



CCSS Dominate Education Agenda

by Richard Long

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have become a major political issue.

For this suite of articles, we have asked several groups to share what they are doing to help their members get a better handle on CCSS implementation. We also invited some critics of the Standards to comment. These observers are mostly concerned with parts of the CCSS and assert that the CCSS may not be the complete package that is needed.

A number of political issues are impacting the debate. Some are focused on the Standards, others on the assessments, some on federalism and local control, and others on who wrote them and what may have motivated them. For example, the federalism issue is driving some to say that their state should not adopt the CCSS because the federal government is requiring it as a condition to get needed money from Congress. They view this as coercion.

Three states (Indiana, Michigan, and Pennsylvania) have decided to pause and review whether or not they will continue to implement the Standards.

Others say that the assessments will drive curriculum, which is viewed as a loss of state authority. Still others see the cost of the CCSS assessments as being very high. Florida, for example, has pulled out of one of the assessment consortia (PARCC) claiming cost, but state authority was also a factor.

Michigan has generated some controversy in recent discussions on adoption and implementation. During the summer a bill to fund the entire state until October 1 included a provision to prevent spending money on the implementation of the Standards. Since the bill was critical and the impact of a delay of a few months was viewed as minimal the measure went through. Since then there have been attempts by anti-Standards advocates to find a legislative vehicle to

extend the moratorium, although the effort does not seem to be gaining traction with the legislature.

Also under review by five states (Alabama, Utah, Georgia, Oklahoma, and Florida) is a decision on whether or not they should develop their own assessments. These states seem to be focused on specific issues. They want to control what is being measured, lower the cost, and gain better control over the political fallout the will ensue when CCSS assessments take hold and the expected drop in measured student achievement becomes a public issue.

In sum, there are a lot of political fireworks around the Standards with a few states making changes from their earlier support; but the reality is that the CCSS continue to move ahead.

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How Other Teacher Organizations are Responding to CCSS Implementation Challenges

by Melissa T. Mayville, Senior Policy/Program Analyst

The National Education Association (NEA) is engaged in a myriad of activities that are focused on supporting implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). NEA continues to work with a team of members—teachers and education support professionals—from across the U.S. to build capacity around best practices for implementation of the CCSS. By integrating new information into the NEA CCSS Toolkit and providing resources and a platform for educator engagement on the GPS Network, the NEA is expanding its reach into schools to offer support for



those who are most in need of implementation resources.

NEA, in partnership with the Hunt Institute and the National Network of State Teachers of the Year, is completing a series of four video episodes focused on providing clear, explanatory information on the impact of the CCSS to be used by a variety of individuals in a variety of venues. This work is occurring in tandem with NEA's partnership with Better Lesson, focused on a Master Teacher Project (MTP). The MTP will feature the work of 95 NEA teacher-members who will develop cloud-based, freely available

& readily accessible, remixable lesson plans that span an entire course.

As a complement to the MTP, NEA is working with the Teaching Channel to provide a view inside the classroom of what CCSS implementation looks like across regions, these videos will feature teacher reflection and support materials for the viewer's use.

NEA is committed to providing quality resources and meaningful professional development to support the implementation of the CCSS for all educators. Visit us at www.nea.org.



by Barbara L. Cambridge,
Director, Washington Office, National Council of Teachers of English

To acknowledge both the challenges of the CCSS and teachers' right and responsibility to enact principles of good teaching, NCTE supports educators through print and online publications, in-person and online professional learning, and collaborative efforts to implement and improve CCSS.

In the realm of publications, the Support Students series targeted to CCSS implementation offers separate print volumes for Grades PreK–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12. In addition, NCTE's first enhanced e-book with video vignettes and audio clips of teachers working together to teach students to negotiate text complexity, assess their learning, and deepen understanding of a range of challenging texts will be available across multiple platforms by the end of 2013.

NCTE conducts three kinds of on-line professional learning activities focusing on instructional shifts associated with CCSS implementation: (1) a Fall 2013 series of webinars; (2) investigations, which are just-in-time self-paced explorations of extensive models and examples to help students prepare to meet college



and career-ready standards; and (3) facilitated online courses, which use classroom videos and professional texts in a cohort model of collaborative learning

within and across disciplines. Face-to-face professional learning will occur at NCTE's November 2013 convention in Boston where CCSS-related sessions appear in every time slot.

