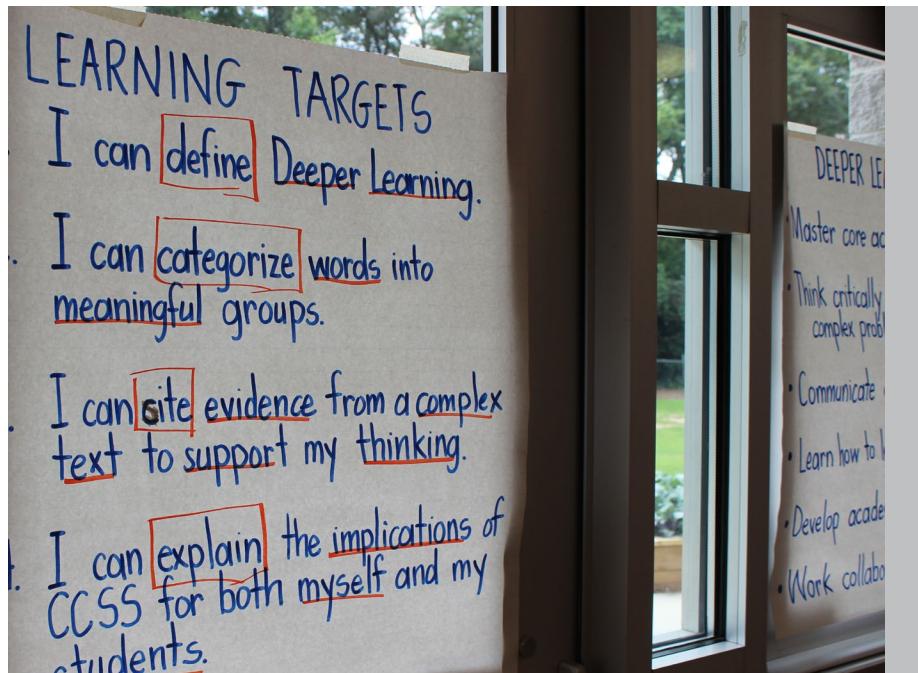


SIGNPOST

Fall 2013



Deeper Learning and CCSS learning targets hanging on the windows at Clairemont Elementary School.

Making the Shift to Deeper Learning

By Erin Wheeler

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, BEFORE WE SHIFTED TO THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS), I spent a good deal of time sifting through both the Common Core and the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, and looking over feedback from leading educational reformers. At first I did not feel the full weight of this shift. I thought, "This is very similar to what we have done before. We just need to increase the amount of informational text we use and deepen our math discussions a bit."

Everything changed at the end of our second Expeditionary Learning Mentor School Institute. Expeditionary Learning President and CEO Scott Hartl charged us with being national leaders in implementing the CCSS in our schools. I began to understand that this work was about far more than teaching different content. It is about developing a different kind of student and thinker. And it was my responsibility, as an educational leader, to make this happen for my students and staff.

My first priority was to set the stage for my staff. I knew I had to change their paradigm – a far more difficult task than supporting my teachers to just teach a different set of standards. Before we could truly understand the CCSS and their implications on our teaching and our students' learning, we needed a foundation.

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Welcome to Signpost

Signpost is Expeditionary Learning's national conference newsletter devoted to lifting up the best practices and perspectives from our network of EL schools. The theme of this issue is "Deeper Learning through the Common Core," a topic that marries EL's deeply held beliefs around curriculum and pedagogy with the new standards being implemented across the nation. We feature Erin Wheeler, principal of Clairemont Elementary School in Decatur, Georgia who shares her reflections on Deeper Learning as a school leader. Michelle Dunstan, a third and fourth grade teacher at Anser Charter School in Garden City, Idaho, provides a teacher's perspective as her school enters the fourth year of using the standards.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Signpost*. We welcome your comments and ideas. Please email April Hattori, ahattori@elschools.org.

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That foundation became Deeper Learning. Fortunately our years of work with Expeditionary Learning positioned us well to make this shift. My goal was to attach the good work we were currently doing with Expeditionary Learning to Deeper Learning.

We first started with a common text explaining the Common Core shifts in

"I began to understand that this work was about far more than teaching different content. It is about developing a different kind of student and thinker."

