four or five, and has... shown exemplary work, they become a team leader." At other schools with structured teams, veteran teachers also tended to lead teacher teams. As such, leaders at these schools tended to draw from the pool of teachers who had experienced the school's team model to identify new teacher leaders.

Interviews also suggested that school leaders in this group provided clear modeling and guidance for teacher leaders through three mechanisms: weekly planning meetings, co-facilitation, and feedback on teacher leadership. As further explored in the following section, leaders at schools with mixed or loosely structured teams generally did not have comparable supports in place to support teacher leadership and facilitate the success of teacher teams.

Weekly planning meetings. All schools with structured teams convened teacher leaders and school leaders weekly to co-plan agendas for upcoming team meetings and share information on the progress of teams' work. As one principal explained, "The meetings with the department chairs are really focused on noticings that I have... from being in the classroom... and also some operational items that need to be taken care of." These weekly leadership meetings were used to craft individualized team meeting agendas. A team leader at another school noted that meetings offered a space not just to "hear from the administration; you can [also] get help from other team leaders," suggesting that weekly planning meetings provided a space for collaboration among team leaders, as well as with school leadership.

Co-facilitation. Three of the four principals in this group with structured teams described regularly sitting in on teacher leader meetings – sometimes to observe and sometimes to provide support by modeling facilitation as a form of differentiated support. One principal, for example, noted that she tried to "be there and support the planning;" she also noted that she liked to attend meetings in order to ascertain, "What do I need to do in terms of [school leadership] to support what [teachers] feel they need to do to get the difficult work [of teaching] done." As this comment suggests, co-facilitation may have also allowed for improved communication between teacher teams and school leadership. A principal at another school noted that she made it a point to regularly attend and co-facilitate teacher team meetings with two grade teams that had struggled to get their work off the ground this year. She noted she did not "want to be there all year," but felt her modeling was helping the team become more cohesive and productive in the short term and would prepare it to function independently in the longer term.

Feedback on teacher leadership. Lastly, teacher leaders at these schools benefited from feedback on their work not just as teachers, but also as teacher leaders. As one teacher explained, "A lot of my feedback has mainly been related to the work as the department chair, so it hasn't been on my instructional practices..., more like organizational duties.... Here's what needs to happen, how do I make this happen. A lot of collaborative organizing and like, 'You're doing a good job, relax.'"

Overall, at schools with structured teams, teacher leaders benefited from supports provided in the form of weekly planning meetings, opportunities for co-facilitation, and regular feedback, and principals and teachers positively described the impact of supporting teacher leaders – and, thus, teacher teams – in this way. As one principal commented, "I'm really excited about how I'm leveraging my department heads this year. They helped me create

[the school's instructional focus], so they have total buy-in to it." A teacher at another school reflected, "Them even asking me to make the transition from teacher to leader has made me... look at things differently so I can be able to mentor and assist adults, and I think that helps my teaching," suggesting the positive impact of nurturing teachers in this manner.

In contrast, schools that did not have a defined role for designated teacher leaders appeared to have less effective teacher teams. At the three schools with loosely structured teacher teams, two did not have designated team leaders; rather, teachers were expected to meet during common prep periods, occasionally joined by a school leader for supervision. At another school in this group, teacher teams did have leaders, but their role appeared unclear compared to the concrete expectations around planning and facilitation described above. One teacher at such a school explained, "We have a grade leader for each grade, and each grade leader meets with administration, and any concerns are communicated through the grade leader," but shared few specifics about the team's collaborative efforts.

At schools with semi-structured teacher teams, in turn, teams did have designated leaders, but these leaders either appeared to have very little autonomy or so much autonomy as to suffer from lack of guidance. With respect to the former case, an assistant principal said she would "usually run the meetings and steer it in the directions of things that I'm seeing," and did not mention how teacher leaders figured into this process. A team leader at this school saw her role primarily as one of holding teachers accountable, saying, "I look at [my peers'] work... to make sure everything is Common Core-aligned, that it's rigorous;" she did not mention any responsibilities around planning or facilitating meetings. At the other end of the spectrum, teacher teams at some schools seemed to have so much autonomy that they were unclear how to focus their teacher team time. For example, at a school where the principal explained, "I don't dictate every second of [teachers'] day, I don't treat them like children," an interviewed teacher indicated that she wished her teams had "more protocols" because teacher team time was not especially productive.

