



ISSUE BRIEF

STATE-LED COMMON CORE ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

BACKGROUND

Since the spring of 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA), in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers and Achieve, Inc., has been working on the Common Core State Standards initiative in a state-led effort to establish a shared set of clear education standards for English language arts and mathematics. To date, 46 states have voluntarily adopted these standards. Texas, Alaska, Nebraska and Virginia are the four exceptions. A diverse group of teachers, experts, parents and school administrators has designed them, culling from the highest state standards across the country and throughout the world.

Now comes the hard work of putting the standards in place throughout the local school districts of the United States. The Commonwealth of Kentucky is the furthest down the road in this practice. Their approach has been a collaborative one with the K-12 and postsecondary education communities working hand in hand, even though they have separate governance systems. Overall, to accomplish this, an extensive professional development plan must be designed and adopted for local administrators and teachers, and a communications strategy designed for students, parents, businesses and the community-at-large to explain the steps for adoption, the changes in the curriculum and the accompanying, aligned assessments, what it all means for classroom instruction, and how it will alter classroom materials and supports. Increased learning time will most likely be necessary, too, as these standards, in many cases, are more rigorous than those that have been in place. Critically important as well will be adaptations and upgrades for teacher preparation programs.

Because the Common Core State Standards is a voluntary, state-led effort, it is imperative that local school board members and their school district team work cooperatively with the state education agency (SEA) in implementing the standards and briefing their communities and local school partners. Most states have already begun this critical outreach piece. To get this under way, it is imperative that there be briefings, updates and an embedded, collaborative rollout from the state education agencies. Local school boards are encouraged not to wait to be called upon by their state to become engaged and enlightened in the process.

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) recognizes the importance of rigorous academic standards to ensure that students enrolled in our public schools are competitive in the global society. Clearly, states and local school districts are very much committed to substantive improvements in academic standards. This project, which has also been promoted by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan as part of the overarching goal for the year 2020 of students being college or career ready upon high school graduation, is in part aimed at removing the need for remedial interventions at the postsecondary level, an issue that has received marked attention in the mass media and education press in recent years.

Research indicates there is strong consensus among states to ensure rigorous standards, strong curricula aligned with those standards, and valid and reliable systems of assessments that fairly and accurately reflect the performance of students, schools and school districts. While there are those who believe public schools

would best be served through the development of national academic standards, there is overwhelming support by stakeholders who believe that common-core standards should be developed by states individually or collectively by groups of states to achieve this goal. It should be pointed out that the Common Core State Standards have not been debated nor necessarily endorsed by the Congress. No hearings have been held although the issue has been raised randomly in hearings and meetings; and there has been no official or unofficial congressional oversight. Interestingly, the Common Core State Standards movement touts its flexibility in public accountability, totally contrary to the rigid accountability system stipulated in No Child Left Behind (NCLB)/the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. However, where NCLB was flexible on content, the standards are inflexible. In regard to assessments, both would be regarded as inflexible.

What makes the Common Core State Standards different than what is currently in place? They are aligned with college and work expectations, focused and coherent, include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills, are based on evidence and research, and they are internationally-benchmarked so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society.

ACCOMPANYING ASSESSMENTS

In tandem with the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards, five national assessment consortia—two for general education, two for special education for developing alternative assessments, and one for English language learners have been established. These five are funded with some \$417 million in federal Race to the Top (RTT) grant funds, and are developing assessments aligned to the standards. They are the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), Dynamic Learning Maps, and the National Center and State Collaborative. The fifth consortium, made up of 28 states, is working on developing an on-line tool for English language learners. The State of Wisconsin is leading this group together with the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium and other collaborators.

The assessments will need to be aligned to states’ accountability measures, graduation requirements, teacher evaluation measures, and their respective postsecondary entrance requirements. Economies of scale are expected to overall lower the costs of assessments for states as a result of these consortia’s work. However, when the considerable RTT funds run out U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in April 2012 it will be up to the chief state school officers and governors to determine next steps and funding mechanisms. Clearly states are being encouraged to join and develop multi-state consortia. An admittedly ambitious timetable anticipates the assessments being ready by the 2014-15 school year. Please see a brief recap about the four of the five consortia designing the assessments.

