

Section VI. Educational Issues and Trends

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are designed to provide consistency across the Nation to develop college- and career- ready students who employ high-levels of thinking. These English Language Arts and Math standards promote a progression of learning from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Just two years following the full adoption of CCSS, teachers, parents, students, and even state officials questioned the possibility for students to succeed under such demands, the financial restraints it leaves on states and the reasons for changing the way students learn basic procedures such as addition and subtraction! When North Carolina originally adopted Common Core standards, parents and students were unaware of what to expect, which allowed negativity to take root. Parents take to social media, newspapers and any place that they can convince people that Common Core is a monster that must be destroyed! Teachers struggle to help students master the content within an academic calendar and question whether the standards expect too much from children. As the backlash on CCSS increases, a new wave of computerized assessments will follow in the upcoming school year, creating more apprehension, tension and frustration across the state. A research professor of education from CNN questions, “How many billions will schools across the nation pay for software and hardware and bandwidth for Common Core testing?” (2013) Every change causes resistance. Parents struggle with the reasons why their child does not learn math as they did when growing up or reading the same traditional pieces of literature. Media provides snapshots of CC that are out of context, which leads to misrepresentation and misconceptions to Common Core’s purpose, which is nothing more than having high expectations for students across the nation.

Misinformation affects the trust in the education system. Children who normally pass end-of-grade assessments are now faced with lower scores and parents question the effectiveness of this rigor. Teachers whose students usually make high growth are challenged to prepare

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students for growth on demanding assessments. North Carolina politicians and state officials now toil with the possibility of eliminating the adoption of Common Core standards. While some members place the blame for these struggles on rigorous standards, they are not the root of the problem; high-risk testing is!

Is the solution to eliminate testing? Absolutely not! Is the solution to lower the standards so that every child passes? Definitely not! The solutions include putting more emphasis on growth of a child and celebrate the increase in scale score, rather than placing a child's success or failure on a "level." Another solution is to conduct mini-assessments at least twice a year to monitor important checkpoints and development. In a system that is driven by data, following the middle-of-the-grade assessments, teachers, parents and students must be provided a detailed description in areas of strength and weakness. Affordable professional development must be offered to support teachers across the state in planning lessons that are rigorous, relevant, engaging and demanding and less focused on quick mnemonic devices or procedures. Teachers need more resources that continue to make learning fun, but help students develop vital reasoning skills. Information must be provided to help parents understand the transition that will occur from early elementary through graduating high school. Flow charts, thinking maps and models will help the nation visualize the links between grade levels rather than seeing one problem on Facebook that leaves people wondering, "Why would they ever teach it that way?" The increase in communication and emphasis on growth will work to provide the state a more optimistic view on the transition that must be made to strengthen education across the nation in a globally competitive society. The change will be resisted as students struggle, but the results will be evident for years to come as young minds are challenged to think and understand the world around them in meaningful and memorable ways.