Structured teams had clear sets of responsibilities, with department teams serving as a vehicle to advance instructional goals and grade teams intended to meet individual student needs. At all four schools with structured teams, leaders set clear expectations for these teams and provided time during the school day or compensated teachers with per-session for after-school meetings. As one teacher explained, "Agendas are done, minutes are kept. They've made the time and they've created the expectation that the time be used productively."

Structured grade teams focused on individual student needs. At all four schools in this group, every grade team was expected to focus on meeting individual student needs. One school had an especially systematized approach to meeting this goal. Teachers were expected to regularly look at samples of student work from the same student across classes using a protocol, with the goal of identifying common areas of struggle and interventions to implement across content areas.

Structured department teams allowed for co-planning, looking at student work, and peer feedback and support. With respect to department teams, work was more varied. Teacher teams' responsibilities tended to revolve around co-planning, looking at student work to identify common areas of struggle, and, in some instances, providing peer feedback and support. A high school principal described how department teams fostered peer relationships and communication that supported successful co-planning, explaining, "When we have a first-year teacher [writing] the lesson plans for [the] week, they have the previous year's as a model [and] this highly successful veteran [team leader] is always looking at [the lessons] because she's going to be teaching them in her own room." The principal went on to describe how all teachers were expected to review and provide feedback on each other's plans, and that teacher leaders were to "watch the other two teachers [on their team], see how they're doing, see how the lesson is working in all the classes in a similar way."

Conversely, when teams' responsibilities were less structured, work appeared less effective. At schools with loosely or semi-structured teacher teams, leaders shared less detail about what they expected teachers to do with teacher team time, and teachers, in turn, offered less information about the work they did in their teams. For example, at one school, an assistant principal noted the existence of teacher teams, saying, "We have common planning across the grades in a subject and then we have grade common planning." However, she seemed unclear about the work taking place in these teams, commenting, "They may pass lesson plans down, I know that happens," but offering little detail beyond that. Teachers at this school said they tended to focus on responding to day-to-day challenges with curriculum rather than proactive planning in their teams. One teacher described focusing "generally about the curriculum and how it's being presented, struggles that we're having in class as far as instruction, classroom management, coping with the curriculum." A teacher at another school offered a similar response, saying, "We talk about the practices we're working on in the class, are expectations being met, why or why not, and we talk through different suggestions," but did not offer specific examples of this work. These comparatively vague descriptions offer a lean contrast to teachers' rich descriptions of their work in structured teams.

Structured teams pushed teachers to develop a common set of practices, typically aligned to the school's instructional focus. When structured teacher teams focused on co-planning, their work often extended beyond planning lessons or units to encompass developing instructional strategies aligned to the school's instructional focus. At a school with a focus on literacy, for example, teacher teams served as the primary vehicle for developing instructional strategies in support of reading and writing across content areas. One teacher explained:

Our grade team chose sentence completion guides to start, because we felt like across the board we can effectively use those in each subject matter, and we're all going to teach it at the exact same time, and then observe each other and then see what worked in this class but not in this class... to strategize what would work across classes. We do want to be across the board using the same strategy.... When we introduce this... guide, there's no mystery and it's a resource the kids will use all the time to help them understand whatever task they're going to be performing.

As such, at this school, teachers worked in concert to develop, implement, and refine instructional strategies related to the school's focus on literacy. Students at this school described using and benefiting from the reading strategies their teachers had worked hard to develop, suggesting the efficacy of this approach (this is further described in the section of this report on instructional focus).

Similarly, at another school with structured teacher teams, a science teacher working on a vertical team explained how this structure allowed him and his teammates to look at student work and develop action plans for students. This emphasis on individual plans was aligned to the school's focus on differentiation. The teacher explained:

We look at student work together.... We're able to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and what their next steps are, because it's important to discuss these critical science skills with the sixth- and seventh-grade teachers because they are taking a State exam in eighth grade.... How do we help each other to build those skills?

Notably (as is discussed in greater depth in the report on instructional focus), students at this school also reported benefiting from the school's focus on differentiation, describing how their teachers used a variety of groupings, as well as individual conferencing, to meet their needs.

