



For Immediate Release: Oct. 30, 2013

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150 Educators Attend a “Candid Conversation about College Readiness”

On Friday, October 25, in Taunton, the CONNECT Partnership and the Southeastern Massachusetts Reading Center (SEMARC) hosted a conference titled, “Higher Ed, PARCC, Model Units: A Candid Conversation about College Readiness.” Over 150 secondary and post-secondary education leaders shared thoughts on aligning educational expectations between high school and college, and heard how evolving state standards will affect what public school students learn and how they are assessed.

Said Kathleen Kirby, Ph.D., Executive Director of the CONNECT consortium of the region’s public colleges and universities, “Many students entering our public institutions of higher education—up to 60% at our community colleges--are placed into remedial classes,” thus slowing their progress toward a degree, and running up costs for both the students and the colleges. The disconnect, she noted, is not due to failures from either the high school or the postsecondary side, but rather, from the fact that the two systems “don’t communicate with each other.” The day’s discussion was designed to make the transition from high school to college “less a chasm, and more of a bridge,” stated Dr. Kirby.

Presenters from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shared information about the new PARCC (Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments that are being developed to replace MCAS. They gave a preview of what test items might look like in Math and English Language Arts, and guided teachers in understanding how to change their curriculum to prepare students for the new assessments.

One attendee, Bill Kendall, the Director of Mathematics and Technology for Braintree Public Schools, reported that the conference would transform his high school’s senior year math program. “I attended with an incredibly strong math teacher. . . . We are going to work on re-designing all senior math courses so that second semester becomes a college teaching semester. We will lecture the amount of time a college course would and organize other times for students to learn math using college readiness skills.”

All materials and presentations are available on CONNECT’s college readiness website: www.connectsemass.org/RegionalReadinessConference1.htm. Videos of the main speakers will be coming soon.