COMMUNITY SCHOOL FOR CREATIVE EDUCATION AND ENVISION LEARNING PARTNERS

Weaving Together Deeper Learning Strategies, Waldorf Principles and Common Core State Standards

A picture of what it looks like when an elementary school embraces systems and structures that provide evidence of student learning

“Inch by inch, row by row, I’m gonna make this garden grow.
All it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground.
Inch by inch, row by row, someone bless these seeds I sow.
Someone warm them from below, ‘til the rain comes tumbling down.”
-- Garden Song

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OVERVIEW

This summary highlights the partnership between Community School for Creative Education (CSCE) and Envision Learning Partners (ELP), the consulting division of Envision Education and their initiative to adopt and adapt Envision’s Deeper Learning Student Assessment System (DLSAS). The CSCE’s vision is:

“A future in which all children have access to quality education; all children experience success in community and career; and youth voices contribute in valued and meaningful ways to the success of a thriving, equitable, and multicultural society.”

CSCE is a member school of the Bay Area Performance Assessment Network (BAPAN), an initiative facilitated by ELP, in partnership with the Alameda County Office of Education, through generous support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. BAPAN connects to a larger body of work supported by the Foundation’s Deeper Learning Initiative, which states:

“All students have the right to a motivating, challenging education that will prepare them to succeed in college, careers, and life and become engaged citizens. The key to that education is deeper learning.”

CSCE was chosen to be a ‘Model School’ – tasked to implement a performance assessment system with targeted supports from ELP that included professional development and instructional coaching over several months. The story of that partnership illustrates the process of aligning age-appropriate, evidence-based assessment practices and how building teachers’ capacity to plan and implement project-based learning impacts student learning. The successes and challenges that arise in whole school transformation efforts point to implications for wider adoption of deeper learning strategies.

Information included in this summary is derived from (a) interviews with CSCE teachers and school leaders; (b) observations of professional development sessions, instructional leadership meetings, school open houses, student defenses, and teacher defenses; and (c) the review of relevant CSCE documents, data, videos, and project plans. This summary is organized into four main sections: (a) introduction, (b) deeper learning in action (c) partnership contributions, and (d) considerations for wider school transformation.

1 For more information about the Deeper Learning Initiatives, see http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education/deeper-learning/what-deeper-learning
INTRODUCTION

Established four years ago, the Community School for Creative Education is a Waldorf-inspired, equity-focused charter school in Oakland, California serving 200 students from transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. The school serves a diverse population: 31 percent are English Language Learners; 20 percent receive Special Education services; and 72 percent qualify for free and reduced price lunches. The student population closely reflects the neighborhood: 25 percent African American, 25 percent Latino, 15 percent Asian, 15 percent Caucasian, and 20 percent either mixed race or declined to state. The school’s mission states:

The Community School for Creative Education partners with families and communities to provide a rigorous, college-preparatory program integrated into a culturally rich, arts-infused, highly personalized curriculum inspired by Waldorf education for the diverse students of Oakland, to promote equity and prepare culturally competent, well-rounded, lifelong learners to lead, contribute to, and successfully participate in our rapidly changing, multicultural society.

CSCE joined the BAPAN network in August 2013 to build the capacity of its teachers to develop more rigorous assessment practices that would improve student learning by strengthening the instructional core that combines Waldorf practices and state standards. Envision’s performance assessment system provides standards-aligned assessments that ask students to perform a task that shows what they know and can do rather than rely solely on standardized test answers. School leaders wanted to have more meaningful evidence that their students were learning, and believed that the deeper learning system would integrate the depth and developmental focus of Waldorf education and the external criteria of the new Common Core State Standards into a rigorous instructional core that serves all learners.

CSCE leaders and teachers began their partnership by attending the BAPAN Summer Institute in August 2013 to learn about the Deeper Learning Student Assessment System (DLSAS) to identify a work plan for their site. Leaders attended a series of three professional development workshops through the fall, bringing back project planning tools for implementation. ELP provided on-site coaching to support the efforts as part of regular BAPAN activities.
In April 2014, CSCE was chosen to be a ‘Model School’ and receive more targeted professional development and coaching to support the implementation of projects in all classes at the school. They are Envision’s first partnering elementary school seeking to implement a system of performance-based assessments culminating in 5th grade Portfolio Defenses. A separate grant from the Hewlett Foundation supported this work and allowed for up to 20 days of extra partner time in addition to resources to learn from the engagement, which is described in this evaluation.