At another school with structured teams, teachers described working closely with each other to co-plan, saying, "We'll come up with the overview and the aims together.... We go back and forth.... We have Google Drive so the lesson is uploaded the night before; you can get on, make changes. [My colleagues] and I do slightly different

things [and] share them with each other.” Overall, across the schools in this group, teachers working in structured teams collaborated to develop common plans or practices.

In contrast, teachers on loosely structured teams rarely, if ever, offered concrete examples of how they used their teacher team time. Indeed, as described above, their descriptions of work in teacher teams tended to focus on reacting to day-to-day challenges with implementing curriculum, rather than proactive planning or design of instructional strategies. A teacher at one of these schools commented, “Each content has their own content meeting, and each grade has their grade team meeting, but... they’re very generic; make sure you have your quiz ready, what are your students struggling in.” As such, while structured teams were able to develop common practices, often aligned to their schools’ instructional foci, it appeared that loosely structured teams did not achieve such ends.

NEW CURRICULAR RESOURCES: CHOICES AND IMPLEMENTATION

At the outset of the 2013-2014 school year, the NYC Department of Education recommended specific curriculum for grades K-9 ELA and math for the first time in a decade. This section explores the ensuing curriculum choices made by elementary and middle school leaders, and how their staffs approached adoption or adaptation of these resources, as well as how high school staff approached developing curricular materials in-house. For the purposes of this section, “adoption” is defined as using a curriculum with few or minimal adjustments, whereas “adaptation” is defined as making significant adjustments, such as revising specific units, lessons, or resources and incorporating them into existing curriculum.

As shown in Table 5, all six participating elementary and middle schools purchased at least one new curriculum (high school staff did not report purchasing any new curricula). Five of these schools were using these resources for the first time; one elementary school, however, had obtained My Math (a McGraw-Hill curriculum) and a publicly available Common Core ELA curriculum from another state in the 2012-2013 school year. In addition, four schools purchased supplemental resources to help students develop key skills.

| | Elementary Schools | Middle Schools |
|--|--------------------|----------------|
| ELA Curriculum | | |
| Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) | 2 | |
| Publicly available Common Core ELA curriculum from other state | 1 | |
| ReadyGen | 1 | |
| Code X | | 2 |
| Expeditionary Learning | | 1 |
| ELA Supplemental Resources | | |
| Adaptive reading programs | 1 | 1 |
| Vocabulary development program | | 2 |
| Math Curriculum | | |
| Go Math | 2 | |
| My Math | 1 | |
| Connected Mathematics Project 3 (CMP3) | | 3 |
| Math Supplemental Resources | | |
| Adaptive math program | | 1 |
| Retained Curriculum | | |
| Teachers College | 1 | |

Table 5. ELA and Math Curricular Resources

The four themes highlighted here emerged from rigorous coding of structured interviews, confirmation from informal conversations with teachers about student work, and semi-structured student interviews. These themes are outlined below and elucidated in the sections that follow:

On the continuum from adoption to development, schools took one of three approaches: wholesale adoption (most common in elementary math), widely varying degrees of adaptation (typical in ELA and middle school), and independent development (common in high school).

Timing of rollout forced schools to make reactive decisions around curriculum adaptation, hindering effective use. Curricula became available near the start of the school year, and as a result leaders often made decisions around whether to adapt new resources at the same time as teachers attempted to use new materials and encountered challenges.

Leaders, teachers, and students associated Common Core-aligned curriculum with high-stakes testing, and described the negative impact of testing on students. Research by Eskolta in prior years found that Common

Core-aligned curriculum appeared linked in the minds of teachers and leaders with State exams, and this finding resurfaced this year.

School staff saw the need to supplement curriculum to address skill gaps, and their ability to do so was affected by the quality of teacher teams. More structured teacher teams provided a framework for more extensive curricular modification.

