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As a teacher, I have found there is a great deal to value in the CCLS. I like the stronger balance between non-fiction and literary (fiction, poetry, drama) texts, especially in that it provides a more defined approach to the study of rhetoric. Beyond achieving a better balance between these two types of texts, I believe the new standards change the practice of teaching reading towards an inquiry approach that has a greater emphasis on a meaningful close reading of the text, much like students would experience within the AP Language and Composition curriculum or within the AP Literature and Composition curriculum. It moves the teacher away from the “study guide” approach to reading and writing instruction. Instead, students must develop the skill of drawing inferences about the writer’s technique to reveal a larger idea or thematic element in the text and revealing that inference in clear and cogent writing.

There are areas of weakness in the CCLS as well. They do not clearly define what kinds of non-fiction texts students should be exposed too, even though this category is quite broad and includes texts that are literary in nature.

The standards also intend for students to have a deep understanding of grammar, which I agree is important. However, consider Language Standard 1.a for grades 9-10: “Use parallel structure.” This standard and the others addressing grammar and all of its elements represent a larger problem with the standards – time! There is simply not enough time, for example, to teach the principles of grammar to the level where students will adequately be able to use parallelism intentionally as writers for an intended effect or as readers studying another writer’s use of this grammatical form. There is not enough time in a school year to teach the range of skills presented in the standards to a high level.

Finally, tying the standards to the APPR process undermines the goals and promise of the CCLS. Because there is inadequate time to teach all of the standards – there’s too many of them – teachers will focus on only those addressed by the state assessment. Furthermore, new teachers not yet tenured and teachers anxious about job security will not take the risks needed with instruction that will benefit students and their learning. A teacher is more likely to do what is “safe” and known as a practice, rather than trying something new and inventive. Data driven instruction is a practice I use and it quite powerful, but what the state has implemented is not a form of data driven instruction that enables a teacher to grow and strengthen their practice of teaching. Tying the APPR to student performance will also continue to gut the field in terms of retaining strong, experienced teachers, but also in terms of attracting new and talented individuals to this field.