National Assessment Consortia

PARCC

Summative Assessments

- *Computer-based, distributive
- *Grades 3-11 administered in 2 required components
- *1 performance-based assessment (PBA) administered as close to the end of the school year as

SMARTER Balanced

Summative Assessments

- *Computer adaptive, highly individualized
- *Grades 3-8 and 11 administered during the last 12 weeks of the school year (optional component for grades 9-10)

Dynamic Learning Maps

- *Assessment selects items and tasks for a student based on that student’s previous responses
- *Instructionally-embedded assessment
- *Instructionally relevant items
- *Universal design and

possible

*1 end-of-year test administered after approx. 90% of school year

Formative Assessments

*2 components

*Early assessment to indicate the Knowledge and skills of students to tailor instruction to meet the student's needs

*Mid-year assessment consisting of performance-based items and tasks, emphasizing hard-to-measure standards(states may include a summative component)

*Students will be able to take the twice

Interim Assessments

*Optional computer adaptive

*Used during the school year

*Flexible and open

*Provide actionable feedback

Formative Resources

*Web-based

*Data

*Professional development modules

*Opportunities to help develop and score test items

accessibility features

*Administration options that provide instructionally-embedded testing and a summative test

*Professional development program provides understanding of learning maps and appropriate tasks for students

http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/pdf/DLM_Bochure_31_May_2011.pdf

National Center and State Collaborative

*Curricular and instructional Frameworks

*Formative assessment tools and strategies

*Professional development on appropriate interim uses of data to monitor progress

*Summative assessment

*Short term outcomes

*Long term outcomes

<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/projects/NCSC/NCSCKickoffHandout.pdf>

An as-yet-undetermined, new entity will be created to oversee the Common Core State Standards, but who and what that will be has not been revealed. NSBA has been requested to have an influential role with Achieve in reviewing and commenting on standards. NSBA in an ongoing way will continue to be closely monitoring the evolution of the overall movement as well as the development of the oversight organization and structure. It is expected that the Common Core Standards will be reviewed on a five-year cycle, working through a process similar to that used in their creation, involving Achieve, NGA and the CCSSO.

DISCUSSION

NSBA recognizes that to further ensure global competitiveness the federal government must play a role. However, the federal role must be one of partnership and support to states - - not only in terms of funding for those students with the greatest needs, but also in serving as a clearinghouse to share and promote ideas and best practices regarding actions to overcome shortfalls in student achievement. Additionally, the federal government should increase incentives to states and local school districts to create constructive remedies, and provide technical support to the states to assess those state standards.

In order to better understand what specific role the federal government could play related to state-led common core standards, the following recommendations are offered:

- (a) Support state and local efforts to provide students with an education that is appropriately focused on the skills and uses of knowledge needed for success in the global and technological world of the 21st century by funding multiple education entities, including regional education service agencies, to develop model standards for voluntary adoption for those purposes;
- (b) Support 1) funding for research; 2) financial assistance to states or groups of states, when requested, to assist them in developing and implementing standards around the skills and uses of knowledge that students will need in the 21st century; and 3) direct financial assistance to states or groups of states, when requested, to assist them in developing and implementing content standards provided;
- (c) Oppose efforts to make the aforementioned activities mandatory on states or local school districts, or as a condition for the receipt of other federal aid;
- (d) Oppose efforts to involve the federal government directly or indirectly (e.g. through an entity over which it can exercise control) to develop mandatory or model national content standards or to mandate the development of common content standards among groups of states; and
- (e) Ensure that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and international tests do not exceed their current use to provide comparative data through sampling, and oppose requiring or coercing the use of these assessments by states in developing their own standards or for high stakes accountability purposes.

NSBA POSITION

NSBA supports state-led common core standards that include sufficient flexibility in operations to effectively and efficiently address the unique challenges of local communities. NSBA believes that the federal government should not be involved in the actual development of such standards.

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