



Network Team Institute Webinar June 28, 2011

John King, Commissioner of Education

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Ken Slentz: Good morning everyone and welcome to the latest webinar from the State Education Department on the Regents Reform Agenda and on our Race to the Top initiatives. Today's discussion will focus on the Race to the Top network teams, the network team equivalents, the intention behind their creation, the upcoming summer institute, the professional learning that will be provided and the ongoing supports and the expectations of the work. At this time I would like to introduce our new commissioner, John King. John, we sent out a good deal of information to the field on the network teams, but it would be helpful if we could hear from you a little bit on the vision behind the network teams. What can you tell us was the vision that you and the Commissioner, then Commission Steiner, had when we put this concept into our successful Race to the Top application?

John King: Sure, thanks Ken and thanks to everyone who's making time to join us for this conversation. You know I think the core of the vision behind the network teams is the idea that professional development matters and that the way to ensure that the common core is effectively implemented in classrooms, the way to ensure that principals and teachers are leveraging data on student performance and student work to the maximum effect to drive improvements and instruction, the way to ensure that teacher and principal evaluation really drives improvements in teaching and learning, is to ensure that there is good training and professional development for superintendents, central office staff, principals, other administrators, and teachers on all those different aspects of the Regents Reform Agenda. So we intentionally set aside a very large portion of the Race to the Top resources to support network teams. We also set aside resources on the State side of Race to the Top to support, bring folks together for training in Albany. Providing webinars, tools, supports to the network teams, and then supporting ultimately the network teams in doing job-embedded professional development. Really working right alongside principals and teachers to implement the Regents Reform Agenda.

Ken Slentz: You made a point that I want to emphasize, because it is, it's a challenging conversation and you said professional development matters. Here we sit in a fiscal crisis. Let's call it what it is, and we know that districts are struggling with their budgets. How do we balance those budgets against this increasingly pressing need for good professional development? How can we help communities start those conversations?

John King: I think the challenge, I think you are exactly right, certainly one of the challenges is in tight fiscal times there is a tendency to reduce funding for professional development, to lower that investment to sit in some ways as a luxury. I think it's quite the reverse. The effectiveness of our schools is what's going to drive improvements in our economy long term. Investments in our students will matter long term for the success of our state's economic development strategies. And so we've got to invest more not less in professional development and take resources potentially from other areas and realign them in support of high-quality professional development. The question then becomes how do we make sure that that professional development is the highest leverage possible set of activities. And I think we see

some of the best bets around professional development as the common core, data-driven instruction, and teacher and leader evaluation. Not as a gotcha, but as a tool to drive improvements in teaching and learning. To have a basis to coach and support people. And so making smart, strategic investments in professional development. It's sort of like corporations making smart strategic investments in R&D so that their long term business success is supported.

Ken Slentz: So, I want to go back to a comment you made in the David Coleman webinar and ask you to get a little bit more specific with what you just said. You referred to the network teams, the network team equivalents as the field workers in our newest civil rights movement, and we have been, as a state, probably too subtle in talking about this as in fact a civil rights issue. So if that is in fact the case, if in fact that's the vision, what specifically do you see the role, the things that you just articulated, those three key areas, what specifically do you see the role of the network team members being in relation to articulating this to the field?

John King: Sure. Two critical aspects. One is one I would characterize as turnkey training. So there is a set of training activities that we'll do here in Albany in August with network team members. There are trainings that we will roll out regionally or via webinars over the course of the year. There are tools that we'll provide like the Publisher's Criteria for the Common Core, which we've posted, or eventually sample modules that are aligned to the common core. The network teams will be charged with taking those tools, those experiences, and turn keying them for principals and teachers in their, in the districts that they support. So that's one major role, turn keying. Second major role is what I would characterize as job-embedded professional development or sort of partnership professional development. Where network team members are participating in inquiry teams at the school level and helping the inquiry teams develop a culture where they take a hard look at student achievement data and figure out what lessons they can draw, not about the students, but actually, not just about the students, but actually about the teacher and about their instructional strategies. Going into classrooms with a principal observing the teacher. Really helping the principal what great evidence-based observation might look like. Debating potentially. You know, was that evidence of X or of Y. You know, what meaning do we make of that evidence, and then potentially meeting with the principal at great length to help the principal prepare for the conversation the principal will then have with the teacher about what they observed. So it's both things. It's turn keying and then it's the professional development alongside principals and teachers in schools.

