Sneaking a Peak
Item and task prototypes have recently been released from PARCC, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. This is the multi-state consortium which will be guiding the creation of the Common Core Assessments that will replace the current ISAT tests in 2014-2015. The online prototypes found on the PARCC website are designed to guide educators on the importance of content of the standards in the future technology-based assessments.

What follows is an excerpt from the PARCC website concerning the released items.

PARCC Item and Task Prototypes
The primary purpose of sharing item and task prototypes is to provide information and to support educators as they transition to the CCSS and the PARCC assessments. The dynamic, online prototypes presented on the PARCC website are designed to shine a light on important elements of the CCSS and to show how critical content in the standards may be manifested on PARCC's next-generation, technology-based assessments.

The PARCC sample items and tasks can and should be viewed as one of the many types of materials educators can use during the transition to the CCSS and PARCC.

In addition to educators, students and parents may also find the sample items and tasks to be a useful resource for learning more about the CCSS and how state assessments may appear in the future. The prototypes provided to date represent just a beginning to the complement of items and tasks that will be shared over time to represent the full range of assessment tasks that will be included on actual PARCC assessments beginning in 2014-2015. Additional prototypes and rubrics will be added over the coming months to paint a more complete picture of the PARCC assessment design in each content area and grade level.

To view the sample items, go to: http://www.parcconline.org and click on Item and Task Prototypes. The sample links are about half way down the page.

The PARCC sample items and tasks can and should be viewed as one of the many types of materials educators can use during the transition to the CCSS and PARCC.

parcconline.org
Informational Text: Are They Really Reading?

The Common Core State Standards bring instructional shifts to many classrooms. One of these shifts includes a greater and wider use of non-fiction and authentic texts. While the middle school years exposes students to a plethora of informational text through content classrooms (social science, science, vocational, health, etc.), the question we need to ask ourselves is, “Are students actually reading the text?” The research is clear. The only way to become a better reader, is to read. Our students need to be reading more. Assigning text to be read, does not guarantee students will read closely. How can we help students closely read and engage with the text?

Many teachers use graphic organizers with their students. A good practice for using organizers is to have students CREATE their own organizer, DISCUSS the organizer with their classmates (think-pair-share, or small group) and summarize the information gleaned from the organizer and discussion.

Try it out!

- Have students create a graphic organizer to record their thinking.
- Once the organizer is complete, students must find someone to explain the components of their created organizer.
- Before assigning students to write a summary, explicit instruction in HOW to write a summary must be modeled.

Check out this website for additional reading strategies to assist students with reading informational text.

http://www.adlit.org/strategy_library/

Common Core ELA Standard #1 in 6th Grade

**English Language Arts**

RL.6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of **what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.**

With… autobiographies, essays, opinion pieces, memoirs, songs, and more.

**Science and Technical Subjects**

RST.6.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of **science and technical texts.**

With… tables, graphs, charts, health articles, lab reports, welding manuals, “how to” books, and more.

**History and Social Studies**

RHS.6.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of **primary and secondary sources.**

With… letters, photographs, maps, charts, tables, graphs, political cartoons, articles, and more.

Digital Literacy in the Classroom

So what is digital literacy? Digital literacy includes three components:

1. Reading digital text,
2. Writing digital text, and
3. Developing the technical skills necessary to consume and produce these texts.

To meet the needs of the Common Core Standards, teachers must focus attention on powerful instructional practices that make strategic use of technology.

The following 3 points are at the heart of digital literacy.

- Students need to conduct effective online research;
- Students need to integrate both online and offline research into what they are learning;
- Students need to be familiar with the strengths and limitations of various technological tools and mediums and can select those best suited to their communication goals.

There are a number of websites with free digital tools. Here are a few favorites.

http://commoncore.org/maps/resources/digital_resources - provides free digital resources and tools for creating, collaborating, researching and sharing.

www.cooltoolsforschools.wikispaces.com - provides teachers with exemplary online learning resources.
Focus on Standard for Mathematical Practice 1

The first Practice Standard, **Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them**, requires students to start a problem by looking for entry points and explaining to themselves the meaning of the problems. Students need to make conjectures, plan a pathway (rather than jumping in), monitor their progress and change course when necessary. When students finish a problem they need to check using a different method or representation (consider equations, verbal descriptions, tables, graphs or diagrams) and then ask themselves, **Does this answer make sense?**

Proficient students should also understand the approaches of others and be able to identify correspondences between different approaches.