—Erin Wheeler

ELA and math. We studied the definition of Deeper Learning and connected it back to the language in Expeditionary Learning's Core Practices. I used practices that we were already doing well — job-embedded professional development, planning backwards, guiding questions, and meaningful final products with authentic audiences. We revisited this text several times throughout the year as we dug into the standards. We made a good deal of progress last year unpacking the standards, re-aligning expeditions to the standards and delving into complex text. Although I knew we were making progress, something seemed to be missing. Deeper Learning was still just a definition posted on our workroom wall.

Reflecting on the year, I kept coming back to our students. What kind of students are we growing so that they can be truly successful beyond our

classroom walls? The piece that was missing became evident to me after reading articles surrounding performance traits. We were spending all of our time focused on what our students needed to learn instead of focusing on how our students learn — the traits that keep them going in the face of great challenge — the perseverance they need

Deeper Learning Defined

The deeper learning framework includes six competencies that are essential to prepare students to achieve at high levels.

1. Master core academic content
2. Think critically and solve complex problems
3. Work collaboratively
4. Communicate effectively
5. Learn how to learn
6. Develop academic mindsets

Source: The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

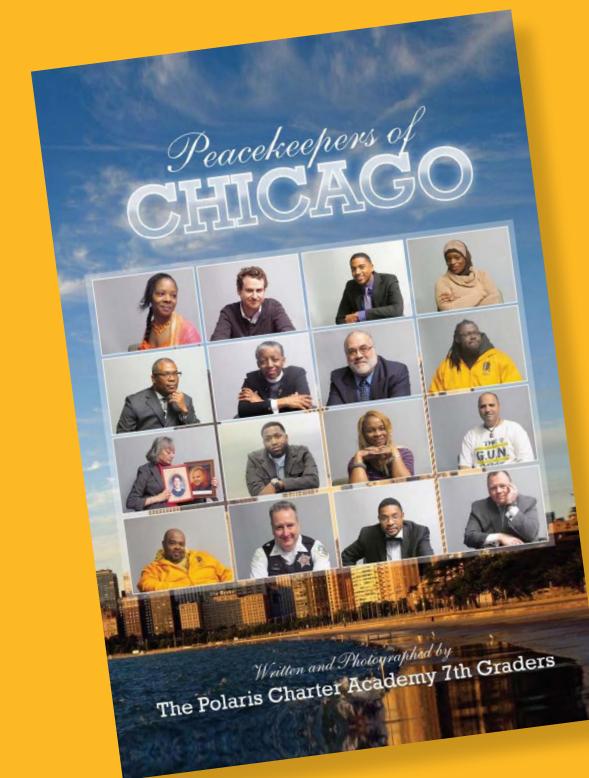


FROM THE CENTER FOR STUDENT WORK

Peacekeepers of Chicago

The seventh graders of Polaris Charter Academy were on a mission to bring peace to their West Humboldt Park neighborhood in Chicago. After researching the neighborhood's frightening gun violence statistics, students felt compelled to send a message to their community that addressed the topic and proposed a plan for action. Their year-long expedition was a service project that explored direct actions versus policy reform and addressed an important question facing citizens of Chicago: Who is responsible for gun control - the people or the government?

One product the students created was a book entitled "Peacekeepers of Chicago." It features biographical sketches of community members who are focused on making their community safer and stronger. The sketches integrate both narrative descriptions and qualitative and quantitative evidence to support the claim that each person deserves the title of "peacekeeper."



simply been around the topic of how much wait-time we give our students before stepping in. Other discussions have gone far deeper and pushed us to choose text that would have once seemed way beyond our students' reach. For example, our third grade team decided to use Brown v. Board of Education as the complex text in their democracy expedition. But most importantly, our conversations are turning to the skills and traits we need to explicitly teach our students so that they can confidently tackle a text like Brown v. Board of Education.

In my observations of teacher conversations, a common theme emerged. The teachers were frustrated and felt unsure if their moves were the right ones. "Are we being developmentally appropriate?" became an overwhelming theme.