Using Envision’s Work Plan template, CSCE leaders identified a key area of focus: they created a Graduate Profile that articulates expectations for each student and chose to start with aligning main lesson blocks with performance assessment planning tools. As part of CSCE’s professional development with ELP, all CSCE teachers and leaders visited an Envision School in May 2014 to participate in a Defense Design Studio and observe a high school student’s portfolio defense. This powerful experience provided the school’s staff with a model for their own students’ 5th grade defenses and helped the staff envision how they, too, could prepare their students for that level of rigorous learning.

CSCE leaders chose to focus on teacher capacity building, in particular Envision’s category of ‘assessment, curriculum and instruction that leads to deeper learning.’ They also determined that the driving indicator would be that ‘Teachers create well designed and aligned performance tasks that ask students to create a response or product in order to demonstrate and measure complex skills’. Teachers at every grade level used Envision’s KDR (know-do-reflect) project planning template to design and implement projects that blended Waldorf practices and California State Standards and that incorporated a measure related to making meaning of informational text -- a school goal -- into every performance assessment. Spring projects focused on Science standards and culminated in an Open House in May that showcased students’ work.

CSCE teachers and leaders continued to work with ELP staff in late summer to reflect on successes and challenges to the spring projects, and to plan the first lesson block for fall, which spanned six weeks and would culminate in a ‘Block Party’ exhibition for family and community members. The units were focused on language arts and social studies standards, in particular the standards associated for ‘using informational texts’. Teachers designed their projects using the Envision project planning template, with instructional support from ELP. Projects were on display to family and community members at the end of the lesson block.
Fifth graders went beyond presenting their projects to defending their thinking with particular attention to reading, writing and math. Each student prepared a formal Defense, a presentation of artifacts and reflections on their learning process in relation to objective strengths and areas of growth in front of a panel of educators and community members. Each student had fifteen minutes to present their project, including their research paper, associated artwork, and notes to a panel that included CSCE Board members, Envision staff, an Envision high school student member, community members, and CSCE teachers.

Another agreement for being a model school involved teachers presenting their projects, explaining the process used to develop assessments and defending their learning in November 2014. They followed a similar format as the students’ defense: presentation of artifacts describing their projects as well as reflections of their learning process and plans for growth. Six of eight teachers participated in the defense. Their insights, in relation to what they learned through partnering with ELP, are included in the next section.

Evidence of changes in student practice, teacher capacity building, and the ways in which CSCE’s partnership with ELP has impacted school culture and structures is presented in the next section.

It’s two days before the first ever student defense and the fifth grade classroom is busy.

Students are spread out around the room working in small groups, meeting with the teacher, and organizing note cards, research papers and artifacts to assemble on their presentation boards. Frayed nerves and palpable excitement combine to create an electrifying mood.
DEEPER LEARNING IN ACTION

Envision’s deeper learning model is a systems approach to considering forces essential to improving student learning. The figure below illustrates this model and how various components are interconnected. Students, teachers, school culture, school systems and leadership are considered integral to whole school transformation. Each component impacts the system overall.

The partnership between ELP and CSCE focused primarily on supporting teachers to develop assessment practices aligned with curriculum and instruction that leads to deeper learning. Changes in student learning behavior and early assessments of learning outcomes are considered evidence that those teaching practices made a difference. Aspects of school culture, systems and leadership were introduced, including instituting a student defense process that provided evidence of students’ learning and growth. It is important to note that the primary partnership work was with teachers on instructional design and less so with school leaders to consider the larger issues of whole school change strategy. Yet, examples from each component to the DLSAS presented here illustrate the impact of the partnership, making it evident that the work with teachers reverberated throughout the school.

Student Practices

Envision’s model starts with defining successful results for students. It emphasizes defining a vision for graduates and then points to aligning practices and structures towards those aims.