**How do I encourage MP1?**
- Ask what information they need and how to start.
- Provide ample wait time throughout a problem allowing students to go down a variety of paths.
- Have students reflect on how a problem relates to previous work.
- Ask students to construct their own solution pathway rather than following a provided one.
- Employ problems involving ideas that are currently at the forefront of the student's developing mathematical knowledge.
- Provide students the answer to a problem and ask them to create a strategy that would lead to that answer.

Focus on Standard for Mathematical Practice 2

The second Practice Standard, **Reason abstractly and quantitatively**, requires students to make sense of quantities and relationships in problem situations. Mathematically proficient students should decontextualize and contextualize. Decontextualizing is taking necessary information from a given situation, representing it symbolically and treating these symbols as if they have a life of their own. Contextualizing is pausing during the manipulation process to probe into the meaning of the symbols. Students should be able to create a coherent representation, consider units, and attend to the meaning of quantities.

**How do I encourage MP2?**
- Have students justify their answer using a different representation.
- Have students label their answers.
- Have students write a real-life example.
- Have students explain their thinking.
- Provide students with contextual problems in which they can gain insight by relating the mathematical expressions to a given context.

Key Content Changes for 6th Grade

Within Common Core, the major work of fractions is addressed in grades 3-5. Sixth grade students apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication and division to divide fractions by fractions. This strategic move provides an opportunity for students to explain why procedures for dividing fractions make sense. Reasoning about multiplication and division leads to a focus on problems with rates and ratios. Sixth grade students need to understand statistical thinking, statistical variability, and summarize and describe data distributions. The Expressions and Equations domain highlights how Algebra is a key change. Students write expressions and equations corresponding to given situations.

**New ideas for sixth grade:**
- interquartile range
- mean absolute deviation
- tape diagrams
- double number lines
- absolute value
- four quadrant graphing
- expressions, equations
WELCOME, to your second full month of the school year. And thank you, for making time to read Capture the Core despite the many demands of teaching class in full swing!

In last month’s issue, you were introduced to the state-wide effort to assist each district and school in building a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports that reduces barriers to teaching and learning and continuously engages and re-engages students in the learning process. Sounds ideal, doesn’t it? But, how does it happen?

A comprehensive approach works within a framework of district, school, and classroom systems designed to create optimal Conditions for Learning, and YOU are a part of this. Research (and teachers’ good sense) point to Conditions for Learning as fundamental to student achievement. Conditions for Learning are included among the best practice indicators representing Eight Essential Elements of Effective Education within the Illinois Continuous School Improvement Model. These indicators are listed in the Rising Star on the Illinois Interactive Report Card system.

Regardless of what improvement model is used in your school and district, you can help ensure that Conditions for Learning (CL) indicators remain an important part of the school improvement dialogue. How do you do this?

1. Become familiar with Conditions for Learning indicators and the research that backs them. Find a list and links at www.isbe.net/learningsupports/html/conditions.htm.
2. Create awareness in your school, among colleagues and in relation to your school improvement efforts.

Thank YOU for striving for optimal Conditions for Learning!

Classroom Connections

This month, let’s take a closer look at just one, but a very significant, Conditions for Learning indicator: “The environment of the school (physical, social, emotional, and behavioral) is safe, welcoming, and conducive to learning.” *

Note that the learning environment, or school climate, includes so much more than physical surroundings! Research proves that the nature of interactions among people hugely impacts student and family engagement and therefore, student achievement.

As a classroom teacher, you are the most important professional impacting your students’ school experience. Teachers often create positive environments intuitively, but we know that making our efforts intentional significantly improves outcomes.

How do you foster support, respect, and high expectations in your classroom? Now is the time to set and model behavioral norms, by applying the “three Cs”:

Collaboratively develop. Invite your students to add thoughtful input when determining their class norms.

Clearly communicate. Norms require learning, as do academics. Teach and model with dignity and clarity.

Consistently reinforce. Acknowledge appropriate actions, correct inappropriate responses with dignity.

Learn more about school climate by clicking “CL7” at www.isbe.net/learningsupports/html/conditions.htm.

* Continuous School Improvement Connection:

This best practice indicator is listed as a “Smart Start” Indicator, CL7, in the Rising Star on IIRC system.

Helpful Resources

http://resourcesforhistoryteachers.wikispaces.com/ - features primary source, multicultural, and multimedia resources for teaching history in K-12 schools
http://www.parcconline.org/ - features the most up to date information on the progress of the assessments and the prototype items for CCSS.
http://illustrativemathematics.org/ - provides K-12 Illustrations of the range and type of work students experience in Common Core and publishes tools to support implementation
www.isbe.net/learningsupports - includes Conditions for Learning indicators and an A-Z list of topics related to specific issues that create barriers to student learning.