

Teachers' Voices on Common Core State Standards

National Standards

- ❖ I like unification. While I recognize that our country is so huge that states must operate independently on many levels, it feels unfair to me that by nature of chance or money some students have access to stronger educational standards. So the national, or almost national, goals feel like the best way to make education as democratic (and universally good) as possible.

- ❖ I love that the CCSS “support cross-curricular literacy teaching.” As an English teacher, that’s huge. It makes me so frustrated when I hear kids says that written answers for another class don’t matter, or don’t have weight, or aren’t graded as strictly. I hope that the CCSS encourage all non-English subject teachers to grade writing like it matters.

- ❖ The standards keep teachers on the same page. Consultant Kim Marshall found that “most teachers resisted using a common set of grade-level standards.” But in my school, our classrooms are not isolated, and we share goals, benchmarks, department and school standards. But I don’t think we should be an isolated district or state, and theoretically the CCSS can pull the nation of teachers together to be on the same page with regards to what we’re teaching and to what we’re held accountable.

- ❖ A perpetual problem: Teachers rarely pause at the end of a unit to look at which materials produce the best gains, which ones are less successful, and which students need more help. This is so true, and although I know in my gut what is working and what isn’t, looking at measurable outcomes is another. Who has time to look at the scores reflectively after a unit is over? You rush forward to squeeze the next unit in, and maybe you make some notes about what to re-teach or teach differently or review or skip. SMART goals and the CCSS ask us to evaluate student scores, but the paradox is that more than ever I feel I am drowning in documents, websites, forms and materials to read... in order to calculate data... in order to rewrite my units... in order to teach. It’s a lot. But

theoretically, pausing after a unit to assess data is something we must do and an advantage of the CCSS. But it sort of feels like flossing. No one wants to, no one makes time for it... but we all acknowledge its benefits.

- ❖ I fundamentally agree that all students would learn the same things, in ways appropriate for them. I think that I already do that, and I'm eager to figure out the easiest way to document it, prove it, see students succeed because of it, and figure out what I'm missing so that I can change. And I'm hopeful that the CCSS will unite all teachers to the same standards so that I'm not alone.

 - ❖ Because I have not had exposure to anything other than the CCSS -- I cannot imagine there could be disadvantages....perhaps because the task of switching is creating the "grumblings" in my school system -- but I just see so much good -- "aligned tests...clear grade by grade curriculum..." from (Kim Marshall *A Principal Looks Back*, Phi Delta Kappan) -- the idea that teachers rarely "pause at the end of a unit to look at which materials produce the best gains, which ones are less successful and which students need more help" - was hard to imagine -- to find a lesson and its parts that worked -- really worked -- and to not build upon it -- the parts that produced the best gains -- you wouldn't know what worked unless you paused to look --- but in previous years at xx St -- the time line of where the teachers had to be lesson wise by the end of the year -- I saw too much of that mind set of "teach, test and hope for the best"

 - ❖ I imagine "hearing" a silent message -- choose to recognize the benefits of the CCSS -- rather than the extra work -- "teaching common standards means students learn better, all students"
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- ❖ While there has been resistance to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in certain, states, communities, and districts, I am of the opinion that the adoption of the CCSS is advantageous for both students and educators. As Scheidler states in, *Happy in a Standards-Based World*, "school wasn't serving all kids." The traditional tracking system, which included lower expectations for lower performing students, was a self-fulfilling prophecy which in turn left a large percentage of students unprepared for college or careers. With the CCSS, all students are expected to master the same content and practices with an outcome of being prepared for college or a career. This is critically important because as Scheidler points out, "[there is

a] growing gap between those students who will go out into a world where lower lever jobs are disappearing, replaced by jobs requiring higher technical skills." The future of our students is in our hands as educators.

- ❖ Another advantage to having CCSS is the national test, whether it be from the PARCC or Smarter Balanced consortia. This national test has two advantages. First as Scheidler states, "with...public reporting, classroom achievement is brought to the attention of administrators and the public". And, while this was true of state tests as well, now all students nationwide are being assessed on the same content and practices which will make the evaluation of student achievement comparable across states and more transparent to the public.

Secondly, unlike No Child Left Behind, students and schools will not be evaluated based on proficient or non-proficient students, rather they will be evaluated based on student progress. This model sets up an achievable pathway to success, one that recognizes that underachieving students are not going to become proficient overnight.

But, at the same time there are expected measures of growth over time to close the gap so students are not indefinitely classified as underachievers.

- ❖ I believe having CCSS is advantageous - a common language for both students and teachers. Unfortunately, in many districts I visit in my current role, there is a severe lack of consistency across individual grade levels and vertically. Though I believe there is an art to teaching, I firmly believe the same content and practices must be taught in all classrooms. How the content and practices are taught is up to the individual teacher or administrator but the "what" needs to be identical.