I recognize that what we are asking teachers to do is really hard. They just

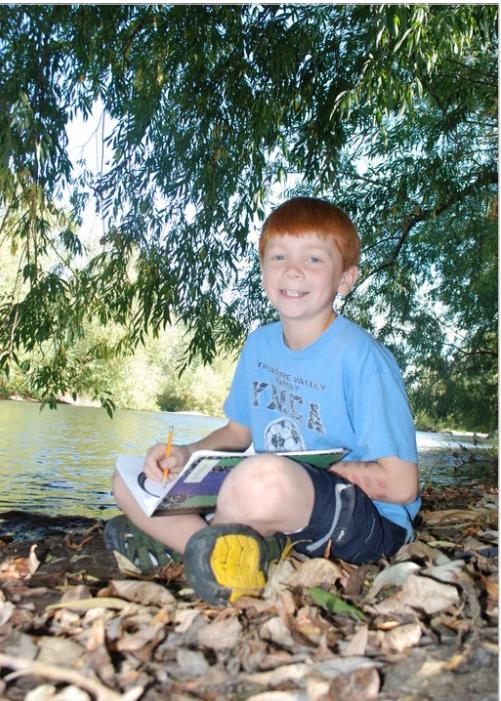
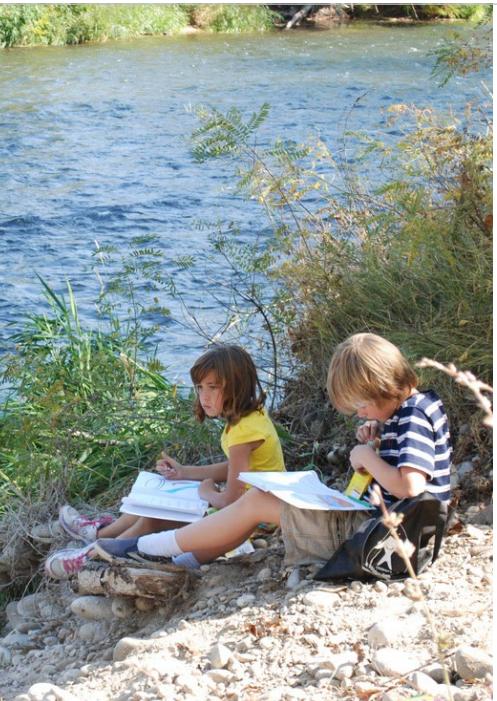
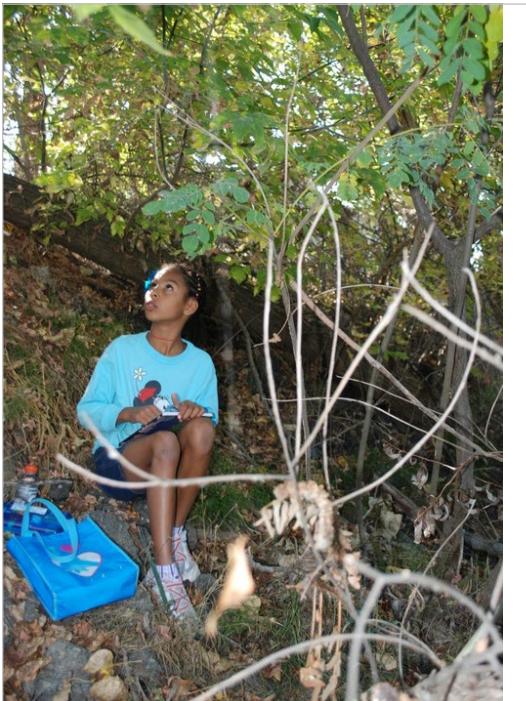
want to get it right and do right by their kids. Sometimes that means playing it safe. It is far easier to use the text that feels easy enough for the whole class to tackle, not the one that is going to take great perseverance to understand. It will take time to teach students about perseverance, and that time can feel risky when there is so much pressure to teach all the standards well right now. It is important as leaders that we acknowledge that.

