

# Welcome!



THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

## Webinar

If you see can see the slide and hear music or my voice, you're all set.

All attendees are muted upon entry. Please use the chat feature for comments and questions during the webinar.

**The webinar will be recorded.** All webinar registrants will receive a follow-up email that will include the webinar slide deck, recording, and other resources mentioned during the presentation.

# edtrust

October 22, 2019

## #AssignmentsMatter: Working Towards Rigorous Instruction Through Assignment Analysis



The Education Trust

# HELLO

my name is

Please introduce yourself in the chat box and **share one question** you hope to have answered in this webinar.

# Today's presenter



**Tanji Reed Marshall**



**The Education Trust**

# Who is The Education Trust...

- The Education Trust is a nonprofit organization that promotes closing opportunity gaps by expanding excellence and equity in education for students of color and those from low-income families from pre-kindergarten through college. Through research and advocacy, the organization builds and engages diverse communities that care about education equity, increases political and public will to act on equity issues, and increases college access and completion for historically underserved students.

# Goals - Objectives

- Answer the question: *Why analyze assignments?*
- Review national data on the state of assignments
- Explore a guide for analyzing assignments



# Analyzing Assignments

Think of a memorable assignment you experienced as a K-12 student. What do you remember most? What made it so impactful for you?

Students can do no better  
than the  
assignments they are given...

# Why Assignments?

- Clear **window into classroom practice**
- Represent **what teachers know and understand** about the college- and career-ready standards
- Give insight into the **school leader's and/or district's expectations** for what and how to teach
- Reflect what **teachers believe students can do** independently as a result of their teaching
- Show how **students interact with the curriculum**

# What's An Assignment?



An assignment is a task that a student completes independently, or with a group of peers.

## Examples include:

- warm-ups/“Do Now’s”
- summary activities/“Exit Tickets”
- essays
- journals
- extended discussions
- Socratic seminars
- literature circles
- class debates
- lab reports
- homework assignments
- exams/test
- group projects

# A Deeper Look at What We Did....

- Collected assignments from Grades 6-8 teachers in ELA, science, social studies, and math courses
- 7 districts, 15 schools

<b>Literacy</b> (ELA, Science, Soc Studies)	<b>Math</b> (Math Grade 6-Geometry)
4095 assignments	1856 assignments
248 courses	91 courses
214 teachers	63 teachers

# Literacy Assignment Analysis Guide

 **ALIGNMENT**

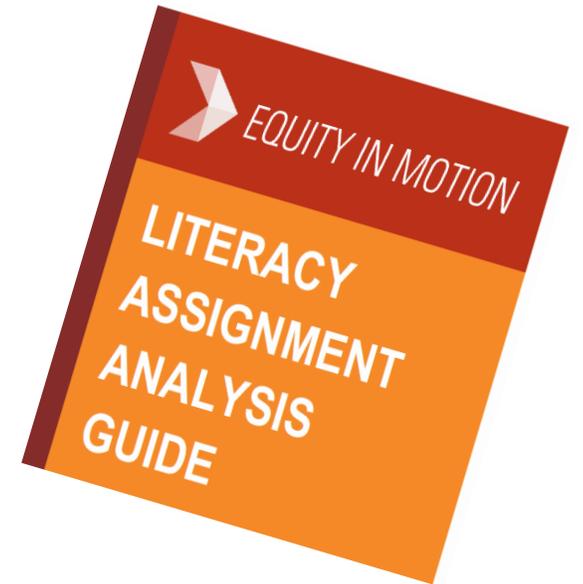
 **CENTRALITY OF TEXT**

 **COGNITIVE CHALLENGE AND WRITING OUTPUT**

 **MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

 **DISCUSSION**

 **SCAFFOLDING**



# What We've Found in Literacy...



## ALIGNMENT

- Just over one-third of assignments were aligned with a grade-appropriate standard.
- Rates from ELA assignments were higher, with just under half demonstrating alignment.



