



Focus on Education: The rollout of Common Core

By Ashley Hirtzel

All this week, WBFO's Focus on Education is bringing you a series of stories about the Common Core learning standards. Our second installment takes a look at the rollout of the standards and why it appears New York State is leading the way.

Elementary School Teacher Sharon Pikul is among the many teachers calling the implementation of Common Core "rushed."

"They're increasing the rigor without preparing students for that jump in competence for where they want them to be, so the assumption that they have skills to meet the rigor is a little bit of a faulty assumption," said Pikul.

The outcry over the standards has brought teachers and parents together, united with similar complaints.

Parent Shannon Styles says teachers should have been versed in the standards first before they were presented to students.

"Of course we want kids to do better when they get to college. We want them to be college and career ready. But it needed to be implemented differently. It's like kids left school in June in one grade level and they came back two grade levels ahead. So it's like they just missed a whole grade of school and that's what I have a problem with," said Styles.

Should New York State delay Common Core?

The uproar regarding the rollout of Common Core has even caused the New York State Legislature to call on the state Board of Regents to delay the effects of the standards for two years. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver says the department must help teachers adjust to the standards before moving forward.

"Common Core may be beneficial. It probably is beneficial. But you can't thrust it upon students, on faculty, and on administrators," said Silver.

The New York State Board of Regents recently adopted several measures to delay the full implementation of Common Core until 2022. The changes include protecting students and

teachers from the impact of state assessments and reducing the amount of local testing associated with the teacher evaluation law.

New York State Education Commissioner John King says the adjustments originally ensured that no teacher is unfairly removed as a result of Common Core assessments. He says administrators will revisit that decision in April.

“We think there is tremendous urgency to get the Common Core implementation right in every district, but we acknowledge that the implementation has been uneven across districts. The goal of the adjustments is to ensure that we do everything possible to support the success of our students,” said King.

“There weren’t any teacher protections, hardly, to begin with anyway. We already have an appeals process if the evaluation doesn’t make any sense, we can appeal it to an arbitrator,” said Buffalo Teachers Federation President Phil Rumore.

Rumore referred to these latest revisions as putting a “Band Aid on a broken leg.” He says he considers it a “slap in the face” to Governor Andrew Cuomo.

Governor Cuomo said the adjustments weren’t good enough. In a written statement, Cuomo said “the recommendations are another in a series of missteps by the New York State Board of Regents.” Cuomo said the recommendations are too little and too late for parents and students.

“I support the Common Core agenda. New York is one of 45 states to adopt Common Core. But the way the Common Core has been managed by the Board of Regents is flawed,” said Cuomo.

But, New York State Regents Chancellor Robert Bennett maintains the Common Core standards as they’re written are not flawed.

“If it was too fast or too much too soon if that’s what flawed means, then we’ll take a look at that and we’ll look at the districts that are not ready and we’ll take a look at the districts that are ready. What I would like to do is have the districts that are ready help the districts that aren’t ready,” said Bennett.

Bennett says New York State can’t afford to miss out on the benefits of Common Core. Still, many question why it feels like the state is taking the lead with implementing the learning standards.

CATO Institute Associate Director with the Center for Education Freedom Neal McClusky says in order to understand the push for Common Core, you have to go back to 2009, when the federal government created the Economic Stimulus package.

“The Stimulus included a relatively small piece of money that became the ‘Race to the Top’ fund, \$4.35 billion, and the Obama administration said the way we’re going to use this money is we’re going to say, ‘If you want to compete for part of this money, you must adopt standards that

are common to a number of states and you get the most points if a majority of states have adopted those standards,” said McClusky.

McClusky says follow the money trail. He says in order for states to get ‘Race to the Top’ funds, they had to adopt Common Core before it was even published.

“Then what happened was to cement this, most states said they would use the Common Core, with the exception of Texas, Alaska, Virginia, and Nebraska, but not everybody won ‘Race to the Top’ money. New York did, so this locked New York into the Common Core,” said McClusky.

McClusky adds that the first states in the country to adopt Common Core received the most ‘Race to the Top’ funds. He says New York State was able to garner the most money, because of its enthusiastic reception of the standards.

Regent Bennett says that’s not so. He points to taking the lead because New York was the first to base state tests on the standards.

“There’s general agreement I think that the learning standards are good, they’re valuable. The question is, who understands them? Which districts did it well, which districts lagged and didn’t do it well? And what do we do about that? We really have to make sure all districts are on board,” said Bennett.

Panel to examine Common Core rollout

The governor also recently formed a panel to examine the rollout of the new learning standards and make recommendations for improvement before the end of this year’s legislative session. However, New York State Allies for Public Education’s Lisa Rudley says even the panel itself is flawed.” She says it was unfairly “stacked” with Common Core supporters.

“That’s an issue, because it removes the objectivity of evaluating what the real issues are of the Common Core standards. One of the biggest issues that I find offensive about this panel is that it did not have any representation of special education teachers or early childhood or elementary teachers,” said Rudley.

Governor Cuomo said that no decisions should be made on Common Core until the panel makes its recommendations. Rudley argues that action should be taken immediately.

“I think that the standards, in it of themselves, should be highly scrutinized. There are so many reports, records, and research showing that these standards are flawed and they left a lot of people out of the conversation. So, in the words of Dr. Joe Rella from Long Island, ‘We need to stop it, fix it, or scrap it’,” said Rudley.

But beyond implementation, many believe the Common Core learning standards are developmentally inappropriate and the worst way to prepare students for the future. Tune into

WBFO 88.7 FM Wednesday to hear why many believe Common Core isn't the answer and why some feel that it is.