At CSCE, all students, from transitional kindergarten to fifth grade, developed science projects, created written and artistic products, and exhibited their work at an all school Open House in spring 2014. Students were led by teachers’ newly developed skills using Envision’s performance assessment planning tool that articulates essential questions, learning targets tied to standards (both state and Waldorf), and specific assessment practices that ensure evidence of students’ learning. The projects ranged from butterfly reports in kindergarten and an exploration of local fauna in first grade to considerations of whether bacteria are good or bad in fourth grade. All of the projects addressed California state science
standards in engaging project-based pedagogy. On an evening in early May, students gleefully showed their work projects as parents and community members wandered the halls and classrooms to see student work.

In the fall’s first lesson block, all students worked towards meeting the Language Arts and Social Studies standards through projects developed again using Envision’s project planning tool. Early grades focused on ‘ready to learn’ topics including, citizenship, the awareness of others and how to be good community members. Simultaneously, older grades expanded into more content-based topics such as the California Gold Rush, Ancient Civilizations, and comparative analyses of different cultures. The projects were designed with specific learning targets aligned to essential questions developed by each teacher.

Student outcomes reported by teachers fall into three categories:
- Increased engagement with the material;
- Expanded reach towards higher expectations;
- Increased awareness of students’ strengths and challenges as learners.

Teachers across the school noted that students’ interest levels increased during the projects where topics related to their own lives. Authenticity of projects is widely noted as an essential and meaningful component of any project-based-learning experience. Students’ ability to choose within project parameters contributed to a greater sense of agency in their learning. First graders in the spring chose animals they see in their neighborhoods that they always wondered about, while first graders in the fall discussed flags as symbols from countries their families had once lived.

Fall Block Party: Prompts for 6th grade parents

- What did you learn about the writing process?
- What evidence can you show me about what you learned about using strong introduction and conclusion sentences?
- What evidence can you show me about what you learned about using just the right words in just the right place?
The fifth grade teacher reported increases in both student engagement and internal motivation as a result of the projects’ elements of choice and clear guidelines for success:

“This all came from giving (the students) the power to move themselves forward. It took it away from me and gave it to them. Throughout this entire project, my students were buzzing around, they were helping each other. I could leave them for two hours while I was conferencing with students. It was really empowering for me as a teacher to see my kids so focused and motivated.”

Teachers reported raising their expectations of students from the spring to fall projects as their own confidence in designing meaningful, evidence-based projects deepened. They noted that, without a doubt, students stretched to meet the higher expectations. The theme of teachers wondering, “Am I asking enough of them?” was repeated as student engagement increased with the expectations.

Teachers also noted students’ significant increase in awareness of themselves as learners, the critical metacognitive skills characteristic of lifelong learners. Teachers noted that shining light on students’ learning process “let students be powerful” and “increased their agency.” This was especially strong in the fifth graders who incorporated standardized tests scores into the projects they defended, using what they learned about their scores to identify areas for continued effort and growth. Students described their strengths and areas for growth in relation to the scores along a “this is where I am and where I need to be; and this is my plan to get there” format. As this student explained in her defense presentation:

“My overall score in language is 185 which is not yet at the fifth grade level. My weakness in this is editing for grammar. I speak two languages – Spanish and English - and it is hard for me to make sense when I’m writing. I can work on this by reading my words out loud to hear if it makes sense. My strength in this area is organizing and developing. Writing, I had no problem having ideas to support my topic.”
The first main lesson block for 5th graders (six week project) focuses on ‘Past and Present: Their Life and Mine’. Students use a research-based approach to address the essential question, “How has the past influenced the present?” Studying Ancient Egypt pushed students to consider connections between civilization today and those from antiquated times. Art is integrated throughout the project as each student chooses a letter to determine their topic and illustrates a page for an A-Z book to be shared with younger students at the school.

The teacher works with four students simultaneously at her desk, looking up to ensure others around the room are on task, occasionally getting up to check the list on the board tracking students’ needs for completing the project and ensuring students are ready for the defense. She sets the schedule for the two days of defenses while students watch, holding their breath.

