Sharon Taberski Comments on the Common Core Standards

Common Core State Standards

As this book goes to press the new Common Core State Standards have recently been released across the country, and none of us know just how they’ll play out or where they’ll take us. Educators are returning to school after summer break and finding these new standards awaiting them with their new crop of students. What these standards represent is a set of desired outcomes. We can only hope that these goals will be implemented with more sensible nuance and realism than we experienced with No Child Left Behind. To achieve these outcomes, schools and teachers need to be realistically resourced, and incentives need to be supportive, not punitive.

And just as we should not lose sight of our end goals, we must never forget a basic tenet of teaching and learning: We need to start where the children are if we are to have any hope of moving them farther along. We can’t ignore the fact that many of our students live in poor, distressed households that find it difficult to impart the rich background of language and experience that economically advantaged families can more readily provide. It’s difficult to learn when you’re hungry or afraid to walk the streets of your neighborhood. We can’t ignore that children from immigrant families will often first have to struggle in school learning English, and that it will take time for them to acquire the academic language, concepts, and the confidence they’ll need to succeed. We can’t ignore the fact that the special needs of some children are quite real and must be addressed honestly and fully. All these considerations, along with questions of how attainable the standards actually are (either set too high or too sparse) for our particular population of students as a whole will have to be factored into our efforts if we are to successfully educate our children.

We must also remember that while the Common Core State Standards set the goals, they are not a prescription for how to achieve them. That’s up to us. We need to use our talents, our knowledge of best practice, and our experience to bring them to life. This book offers an array of conceptual and practical tools to help teachers in the early grades achieve success in one section of the standards—literacy. Whatever success we achieve here provides the grounding for further success in the upper grades and the gateway to the broader fields of learning defined in the Common Core State Standards.