## CENTRALITY OF TEXT

- About half of the assignments reviewed were connected to a text.
- However, only 13 percent of assignments required students to use a text for citing evidence as support for a position or a claim.

# What We've Found in Literacy...

## **COGNITIVE CHALLENGE AND WRITING OUTPUT**

- Less than 15% of assignments pushed student thinking to higher levels.
- More than 80% of assignments only required multiple short responses or less.
- Only 6% of assignments required extended writing

## **MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

- Choice and relevancy—powerful levers to engage early adolescents — are mostly missing in action.
- Most efforts at choice and relevancy were superficial, and often condescending.

# What We've Found in Literacy...



## DISCUSSION

- Just under 10% of assignments included some type of discussion.
- But only 3% aligned with the formal and extended discussion attributes described in the Speaking and Listening Standards.



## SCAFFOLDING

- Assignments were often “over-scaffolded”, and contained heavy doses of teacher support coupled with infrequent opportunities for student independence.

# What We've Found in Literacy...

## ***Other Noteworthy Findings:***

- English Language Arts (ELA) assignments score better overall compared to assignments in science or social studies
- Assignments from honors/advanced courses score the same overall as those from non-honors courses in literacy
- Literacy assignments that take longer to complete (one or two class periods) are more likely to be aligned, include writing, and require higher levels of cognitive demand

# Math Assignment Analysis Guide



**ALIGNMENT**



**COGNITIVE CHALLENGE**



**ASPECTS OF RIGOR**



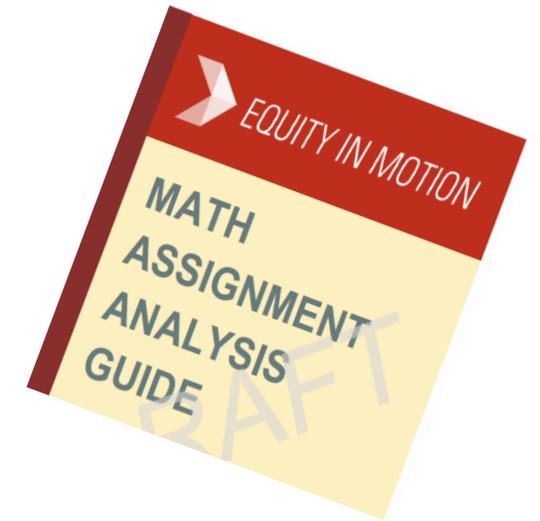
**COMMUNICATING MATHEMATICAL  
UNDERSTANDING**



**MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT**



**SCAFFOLDING**



# What We've Found in Math...



## COGNITIVE CHALLENGE

- Only 9% of assignments pushed student thinking to higher levels.
- The overwhelming majority required low cognitive demand, limiting students to recalling a fact, performing a simple procedure, or applying basic knowledge.



## ASPECTS OF RIGOR

- Assignments were more than twice as likely to focus on procedural skills and fluency compared with conceptual understanding or application.
- Only 39% incorporated varied types of mathematical representations.

# What We've Found in Math...



## COMMUNICATING MATHEMATICAL UNDERSTANDING

- Less than one-third, 32%, of assignments provided an opportunity for students to communicate their thinking or justify their responses.
- The majority of assignments were answer focused.



## MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- Students were rarely given opportunities for choice in their assignments, 3%, and only 2% of tasks provided some aspect of relevancy.

# Overall Analysis

- The majority of assignments students receive on a daily basis — six-plus years into the adoption of new standards — **remain far below the college- and career-ready level.**
- And these results were **not just isolated to small districts** or in districts implementing decentralized curriculum practices. A fair amount of the assignments we analyzed came from districts that have invested significant time and financial resources into aligning curriculum materials to the Common Core.

