

## *No one ever said it was going to be easy...*

Teaching has long been recognized as one of the most challenging of all professions. The sheer number of decisions that teachers make on a daily basis far exceeds the number of decisions that professionals working in almost every other field are required to make. Teaching is hard work; this has always been true.

What's also true is that working in education feels harder and more challenging than ever. Collectively, we've been through a lot over the past several years and the hits keep on coming. It's clearly not enough any more to have a deep command of our content, an understanding of child and adolescent development, and a repertoire of time-tested instructional strategies well matched to your content. Standards and assessments have changed, community and parent expectations have changed, and perhaps most significantly, our students and their needs have changed.

Despite how much more "normal" this school year has felt compared to the previous two, there is no question that our students, as a whole, appear to be forever changed by the events of the past few years. Whether we are talking about motivation, respect, attendance, time management, self-control, task completion, or impulse control we are seeing different behaviors from (some of? many of? most of?) our students than we are accustomed to. While last year we may have been hoping that the changes we were seeing and feeling were temporary, I think we are now at a point where we need to acknowledge and accept the fact that some of those changes are more durable and long-lasting. That makes our jobs harder and more challenging than ever.

There are no simple solutions, no quick fixes. We can, and will, continue to provide school-based counseling and mental health supports, but no amount of additional school counseling/mental health support is going to completely resolve the challenges we are experiencing. Hoping and wishing that things will "just go back to the way they used to be" is fruitless and frustrating. Trying to discipline our way out of the changes we are experiencing feels equally frustrating for all involved. So, what if we tried a different approach?

What if we accepted that kids have been changed over the past three years. If we accepted that as a reality, instead of trying to fight against it or wait it out, could we begin to shift our mindset just a little bit. Could we begin to focus on developing in ourselves strategies that would better meet the needs of this new version of our students? Could we adjust our lens a bit and recognize that all behavior is a form of communication and our students are trying to tell us something and it is our responsibility as the adults in the room to do everything in our power to listen to and understand them? Could we accept that some of our old tried and true methods no longer work, or work as well, for our new students? Could we try a new instructional approach because it might have a better chance of connecting with a student who is having trouble connecting? Could we remind ourselves to focus on what we control rather than on what we don't control?

Once we accept the need to change in order to better meet the academic and social/emotional needs of our students, we can figure out how to support one another through those changes. It might not be easy, but that's nothing new. We do hard things every day; we are teachers. We can do this, too.

Until next time...

Melanie

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>CS/DL Standards</i>	2
<i>Spring SC Day</i>	2
<i>ChatGPT</i>	3
<i>Computer Based Testing</i>	3
<i>Updates from ILC</i>	4
<i>The Science of Reading</i>	4
<i>Additional Resources for Teachers</i>	5

## *Computer Science/Digital Fluency Standards*

In December, 2020 the New York State Education Department approved the [New York State K12 Computer Science/Digital Fluency Standards](#). The vision behind this work is that *"every student will know how to live productively and safely in a technology-dominated world. This includes understanding the essential features of digital technologies, why and how they work, and how to communicate and create using those technologies."* The standards themselves are arranged into five key concept areas:

**Impacts of Computing:** understanding the impact of technology on society through many lenses including personal, social, cultural, accessibility, legal, economic and ethical

**Computational Thinking:** thinking about and solving problems in ways that can be carried out by a computer

**Networks & System Design:** understanding the basic function of computing systems and networks that are used as fundamental tools in our personal and professional lives

**Cybersecurity:** being knowledgeable about the physical, digital, and behavioral actions that can be taken to increase the security of data and computing resources

**Digital Literacy:** understanding the benefits and implications of using digital technologies to be successful in our contemporary world

Unlike most standards released by the State, these are not intended to be “owned” by one discipline; rather they are intended to be integrated into, and owned by, all disciplines. While this is laudable, it’s also problematic as something that is “everyone’s responsibility” often becomes “no one’s responsibility”.

Fortunately, we have the opportunity to partner with other districts through a grant (the “Smart Start” grant) received by Monroe BOCES #1. This grant opportunity is allowing teachers, K-8, to dive deeply into these standards and find the connections between them and all of the other things they are responsible for teaching. Through a year-long professional learning experience that includes a week of learning in the summer, webinars throughout the year, and ongoing support from a coach, teachers build a portfolio of lessons aligned with the standards for their grade level. These lessons may, or may not, involve students actually using computers, tablets, or some sort of robot to investigate one or more of the key concepts. Many of the learning experiences are accomplished without any sort of technology device being used.

More information about the grant, along with access to all of the lessons created by past participants in the work is available at this link: [Professional Learning For Districts / NYSED Smart Start Grant \(monroe.edu\)](#) Registration is now open for the 2023-24 participants in the Smart Start experience. If you are a K-8 teacher and are interested in participating in this high-quality, impactful professional learning experience designed to prepare you for the integration of the Computer Science/Digital Fluency standards, please reach out to your Building Principal for information about the dates for the summer portion of the training and how to register.

