

LETTER FROM JIM BURKE AND LESLIE BLAUMAN

Dear Colleague:

Welcome to *The Common Core Companion Test-Readiness Survival Kit*. This collection of free resources is designed for educators who have been using one or more books from The Common Core Companion series, published for Grades K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12.

The most important thing to recognize first about this collection is what it is *not*.

It is not test prep. It's test *readiness*. "Prep" has too much baggage, too many "bad practices," and test industry profits associated with it. (We know, we know, ELA teachers always get so whipped up about connotation.) Test readiness, on the other hand, comes closer to our intention here: to help you be strategic in how you get your students ready to take standardized tests in general, and the CCSS's PARCC or SBAC in particular, and still stay true to what we know about effective instruction.

The Common Core Companion series underscores that the Standards may be the high jump, but it's the intellectually energizing teaching you do all year that gives students the stamina to leap over the standards. Students succeed when they are fortunate enough to be taught in language-rich settings, in which teachers bring about high levels of reading, writing, and thinking through instructional and independent reading, discussion, and purposeful writing.

That said, it's good to be mindful of the comprehension and writing skills students will be expected to perform on these ELA tests, and make explicit connections between the "mind work" in our instruction and the cognitive demands of the tests. For example, can our students sequence events? Determine main idea? Recognize extraneous information? Compare and contrast text structures? Evaluate character change? The resources here help you focus your test-readiness plans on the academic language and literacy skills that are most critical to the CCSS assessments.

Just as we wouldn't send our students off to Italy without their knowing Italian, we shouldn't send our students into these exams unfamiliar with their unique language and formats. So a big part of these resources is the grade-specific sample passages and questions based on PARCC and SBAC tests. We encourage you to share these with your students, and use them as the basis for talking through strategies for approaching each type of test item. Don't wait until the last minute—it's best done periodically over a longer stretch of weeks leading into the exams.

When the tests are over? Keep on keeping on with your best-practice literacy instruction, and the satisfaction of knowing you and your students have given it your best shot.

Jim Burke

Leslie Blauman

COMMON CORE COMPANION

TEST-READINESS SURVIVAL KIT

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