

Common Core State Standards and the School Community



North Carolina Association of Educators

700 South Salisbury Street

P.O. Box 27347

Raleigh, NC 27611-7347

(919) 832-3000

www.ncae.org

The North Carolina Association of Educators is an affiliate of the National Education Association

North Carolina has often been on the forefront of education reform. Curriculum reform is not new and occurs at least once every decade. The most recent curriculum reform has involved the integration of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) into the North Carolina Essential Standards. This reform effort has not been without problems, and concerns.

As the State Board of Education and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction adopted the CCSS and began an implementation plan, funding and time were of short supply. In the fall of 2012 NCAE conducted a survey on time to teach as we were hearing from members and non-members from across the state that teaching time was limited as they worked on CCSS pacing guides and new assessments. In this 2012 survey 94 LEAs and two charter schools responded. The largest group we heard from was PreK-5 at 54 percent, middle school 25 percent and high school 20 percent with 83 responders being administrators or retired and substituting.

Questions from the 2012 Time to Teach survey relevant to CCSS had the following results:

In your school community has Common Core been integrated into the NC Curriculum/Essential Standards?	Yes 96%	No 4%
Has your school or school system created a separate report card for benchmarking the Common Core?	Yes 17%	No 83%
Do you feel that the Common Core standards are adding value to your classroom and curriculum?	Yes 58%	No 42%
Do you feel that you have had adequate preparation in the implementation of Common Core?	Yes 30%	No 70%

We are aware that other surveys have been conducted over the course of this school year regarding CCSS. The Gates Foundation, Scholastic, and the NEA have surveyed educators, parents and community members. The results from these surveys are similar in outcome. There is more support for continuing CCSS into school curriculum instead of stopping the implementation. There is confusion and need of support for parents/guardians in better understanding the new standards. There is a need for relevant resources and aligned textbooks.

As the conversations and debate around CCSS in North Carolina have ensued there is still some confusion as to what teachers think about this reform effort that is now in year three in most school communities. To gather data and provide facts for state legislators, NCAE conducted a random sampling survey in November 2013. The following LEAs provided data:

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|-------------|---------------------|---------|
| Brunswick | Columbus | Robeson |
| Burke | Cumberland | Vance |
| Carteret | Guilford | Wake |
| Catawba | Iredell Statesville | Wayne |
| Charlotte | Johnston | |
| Mecklenburg | Northampton | |

Participants that completed the survey shared that they spend at least one hour per day to one day per month working on issues related to CCSS. Most of the schools noted that this was their second year working with CCSS and that they felt more comfortable than last year. More time is spent on assessment issues than pedagogy however.

Some specific questions asked to help us frame the climate in schools are as follows:

I believe the new CCSS will benefit our students and create strong thinkers.	55%
I believe the CCSS are useful but the implementation has been flawed and too fast.	46%
Teachers are collaborating more to ensure student success.	57%
Administrators are not sure what to look for when observing teachers for CCSS tasks.	10%
I need more CCSS resources to ensure concepts can be covered and aligned accurately.	49%
Our parents and community members need more support to better understand how the CCSS impact the learning process.	86%
I need more professional development to better understand how best to integrate the CCSS within my subject area.	62%
I am opposed to the CCSS and would like the state to stop this mad rush with national standards.	18%
I want NC to continue moving forward with the implementation of the CCSS.	82%
I would like for the state to find better ways to assess students that does not include more tests. I want more time to teach.	99%

We asked educators to **share successes with the implementation of the CCSS**. Here are the most common and similar responses:

1. Gathering new ideas and sharing more with peers.
2. Better writing prompts and better student writers.
3. Teachers digging deeper into the standards.
4. Uninterrupted planning time with a real focus on student success/achievement.
5. Increasing how we differentiate.
6. Common assessments created by teachers and consistency with what we teach.
7. Collaboration among our Professional Learning Teams.
8. This year has been slightly easier as we better understand how to teach the new standards/curriculum.
9. Students are getting the math and like that they can explain problems.
10. Cross integration of other subjects besides English and the use of technology.
11. Problem-based learning is turning students on and they are having success.
12. Our administrator trusts our decisions.

We asked educators to **share barriers with the implementation of CCSS**. Here are the most common and similar responses:

1. Too rigorous for special populations, particularly the severe and profound. Some of the standards are not developmentally appropriate.
2. Not enough relevant resources or time to seek out the best aligned resources.
3. Lack of time to prepare or reflect on what has been learned for implementation.
4. Not enough funding to back up CCSS needed materials and training.
5. Too much testing. Too many local benchmark tests.

6. Some strategies don't work in groups as the guide mandates.
7. Meeting the needs of all students; some need more time and the pacing guide mandates one move on to the next concept no matter what. In CCSS, the building blocks are even more crucial in math now than ever.
8. Paper work and benchmark testing take away time to teach.

We asked educators to **share challenges** they face with the implementation of CCSS:

1. Implementation should have been phased in with the math concepts and not rushed with piecemeal process. Playing catch up is no fun.
2. More time needed to better understand how to integrate the concepts beyond the model lessons provided.
3. Time to educate the families and general community.
4. Time needed to create formative assessments. Trust teacher made formative assessments!
5. It has been hard to change when you have taught one way for so many years, but we are changing.
6. The crazy testing issues have caused us to have the wrong focus of creating strong thinkers.
7. Class size has created issues for the teamwork and problem-based lessons.
8. Lack of relevant textbooks or technology tools.
9. The negative press and incomplete facts about what is happening in the classroom. Don't change our curriculum now!
10. Testing issues and standard six processes.

Based on conversations, presentations made to the State Board, training sessions, CCSS work groups and the data gleaned from this survey, it is apparent more educators are in favor of the new standards than against. The standards focus on student success, critical thinking skills, preparing students for work or college, and create a consistent foundation for all students. As with any educational reform, time is needed to best understand how to implement strategies and support students for success. Due to the high-stakes teacher evaluations and the lack of understanding as to how the new teacher contracts will impact one's career, many educators have been thrown a curve ball and find it difficult to focus on their work. Students are more than a test score and teachers want them to find joy in learning and not fear.

Data gathered shows that North Carolina needs to stay the course and continue to prepare teachers with relevant resources, time and support for student success. At the same time, more must be done to assist the parents/guardians who want what is best for their children but may not understand the "new math." The majority of the educators who participated in our 2013 survey demonstrate they don't want to stop and start something new. They want less assessment but better assessment methods as well as more time to reflect on the pedagogy of how to teach the CCSS.

This quote from a teacher sums up the results of our 2013 survey, *"I see positive changes being implemented as a result of the Common Core Standards. Teachers are being challenged to rethink the way they teach to be sure their lessons are relevant, and are truly building conceptual knowledge and understanding for students. Students are being challenged to rethink the way they learn. They are defending and justifying knowledge gained, which is making them more accountable for their actions in the classroom."*