CCSS and SBAC

SEED

Implementation is not consistent district to district. Even within the district, implementation varies from school to school, and even from evaluator to evaluator. Huge amounts of money and time are being allocated to this process that could be much better put to use teaching and supporting kids. As a result of inconsistencies, teachers are being asked to complete copious amounts of busy work – for example – having to scan pieces of student work, remove their names, rescan them, upload them to one program and transfer them to another. I am a computer savvy individual, and the process of compiling all this evidence that I was doing my job took me 10 hours for the midyear, and it wasn’t even looked at during the meeting. The paperwork for each observation took between 5-8 hours to complete – including the process of uploading information to the Bloom Board website that the district requires. I had to create Excel files, make graphs, create PDFs of the graphs and upload them. I had to write essays for each observation and each conference – before and after. I’m an English teacher, and even I found the writing tedious and repetitive. The most frightening piece of all is that different evaluators interpret the rubric differently, so what one person sees as “proficient” another gives “exemplary” for and yet another gives a “developing” for. At the midyear, in my school, only three evaluators had completed the required formal observations. The reality is that the process is clunky, inefficient, redundant, and pointless. The people who don’t do their jobs are still “having problems figuring out the technology” and drop-in evaluations are much more effective. I speak as one who is both an administrator and a teacher- - having held both roles, sometimes at the same time, I can see the benefits of having teacher evaluation. However, the piece which ties the standardized test scores to it is the most ridiculous. My “group” is tied to MAP test results given to kids in September and again in June. My personal group of students who are actually being tested numbers 9. They make up 10% of my total student population. The standard deviation of results is greater than the increase students must demonstrate – this means that for all intents and purposes, the assessment isn’t even statistically valid or significant, and yet it makes up 45% of my evaluation. This seems absurd. Using the SBAC results is even crazier – because . . .

The SBAC – is one of the worst standardized tests I’ve ever seen. I’m an International Baccalaureate Coordinator, and I teach SAT Prep and AP English as well as IB English. I’ve had 20+ years of experience with standardized tests. IB assessments are globally recognized as rigorous. They set the standard for common core assessment. They record learning over time that is portfolio based and scored by multiple trained assessors who also teach in the subject area. AP is a less good assessment – primarily because it tests what kids DON’T know – rather than what they do know. Because the assessment for the entire course comes down to one 3-hour test, it’s not a holistic picture of student learning. The now-obsolete CAPT test was as good as could be expected for a snap shot of one moment in time – at least it tested kids on what they could demonstrate they knew. The SBAC in contrast is a terrible test. The technology involved is obsolete – students don’t use all those commands and most never have used a mouse. They
are used to tablet learning. When using paper texts, we teach them to annotate text and go back to the test for all real-life learning experiences, but the technology in SBAC makes this process both difficult and time consuming. Since the test is timed, the technology handicap already makes the results of the testing suspect. How do we know whether they understand the material or if they failed to master the testing technology?

Then there are the questions – too many choices and the “best” answer is arbitrary. I say this because 5 teachers, all with Masters degrees in English can’t agree on the “best” answer to many of these questions. We teach students to bring their experiences to the text, to think of the best answer they can support – but here, SBAC penalizes them for not agreeing with the test maker as to the “best” answer. Then SBAC goes on to link the next three questions to that first question. If they student gets the first one “wrong”—meaning not that they lacked knowledge, but that they guessed wrong – then they get the next three wrong. It’s insane! And inane. I think what’s really happening here is that ETS is making a lot of money creating an impossible test. After they make everyone crazy piloting it, they will “revise” it and we will be the ones who tested it for them for free. In the meantime, we’re losing valuable real instructional time while this test goes on. How does 4 weeks of testing and prep make sense if we’re trying to increase rigor? In my other “standardized” courses – namely IB and AP, the coursework is just like the assessments. Assessments are part of the coursework. We don’t need to spend hours teaching students how to master the technology that they are ONLY going to use to take this one test. Technology that makes it CHEAPER for ETS to administer and grade. We’re shortchanging kids in order to help ETS make more money. Does this make any sense? Who is getting the kickbacks here? I think the State of Connecticut should tell the federal government to take their SBAC test and go packing. We need real forms of assessment – not these ridiculous, brain-numbing multiple choice tests given on computers.

When I trained first as a teacher, and then as an administrator, one of the questions I learned to always ask myself before making any decision is “Is this the best thing to do for kids?” I think the SBAC test and the SEED (as currently rolled-out by the state) are not what is best for kids. They take away from meaningful instruction, they treat kids like widgets instead of people, and they attempt to quantify something that can only really be assessed accurately through qualified research practices.

Kelley Donovan