On the policy front, NCTE operates in multiple coalitions, for example in the National Center for Literacy Education, which is doing a fall 2013 national survey to discover directly from educators how CCSS are impacting educational practices and student learning and in the English Language Arts CCSS Coalition, which centers on ways that literacy learning underlies the CCSS. In addition, to avoid confusing summative assessments and standards, NCTE leaders have issued statements about formative assessment and about delaying new assessments until educators have time to understand the standards, change curricula and pedagogy appropriately, and enable students to make progress toward meeting the standards. Visit us at www.ncte.org.



by Ken Krehbiel,
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

A position statement we released in August is the strongest support to date of the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CCSSM) by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

Over the past two years, NCTM has been incorporating CCSSM sessions in its annual and regional conferences and into a series of teacher institutes throughout the year. The next institute is *Cutting to the Common Core*, February 14–15, 2014 in Orlando which will analyze and approach content trajectories for each grade band through the lenses of mathematical practices and assessment. An administrator strand, to complement the K–5, 6–8, and high school strands, has been added to support coherent school and district-based team development.

NCTM also has published or co-published various books, webinars, and professional development materials to support analysis and implementation of CCSSM. These include "Making It Happen: A Guide to Implementing and Interpreting the



Common Core State Standards for Mathematics" and an updated "Administrator's Guide: Interpreting the Common Core State Standards to Improve Mathematics Education." Shortly after the release of the CCSSM

NCTM created a set of short PowerPoint presentations that can be used by teachers, teacher leaders, and supervisors to provide needed information about the Common Core Standards.

Finally, NCTM has joined with three other mathematics education organizations—the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators (AMTE), the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM), and the Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics (ASSM)—to form the Mathematics Common Core Coalition, which includes the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association and the two CCSSM assessment consortia: PARCC and Smarter Balanced. Visit us at www.nctm.org.



Criticism of the CCSS

The Downside of a Test-Driven Curriculum

by Arthur N. Applebee,

Distinguished Professor and Director, Center on English Learning & Achievement,
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Although the Standards have promise, my greatest concern is with their implementation. The grade-by-grade back-mapping of graduation standards is too often turning into a grade-by-grade literacy curriculum replacing the rich discipline-based explorations of language and literature that have characterized ELA instruction. As new tests are developed to “align” with CCSS, this problem is exacerbated by the pressure to teach to the test.

And in spite of high-sounding goals, the tests that are emerging are as narrow as those they are replacing, relying on multiple choice (now “selected response”) items for 70% or more of the final grade (cf. NY and KY). Because the stakes are high, schools and districts expect teachers to follow a test-driven curriculum that strips reading and writing activities of any broader

disciplinary context that might give them meaning. Rather than encouraging knowledge-building, most implementations of the CCSS have focused on limited test-taking skills and formulaic approaches to timed tasks.

Early attempts at aligned assessments also confuse evaluation of individual students with aspirational goals that emphasize higher standards appropriate to the nation as a whole. Converting those aspirational goals to individual performance assessments—failing 70% of students in NY on English and math, for example—is bad policy, and disastrous pedagogy.



For more on the Standards, see Arthur N. Applebee, Common Core State Standards: The promise and the peril in a national palimpsest, *English Journal*, 103:1 (September 2013), pp. 25–33.

No Child Is Standard

by Neal McCluskey,

Associate Director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom

The argument in favor of the Common Core is, essentially, “These are high standards.” It is a highly debatable assertion, but let’s assume it is true. Even then, given four major realities, the argument for the Core falls on its face.

The first reality is that all children are different. They learn different things in different ways, mature at different rates, and have different talents and goals. Given this basic reality, it makes no sense to set standards that essentially require all kids to do the exact same things at the exact same times.

The second reality is that even if there were one, best standard, we don’t know what it is. There are almost always numerous ways to improve things that the vast majority of people—including experts—don’t see, and the key to discovering them is to enable people to try different ways of doing things. Set a monopoly standard, and the freedom that leads to innovation will die.

Third, the Common Core has been—and *must be*—driven by the federal government. Core supporters argue that states will not impose high standards and tough tests on themselves, therefore the Core is needed. But the Core alone can’t make unwilling



states use it—only Washington has that power. That’s why the 2008 report *Benchmarking for Success* (www.achieve.org/files/BenchmarkingforSuccess.pdf) called for federal “incentives” to get states to sign on to common standards, and why the federal Race to the Top program and No Child Left Behind waivers offered money and regulatory relief, respectively, to states that adopted the Core. The problem is, Washington is just as prone to special-interest control—what supporters complain about at the state level—as any other level of government, and you’d have to move to another country if you weren’t happy with the standards.

Finally, there is the empirical research, which shows that once you control for such factors as socioeconomic status and culture, national standards have no meaningful effect on outcomes. (See “Behind the Curtain: Assessing the Case for National Curriculum Standards” at <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa661.pdf>.) Given the first three points, that’s exactly what you would expect.

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