FINDINGS

On the continuum from adoption to development, schools took one of three approaches: wholesale adoption, widely varying degrees of adaptation, and independent development. This trend echoes findings from Eskolta’s prior study of the implementation of the 2011-2012 Citywide Instructional Expectations, when schools were asked to implement Common Core-aligned units and were provided a variety of “task bundles” to support this work. That year, Eskolta’s research found that elementary schools tended to adopt curricula, high schools tended to adapt existing resources or develop their own, and that middle schools often occupied a middle ground, adapting resources to meet their students’ needs. This year, as described below and shown in Figure 10, in elementary math, adoption was the norm. For elementary school ELA and middle school math and ELA, adaptation appeared most common, running the gamut from adding scaffolds to culling specific units or resources to integrate into existing in-house curriculum. Participating high schools favored independent development of resources.

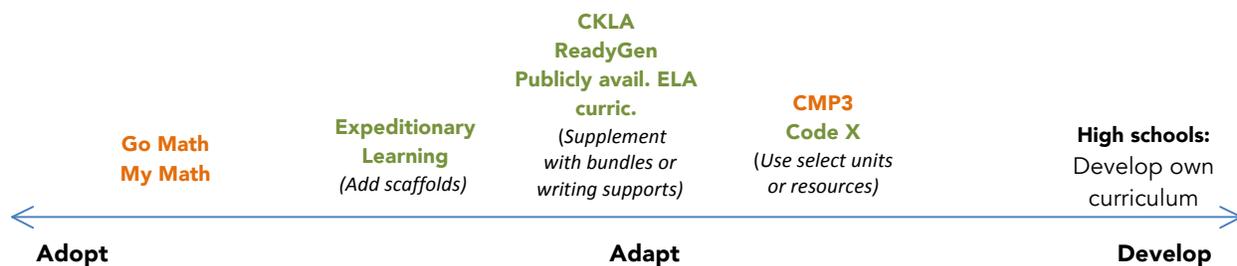


Figure 10. Continuum from Adoption to Development

In elementary math, adoption was the norm, although some teachers expressed concerns about pacing and addressing the literacy demands of new curricula. Staff at the elementary schools described adopting their new math curricula: My Math at one school and Go Math at the other two. One teacher, for example, explained that Go Math provides a comprehensive program, explaining, “It gives you the homework, enrichment, handouts and also advice and suggestions of how to teach ELLs, kids with special needs, it’s basically all there.”

Some teachers raised the concern that straightforward adoption of the curriculum led to pacing issues, in part because students needed more time to read and understand complex word problems. In a comment characteristic of these critiques, one teacher said, “Whereas in the past you spent a little longer trying to work on those [multi-step] problems, it just feels like... now... you have to teach and move on.” A middle school teacher also discussed “never fitting in” all the content required before testing. Some students also described struggling with new math curriculum; a fifth-grade student at one of these schools affirmed teachers’ comments about the increased demands of a literacy-rich math program, saying he was struggling because “sometimes I don’t get the words [in word problems], but I try my best.”

For elementary school ELA and for middle school math and ELA, adaptation appeared most common, and was driven by the need to help students develop basic skills not addressed in new curricula. Interviewed staff at every

participating elementary and middle school described adapting newly-purchased ELA curriculum in an effort to ensure students could access the material; at two of the three participating middle schools, staff also reported significantly adapting CMP3 to better address their students' mathematical needs. Across schools, teachers said they found it especially difficult to modify new curricula to be accessible to English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The extent of modification ranged from incorporating more scaffolds, to supplementing with outside resources, to selecting individual units or tasks and combining them with existing in-house curriculum. (As further discussed in the final section of this report, well-structured teacher teams appeared to facilitate more comprehensive curricular adaptations.)

At the "incorporating more scaffolds" end of this spectrum, a middle school assistant principal explained that her teachers felt it was necessary to scaffold Expeditionary Learning activities: "Our kids have issues with discussion, they can't have these triad discussions... so we have to ask them scaffolded questions to build their confidence." In a more hands-on approach, other schools supplemented new programs with additional resources to prepare students for challenging culminating tasks. Staff at an elementary school, for example, supplemented their curriculum (a publicly available Common Core-aligned ELA curriculum from another state) with bundles from the NYC Department of Education's Common Core Library. A teacher commented, "[The curriculum] gave us a good focus, [but] it's not a complete literacy program." Staff at another elementary school took a similar approach with CKLA and ReadyGen. The principal explained that these programs lacked sufficient preparation for writing tasks and said her staff had to modify these curricula to incorporate more writing practice. Students notice and appreciate the scaffolds as well; at a middle school, a student reflected, "[Teachers] write notes and they put pictures, examples of the text on the SmartBoard instead of just talking out loud and that helps me because it's right there.... I understand it better."

