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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Interested Parties**
FROM: **Penn Hill Group**
DATE: **January 10, 2013**
SUBJECT: **Summary of AEI event: "Common Core: What's next for school systems?"**

Find details about the event here:

<http://www.aei.org/events/2013/01/10/common-core-whats-next-for-school-systems/>

Overview:

This event was a conversation between superintendents, a U.S. Department of Education representative, and a College Board representative. It focused on the Common Core State Standards adopted by the majority of states—specifically, the challenges states face in implementation and opportunities for continued improvement.

Event Participants:

Panelists:

- **Eric J. Becoats**, Superintendent of Durham Public Schools
- **David Coleman**, The College Board
- **John Deasy**, Los Angeles Unified Superintendent of Schools
- **Elizabeth Celania-Fagen**, Douglas County Superintendent of Schools
- **Joanne Weiss**, US Department of Education

Moderator:

- **Frederick M. Hess**, AEI

Opening Remarks:

Rick Hess opened by saying that Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia. Then he clarified that this event would not focus so much on whether CCSS are good or bad, but would rather focus on the challenges ahead as states seek to deliver on their CCSS promises and what opportunities there are for various actors in education as CCSS is implemented.

Panel Interview

From there, Hess began an interview with all five panelists at once, calling on individuals to answer each of his questions. His first question was directed at John Deasy. He asked Deasy where CCSS sits with teacher evaluation and school improvement.

Deasy replied that CCSS makes life easier, particularly by anchoring the work being done in creating balanced and appropriate accountability and informing instruction, which, in turn, helps to make decisions concerning distribution of resources. He then said schools currently face an orientation dilemma: How does the system orient itself from previously top-down results driven, where leadership will now be driven by quality of instruction? He also said he believes new technology in the classroom will only help if it becomes an integral in instruction. A third issue he

raised was pedagogy and the need to teach students how to learn. Finally, he listed teacher accountability as a main point of concern in implementing CCSS.

Hess asked Eric Becoats about his experience as superintendent in Durham, NC, where he has been working to train and support his educators in the transition to CCSS. Hess asked Becoats to speak about some of the challenges he has faced.

Becoats said that one big challenge was bringing the Board of Education along in the transition process. He said he had to work hard to gain their support. After that, he said, a transition of teacher training had to occur: a shift from training on *what* CCSS is to *how* it is to be implemented. Becoats said a big piece of this is making sure teachers feel like they have the time they need to get comfortable with CCSS. He said he did this in part by introducing his teachers to existing resources to help them with curriculum implementation.

Hess then asked Becoats how he convinced Durham teachers that this is really a change worth buying into.

Becoats said he did this by showing them the data where teachers could see that students were not performing where they needed to be, which was motivation for change. He said he also tried to show teachers that they don't always need to be a director—that they can be a facilitator, too. He also said a main focus of his was on supporting teachers' use of technology in the classroom.

Hess moved on to Elizabeth Celandia-Fagen, asking her what implementation looked like her more affluent, higher-achieving suburban school district (Douglas County).

Celandia-Fagen said her district is focused on more than just CCSS. She said they are focused on the idea that the education paradigm needs to change for 21st century, and they are asking themselves what they think education should look like in the 21st century. With that in mind, she said, they chose to implement CCSS because they thought it played into that vision. She said another important aspect of CCSS implementation they are focused on is finding accurate measures for things they think are important (i.e., student/teacher performance measures).

Hess next asked David Coleman of The College Board about the role of ELA in CCSS. He asked whether English teachers will feel pressed to squeeze fictional texts out as they try to meet the requisite informational texts.

Coleman replied by first noting that while there was no teacher on the panel, teachers were still supported there. He spoke of the great work teachers are doing with CCSS and their own efforts to share lesson plans and teaching strategies across district and state lines. He then moved on to discuss the ongoing accountability movement and the effects of NCLB only assessing reading and mathematics. He said this caused reading requirements to narrow, particularly in elementary school, while classes like history and science fell by the wayside.

Coleman pointed to this as a great positive of CCSS in its push for 50 percent of elementary classroom time to be spent on science, history, and the arts. He believes CCSS is un-narrowing curriculum and using reading and writing as tools to do so. He said CCSS supports the literary movement in k12 education that endorses American classic literature, Shakespeare, historical primary and secondary documents, and scientific documents.

Coleman also underscored the fact that AFT demanded greater teacher accountability in ELA, specifically through shared responsibility among history, science, and ELA teachers for students' reading scores.

Hess next asked Superintendent Becoats how to introduce CCSS while also implementing new accountability measures.

Becoats said his focus has been on making sure teachers understand the standards and ensuring the district's assessment system is aligned with those standards. He said this is an ongoing process of alignment and improvement of curriculum and assessments.

Hess then asked Joanne Weiss of the U.S. Department of Education what the role of the federal government is CCSS.

Weiss said the federal government's role is to enable quality educating to take place and to create conditions under which the right incentives can exist. She said the action, leadership, and breakthroughs should, and will, clearly come from the work in the classrooms, so the federal role needs to support those in-class innovations when opportunities to do so arise.

Hess followed up with Weiss, asking her about current Title I rules, which try to make sure federal dollars are focused on students of high need. He said schools are wondering whether Title I dollars can be used to train teachers for CCSS, and then asked what the federal response to this is.

Weiss said that the federal government is focusing on allocating resources to students with the greatest needs, and that includes lots of schools that receive Title I funds. She said schools can spend Title I dollars how they see best for things like professional development. She also said that waiver states can use a previously tied up 20 percent chunk of funds for Title I in whatever way they see best.