# How often do students receive do students receive assignments that:

- *reflect the spirit of, and are align to, college- and career-ready standards?*
- *require them to use textual evidence to support a position or claim?*
- *push them towards strategic or extended thinking?*
- *require them to communicate using the language of mathematics?*
- *give them choices?*

# Analysis Guide Purpose

➤ Isolate key features & characteristics within a *single* assignment

➤ Highlight patterns and trends over *multiple* assignments



## CENTRALITY OF TEXT

Texts hold a fundamental place in the area of literacy. In an assignment, the centrality of text permits students to grapple with key ideas, larger meanings, and author's craft and intent. Students must have the opportunity to:

- display increasing expertise in interpreting and responding to a text, and
- draw evidence from a text to justify their responses and thinking.

Such skills are essential to postsecondary success and undergird the pedagogical shifts. Specifically, an assignment fully reflects this centrality of text when students are required to cite evidence (e.g., paraphrasing, direct citation) to support an opinion, a position, or claim.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- Do I ask students to interpret and respond to complex texts? When? How often?
- Do I ask students to cite textual evidence in order to support or develop a claim? When? How often?
- How do I select texts for my students to read?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
<p>What is the Name of the text?</p>	
<p>Is the text complex?</p> <p>a) No b) Yes</p> <p>If yes, what type(s) of text complexity do you notice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Consider the <b>quantitative</b> complexity of a text (e.g., Lexile, A-Z level, grade level equivalency).</li><li>Consider the <b>qualitative</b> complexity of a text (e.g., content, theme, language, sentence structure, literary elements).</li></ul>
<p>What is the genre of the text(s)?</p> <p>a) No text b) Literature (e.g., stories, drama, poetry) c) Informational (e.g., historical text, technical texts, literary nonfiction, memoir, biography) d) Mixture of literature and informational text</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A text typically falls into one of two genres: literature or informational.</li><li>Dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses do not count as a text.</li></ul>
<p>What is the predominant text type?</p> <p>a) No text b) Written text with minimal/no visual text c) A mixture of written and visual text d) Visual text with minimal/no written text (e.g., video, drawings, diagrams with short captions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Written texts may include, but are not limited to, a novel or trade book, traditional textbook, poem, letter, article, lab experiment, magazine, or webpage.</li><li>Visual texts may include comics, videos, paintings, photographs, speaker, performances, or music.</li><li>Many written texts include illustrations, pictures, graphs, or tables to present or highlight key ideas and information. In these cases, the text should be classified as written text because the pictures, graphs, tables, etc., are part of a written text; they do not stand-alone.</li></ul>

# Analysis Guide Cautions

- Unable to capture context (before/after)
- A single assignment does *not* exist in a vacuum
- Every indicator is not needed in *every* assignment

 **CENTRALITY OF TEXT**

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# Tale of Two Assignments



## EXAMPLE A

GRADE 10 ENGLISH II – Women’s Right to the Suffrage

**Directions:** Use your excerpt (audio file) from Susan B. Anthony’s speech **and** *Votes for Women Means Votes for Black Women* to complete the tasks listed below.

PART 1: Meet with your collaborative group to discuss and answer the following questions:

1. What is the significance of how Anthony speaks about women in her speech and the distinctions she is shown to make between Negroes and women in the *Votes for Women...* article?
2. How can Anthony’s questioning of whether women are persons in her speech be applied to the treatment of Negro women as they worked to participate in the Suffrage March?
3. Many historians hold Susan B. Anthony as heroine in the fight for women’s suffrage while erasing Black women from this fight. What is the responsibility of historians in telling a complete narrative of historical events and figures?

PART 2: Use the texts, answers from your group discussion, class research articles, and other notes to craft an analytical essay that addresses the following question:

***How does the relationship among race, gender, and the use of power advance and challenge the need for social equality for all people?*** Be sure you cite evidence from the texts you use, which must include Anthony’s speech and Ansa’s article. Proper in-text MLA citations are required as is a reference page.

What do you notice about this assignment?