As described earlier, students in the fifth grade created work products with a culminating Defense in mind; the research paper, artwork, and the tools (e.g. graphic organizers) used to create their final products were used as artifacts that illustrated their learning process over the six-week lesson block. All twenty-three fifth graders completed their projects (described in sidebar), and presented their artifacts before a panel of educators and community members. They stretched themselves to meet the high expectations articulated in the Defense Rubric. Every student was ultimately assessed as proficient on the fifth grade rubric, which was based on the Envision Schools high school defense rubric. The fifth grade rubric included indicators within the domains of: Mastery of Knowledge, Application of Knowledge, Meta-Cognition, Presentation Skills, Response to Questions and Comments, and Overall Effectiveness.

Student defenses were spread over two days. Each student had 15 minutes to present their work, 5 minutes to take questions, and then left the room while the panelists deliberated and discussed scores on the rubric. When the student came back, they received feedback on recognized areas of strength as well as feedback for future growth areas. They were then informed if they passed or needed to re-submit a portion of the defense that they did not meet proficiency indicators. Students who passed were visibly relieved and proud of their efforts. Those who were asked to re-submit handled the feedback with grace that defied their young age.

**Teacher Practices**

The partnership between CSCE and ELP focused most heavily on building teachers’ capacity to design and implement curriculum aligned to clear expectations and assessment practices for student learning. Through a series of professional development workshops and on-site coaching support, CSCE staff acquired the skills and knowledge to use deeper learning strategies in their classrooms.
Four areas of growth stand out:

- Increasing knowledge and skills (project design competence);
- Proficiency in using Envision’s Performance Assessment Planning Template (called the K-D-R Planning Template by CSCE);
- Identifying student proficiency indicators; and
- Using student data to improve instruction and learning targets.

CSCE teachers reported increased understanding of performance assessment, aligning instruction to standards, and in general how Waldorf education is infused in their practice. Making sense of the school’s Instructional Core was a high priority for school leadership. As a public charter school, CSCE had many initiatives competing for instructional attention. As the year progressed and teachers focused on designing aligned projects, instructional cohesion developed. Each teacher increased their skill in designing projects, including understanding the core concepts of performance assessment.

“I feel a lot more confident to align my learning targets with the standards and to be clear about what I need my students to do to show mastery.”

This teacher described her struggles and eventual realization about essential questions and her bigger goals for students:

“It is a question that allows students to apply what they are learning about to the world rather than just accumulate knowledge to answer a question. I want to stretch my students to think about how everything they are learning connects to what we are doing and how it applies to the larger world around them.”

Particularly profound for a number of teachers was the understanding of aligning daily instruction with learning targets. Many realized that much of their instruction did not directly match with what they planned to assess their students as knowing or being able to do. As this teacher explained:

“I was having them complete work that didn’t directly align with my learning targets... (I realized that) if it doesn’t show mastery of this target, it is not an effective use of class time.”

In addition, all teachers developed proficiency in using the Performance Assessment Planning Tool. Teachers noted deepening their understanding from the first to second project in profound ways that transcended project requirements. Comparing the KDRs completed in spring to those completed in fall shows an increase in depth and comprehensiveness. The emphasis was on design more so than specific evidence-based assessments in the early work with CSCE teachers.
The Stanford Center for Assessment leadership and Equity has validated Envision rubrics as acceptable measurements of college readiness. They are used to assess high school students’ levels of proficiency across different domains. The rubrics were adapted for a younger population in an attempt to make the assessments developmentally appropriate. Some teachers chose other, more relevant rubrics, such as Six Traits of Writing, that were designed for different grade levels. For the fifth grade Defense, Envision’s defense rubric was used with slight modifications, including some changes in language. Knowing that panelists would be using the rubric to assess their performance, students used them to prepare their defense.

The fifth grade teacher explains her approach of using test scores to increase student metacognition and motivation:

“With NWEA testing, students get individual scores: an overall score for the category as well as sub scores for each of the breakdowns. For instance, in reading they get an overall score and then individual scores for literature, informational text and vocabulary. My students get these scores but they’ve never understood what they meant. So I thought, ‘how can we make some meaning of this for them?’ I did this through individual conferencing because so many of my students are not at grade level and didn’t want to publically share that out loud and I didn’t want them to discover that and not have the right support to really processing what it means.