I have come full circle just in the process of writing this article. It became clear as I grappled with how to best share our story, that the question that I need to be asking myself is this: **What kind of teachers am I developing so that they can demonstrate the rigor of Common Core, and be deeper learners and thinkers who will develop successful students outside our classroom walls?** Before it can be

it is about me, the instructional leader. I am responsible for teaching and developing a different kind of teacher and thinker. I need to reflect on the traits that keep teachers going in the face of great challenge, and the perseverance teachers need when they have not yet seen the purpose of their teaching. I need to challenge them with rigorous work that is guided by thoughtful learning targets. I need to engage them in the same close reading I expect them to use with their students. Even though I feel the pressure of implementing the CCSS deeply today, just like my teachers, I know the best moves I can make are taking the time to develop deeper learning and thinking teachers. ▶

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Erin Wheeler is the Principal of Clairemont Elementary School in Decatur, Georgia. She has been a school leader at Clairemont for four years. Previously she was an EL school designer, instructional guide and teacher.



Close reading prepares students to be fully engaged in fieldwork-based research during a trip to the Boise River.

Diving Deeper into the Common Core

By Michelle Dunstan

ANSER CHARTER SCHOOL IS IN ITS FOURTH YEAR OF WORKING WITH THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS. We adopted them early after the Idaho State Board chose to adopt them in 2010. Our experience with this process has inspired us to go deeper in our practice, which we believe will lead to Deeper Learning in the classroom. With the Common Core, I'm focused on being more purposeful as a teacher. It's a continual learning process. In our fourth year with the ELA standards, we are focused on three areas: the 4 T's (Topic, Text, Task, Target), students reading closely, and text-dependent questioning.

The Beauty of Close Reading

When my grade-level team taught our Boise River Expedition last year, we addressed the instructional shifts required by the Common Core, but our third/fourth grade students were not making a rich connection to the text. It was clear that, a technical article on human interaction with water had not engaged them.

We began to see glimpses of what was possible when we experimented with the Workshop 2.0 model. The first time I brought my crew to this deeper lesson structure, it was amazing. Learning about the "Engage" and "Grapple" elements inspired us to take a fresh approach to teaching students how

to read a challenging text.

We modeled for kids how to read closely. We also showed them an EL video of students reading closely and analyzed it with them. We asked them: "What do you see the students doing? What do their bodies look like when they're reading closely?" Then we jumped into our own close reading with text about the history of the canal systems in our area. I thought going through the close reading process for the first time was going to be very challenging for our kids, but I believe allowing them to dig in and grapple with a more difficult text made this a very successful moment in our learning.

After the close reading lesson, we did

an inquiry-based activity on different canal systems in our area. The students then paired up, and each pair created a poster with evidence from the text about the specific topic they were given. Because of their close reading, students were armed with knowledge of the different ways water flows through Boise. They were engaged like I've never seen before.

When discussing the close reading process with my crew, the comments were: "It was hard." "We had to really focus." "I was able to understand what I was reading." We had to use grit to get through this process and because of it, we connected with informational text in a deeper, more meaningful way.

We also have become more purposeful in finding the right text for kids. With our Boise River Animal Project, which is part of our year-long Boise River Expedition, we narrowed the number of books and websites for students to study. We also gave them the opportunity to engage with other media like video and applications and asked them to pick one piece of research with which to work. To guide their online research, we asked them questions in four categories: What does the animal eat? Where does it live? How does it adapt? Is there a fun fact about the animal? In the past, the student who had a rattlesnake as his/her animal might have replied with a single answer, "it eats mice."

But the close reading process allows them to be more connected with the research. Our student with the rattlesnake who is asked the question, "What do rattlesnakes eat," may write that they not only eat mice, but he/she may tell me *how* and *when* they eat them. Close reading enables the student to go deeper with the text, while having more fun with the subject matter.

A Culture of Teachers Teaching Teachers
Leadership is essential to ensuring that the entire team of educators is on the same page with the Common Core. Under Principal Suzanne Gregg's

Augmenting Readers' Workshop 2.0 for Close Reading of Complex Text

Workshop 2.0

Engage

Build student's curiosity and need to know linked to the purpose of the lesson.

Grapple

Build student's self-reliance, confidence, and perseverance through grappling with text.

Discuss

As students discuss the text with each other in pairs or in small groups, they build skills to justify their thinking, make coherent arguments based on text evidence, consider the ideas of others, and be metacognitive about their own approaches to reading.

