PARCC Fellows Can Create a Bridge Between the MCUs and "Stamina" Needed for PARCC Assessments

In spring 2015, about 5 million students across 9 states and the District of Columbia will take math and ELA/literacy assessments created by PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). Approximately 220,000 third through eighth graders in 197 Massachusetts school districts will “test drive” PARCC this year.

As part of the roll-out of this important new assessment, “PARCC Educator Leaders” were nominated and then trained to support families, students, and colleagues in districts, colleges, and universities as they navigate the PARCC’s many facets.

Several PARCC Fellows also participated in designing and writing Model Curriculum Units. PARCC Fellow and Model Curriculum team member Donna Goldstein, a 5-8 Literacy Coach at Coelho Middle School in Attleboro, identified MCUs’ performance-based assessments as good practice to develop “stamina” for the demanding multi-phase tasks on the PARCC.

“The rigor built into the Model Curriculum Units is a bridge to meeting the complex yet important demands of the standards,” said Goldstein. “The PARCC requires students to show understanding of ideas across multiple sources and an ability to express their ideas in several ways.”

Goldstein also noted that “Many MCUs have ‘deep reading’ or ‘close reading’ lessons and tools woven into them as well to give students practice in approaching a source multiple times to access information.” This ability to gather information from multiple sources is a skill necessary for students long after they leave high school.

Developing stamina, persistence, and determination is essential both in and outside the classroom. Eileen McQuaid, a 6-8 Coordinator ELA/Social Studies in the Brockton Public Schools, and Model Curriculum team member, is also a PARCC Fellow. “Brockton students will get regular practice independently completing (MCU) performance-based assessments during the school year as part of their curriculum,” she explained. “They’ll be able to build the stamina they will need for the much more rigorous tasks on the new PARCC assessment.”

Eventually, students go out into the world and we want them to be as prepared as possible for college and/or careers. The PARCC is intended as a means to evaluate their preparedness for successful academic and professional futures before they leave high school, and both Goldstein and McQuaid are enthusiastic about helping to

Unfamiliar with Model Curriculum Units?

As part of a Race to the Top Grant, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) has developed over 100 Model Curriculum Units (MCUs.) Using the Understanding by Design model developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, these MCUs were created by teams of teachers from across the Commonwealth with the assistance of the ESE.

There are many MCUs, spanning grade bands and curriculum areas! Get them on the Model Curriculum section of the ESE website.

New Science MCUs

Did you see last month’s newsletter about the science MCUs? New science MCUs are coming to the site soon!

You can get up to speed on them by viewing this webinar with Jake Foster, Associate Director of STEM:

Email: modelcurr@doe.mass.edu
Web: http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/

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roll out the PARCC. "Being a PARCC Fellow is a big commitment," McQuaid acknowledged. "But one I would recommend to others because of the unique role it enables you to play in helping your district navigate the unchartered waters of this high stakes assessment, as well as the new professional relationships and insights that you gain from working with other districts."

Hands-on Workshop Guides Teachers to Model Curriculum Unit Adaptation and Implementation

Two days of diving into the MCUs and talking with colleagues about curriculum has prepared teachers to return to their districts ready to work with colleagues on customizing MCUs for their students.

During the first week of December, 154 recipients of the Building Aligned Curriculum grant attended a two-day workshop where they "unpacked" the MCUs, looking at the essential questions, the Understanding by Design-inspired structure, and the standards. The participants, representing 40 districts across the state, discussed best practices and techniques for customizing and implementing MCUs in their home districts. Participants also viewed and discussed implementation videos to gather ideas for their own MCU implementations.

Six steps were identified for customizing and piloting MCUs. (These steps are general and many districts may want to add intermediate steps, but they are a good starting framework):

1. Examine unit and lessons based on student needs.
2. Adapt unit and customize learning plan/lessons (Round 1)
3. Pilot unit and collect ongoing data in real time.
4. Facilitate a LASW protocol to assess effectiveness of unit
5. Revise unit and lessons based on teacher feedback and student data, reflecting on Understanding by Design process successes & challenges.
6. Share the revised unit.

For those who could not attend the workshop, a video summarizing the workshop lessons will be available in February or March. Until then, visit the DESE's YouTube site for videos about MCU creation, implementation, and much more.

You'll also find video links on the Model Curriculum Unit web page.