The first thing we did was orient. We highlighted the overall score, then the highest and lowest scores – an area of strength and an area to work on. I worked with each individual student to think about ‘what does it mean to be strong in literature?’ and really talk about what that means. A lot of my students were really low in the area of informational text and really high in literature. Since my project was social studies-based, what a perfect opportunity to be practicing those informational text skills. I worked with students on skills that help them comprehend informational texts. We found things like highlighting, taking notes, marking in the margins, re-reading, and a lot of them identified the skill that you have to put effort into it, especially if it is something you don’t want to read.”
Lastly, more teachers reported using student data to improve their instruction. Teachers talked about plans to calibrate student work scores to ensure they each understood performance assessment more deeply, including implications for shifting instruction. As one teacher noted,

“I now take a longer term lens when reviewing student work. It isn’t just about grading them, but rather considering my instruction and what they still need to learn.”

This was particularly informative for the fifth grade teacher who guided her students in understanding and using their own data in the form of NWEA test scores. She describes the process of using sub scores with students in the side bar. The overall experience of noting where their assessments matched up to grade level because of the connections students made to their projects. As the teacher explains:

“It was really empowering for (students) in the end to see what their scores were, and to talk about it out loud. (They could) identify who is really good at mechanics; because that’s who you need to ask to peer edit your paper because that is their strength. ‘Who is good at vocabulary?’ If you’re struggling with a word and you’re using context clues and it’s not working, maybe you need to go find one of those people and talk it through with them so you can understand their thinking and learn from each other.”

Identifying strengths and areas for growth in a safe environment allowed students to recognize their own agency over their future. As the teacher reports:

“Kids said things like ‘I always thought I was a good reader but now I realize that I have one area I really need to work on and if I do this, I will be able to raise my score up to grade level.’”

Teachers recognized the importance of strengthening the ability of their students to reflect on their learning strengths and areas for growth beyond single assignments or assessments. As this teacher explained:

“I want to take it further. I don’t just want them to identify what they’re good at and what they need to work on. I want them to see how they track progress and continually set progressive goals.”
School Culture

Considering the ways in which classroom, school and staff culture support transformative results is an essential component of deeper learning. CSCE’s work with ELP brought about changes in two important areas: revision and reflection. Teachers and school leaders reported significant shifts in their practices of working with students to review and revise work throughout the projects. Whereas in the past only final products would have been displayed, the fall Open House included the progression of students’ work throughout the lesson block. Fifth graders presented drafts of their research papers, including marked up versions, as evidence of their learning. The growth in student work was apparent for each student in their descriptions of how they focused on improvements. There was a real sense of pride in the descriptions of how they had improved from earlier drafts. As one students explained:

“I did this drawing five times. I couldn’t get it quite right but eventually, I did. I like how this one turned out.”

CSCE teachers strengthened their reflection muscles over the course of the partnership with ELP. Many teachers noted being more thoughtful about their teaching practices as a result of the work together. They hoped that they were modeling if for their students as well by asking more questions in class to reveal students’ learning processes.

In addition to the evidence of revision and reflection in CSCE’s school culture, a strong sense of community and shared vision permeate the school. Teachers follow their students from grade to grade, a practice that leads to deep connections among students and with their teachers. Genuine affection and concern for one another was observed in the fifth grade class in particular as they prepared for their Defenses.

Students incorporated standardized test scores in their presentations that indicated where they were in relation to grade level standards. The fact that they did so with little hesitancy or evidence of fear surprised adult observers. Students had the option of inviting fellow students to observe their defenses as supporters, and the rooms were packed. When a student did not initially pass, friends were right there to cushion the blow and to help them prepare to re-submit. Collaboration was mentioned earlier as a skill students developed. It is also an indicator of a culture of trust and support.
A number of teachers spoke about shifts in their class cultures from teacher-centered to more student-centered. The kindergarten class project, titled ‘Building Community and Caring in Kindergarten: A study of Open Communication and Language Skills’, specifically aimed to develop class norms that facilitated learning and growth. The teacher provided much evidence of ways in which her students developed language skills, cooperation and strong problem-solving skills over the course of the unit. One of the more significant outcomes for her as an educator was noting the shift in ownership as students became more engaged in the class community:

“I ended up with a unit that allowed my class to develop as a community, build on trust and communication and high-level language discussions. And that was one of the most powerful things – having my students participate.”