Focus

Provide explicit instruction to "mop up" whatever students don't figure out on their own. Gradually release responsibility, allowing students to practice the task with support.

Apply

Allow time for students to practice the skill or concept, providing intentional differentiation.

Synthesize

Assess progress toward learning target, address misconceptions, generalize conceptual understandings.

Close Reading of Complex Text

When students are closely reading a complex text, the workshop is more teacher-directed because the text is harder for students to read independently. Teachers, pre-planning is essential so that they can act as guides for students as they make meaning of complex texts. Very specific enhancements to a readers' workshop, described below, will help students access complex texts in order to build their knowledge about the world and their literacy skills.

During the *focus* section of a workshop:

- Ask strategic text-dependent questions that bring students back to particular words, sentences, or paragraphs in the text. These are not generic questions, but rather questions about the specific text (e.g., In paragraph one, what do the authors mean by "genetic specificity?")
- Model only as needed to clear up misconceptions. Asking text-dependent questions helps to "mop up" misconceptions.

During the *apply* section of a workshop:

- Students re-read to answer strategic text-dependent questions or to complete a specific task (e.g., determining main idea and finding key details).
- Students may need to re-read multiple times.
- Students apply their learning, writing in response to a prompt and sharing orally.

LUIS LIRIANO, SENIOR AT SPRINGFIELD RENAISSANCE SCHOOL, SPRINGFIELD, MA

Meeting the Challenge

AS SOON AS STUDENTS WALK THROUGH THE DOORS OF THE SPRINGFIELD RENAISSANCE SCHOOL IN SPRINGFIELD, MA, their education has a different focus. For the first time in their schooling, character and courage are joined to academic success. When Luis Liriano started at the school in 6th grade, he encountered the school's seven character traits: courage, respect, responsibility, friendship, cultural sensitivity, perseverance, and self-discipline. Courage has been a prevailing theme of his experience.

In reflecting on these traits, Luis summarized his six years of learning at Springfield Renaissance. "I have the courage to confront my fears in anything I do. I never accomplished a high school sport, but in 10th grade, I did it. Self discipline: in 6th grade, I liked to talk. I was shy but I was goofy and talked a lot. As time went by, I don't talk as much. I focus on my education. Responsibility: I do everything to meet my deadlines. Perseverance: no matter how hard the challenge, I keep going. At times, it's going to be really hard and you think 'I can't do it.' But take your time. By the time you realize it, the challenge will be

Luis also mustered courage to lose weight and overcome his fears about sports. "When I came to this school in 6th grade, I was always mad at myself and sad that I was the biggest one in the classroom. I couldn't be with everyone in gym class and couldn't run with everyone. But it all changed, from being like that to losing all this weight. That was my goal and I accomplished that goal. I'm still accomplishing it," Luis said.

At the start of Luis' sophomore year, his principal, Dr. Stephen Mahoney, announced that the school would be piloting a new kind of sophomore passage, the crew-based performance assessment during which a student "defended" his or her readiness to move on to the 11th grade and become an upperclassman. The new passage would include significant service and fitness challenges.

For Luis, the fitness challenge would be the most difficult. He had never participated in a team sport and had fought with weight issues. But he knew that the Sophomore Passage was his opportunity to start anew. He committed to joining the swim team, perhaps the most physically demanding of all sports.



"No matter how hard the challenge, I keep going. At times, it's going to be really hard and you think 'I can't do it.' But take your time. By the time you realize it, the challenge will be done."

- Luis Liriano

done," he said.

Academically, having the courage to strive to be better was a challenge when he first arrived at Renaissance. "When I got here in 6th grade, I learned that you can revise your test grade. This was new to me. If I got a 2.5 on a test and wanted to get a better grade, I could stay after school and show my teacher that I know how to get the answer. Revising was hard, but I did it."

With college in his sights, Luis takes honors classes, serves as a Renaissance Ambassador, and mentors younger students. He plans to apply to Westfield State University in Westfield, Massachusetts and John Jay College in New York City to study criminal justice.

"I was scared of swimming and I didn't have the best body. When the swimming season started, being so big and swimming back and forth, I'd get tired. It was hard. But at the end of the season, I lost 60 pounds. That was the hardest challenge of my whole life. It changed me. It made me want to play baseball. Now I'm more active and liking it," he said.