Ken Slentz: Okay, thank you. That was helpful. So clearly with what you just described, there's a special skill set that has to come with the individuals that are on these network teams. Tell us what you believe that skill set has to be.

John King: Sure. I think that's exactly right. Let me talk about each of the areas. So I think around the common core and doing professional development around the common core, it's a good understanding of curriculum and assessment. A good understanding of, you know, how do you design a lesson. How do you check for student understanding in a lesson? How do you build a sequence of lessons that build on each other? How do you, how do you differentiate instruction when you have students of different skill levels? It's the ability to be reflective about instructional practice to go back and look at a lesson and say, huh, did students really get, you know, did students really achieve the objectives of the lesson. How do I know? What evidence did I see of students either understanding the material or struggling with the material? How am I going to adapt in my follow up lesson to make sure I'm responsive to what I saw in the lesson?

Those kinds of skills, reflective practitioner skills, I think are critical. And then frankly content knowledge. So whether it's on the math side or the English language arts side, having a good sense of what are skill appropriate texts consistent with the common core. What does it mean to focus deeply on a conceptual understanding in math? So those are the skills around the common core. It's a complex, rigorous set of skills, but I think really important to making the common core a success. Too often I think people assume to themselves, well, you know, we are doing the New York State standards. Our publisher says the materials are aligned with the common core. That's not really the question. The question is are the materials and instruction really producing students whose skills match the skills that are identified in the common core? The students really have a deep understanding of proportional reasoning. The students, are students really able to make arguments with evidence from text at the text complexity level described in the common core. That's the measure. And so you need strong professional development to ensure that. Around data-driven instruction, I think it's two sets of skills. One is really strong facilitation skills. Able to help a team of teachers and administrators work together to look at student achievement data. To look at student work and draw lessons about instruction. And two is what I would characterize as almost like a careful eye for detail. In looking at if you and I were teachers on a team that was being supported by a network team on our data-driven instruction, and we were teaching different classes, we would want to look really hard, which questions do your kids do better on than mine and why. What was different about the instruction? Did my students tend to answer, give the same wrong answer or different wrong answers? If we are looking at essay rubrics together, are there strengths in your students' writing that aren't reflected in mine and why? What did you do differently? Or what different skills did your kids bring and how can I then tailor my instruction to help my students get those same skills. And that's a careful eye for assessment detail, whether that's at the question item analysis level or the rubric component level. Really being able to look at student work, student assessments, and then draw out lessons for instruction. And then around teacher and principal evaluation, it's really this idea of evidence-based observation. And there again I think facilitation skills, can I help a principal think about how to engage a teacher in reflecting on their instructional practice? Can I help a principal think about how to help the teacher see a moment in the instruction where they could have made a different choice that would have been better for students? And then again careful attention to detail when it comes to observing instruction. You want people on the network team who are going to be good at going in a class and saying, you know I noticed that when Ken gave that answer, the teacher didn't ask a follow up question. What's your evidence, Ken? The teacher just took the question. Or I noticed that when this group of students was struggling, Ken went over and basically gave them the answer rather than asking them a question that might help them as a group direct their learning towards the answer. That kind of careful observation of classrooms I think is what we hope to develop throughout our educator workforce through this work on teacher and principal evaluation.

Ken Slentz: So there's two key things, two key takeaways for me based on what you just said. There is a much greater emphasis on the production of evidence, prove your case; demonstrate your learning through the proof within that evidence. The second piece, and again I think we want to be careful to articulate this. David Coleman and I talked about this in a webinar as well. We have the tendency to look at the old standards and to look at those, the textbooks and the stamps to say we think we're already doing this. That too comes back to evidence in the end. I think the conversations that need to be had, one of the things that we can help the network teams with perhaps is how to start those conversations and really looking at the evidence produced by your instruction, by your evaluation. To demonstrate, not in a disparaging way, not in a punitive way, but that it's not that what you're doing may not be good

for kids. It may not be good based on the targets and the trajectories that we need to go. Are there two key points that you would give to people to start those conversations that we really need to look at our practice across the state to say in fact that this is very different, this is new? So to say we're already doing it, there's a bit of a conflict there.

John King: Right.

Ken Slentz: What would two key points be that you would give to start those conversations?