School Systems

School structures that support deeper learning are critical to lasting changes in practice. Evidence from the partnership between ELP and CSCE points most strikingly to the strengthened Instructional Core and the early work towards establishing systems for improving student learning outcomes. As indicated earlier, CSCE’s instructional practices were a mix of Waldorf principles and state standards-based curriculum, such as the Open Court reading program. Developing curriculum and instruction was confusing to many teachers, and assessments did not match well. As a result of working with Envision Learning Partners through BAPAN, curriculum and instructional practices at CSCE are now much more aligned to evidence-based student outcomes. Teachers reported increased vertical alignment across grade levels for the first time. They also noted that Envision’s model empowered them to have consistent methods across classrooms, such as the use of learning targets and essential questions. Having common language was mentioned by a number of teachers as “changing the game.”
Considerable work remains in order to align all six annual lesson blocks, but school leaders believe the experiences from the most recent block will guide efforts. Early in the BAPAN process, CSCE leaders developed a school-wide Graduate Profile that articulated learning outcomes for all students. The fifth grade Defense aligned with the profile and served as an example of where the school is heading: all graduates will be expected to present artifacts of learning to an external panel. The first Defense was a resounding success: all twenty-three students participated. Six were asked to re-submit portions of their Defense, which they all did and passed. All CSCE teachers participated in calibrating the Defense Rubric for the first student’s Defense. This process allowed other grade level teachers to better understand the process as well as consider ways in which their students’ projects incorporated assessment elements. The experience strengthened the collaborative culture among the teachers as well. Many of the other teachers served as panelists for the re-submitted defenses in addition to supporting the teacher in other ways in preparation.

Leadership

Supporting a vision of excellence for all students through strong management, community building and instructional leadership is the outer layer of Envision’s transformation model. It encompasses all areas of a school to ensure supports are in place to achieve its mission. The partnership between ELP and CSCE described here did not focus directly on what it takes to lead the vision. In this process, expectations are high and performance-based assessments are critical; moving forward, strong instructional leadership will be essential to provide the clarity needed to weave Waldorf principles with state standards. This includes identifying supports needed for teachers to do the work, providing necessary resources in terms of planning time, and developing processes to analyze student work, teacher practice and data about student performance on a regular basis. As will be discussed in the Considerations section, there were a number of constraints CSCE had that made this extremely challenging, highlighting the complexity of the work.
PARTNERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

ELP sought a partner for deeper implementation of the DLSAS so that it could consider its model with younger students. CSCE met the criteria for such a partnership given its leadership commitment to embark on a whole school endeavor, an eagerness to participate in professional development activities and agreement to meet all requirements of the partnership. A work plan was developed that outlined expectations and a timeline of activities and supports.

ELP’s involvement and impact was evidenced in three distinct ways: acting as an instructional design thought partner; providing a solid model and design supports; and leading efforts to measure student learning. ELP staff challenged CSCE teachers’ thinking, assumptions and approaches throughout the process in gentle and supportive ways. Working with teachers and the principal in the biweekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, ELP staff led teachers in designing projects that would align with student learning outcomes. ELP also added significant value by providing a successful, evidence-driven model. The DLSAS, with the components of learning targets, essential questions, validated rubrics, and project-planning templates, accelerated the adoption of deeper learning strategies for CSCE teachers. ELP staff’s high quality coaching in the implementation stage for teachers was reported by a number of teachers as being exceptional and growing their practice considerably.

One of ELP’s intentions in this work was to learn more about the DLSAS in different environments. As the first whole-school elementary experience, a number of lessons were learned about how to support the work as well as steps to consider to make appropriate modifications. Developing a clear work plan from the start stands out as an essential strategy. Also important was calibrating assessment rubrics to fit the grade level expectations more clearly. These are considered in more detail in the next section.
CONSIDERATIONS

Designing and implementing a deeper learning student assessment system requires commitments and resources at each level of the system.

