

Lisa DiGaudio, Administrator, New Dawn Charter High School

My name is Lisa DiGaudio and I serve the most at-risk teens in New York City. When we wrote the charter for New Dawn, there was no doubt in our minds that implementing the Common Core standards would be an essential part of our instructional program from the day we opened.

This brings me to the point about implementing the Common Core standards. That very first meeting was not well attended for a session that was open to all schools. The guidance from the very beginning on implementation and training were “district decisions.” This is crucial to the training and implementation of the standards. What I saw, session after session, was a well thought out approach to implementing the changes and helping staff that were well entrenched in their own methods to open their eyes to a new way of thinking for our kids.

My students, the students that have been invited to leave their traditional schools because of their attendance and academic performance, have thrived with the practices related to Common Core. Students have learned to annotate text and make critical connections across disciplines with ease. My students take a dive into new texts and explore meanings with their teachers and their peers on a daily basis. Students that come in reading dreadfully below grade level are taking their Regents exams and passing them. And graduating. Common Core at New Dawn has been a four year exploration in how to make learning a deep experience in critical thinking. We as a faculty know we are not done with this journey, and are ready to keep plowing through practices to become more effective for our students.

These standards should not be dumped because of special interest groups with an agenda. I have watched the opt-out movement marginalize my own child, bullying her into defending her choice to take the tests (and she has done extremely well). Politics of this magnitude do not belong in the classroom. Students learn because of their teachers, because of the relationships they have with their teachers. Teachers learn because they are trained in meaningful ways. My experiences with the Network Team Institutes provided me with the tools to work with my staff and constantly troubleshoot to make things better. We have embraced this way of being- research, do and reflect- so that our students get the best of what the Common Core aims for our students to do. College and career readiness would not be an option for my kids before they walk through my threshold. Thanks to the standards and the training we received and implemented, they graduate and go to college. If my students, the most likely to remain dropouts can thrive, there is no reason to remove standards that provide those opportunities to the rest of the population. Train staff, implement the change, train again. Reflect, review, retry. This is what gets results. Not changing standards. We need to continue to change ourselves for our kids.