At the other end of the spectrum, middle schools using Code X and CMP3 described culling and revising a few select units and integrating them into existing in-house curriculum. With respect to Code X, one teacher criticized the curriculum for focusing on narrative writing, rather than the types of reading and writing that she expected to appear on State exams. She elaborated, "I only chose the units... that align to my social studies curriculum. If they were to change it, I think they should align it to the social studies scope and sequence, and only have one narrative writing task." In a testament to the challenges of making Common Core-aligned curricula accessible to students with IEPs, one special education teacher described making very limited use of Code X, commenting, "[For my students reading at] kindergarten, first grade level..., I do the vocabulary with them.... And sometimes I... pull little sections out for them." Another middle school took a different approach, developing a pacing calendar that allowed them to use Code X exclusively for writing and test preparation, one period a day, while using other resources for humanities and reading.

With respect to middle school math, in turn, teachers at two participating schools said they found it imperative to adapt CMP3 because their students lacked the skill base necessary to access its lessons. At these schools, teachers described struggling to implement the curriculum in their classrooms. One teacher explained:

It assumes that kids have prior knowledge that they don't.... You'd go to a lesson on integers, and then all of a sudden they'd be doing scientific notation with integers. [The curriculum] combine[s] a lot of things together, [but students] have to learn all those individual things before they put them together. So I have used some tasks that went very well, but I've used them at the end of the unit when they have all of the skills that they need. But I could never just teach them something with Connected Math, like an isolated topic.

As a result of these challenges, teachers at these schools described significantly adapting the curriculum. One teacher explained, “We made our own pacing.... We redid our curriculum... and have gathered our own resources.” Another added, “We haven’t picked up that [CMP3] book in... months.”

Student interviews at this school suggested students benefited from teachers’ approach to modifying instruction. One student said, “I used to hate math, [but my teachers] always connect math to real life. I was confused in probabilities – [my teacher] explains examples.” At another middle school, where the principal reported supplementing CMP3 with a web-based skills-development program, an interviewed student praised her teachers for not giving problems “straight out of textbooks,” saying it helped her “understand [the material] more.”

At the high school level, participating schools favored independent development of resources. In this section, we do not discuss high school curricular resources in detail, as none of the participating high school staff reported that their schools had purchased new curricula. Teachers at these schools designed their own curriculum and were grappling with finding areas of intersection between the Regents and Common Core, an issue discussed further in a subsequent section on testing.

Timing of rollout forced schools to make reactive decisions around adapting curriculum, hindering effective use.

Schools reported that new curricula and accompanying materials became available shortly before – or even after – the start of the school year. As a result, decisions around whether and how to adapt these resources often were made at the same time as teachers attempted to implement new units and encountered challenges. In a common critique, a middle school principal explained, “Receiving the materials so late, it’s difficult because teachers need[ed] time to really preview it.” She noted that she had anticipated a late arrival and, for this reason, opted to have teachers use a previously designed Common Core unit for the first marking period. Nonetheless, she lamented the lack of time for teachers to prepare for subsequent units.

This school leader also noted that her staff were not implementing CMP3 “to the true fidelity of the model,” and attributed this to the late arrival of materials, saying, “We would have been able to use it better if we had received it in June.” A teacher affirmed this account, explaining that she and her colleagues had not wanted to delay curriculum development to await new resources: “After teaching all the standards [last year] and understanding it, we re-sequenced [our curriculum] without waiting for the State, right after the test.... We didn’t waste time like last year when no one knew what was going on.” (This comment is reflected in separate findings concerning the value of anticipating changes, discussed in sections of this report on instructional focus and leadership.)

