Synergy Grant Summary

*Transitioning to the CCSS: TSC Teachers’ Proactive Process*

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My original intent of working with the six-member committee of Tippecanoe School Corporation (TSC) English teachers tasked with becoming the district’s leaders in transitioning to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)\(^1\) was realized, though aspects of data collection and analysis remain. When the committee was formed (in early 2012), they believed they would be conducting professional development activities to assist their colleagues with their understanding and implementation of the CCSS during the 1012-13 school year. However, the mandate for teacher assessment took precedence; TSC’s version of RISE had to be implemented in 2012-13, and the CCSS, with optimistic estimates for the official assessment rollout in the 2014-15 academic year, was less pressing. Momentum resumed for the committee in spring 2013, when they were tasked with leading the charge on revising the curriculum, a decadal process that conveniently coincided with the CCSS transition.

Data collected thus far includes an initial hour-long interview with each of the six committee members, which were transcribed by my graduate assistant on the project, Margaret Wu, and my URT, Taylor Scott. I also collected materials from and took field notes at three day-long committee meetings (one in summer 2012, when committee members were creating CCSS-based instructional modules to pilot and share; and two in spring 2013, when the committee was working on curriculum revision). Material from my Educator Leader Cadre meetings (two 2-day events in Chicago, three 1-day events in Indianapolis, and two virtual meetings) as well as course materials for my Maymester course on the Common Core have also informed this study. I also tasked three graduate students with gathering information from and networking with other English educators who presented their work on the CCSS at the Conference on English Education’s Summer Conference in July 2013. Data collection will continue (the extent will be determined by available resources—I’m applying for the GA Seed Grant and external funding from the Conference on English Education) for the next year or more.

An in-depth analysis of these data will be the focus of my research efforts over the next year, with proposals planned for NCTE 2014 and AERA 2015. Preliminary analysis suggests the following:

- Faculty buy-in is somewhat of a generational phenomenon; early-career teachers are more open to change than veterans.

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\(^1\) I use CCSS as the broader, more widely accepted abbreviation rather than Indiana’s acronym, INCC (Indiana’s Common Core Standards). The IDOE has not modified the content of the Standards, though states adopting the CCSS may choose to add up to 15% to the content if they wish. There is some talk that Indiana might do so in order to brand the INCC as uniquely Hoosier-esque, but I think it unlikely that the various stakeholders involved in such a modification would ever agree it was necessary, let alone on what the additional content ought to be.
Resistance to CCSS-inspired curricular changes centers on the displacement of beloved texts to lower grade levels because they’re no longer rigorous enough for the new standards.

Recent legislative action (HEA 1427) has made it more difficult to ensure faculty buy-in.

Most teachers (as reported by the committee and ELC members), once they have a working knowledge of the CCSS and PARCC’s recommended Frameworks, view them as consistent with best practices. The committee thus sees their effort as worthwhile even if Indiana disengages from the CCSS and PARCC.

Teachers’ use of work time, when time is given, is remarkably efficient and productive (this holds true for my TSC group and similar groups in my ELC cohort: A chief complaint is a lack of time, resources, and compensation for already-embattled teachers). I thus see bottom-up efforts such as TSC’s as critical to the success of CCSS.

The committee’s leader is integral to the committee’s success. He is organized, flexible, sensitive to colleagues’ concerns, and takes on the lion’s share of the work in advance of the meetings in order to make best use of the committee’s limited time. A leadership change at the beginning of the project (due to district-level promotions) was surprisingly seamless.

I spent a total of $2519.20 on grant activities, broken down as follows:

- 3 CCSS-related books for participants: $663.80
- $75 stipend per participant: $450.00
- Grad assistant: $637.50
- Ed Week webinar: $49.00
- Conference registration for 3 grad students: $450.00
- My airfare for CEE: $278.80

The greatest benefit this synergy grant afforded me was the opportunity to work alongside six dedicated English teachers. I had worked with two of them before—we’ve had methods students and student teachers in common—but not in such a collegial capacity. Although they were clearly well-versed in the CCSS before I joined them and knew better than I what curricular constraints they were working within, I am able to supply them, through my connections with the ELC, with the policy context and latest happenings at the State level that have a bearing on their work. The books and stipend I was able to give them were also much appreciated, intended as they were as a token of my appreciation for the largely uncompensated efforts they are making. Teacher morale is low these days—job satisfaction is at a 25-year low, according to a MetLife study—so I am happy to be in a position to affirm excellent teachers whenever I have the opportunity.

2 Paid hourly for transcribing, participating in several webinars, and reading/summarizing CCSS articles and books