## *Spring Superintendent’s Conference Day*

Our Spring Superintendent’s Conference Day is scheduled for Friday, April 28th from 8:00—3:00. All teachers will spend the morning in their buildings where the learning and work will align to our continued focus on relationship building within a supportive environment for all. What that looks like in terms of specific plans for each building is being determined by each Principal working with stakeholders groups in their building.

During the afternoon (12:00—3:00) elementary classroom teachers will remain in their buildings while all other teachers will convene for work as a department under the direction of their standards leader. Stay tuned for information from your Standards Leader regarding location and focus of your time together.

Plans are also underway for some professional learning opportunities for paraprofessionals as well as members of our clerical staff. We look forward to sharing additional information as it becomes available.

## *ChatGPT—what’s the deal?*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has arrived in a classroom near you! Moreover, as scary as that might seem, there is really no stopping it, so we might as well learn about it, embrace it, and figure out how we can use it to our advantage!

ChatGPT ([Introducing ChatGPT \(openai.com\)](#)) is certainly the most popular, or at least the most talked about, form of AI that is available for use by anyone with access to the internet. ChatGPT, in the words of the developers, is **“a model ... which interacts in a conversational way. The dialogue format makes it possible for ChatGPT to answer follow-up questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and reject inappropriate requests.”** While just launched in November 2022 its impact has already been felt in schools and classrooms everywhere. The big initial (and maybe still current) fear was that students would use ChatGPT as a tool for cheating: the teacher assigns a written response to literature for homework, the student goes home and asks ChatGPT to write the response for them, and the next day attempts to pass off their work as their own. Could that happen? Absolutely!! Can we prevent it by telling kids not to do it? Probably not!!

So, what are we to do? Like the good educators that we are, we need to educate ourselves about ChatGPT in order to better understand what it can do for us, our students, and their learning. We may need to shift our thinking about some of our assignments in order to avoid the potential of ChatGPT doing a student’s work for them and instead, think about how we can engage students in the critical analysis of works produced by ChatGPT. Instead of thinking of ChatGPT as something getting in our way, how can we use its capabilities to lighten our load?

I’m no expert in this area, but I recognize the need to learn and evolve as the world around us changes. So, if you are a novice when it comes to ChatGPT but are curious enough to learn more about how you might be able to actually use it to your—and your students’ benefit—I’ve linked below a few articles and a couple of podcasts to get you started. It’s just possible that in a few years (or less), the use of AI in our classrooms is as ubiquitous as the use of calculators, laptops, and smartboards and we will find ourselves wondering how we ever managed without!

[How Will ChatGPT Change Education and Teaching? | Entrepreneur](#)

[The Future of Writing in a World of Artificial Intelligence #ChatGPT - John Spencer \(spencerauthor.com\)](#)

[Using ChatGPT in Middle and High School Writing Lessons | Edutopia](#)

[6 Ways ChatGPT Can Save Teachers Time | Edutopia](#)

[What Works!: ChatGPT Is Here, We’re Using It, It’s Amazing: 6 Creative Ways to Teach With It Right Now on Apple Podcasts](#)

## *Computer Based Testing*

This spring our students, grades 3-8, will be taking state ELA and math assessments in the Computer Based Testing platform, rather than in the traditional Paper Based format. While ultimately we believe we will experience many efficiencies with CBT, the work to be ready for this spring’s testing season has been considerable. It’s important to acknowledge the “behind the scenes” work done by our Technology Department and the Data Team to make sure that we have everything in working order so that the testing experience is smooth for both students and teachers. Our Special Education Department has provided support and guidance for getting individual students’ testing accommodations uploaded into the system so that students with IEPs have an equitable assessment experience to their peers. A big shout out to the building administrators, their assistants, and our counselors for their support in working through the building level logistics. And, finally, the work that teachers have done in their classrooms to provide students with lots of opportunities to practice in the platform has been essential for setting our students up to be successful. It truly takes a village –and I couldn’t be more appreciative of all of the villagers and all they have done to ensure that things go as smoothly as possible on the actual testing days. Thank you to all!



## Updates from ILC

The members of the Instructional Leadership Council have been busy at work over the last several months. We started the year with two primary tasks that have driven our agendas and framed important conversations for much of the year so far.

The first task was really about the question, “How can we help our teachers make sense of three important documents that should be informing our instruction but are overwhelming to try to grapple with and make sense of?” The three documents were the [NYS Culturally-Responsive Sustaining Education Framework](#), the [NYS Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks](#), and the [PCSD Next Generation Skills](#). Each of these resources is rich, informative, and important for all teachers regardless of grade level or discipline, but to expect teachers to know, understand, and refer to and make sense of each of them individually for their instructional purposes seems unreasonable—to say the least! So, we set about the task of trying to integrate these three resources into one “easy-to-use” document.