Notably, to facilitate a gradual rollout and circumvent issues with timing of materials, some principals had obtained Common Core-aligned curricula early. An elementary school principal, for example, opted to use a publicly available ELA curriculum from another state, as well as purchase My Math, in advance of the 2012-2013 school year. While teachers at this school appeared to feel confident about their understanding and implementation of their ELA curriculum, student interviews at this school suggested the curriculum was not consistently achieving the depth of instruction articulated in the Common Core. Students at this school primarily discussed procedural approaches to learning in their interviews, saying they learn “the order for us to do it” and focusing on mechanics in their reflections on writing.

Overall, teachers expressed a need for more readily available resources, training, and support to help their students meet the expectations of the Common Core, focusing in particular on all of the ELA curriculum options and on CMP3. This critique echoes findings from past studies, in which teachers and leaders alike noted that receiving instructional expectations and curricular resources in the summer or even after the beginning of the school year left teachers with little time to become familiar with materials and put them into practice. A principal asked a question common among interviewed participants who expressed concern about the gap between

students' current skills and the expectations of the Common Core: "What are the materials that... are going to help us bridge that gap?" A teacher echoed, "They really need to help educators out when it comes to the materials and scaffolding especially."

Indeed, despite attempts by the NYC Department of Education to gradually introduce Common Core Standards over previous years, multiple teachers and even a few students commented that they felt the Standards should have been rolled out gradually, starting in earlier grades, to address the often wide disparity between what students were expected to know at their current grades and the skills and understandings they had actually developed. As further discussed below, elementary and middle school student interviews reflected high levels of anxiety about upcoming State tests, suggesting students themselves questioned whether they possessed the skills necessary to succeed on Common Core-aligned exams. One elementary student, for example, said he wished there were "a little bit more time before the ELA [tests]," explaining that "most kids [were] not learning fast enough to catch up with the ELAs and [were] getting left back."

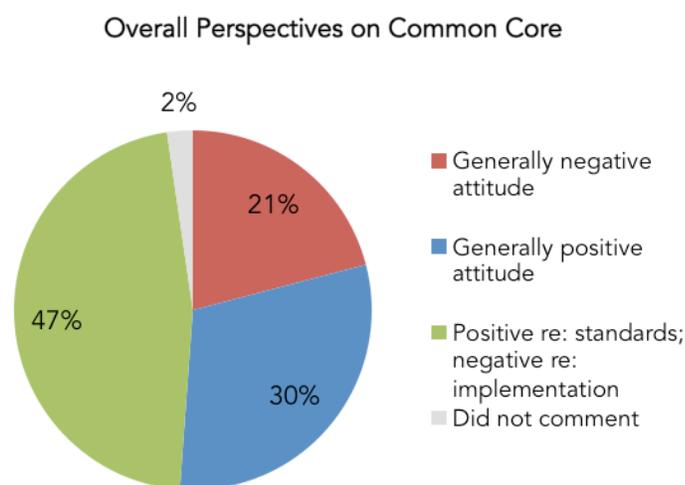


Figure 11. Overall Perspectives on Common Core

Leaders, teachers, and students associated Common Core-aligned curriculum with high-stakes testing and described the negative impact of testing on students. Research by Eskolta in prior years found that the Common Core appeared linked with State exams in the minds of teachers and leaders, and this finding resurfaced this year. As shown in Figure 11, interviewed teachers were generally positive about the concept of the Common Core, with fifteen teachers expressing overwhelmingly positive feelings about the Common Core – in the words of one, "I love the Common Core!" Nonetheless, a majority of teachers described frustration with the implementation of the Standards, often focusing their criticism on Common Core-aligned high-stakes tests they feared their students would fail. An eighth-grade teacher articulated the stakes, saying, "[My students] need to go to ninth grade. They have to pass the test to get out of here. And that test is no joke." Another teacher affirmed this sentiment, saying, "[The Common Core] means well; I'm just fearful of that final assessment which is going to determine whether our students... move on." Overall, teachers at every school spoke about the negative impact of high-stakes tests on their students. In addition, particularly at the elementary school level, leaders and teachers alike acknowledged that they tended to de-emphasize social studies and science instruction in favor of devoting more time to ELA and math.

