

## **NYSED Teaching is the Core Grant for 2014-15**

Over the past three years, there have been several major changes to our public education system as part of the Regents Reform agenda. The first change was the decision from NYS to implement the Common Core Standards for English and Mathematics. These Standards are designed to help our students be better prepared for college and careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Common Core Standards are rigorous and challenging to both students and teachers. As a result, they have forced every teacher of English and Mathematics to rethink and re-design their instruction and assessments.

Another change in the state is how school districts evaluate a teacher's performance. For the first time in the state's history, teachers are now accountable for how well students achieve on NYS assessments in grades 3-8, Regents exams and on local tests in other subject areas that are given to measure student growth. Teacher performance is coupled with an additional recommendation from the state to use data from additional assessments given periodically throughout the year to inform instruction. With all of these changes being put into place in a relatively short period of time, many parents as well as teachers have expressed concerns over the increase in the amount of testing that our students are now experiencing.

The State Education Department has responded to these concerns by funding an initiative to examine the number and types of tests that school districts are giving students and to learn about how to design high quality assessments. Thirteen school districts in the Cattaraugus-Allegany region have been awarded a nearly four hundred thousand dollar 'Teaching is the Core' grant from NYS Education Department. The primary purpose of this grant is to improve the quality of all classroom assessments, while also reducing the number of assessments that do not inform instruction. In addition, this grant can help districts identify and/or develop high-quality assessments already in use for instructional purposes that can simultaneously be used for teacher performance purposes.

For the past three months, the thirteen districts participating in this grant have been looking at their current classroom assessments to see if they have a strong alignment to the Standards. We are also looking to see how assessments are used to inform instruction – the way in which feedback is provided to students during the assessment process; the way in which teachers use the results of the assessments to inform their instructional decisions; and the degree to which assessment results are used to address the needs of diverse learners (including students with disabilities, English language learners, and gifted learners). We are analyzing the timing of classroom assessments – a balanced assessment system should include diagnostic, formative and summative assessments as well as pre/post measures to assess growth. We are also looking at the types of assessments we are giving – are they rigorous and authentic? Do they ask students

to recall information, create a product, demonstrate their learning through a performance or explain their thinking processes? What we are discovering is that our current assessments are rarely modified to meet student needs and do not allow students various ways to access content and/or demonstrate their learning. And finally, we are questioning the reliability of our assessments – how do we know if teachers have the same vision for quality and agree while scoring student work?

Most of our work during these first few months of the grant focused on assessment audits – looking at assessment artifacts to see if we need to replace, revise or keep our current assessments. The primary purpose of this grant is to support districts in their efforts to improve the quality of all educational assessments, while also reducing the number of assessments that do not contribute to teaching and learning. In addition, this grant can help districts identify and/or develop high-quality assessments already in use for instructional or other curricular purposes that can simultaneously be used for Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) purposes.

As we proceed to phase two of the grant, districts will have multiple opportunities to learn about quality assessment design, how to develop performance-based tasks, designing assessments that increase rigor and authenticity, and learn protocols for looking at student work to provide meaningful feedback to students and their families. The districts involved in the grant include Allegany-Limestone, Andover, Cuba-Rushford, Genesee Valley, Hinsdale, Olean, Pioneer, Portville, Randolph Academy, Salamanca, Scio, Wellsville, and West Valley. For additional information and educational resources from NYSED, please visit the “Teaching is the Core Assessment Literacy Series” at <http://www.engageny.org> or contact Mary Morris, CA BOCES Staff Specialist and TITC Grant Coordinator.



Jennifer Borgioli, Senior Consultant from Learner-Centered Initiatives, Ltd. is pictured here at the Olean BOCES Center facilitating a group of LOTE teachers on quality assessment design.