John King: One is to take a hard look at curricular materials and student work. To sit down with a set of lesson plans, classroom activities, student work, and look at it against the common core. And ask are these assignments asking what the common core asks for in seventh grade math. Is this student work demonstrating the skills that the common core is asking for in seventh grade math? Do I see evidence here, and you say, evidence of student proficiency in the skills the common core requires? And if not, what's the gap? That sort of gap analysis work I think is critical. Second I think is to try to look at what's taking place in this school. It's late in the school year, or for some people the school year is over already, and so there may not be an opportunity to actually go and look inside of classrooms, but ask a team of educators to reflect on how close does instruction in our classroom mirror what's in the common core. How effectively are we using data to drive instruction? How frequently are we checking for student understanding in the course of lessons in our school? Does our student work reflect what we are asking students to explain their conceptual understanding in math? How often are students writing in math? Do we in our student writing, do we ask students to use evidence from sources? Do we ask them to not only sort of summarize a text or describe a text but actually to use evidence from the text in support of arguments? I mean it's that work of going back and trying to take a picture of where things stand relative to the common core, relative to the use of data to drive instruction, and also around evaluation. How many times was the principal able to get into each teacher's classroom this year to really focus on observing instruction? Not to talk to a student about a discipline incident, not to bring some materials, but really to sit in the teacher's classroom and observe instruction in order to inform that teacher's practice. Those questions, those sorts of gap analyses, diagnosis questions I think are the right work for the network teams, and frankly for principals and teachers. And I hope the network team members to August questions and concerns. You know, wow, when I realized how little time our principal is spending in classrooms observing around instruction, I wondered how we're going to fit that in? How are we going to organize our entire time as a staff to make that happen? Or alternatively, you know, when I looked at the student work, I think our students are really, are approaching mastery at some of the standards in the common core. How am I going to push them forward? What do I need to do to increase their achievement even more, have them be even better prepared in math? How do I want to extend their learning to try and tackle some more nuanced writing skills beyond what's in the common core? So I hope people will come in August with questions about how to take their work to the next level.

Ken Slentz: So let's use that as the jumping off point, and I want to come back to you to talk about that very realistic tension that exists. I have one prin..., based on budget cuts, I have one principal that we want very much to be our instructional leader, how can we do that? I want to come back to that point in a little bit. But let's talk about the summer training. You gave us a sense of the vision. You talked about the deliverables. You talked about the key skill sets. That's where we want to go. How are we going to get there? Talk about the summer training a little bit.

John King: Sure, sure. So, I hope folks have watched, had the opportunity to watch David Coleman's Bringing the Common Core to Life workshop. If they haven't, they should. David will be with us with some of his colleagues who also worked on writing the common core for a day and a half to really build on that initial conversation that we did in the webinar. And really build a deep understanding of the common core. What's in it? How's it different? What are the shifts in instruction required in English language arts, literacy, math? What kinds of things should people be seeing in classrooms that are moving towards alignment with the common core? What kinds of work should students be doing? What kind of text should students be reading? What kinds of math problems should students be tackling? So a day and a half really focused on deep understanding of the common core. Day and half focused on data-driven instruction. And this is not just, you know, hey take the test scores and sort them. Or take the multiple choice questions and see which was the most frequently incorrect question. This is really about what's the process, what's the culture that needs to be built in schools so that principals and teachers are constantly seeing student work whether it's test, quiz, a do now at beginning of class, a check out assignment at the end of class, an essay, a project. How do you build a culture where student work drives teacher and principal thinking about their practice? Where they are constantly looking at student work for evidence of student understanding, student misunderstanding, and adapting instruction in response to that. So a day and a half on that with Paul Bambrick-Santoya, who's a national expert on, really on data-driven instruction, has trained hundreds and hundreds of principals around the country on data-driven instruction as well as teachers. And then a day and a half on teacher effectiveness, where really we'll try and take a hard look at evidence-based observation. What does it mean to watch instruction for evidence about practice? And then to use that evidence to drive not only evaluation but conversation about how to improve teaching and learning. So that's the, that's in broad terms the structure. And then we are also going to have some evening sessions to try and kind of supplement. So talking about a tool for principals to use to record what they are seeing in their observations and to manage their time around teacher observations. A conversation about value-added data. With Jonah Rockoff, who's the national expert on value-added data and teacher effectiveness. So the people can begin to understand what it is that we can learn from value-added data. Some work with Jeff Wechsler on a rubric for teacher effectiveness. It's called Teaching as Leadership. That looks at teaching practice in a way that focuses on the teacher's role as a leader in their students' education, in their school community, and in the broader community. And then a session with folks from University of Virginia who work on the class rubric which is a very noted rubric for looking at educator effectiveness that's been tested in a lot of classrooms. Shown very strong correlation to student outcome. So just another window on to how you think about teacher evaluation.