Coleman added a bit to this, as well, saying that state-led initiatives are painful, but he is confident that CCSS could not have been created or implemented under the current conditions in Washington.

Hess then inquired about the role of teacher colleges in CCSS. He contextualized this by saying that studies show that about 90 percent of professional development leads to no positive change. He asked if professional development efforts might also need to be addressed.

Becoats said schools need focus on in-school, in-classroom professional development. He said schools need to use their expert teachers to train newer teachers. His districts efforts focus on going to the schools to offer professional training rather than bring teachers out of the classroom.

Deasy offered a follow-up, saying that he sees teacher practice and preparation shifting to a much more clinical-based model inside of schools.

Hess next asked Deasy how much confidence he has that educators are being adequately trained at the college and university level to successfully implement CCSS.

Deasy said there are no centers of immediate expertise, but he is confident that teachers and schools will adapt quickly, and that teacher training programs will adapt quickly if they maintain strong partnerships with surrounding schools where CCSS is being practiced.

Hess asked Coleman if there are levers or supports other than just sharing best practices?

Coleman said schools and teachers need to appreciate the reduced number of focuses for each subject. He said teacher college reform has little success historically. And he said the question is whether the demand for excellence will rise as demand for student performance rises?

Hess then asked Celia-Fagen how a school system determines which published materials are worthwhile in helping to implement CCSS.

Celia-Fagen said she chose to focus on teachers and their innovations instead of studies and support documents. She said her district allows teachers to determine what vehicle for education delivery works best for their students and then supports that as a school administration.

Next, **Hess** spoke about Becoats' trouble with assessments. He explained that Durham schools wanted to implement assessments aligned with CCSS, but because of RTTT, they had to keep existing assessments, which led to a lot of student assessments during the bridge period to full CCSS implementation. He asked Becoats how he dealt with that.

Becoats said he tried to make sure that parents were kept in the loop and knew why the assessments were being done. He said they are moving slow right now during the transition so they can move fast later.

Celia-Fagen added to Becoats, saying her district tries to challenge traditional testing assessments by using assessments that don't feel like a test for students but still work to demonstrate student performance or whatever it is they are trying to assess.

Hess asked Weiss about the quality and rigor of traditional assessments and how to create the types of assessments Celia-Fagen spoke about without abandoning those traditional assessments that many see as a safeguard.

Weiss said it is important to keep in mind that we're at the cusp of a whole new way of schooling. She said we are just figuring it out, and five years from now, we might be shocked at the things we're doing today. She said we have to start understanding what we're doing and then begin tweaking the process to make improvements. She said that people just don't know all the answers right now.

Deasy added to this by saying that CCSS means introducing to fewer pieces of content: a leaner, meaner form of assessment. In L.A., he said, they came to a new accountability deal with teachers, which includes school-wide and individual teacher accountability measures.

Becoats said that in his experience, he has found that when you have a shared accountability assessment, there is greater teacher/school buy-in because of that shared responsibility.

David Coleman offered the final thought of the conversation. He said, in order to ease the minds of parents listening in, that despite all of the troubles of CCSS implementation, students who can read a text, pull out important details, and write coherently about it are well on their way to college. He said that Common Core State Standards are a return to these fundamentals.

Q & A

Q: Will this transition be costly? Will that be a big hurdle for schools/states?

A: **Becoats** said it is not clear that CCSS will be more costly, but schools have to show teachers that many resources they want already exist.

A: **Deasy** expanded on this, saying that it depends on the starting budget of schools/states, but they can make policy decisions for state spending to make it work in an existing state budget. His example was to build more preschool and less prisons.

A: **Celania-Fagen** added by saying her district did a line-by-line budget review to determine what they really needed to spend. With that, she said, they were able to reduce class sizes and make up for an \$18 million budget shortfall.

A: **Coleman** said mediocre 'stuff' is often as expensive as excellent 'stuff,' but schools face a distribution problem when it comes to supportive resources. Coleman said we need to work as a society to address that distribution challenge.

Q: Lots of students who are behind may need more years, not just more supports. How do you meet the needs of these students who need more time to meet these new standards?

A: **Celania-Fagen** said her district is looking at the remediation process and how to go about that differently. Specifically, she said they are looking at students who need to repeat curriculum by checking which segments of a course they succeeded in and failed in rather than making them repeat the entire course.

A: **Deasy** said he thinks America high schools will see a major shift in the courses they offer—a shift away from the monopoly over courses currently held by high schools. He said there are many new, valid modes of education emerging, and students want these counted on their transcripts.

Q: What resources are being dedicated to helping teachers learn and implement CCSS? What resources are being provided to teachers for assessment to ensure quality implementation?

A: **Celania-Fagen** said she is working to redesign professional development to support teachers who have not been trained to teach in these ways.

Q: What can we do to prepare teachers to prevent CCSS from being another failed effort?

A: **Deasy** said he thinks the existing contractual obligations for professional development are not conducive to the process for training teachers to implement CCSS. He said he thinks a new vehicle for delivering teacher training needs to be conceived to better prepare teachers for CCSS.

A: **Becoats** said North Carolina is a mixed bag as a non-unionized state. He said some teachers don't want to put in the extra time for professional development, but others want to get CCSS down so they can implement it with rigor. He said they need to work to continuously improve CCSS teaching. Each year, he said, they ask their teachers what they need in order to be able to teach better, and then summer professional development focuses on those teacher demands for support.