Luis credits Renaissance for helping him gain the courage to become a better student and person. "Today I can look at the mirror, see my reflection, and say who am I as a person. When I came here in 6th grade I couldn't tell you that because I never had a school like this. This school changed me all around."

Mathematica Evaluation of EL Middle Schools

IN THE FIRST RIGOROUS STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING SCHOOLS, Mathematica Policy Research found that Expeditionary Learning middle school students perform better in reading and math than their counterparts in other public schools.

Mathematica focused on students in three Expeditionary Learning schools in New York City (Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School, Marsh Avenue Expeditionary Learning School, and Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School) and two in Washington, D.C. (Capital City Public Charter Lower, Capital City Public Charter Upper). The researchers used the same rigorous standards used in other national education studies.

These results establish EL at a national level of instructional excellence at a time when the education world is seeking models that work. The results are particularly notable because they were achieved by urban students in both traditional and charter schools designed by EL.

Such strong study results validate our approach to school - where intentional focus on citizenship and character are joined with rigorous academic learning. These qualities of teaching and learning that have been the foundation of our model since we were founded 20 years ago are central to meeting today's challenge to develop students who are successful in college, career, and life.

↓ Diving Deeper into the Common Core continued from page 5

leadership, we have developed a culture of teachers teaching teachers. It creates a spirit of collaboration across all grades.

Once a week, all teachers meet for two hours and 15 minutes to collaborate and coordinate our work on expeditions and refine our practice to help our students excel. At these meetings, we discuss the texts and questions we will select and also talk about broader issues.

With the Common Core, it's more challenging to have the right questions ready for class. In the past, development of questions tied to the text was the sole responsibility of the teachers. I would often create questions as I was going through the lessons with students. But now, I am focused on being more

purposeful in my questioning and planning questions as I am planning my lessons and support my students in developing text-dependent questioning skills. We're at a point where we want to encourage kids to develop their own questions with a text.

As teachers, we are working through the Common Core and the implications for our students and our practice. I am evolving as a teacher. Not long ago,

learning targets were brought to us to support our classroom learning. Now they're so much a part of me that I feel naked without them.

Similarly, we are going deeper into the Common Core and working through what works for our students

Positive impacts on EL students in Reading

after 2 years

+5 months
of learning growth

after 3 years

+7 months
of learning growth

Positive impacts on EL students in Math

after 2 years

+3 months
of learning growth

after 3 years

+10 months
of learning growth



EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

247 West 35th Street

Eighth Floor

New York, NY 10001

212-239-4455

www.elschools.org

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Field Notes: News from EL's Network

New Book: Common Core, Unit by Unit: 5 Critical Moves for Implementing the Reading Standards Across the Curriculum

by Cheryl Dobbertin, Director of Professional Development at Expeditionary Learning, explains how teachers can plan instruction that addresses Common Core reading standards. The book offers teachers a practical series of tools and templates, exemplar units, and explicit action steps as a way to help educators simplify planning in any content area. The book can be purchased at www.amazon.com or www.Heinemann.com.

Karen MacDonald Named 2014 Maine Teacher of the Year

King Middle School teacher Karen MacDonald has been named Maine's 2014 Teacher of the Year.

MacDonald has worked for the Portland Public Schools since 1978 and moved to King 24 years ago. At King, she helped create a learning expedition about civil rights, titled Small Acts of Courage.

Maine Governor Paul LePage noted to MacDonald, "Children describe the opportunity to be in your classroom as a gift, and say that they are not just better students because of their time with you, but actually better people."

Expeditionary Learning is committed to creating classrooms where teachers can fulfill their highest aspirations and where students can achieve more than they think possible. With more than 20 years of experience helping new and veteran teachers in all settings, we build their capacity to ignite each student's motivation, persistence, and compassion so they become active contributors to building a better world and succeed in school, college, career, and life. Our innovative curriculum, teacher-created resources, and model of professional coaching and support are anchored by a vision of student success that joins academic achievement, character, and high-quality work.

Expeditionary Learning partners with more than 160 schools and 4,000 teachers serving 50,000 students in 30 states, and thousands of other teachers through its professional services work in New York and other states.