Vision and Clarity of Work Plan

Beyond the clear vision of identifying what is expected of all students and identifying measurable evidence for reaching those standards, schools must determine a clear path to achieve their goals. The first essential lesson identified by both partners is the development of a clear work plan that includes a road map of activities and expected outcomes. The nature of the work in this partnership is constantly evolving due in part to its newness to teachers already burdened by multiple other initiatives, young schools experience and both partners having time constraints. Because of these challenges, the work plan was not as clear as it could have been; any frustrations or unmet expectations can be traced back to this lack of clarity.

Resources

Deeper learning strategies involve numerous supports for students, teachers and schools in general. Students need instructional supports to excel, including opportunities to reflect on their learning process of achievements and areas to improve. They also benefit from a classroom culture of revision, reflection and collaboration.

Planning time and targeted professional development are among the resources teachers need to successfully implement evidence-based assessments and aligned instruction. CSCE teachers had limited access to instructional planning support because the school struggled with its limited resources — including a lack of prep time for teachers. Budget cuts forced the elimination of a Science teacher, a period in which teachers were able to prepare away from their class. Teachers had no prep time during the week after the last round of cuts.
Leadership

The instructional leader role is critical. Teachers need guidance and support to align instruction with learning targets and appropriate assessments. CSCE struggled with this important aspect. In the 2013-14 school year, teachers met weekly with the principal during Professional Learning Community (PLC) time in teams of two or three based on grade level. An instructional leadership position was imagined for the 2014-15 school year but was not funded. The principal met with teachers during the first month of school to plan curriculum and continued working with the Instructional Leadership Team to plan weekly faculty professional development agendas, but the absence of support was noticeable. Teachers were left to make sense of the strands on their own, including which assessments to administer and how to make sense of them. The Instructional Leadership Team, made up of a few teachers and school leadership, meets weekly to plan Faculty meetings. Protecting time in those meetings for teachers to develop curriculum and assessments was a stated goal.

DLSAS Adaptations

Because the model itself was adapted in an elementary school, another lesson became evident. Tools, such as the Defense rubric, needed to be made more developmentally appropriate, a task that needs further attention. Teachers described modifying rubrics to more appropriately measure their students’ development. For example, pictorial rubrics are of great interest to the teachers of younger students. Determining how to best assess arts-integrated learning that goes beyond the product to consider the process of learning through the arts was identified as being a necessary next step.

Another major consideration was the lack of calibration among panel members for the fifth grade Defense. No training was provided prior to the presentations and panelists reported being at a loss for how to assess what was proficient for a nine or ten year old. The rubric provided indicators for each domain to be assessed, but panelists struggled in determining age appropriate expectations. There were also distinct differences between the two panels’ approach and decisions to pass students or to ask for resubmission. One panel decided that students’ content knowledge should be considered more strongly, which was not what students
were instructed in preparing their presentations. One panel also considered the emotional states of the students in determining whether asking for resubmissions would lead to more learning or would impede progress. The fifth grade teacher expressed surprise at two students who passed who she expected would need to re-submit portions. She was also surprised that one of the students did not pass given his strong command of the material and presentation experience.

CONCLUSIONS

In all, the partnership between CSCE and ELP provided strong evidence of deeper learning strategies in action and how focusing on intended outcomes and aligning instruction to these outcomes results in deeper student learning. The Hewlett Foundation describes ‘Proof Point Schools’ as those serving large numbers of low-income students that “Identify a set of deeper-learning skills on which all students are regularly assessed; use a pilot common or comparable assessment of deeper learning; and that employ innovative instructional methods, such as project-based learning, student exhibitions, and accelerated remedial courses to help students achieve deeper learning.” CSCE’s work with ELP certainly meets those criteria. The increased understanding and applicable knowledge by CSCE teachers to design and implement projects with specific learning targets and aligned assessments provides important evidence of how deeper learning initiatives can impact students, teachers and whole schools. There is much work to do, but at the conclusion of these efforts are educators looking to the future to continue the important work. One teacher explained the power of using performance assessments, including the focus on metacognition, with her students:

“In this process, I feel more empowered at the end. Having the same students over four years, I’ve struggled with not seeing the results on paper that I really wanted to see. Why am I not being effective when I work so hard? For the first time, I’ve found an end where I have some power. I’m taking some of it off my plate and on to the kids, but in a really productive way. I do feel excited about it.”