- ❖ I had the opportunity to attend a DESE meeting last week where a speaker visited to discuss the PARCC assessment. He made it crystal clear that the exact language from the standards will be used on the assessment. He emphasized the importance of all teachers using this language in daily instruction. It does take a village! I believe that if all students are being taught to talk-the-talk they will move closer to walking the walk!

I see two major advantages of having and using common standards.

First, on a national level, it helps ensure that the skills that students leave secondary school with *in all states* are the same. Whether you go to school in rural Idaho or suburban northern New Jersey, both will have the same academic skills as they transition into the post-secondary setting. In the past, curriculum varied not only from state to state, but even *classroom to classroom within the same school*. Having a common standard helps ensure that, within a specific state, specific district, or even within a school, all educators are 'on the same page' so to speak about the skills their students will master in order to be prepared for college or employment.

The second advantage is the idea that, having a set of common standards for *all* students will help ensure that *all types of students* are acquiring the same skills. The materials mention the problems that can arise in terms of disadvantaged students (whether economic or through disability) not being taught the same curriculum. It is essential that all students have access to the same standard of curriculum, not just those students who are deemed 'able to handle it'.

As an aside, being a student who made 9 state to state moves before graduating from high school, I can tell you that the 'scattered' nature of curriculum can have a significant impact on learning. When you go from a rural district in Oregon to a major suburban district, it is a total struggle when you don't have the prerequisite skills to work in the curriculum of the new district.

- ❖ I see the advantages of teachers having Common Core State Standards is primarily now teachers have concrete guidelines to follow. In a large city, if students change schools, the hope is that all third grade students have the same knowledge. As stated in Scheidler's article there was "no commonality with grade levels". So before standards, children didn't know the same information. Now with standards, teacher's have the ability to utilize cross-content learning, which allows the students to see how a concept is relevant in math, science, ELA and history. The authors also mention team teaching, which allows teacher to use their strengths and/or passions in certain areas. It allows the teachers to get more creative and gets the students excited about learning. Administrator and state agencies want hard evidence that students are doing better and Common Core State Standards help teachers and school districts do a better job with consistent teaching for all students.

- ❖ In my opinion, there are many advantages to teachers to have the CCSS. I couldn't help remembering my own experiences in the late 70s working for a collaborative and having to create my own set of "guidelines" for special needs students within a resource room. not to mention having no materials to work with!!! So, as you can imagine, my list is long for how the CCSS support educators in their quest to effectively and successfully teach students.

The CCSS...

- provides a **focus/goal** to teaching a guide learning from year to year so teachers know where students have been and where they're going.
- are **inclusive** so all children are taught the same skills regardless of socioeconomics, disability, gender, or race
- promotes **differentiated instruction** that supports **both** higher achieving and struggling students becoming successful as all students learn same things but in ways that fit their strengths and needs
- fosters **zone of proximity** as teachers begin where the student is at in his/her learning

- fosters **critical thinking skills, student reflection, and goal setting** and prepares students for the real world
 - gets students reading **more non-fiction and informational texts**
 - challenges students to meet **high expectations** in reading, writing, speaking, and thinking which prepares students for college readiness, the workplace, and life-long learning
 - encourages **collaboration** among teachers and specialists, as well as **co-teaching**, and **cross curriculum** units of study
 - **empowers and engages** students in their learning
 - fosters positive beliefs and the philosophy that **All Children can Learn**
 - is based on understanding that **assessments drive the instruction**
 - encourages data collection over time
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The most powerful advantage to having common core state standards is teamwork. Teachers work together to teach children. In our course readings, it is mentioned that students are no longer this or that teacher's students. They are 'our' students. The now cliché...it takes a village, etc. is assumed. Teachers have to work together to be most effective.

Principal Kim Marshall of the Boston Mather Elementary School discusses how standards reduce isolation and teachers work together for a common purpose. His message is "No Standards - No United Front."

In the common core powerpoint presentation, the ancient Hawaiian term 'hukilau' is a way of fishing together. Perhaps the 'standards' form a basis for teachers to work together.

In the article title, "Happy Living in a Standards Based World" the author says what is unfair is not having common standards for every child. She states that the standards are guides for teachers and students will learn basic skills.

Another advantage to standards is the public isn't kept in the dark. "Common core and national standards, assessments, and public reporting, make people aware of what is happening in schools in our country and to classroom achievement."