Interviews at the elementary and middle school levels overwhelmingly reflected these anxieties. Some students, for example, expressed concern about sudden curriculum changes; an elementary school student recommended, "They should stop changing the curriculum so much because it's confusing to students in new grades." Many students seemed to equate the Common Core and State tests and to have a negative perspective on both; a middle school student, for example, described the Common Core in harsh terms:

My advice is not to do Common Core anymore. I understand they're trying to get us ready for college..., [but the Common Core] is not helping the students. It's too hard.... The classes, no problem, but it's the test. It

was very hard. I've always had low threes, high twos. Last year, I got a 1.99 and 1.95, and my average was 92.20 in grades. Because of the Common Core, I wasn't able to get into the school I really wanted to go to. When the Common Core started, I used to think, are they trying to make us fail?

An elementary school student also discussed her score and the scores of her peers on the prior year's test, noting, "Some people didn't pass; they had really, really low grades.... The low classes got level twos and ones." Many elementary and middle school students seem highly aware of the importance of their achievement on the State tests.

Conversely, at the high school level, both leaders and teachers critiqued the lack of alignment between the Common Core and Regents, noting that this misalignment hindered teachers' work on matching curriculum to the Standards – a concern raised at the high school level in prior years' studies as well. While teachers at the three participating high schools often referred to making claims, supporting an argument with evidence, and deeply understanding mathematical concepts as examples of integration of Common Core Standards into their planning and instruction, they also grappled with the pressures of preparing their students to pass the Regents. A high school math teacher described the tension between teaching the Common Core and preparing students for the Regents. "It's still a conundrum. The classwork is Common Core with the Standards. But the exams are the Regents." She explained, "They need a high volume of practice with Regents questions. We have to strike a balance." Using the metaphor of backwards design in the classroom, a high school principal described the impact of their uncertainty around Common Core-aligned Regents tests, "I tell my teachers, [in] good teaching, you have to tell the students what's the essential question they'll answer at the end of [the unit].... We're... doing this work to align our curriculum to the Common Core, [but] we don't really know what the end product is going to be."

School staff saw the need to supplement curriculum to address skill gaps, and their ability to do so was affected by the quality of teacher teams. As previously noted, every participating elementary and middle school described adapting their ELA curricula to some degree in an effort to ensure students were able to access the material. The extent and efficacy of curricular modification appeared linked to the capacity of each school's teacher teams. At a school with structured teacher teams, for example, teachers made a conscious decision, supported by leadership, to significantly modify CMP3. Similarly, the two middle schools where teachers described selecting resources from Code X to integrate into existing curriculum had well-functioning teacher teams and evident capacity to carry out curriculum and instructional design within those teams. As such, higher capacity teams were able to make modifications to CMP3 and Code X that teachers perceived as helpful. (Note that teachers' collaborative efforts are described further in the report on teacher teams.)

Conversely, at the school where teachers made relatively slight modifications to Expeditionary Learning, primarily by adding scaffolds, teacher teams and leaders tended to lack clearly defined roles or responsibilities, making collaborative work on curriculum more difficult. The assistant principal attributed some of this difficulty to the relatively inexperienced teaching staff at her school, saying they were "trying to get adjusted... in general to delivering a lesson plan," rendering it difficult for them to work together to make beneficial modifications to the curriculum. Interviews with students at this school, conducted in mid-January, suggested teachers were focusing heavily on test preparation and delivering the curriculum. One said ELA teachers were becoming "less patient" because the "test was coming up."

At elementary schools in the study, which generally had loosely structured teacher teams, without designated leaders or clear responsibilities, teachers' efforts to supplement new ELA curricula with task bundles or extra writing practice did not always appear successful. When looking at student work with a researcher, ELA teachers at one of these schools said students were unable to do the work independently, even with additional scaffolds. In response to a homework question, for example, many students simply rewrote the first lines of the text's opening

paragraph. The teachers explained that this resulted from the fact that many students “can’t read and understand the question,” and indicated that they found themselves grappling with the challenge of supporting students with reading comprehension on a daily basis. In the same vein, a teacher at another school also described struggling to support students with comprehension. She commented that, “Some are not ready for it yet.... With these students... a lot of guidance is needed.” She shared the essay of a student who “got a level one” on a task bundle from the Common Core Library because he did not write a complete response, despite the teacher having spent two weeks reviewing each text with the class and guiding students through each part of the essay. Overall, at these schools, many teachers appeared to be struggling to develop scaffolds that could help their students access rigorous Common Core-aligned curricula.