Ken Slentz: So there's a little bit of confusion around this and now I'm hoping that we have properly razed the anxiety of people in getting ready for the summer training. A lot of network team members. A lot of FTEs that are going to be involved in this movement in the turnkey portion of it. We want to be specific about who is coming to Albany for the summer, because this is going to be very intensive, very targeted professional development. And again I think we want to make, give an understanding that this is not Stand and Deliver. This is hands on practice. Who should be coming in Albany, to Albany this summer?

John King: So the network teams have representatives who have been selected whether it's by their BOCES or by their district depending on, on who's overseeing the particular network team. So those network team representatives will be there. We'll also have representatives of

some of the professional organizations as well who will be participating so that they can again turnkey some of the training for their members and have a good sense of what we're working on, what the vision is around professional development going forward. It's not enough. You know, we'll have probably upwards of 500 people, and you know the exact number. We'll have upwards of 500 people. It's still not enough. You know, I wish we could do it for 1000 people, 2000 people. I mean the key is that we are trying to build momentum around a set of ideas and skills and practices. And we'll use August as a launching pad, but then all those people will go out from August and need to bring that back to their districts and schools. They'll have to have regional follow ups. We'll build lots of tools. We've got some we set out already around network team deliverables and so forth. We'll provide more tools that we'll build over the next few weeks. We'll provide more tools in August around the common core, around data-driven instruction, around evidence-based observation. There will be videos of some of the sessions that we do in August. Training materials. So there will be an opportunity for people to really take those tools and bring them back in at the local level. So this is not just about August. This is not, you know, this is not, you know, one of those one shot, show up for the professional development get a canvas bag, go home, and now to assume you have mastery of everything. This is the start of what will be really a three year conversation as we execute on the Race to the Top and the Regents Reform Agenda.

Ken Slentz: So let me jump off of that for a moment. Lessons are going to be learned as we move through this. Certainly in August, certainly in any follow up training. And I want to make sure that the field understands that at the end of this we will give you a website where you can submit questions. I think we also want to issue an invitation that we're all students as we go into August and as we continue with those lessons learned, what are the best ways to have regional conversations around the lessons learned from the training that then can be brought back into the Department so we can mix that in with our chemistry of how to better what we are offering?

John King: Well you know there will be opportunities at the local level to continuously gather feedback. I think that's the idea of the network team deliverables. Sort of a continuous feedback loop around how are these things working. We'll have more trainings throughout the year. That'll be an opportunity for us as a department to build on the training that we've done to see what's working, what isn't working, what questions people still have and to follow up on those. So again it is sort of an iterative conversation. Let me ask the question back, back to you as you think about the design work. You know, how do you see that unfolding?

Ken Slentz: I think you hit it right when you suggested this is an iterative process. We have been working with a number of folks in the field, a number of our networks already with some superintendents who have very good heads for this type of thing. The understanding has to be that it's constant feedback in both directions. And I think this is where we want to make sure that we are being very careful listeners to what the experts in the field are saying. And this comes back, and we'll wrap back around to the question about the principals in a moment. Understanding that the process is iterative, that we are going to learn from it. Understanding that we are confident that there are going to be areas that we can improve on, and we are kind of excited about learning what those are. But I think that if we understand that this is in fact initially a three-year conversation, I think we also have to at the same time be thinking what do years 4, 5, and 6 bring...

John King: That's exactly right

Ken Slentz: ...and well beyond that. And that's where again for, for the network teams is they're involved in bringing this to life, if you will. Our administrators and our central administrators have to be looking at the system design on how this is in fact sustained once the grant money goes away.

John King: That's right.

Ken Slentz: But I want to take you back to something that seems probably like it was decades ago. I want to take you back to your days as a teacher. If you were going to give a homework assignment to the network teams, for what they should be doing prior to August 1, what would that homework assignment be?