The Common Core Standards help teachers guide their teaching to help all students—and move away from leveling. We just need to tailor our approach to accommodate students' various needs, much like the mini-courses that were untracked, delving into student interest. I agree. More than two decades ago, I bucked the trend by providing similar challenging work for all levels of student by meeting their needs, giving intermediate steps to get them from where they were to where they needed to be. I also looked at their learning styles, interests and skills. The Common Core Standards, which were not in place when I taught, can be thought of as a way to get students to think at higher levels. A great advantage. I knew that I needed to get students to think beyond the literal level, so in a way, my teaching paralleled these standards.

I also liked reading about team teaching, collaboration, time for commiserating and house concept. We did this at my school. The Common Core Standards fit with these ideas.

Additionally, I agree that "Learning must be the center of the work. It must be the measure of achievement." The Common Core Standards is about learning.

The Common Core PowerPoint tells of closing the achievement gap while supporting higher achieving students. I believe this, and believe that all teachers can follow the standards to help students become better learners and contributors to society. The PowerPoint tells of the importance of conferencing and integrating knowledge and ideas. Good! Teachers should find this to be good teaching.

While I'm not a proponent of high-stakes testing, standards matter and teachers need to collaborate. This is student-centered. I also agree with aligning tests with curriculum; it makes as much sense as making tests that are valid and reliable. Last, I agree with scoring student writing objectively (in order to meet the standards). In an attempt to be objective, I use the Six Traits approach, where students are scored with a rubric: Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency, Voice, Word Choice and Conventions. (I'll also add Presentation, because I believe appearance counts.)

- ❖ CCSS provides a structure that guides student learning from year to year and encourages teachers to communicate across disciplines. Conferring with colleagues about student progress and challenges can be hugely rewarding. Scheidler points out, "When teachers can team up we can boost one another's spirits, help one another through the tough issues, celebrate our successes, bring common purpose, and acclimate students to our teaching and learning modes." This is so true - team teaching benefits both teachers and students. The CCSS give teachers the ability to be creative and inventive when designing instruction. What an advantage over tracking and scripted programs!

- ❖ With the CCSS, there will be fewer "pockets of excellence" in schools. Instead, student (and teacher!) achievement will be highlighted. Another advantage of the CCSS is consistency. No longer will a teacher wonder what kind of skills have been taught in another grade or if a student moves from another district. Expectations are clear and all teachers are charged with the task of moving students along the same path of college and career readiness.

I like having a succinct document to plan my lessons against, and to use to be able to collaborate with others. The articles speak of several advantages particular to the Common Core. NCLB was an effort to help all students learn, however the Common Core looks to close the achievement gap in improved ways. I like Common Core's emphasis on spiraling the curriculum and that the PPI accountability standards (that go hand in hand with Common Core, correct?) tracks yearly progress as opposed to waiting until a student tests at a certain moment to see if he/she is proficient or not. Most importantly, the Common Core is a means to track that students are all covering the same material no matter the school (even if teachers are using different ways to get there.) This makes sense to me. Other important advantages of the Common Core standards are the changes from past efforts, such as giving equal weight to reading and writing skills. This is an area I want to focus on, as well as the important real-world learning of higher-level comprehension skills.

I appreciate the overall need for a standard so all students learn to be critical thinking citizens. All students 'privileged' or 'underprivileged' should be given the opportunity to be prepared for some kind of higher learning. I also agree that having a way to measure progress is important. Integrating the new standards is a big learning curve for me also, and, because I often feel in isolation and burdened by such time constraints trying to service three schools, I also appreciated that the article spoke to the need for a holistic approach to change, with the standards being a piece of it. We need to give teachers the big picture, support and resources. At any rate, the Common Core is opening up public discussion on how to improve student learning.

I really enjoyed reading "Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement" (Lucy Calkins, 2012, Heinemann Press) because I found the authors' statement of "You Can View the Standards as a Curmudgeon or as if They are Gold", to be not only easy read, but amazingly true. I thought their perspective was refreshing, and a gentle reminder that in order to teach, we need to get beyond the common negative notions we hear about the standards. Sure, there are variables we cannot control; "burdens or baggage" that students enter our classrooms with that may affect how they will learn and/or access learning, but if we use our time and knowledge wisely while they are "ours" in the classroom, we can help them improve their learning in each of the standards. Maybe it won't be the year they "Pass" (or get a certain PPI?) the MCAS test, but it can be the year they get a higher score.

With that said, I think the advantages to having the Common Core are these:

~ All teachers are teaching with the same academic learning goals/standards in mind

~ The goals are relatively clear

~ The standards build upon each other each year

~ We are demanding growth, not applauding stagnancy

~ We are requiring cross-content learning (no longer do we teach reading, writing, math, science, and social studies separate from one another)

~ We are saying that all students can reach a certain level of independence in learning. We are not allowed to give up on "special needs" students or students in other "sub categories"