APPENDIX A: STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FOR TEACHERS

1. There are a lot of new initiatives this year—how are you feeling about your work so far?
 - a. **If they only talk about their school:** How are you feeling about the rollout of Common Core and Danielson?
2. Does [school name] have what you would call a schoolwide instructional focus, goal or strategy that all the teachers are aware of and think about and use?
 - a. **If yes,** tell me about it.
 - b. **If yes:** How did your leadership introduce that focus? What kinds of things does he/she/they do to maintain the focus through the year?
 - c. **If yes:** What kind of impact is this focus having on your work?
3. Do you feel like your development as an educator is being supported by school leadership?
 - a. **If yes,** how?
 - b. **If no,** what kind of support do you need from leadership? **If yes,** if there was something else you would need to support your development as an educator, what kind of support from leadership would that be?
 - c. **If a comparison hasn't been made, probe:** Is the support you're experiencing now different from how you were supported in the past?
 - i. If yes, in what ways?
 - ii. When was this?
4. How do you feel about the feedback you are getting from school leadership this year?
 - a. **Probe for teachers who seem to have been observations:** It sounds like you've been observed using the Danielson Framework. How does that compare to any other feedback you've gotten?
 - b. **Probe for teachers who do not mention being observed:** From what you said, I'm wondering whether you've been observed using the Danielson Framework yet this year?
 - i. **If so,** How does that compare to any other feedback you've gotten?
5. How has your practice shifted this year in terms of curriculums, assessments or pedagogy?
 - a. **If the teacher teaches both a core subject (math/ELA) and a content subject (science/social studies) ask: Probe:** Are shifts in practice different for <CORE SUBJECT>vs. <NON-CORE SUBJECT>?
 - b. **If elementary or middle school:** Did your school purchase or adopt new curricular resources this year?

- i. Which ones?
 - ii. If your school purchased new curricular resources- **PROBE:** how is that affecting your practice?
- 6. Of course you have students at really different levels in your classes. How do you adjust your instruction in relation to their needs and abilities?
 - a. **If assessment isn't mentioned-Probe:** So, how do you use ongoing (or formative) assessment?
 - b. Can you tell me about a specific example of how you adjusted your instruction with a student who has really struggled or is struggling?
- 7. How do you collaborate and who do you collaborate with? Can you give me an example?
 - a. How does your school leadership support teacher teams or collaboration, if they do?
 - b. What [else] could they do to support teacher teams and collaboration?
- 8. I think the DOE really is interested in how the Common Core and Danielson initiatives are actually affecting teachers. So how do you honestly feel about those two initiatives?
 - a. **Probe:** Is there anything else you want to tell me about shifts happening in your school or the DOE, how it affects you or your students?

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

- 1. In this third year of the Citywide Instructional Expectations, how have you been preparing your staff for this year's work around implementing the Common Core and the Danielson Framework?
- 2. Thinking back over the last two years, what kinds of shifts have you seen in classroom instruction?
 - a. How do you support those shifts?
 - i. **PROBE:** If not mentioned: what kinds of systems or structures have you put into place to support teachers to make these shifts?
 - ii. **PROBE:** If not mentioned: How do you support individual teachers make these shifts?
 - b. Do you support Math/ELA vs. social studies and science any differently?
- 3. What have you seen teachers do to support students in reaching the standards of the Common Core?
 - a. **If no mention, PROBE:** What are some of the shifts they are making in terms of curriculum, assessment, or pedagogy?
 - b. **PROBE:** What are some of the challenges you and your staff face in meeting the needs of struggling students?
- 4. How do teachers collaborate at your school?
 - a. **PROBE:** How do you support them in doing so?

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What does this teacher do that works for you/that you like/that helps you learn?
2. What do you wish your teachers would do that would help you academically or help you be more successful with your work?
3. Do teachers help different students in different ways or do they do pretty much do the same thing for everyone?
 - Ask for comparisons across classes (and/or favorite/strongest and least favorite/hardest subjects and why)
5. Have you seen any changes in the curriculum or the way your teachers teach since you started at this school?
6. What's the point/purpose of education and school?
7. Do you have any advice for the people in charge of your school?