# Tale of Two Assignments



## EXAMPLE B

GRADE 10 ENGLISH II –Women’s  
Right to the Suffrage

**Directions:** Independently read or listen to the excerpt from Susan B. Anthony’s speech and *Votes for Women Means Votes for Black Women*. Answer the questions below.

Who were Susan B. Anthony and Mary Church Terrell?

What was the purpose of Anthony’s speech?

What argument was made against allowing Negro women to participate in suffrage activities?

How would you compare the purpose of Anthony’s speech and Ansa’s article?

How do the events in Ansa’s article connect to Anthony’s speech?

What does the reader learn about Susan B. Anthony from these words, “[*I would rather*] cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work for or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman?”

Write about a time you wanted to fight for a cause but were prevented from doing so. (*What was the cause? Why were you excluded? What did you do? How did being excluded make you feel?*)

What do you notice about this assignment?

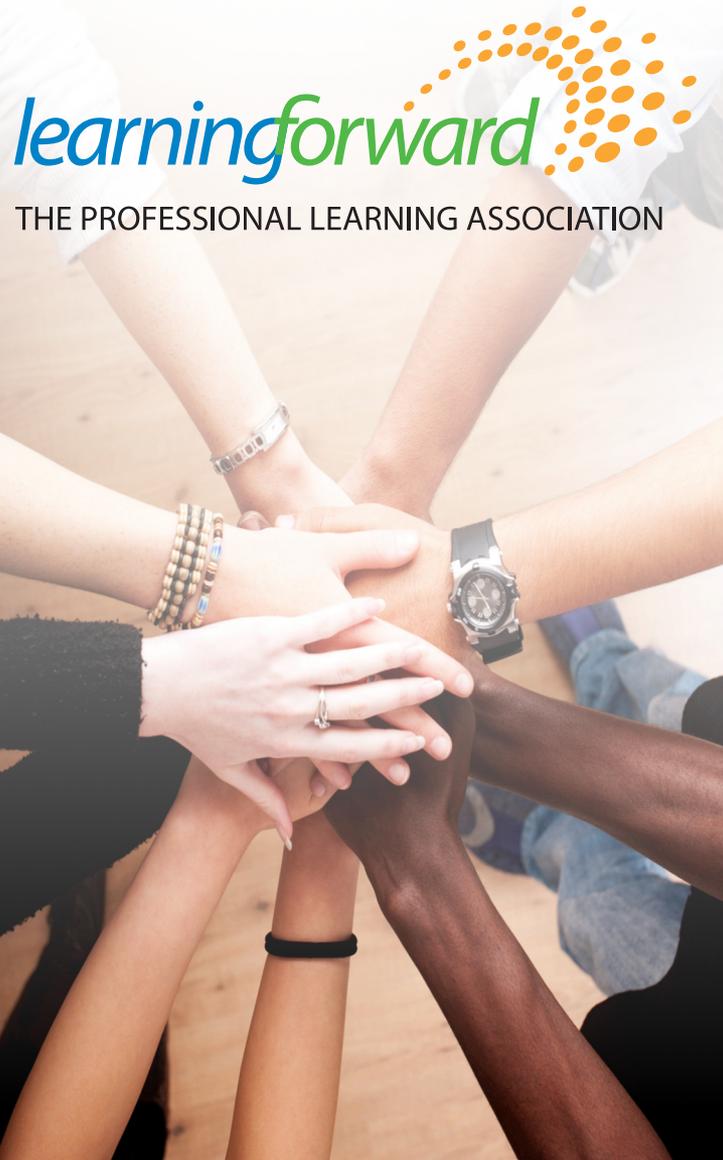
# Discussion

- What do these assignments reveal about how students are asked to invest their intellect?
- How do these assignments offer a vehicle for thinking about educational equity?





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## The Mythbusters Guide to Educational Research

November 8, 2019, 2-2:30 p.m.  
Central

Presenters:

**Doug Reeves and Tom Guskey**