John King: I've got a lot of homework for folks, which is one of the things my students would complain about when I was a teacher. There's a survey that folks need to register for and complete. There's planning their schedule for, for the network teams, planning their schedule for how they are going to turnkey the professional development when they get back to their schools. So is that going to happen in August and September? Are there going to be a series of trainings over the fall, etc? There's a book that Paul Bambrick-Santoya wrote, who is doing the data-driven instruction work that folks can, can take a look at. There's reading the Common Core. Every page, every word, all the appendices. Watching David Coleman's seminar. Might even be good to watch the seminar, read the Common Core, every page, then come back, watch the seminar again to try and consolidate the learning. There's looking at the resources that we've posted on our webpage whether it's the network team deliverables or the publisher's criteria related to the Common Core. And then there's that research work that we talked about. Really try to do gap analysis. Where are we with it, where are the schools and districts that I'm working with with respect to the Common Core? How do I know? What's my evidence? What's the student work I can see? What are the assignments I can see? The lesson plans. Where are we on data-driven instruction? What's the evidence? How do I know people are really using student work, student assessment performance to drive instructional decisions? How do I know that those conversations about student work and about instructional decision-making based on assessments are happening in the schools I'm working with? How much observation are we doing? How much time are principals and teachers spending together talking about best practice, talking about what they've seen in classrooms? So that gap analysis work, that's really important so that folks come in August questions in hand. Areas of focus in hand. Maybe talking with principals, teachers, superintendents, central office administrators, in the districts that they are working with so that they have a good sense of what the issues and challenges are. You know, and then I would say taking time to read a novel that is from Appendix B. Taking time to think about what does it mean. You see this when you watch the David Coleman webinar and how he tackles King's Letter from Birmingham Jail. What does it mean to really read rich text closely? And so having that experience with, you know, with text from Appendix B or a text of similar text complexity at a given grade level, that I think would also be a good July activity. Maybe take the book to the beach and just try and really think about what it is to be an engaged reader of a complex text.

Ken Slentz: Okay, good. Very helpful. So we want to make sure that, folks at the end of this there will be an email box posted where you can send your questions in based on what the commissioner has suggested today. Also questions in general that you have about the network teams. We also, I want to reemphasize a point that the commissioner made, that when you come to the summer training, we want them to bring questions. We want them to bring the

dilemmas, the tension points, and I'll come back to the principal issue. The reality of the principals in dealing with the day to day versus wanting to be the instructional leader, what are the tension points? Maybe for today we could leave that as a rhetorical question and invite people to bring that with them to the training. However, I don't want to preclude you from giving any observations that you might have on that question.

John King: Actually let me just make two final points. One is that education is an enterprise that's always going to be impacted by politics despite our best efforts. I suspect there's always going to be a lot of political noise in the background of our work. But our work is fundamentally about teaching and learning. The Regents' commitment, my commitment is that our work on the Common Core, data-driven instruction and teacher and leader evaluation, high-quality evaluation grounded in student outcomes. That's the right work to drive and improve performance, not just for some kids but for all kids. And that work is moving forward and there will be politics, there will be distractions, there will be those who will seek delay in various ways. That's the work. It's the right work to move the agenda forward. And that's where I hope people will focus. One thing is, block out all of that and focus on the substance. The other thing I would say is, the question ultimately of any educational reform effort is how does it impact teaching and learning? How does it impact the interaction between teacher and student? That's what the Common Core is about. That's what the work on the data-driven instruction is about. That's what the work on teacher and leader evaluation is about. How do we make those interactions between teachers and students more rigorous for students, more challenging, more engaging, and ultimately serve students better. We've got lots of excellent classrooms in this state, and we've got some struggling classrooms in this state. And the goal is to, in all of those classrooms, have even more learning happen next year than happened this year. That's the goal of our work. So I just wanted to underscore that's broader context for our work.

Ken Slentz: Great. Thank you so much for taking the time with us today. It's valuable. Will you be at the summer training?

John King: I will be there.

Ken Slentz: Great. Folks, thanks so much for taking the time to tune in with us today. If you have questions, please submit them to the mailbox that's noted. On the David Coleman webinar, that also is posted on to our website. If you haven't seen that, please know that it's been reformatted into instructional chunks, if you will, that is very useful for doing the type of professional development that the commissioner discussed. Thanks again for your time today. We look forward to seeing you in August.

John King: Thanks so much. Thanks Ken.

Ken Slentz: Thank you sir.