The second big task we set for ourselves was to agree upon and be able to describe what we mean by “culturally responsive instructional practices” and then to identify a set of such practices that would be understood and integrated into teachers’ classroom practice. By diving more deeply into the CR-SE Framework, as well as other resources, we came up with a list of descriptors to work with. From there, we moved to discussions about instructional moves that are aligned with those descriptors.

After several meetings of working on these two goals separately, we began to see and understand the very important connections between them. The high leverage culturally responsive instructional moves are the key to unlocking and making sense of the CR-SE Framework, the SEL Benchmarks, and our PCSD Next Generation Skills and bringing all of those ideas to life in our classrooms.

Our ultimate and audacious goal now is to create a comprehensive, multi-dimensional resource that links the PCSD Next Generation Skills, the SEL Benchmarks, and the CR-SE Framework through a set of high leverage culturally responsive instructional moves. We want to provide easy access to these strategies while also supporting teachers in explicitly embedding the NGSkills, SEL Benchmarks, and CR-SE Framework indicators into their instruction. It will take some time, and lots of “behind the scenes work” to build what we have started to envision, but we know that it will be time well spent and are excited about opportunities to share this work

## The Science of Reading

Our spring grade level release meetings focused on building a foundational understanding of the body of research that has become known as “The Science of Reading” with all of our K-5 teachers. The research in this area comes from multiple fields of study using methods that confirm and disconfirm theories on how children learn to read. It is not a program, product, or a curriculum that schools can buy; rather it is an understanding of how the brain learns to read and what effective readers do that they may not even be aware of. The collective research can and should be used to inform our understanding of the importance of focusing on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension through systematic, explicit, direct instruction.

During the grade level release meetings, teachers were presented with the concept of making subtle but important shifts in their approach to teaching language comprehension, phonics and phonemic awareness, high frequency words, and word solving skills. Having a common understanding, shared knowledge, and consistent approaches to the teaching of these important aspects of reading is our goal.

Teaching young children to be skilled, efficient, and competent readers is one of the most important, and challenging, responsibilities of elementary teachers. We look forward to continued professional learning opportunities for teachers to assist them in putting what research tells us about how children learn to read to work in their classrooms.



## *Additional resources for teachers (some things are worth repeating...)*

There is no question about it, teachers have a lot to keep track of! That has always been true because teaching, at its essence, is a complicated and demanding job. These days, with ever changing standards and assessments, new district and state-level initiatives, and increased community attention on what is happening in our classrooms, it can feel like there is more to juggle and keep track of than ever before.

Over the years, in an effort to assist teachers in accessing helpful documents and resources, we have worked to make many things available on the district website. However, things posted to the website are only helpful to the degree that teachers know that they are there! So, in an effort to be supportive, I want to use this opportunity to highlight a few of the tools and resources and where you can find them on the website.

**Equity Toolkit:** The Equity Toolkit contains a variety of documents created, or adapted from other sources, designed to support teachers in implementing the tenets of the NYS Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework. Documents in the toolkit range from [Six Ways to Foster Cultural Awareness](#) (a general guide for all classroom teachers) to specific guidelines for handling materials that contain the [N-word](#), support for navigating [Challenging Moments](#) in the classroom, and the [Quick Guide](#) for reviewing instructional materials through the lens of diversity and representation. I would strongly encourage every teacher to print out a copy of the Quick Guide and keep it handy as you think about any materials, resources, or tasks you put in front of your students. This tool is designed to “train our brains” to think about materials through an equity lens.



**Professional Learning Communities:** As a district, we highly value collaboration at every level of the organization, including the powerful collaboration around student learning that can take place within a PLC culture. While we acknowledge that we don't have structures in place to support the work of PLCs at all levels, we also know that many teachers are fully invested in this work, with or without a consistent structure supporting them. To that end, we have some resources on this site that may be helpful, most especially the [PLC Playbook](#) assembled by members of the PLC Advisory Committee last year.



**Grading Philosophy Resources:** Several years ago we created a space on our website to house not only our [Grading Philosophy](#) and agreed upon [Grading Practices](#), but also numerous resources (videos, articles, books) to support that work. Access to some of the resources require you to sign in to the district website. (The user name is your first name.last name {melanie.ward}; the password is a unique one that you create for this purpose.)



Additional **Resources for Teachers:** This section of the website contains a variety of resources for teachers that may come in handy from time to time. Everything from the Lesson Plan format, to information about Field trips, textbook ordering forms, to the Social Justice standards can be found in this area. If there is something that you think would be useful to link to this site, please let us know and we can make that happen!



The goal is to make it easy for you to access important information, supporting documentation, and resources that will be helpful to you in planning instructional experiences for your students. I hope you will consider bookmarking some of these sites as favorites and remember to come back to them frequently to access whatever might be helpful and check for updates! If there is something you are looking for that you can't find, please don't hesitate to reach out!