

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE BOARD



Common Ground on Common Core:

Let's Get it Right – Move the Common Core Back on Track

The major statewide educational organizations representing school boards, parents, superintendents, teachers, principals, business officials and other educators have joined together to outline our *Common Ground on Common Core* and identify a five-point action plan for getting New York's Common Core back on track.

The Common Core Learning Standards represent the most significant increase in student expectations New York schools have ever faced. Our students need and deserve the best efforts of local educators and state officials working together to help them succeed.

Background

When the New York State Board of Regents adopted the newly developed Common Core Learning Standards, student learning was at the heart of their effort. Their goal was to more clearly define the relevant skills and knowledge students will need for success in college or careers in a highly competitive global economy.

Early efforts to advance this agenda focused correctly on student learning and preparing for implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. More recently, however, the demands of other initiatives – including compliance with new teacher and principal evaluation requirements and associated testing, recurring budgeting challenges, and accelerated implementation of Common Core testing – have all diverted resources and focus from student learning and adapting to the Common Core Standards.

Schools continue to endure a stretch of difficult fiscal times. Most state aid was frozen in 2009-10 and total state aid to schools was cut in both 2010-11 and 2011-12. Despite the aid increases enacted in the last two state budgets, over 70 percent of school districts are still receiving less help now from the state than in 2008-2009, five years in the past.

Schools will do their best to adapt to the current fiscal realities, but new reforms cannot achieve full success without adequate funding aimed at new professional development, curriculum development, and support for all schools.

Recently, the State Education Department released student scores from the grades 3 through 8 English language arts and math tests administered this past spring. State Education Commissioner John King predicted that these student scores would be significantly lower than those of last year – and they were. That was also Kentucky's experience – the first state to align its tests with the Common Core.

Commissioner King has stressed that the tests create a new “baseline” for measuring the progress of students and that “the results do not mean schools taught less than last year or that students learned less than last year.”

Board of Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch added,

Teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards have worked extraordinarily hard to implement the Common Core. With the right tools, the right training, and continuous feedback and support, our teachers – the best teaching force in the country – will make sure all our students are prepared for college and career success in the 21st century.

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This year's tests asked students questions different in form and content than those they had experienced before. They also required more correct responses for students to be deemed proficient.

This year presented schools with other exceptional challenges, in addition to transitioning to Common Core-based instruction and testing. Schools also developed, adopted and implemented procedures to comply with the state's complex new requirements for teacher and principal evaluations. They continued to operate under tightening budgets as well.

Further, many districts and teachers have said that there hasn't been sufficient time nor tools to adequately learn and implement the new standards.

The new tests were designed to measure student achievement against the Common Core Learning Standards in grades 3 through 8. Yet even today, many of our districts do not have all the necessary resources for full implementation and thus many of our teachers are not fully in position to begin teaching to the new standards. Many teachers have not had sufficient time to grasp the key shifts in learning and the habits of mind inherent in these standards, to rewrite their own lesson plans, and to learn and master new ways to teach in response to the Common Core.

Why Support the Common Core Learning Standards

The goal of Common Core Learning Standards is for every student to gain the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in their next steps beyond school, either college or a career, recognizing that they will live and work in an increasingly integrated and competitive global economy.

The standards were designed to ensure that all students, regardless of where they live or what school they attend, are learning what they need to graduate from high school with the ability, not just to recite knowledge, but to apply knowledge to real world challenges.

These standards reflect the needs for a highly skilled workforce that has mastered academic content, able to think critically, solve complex problems, and communicate effectively.

The Common Core Learning Standards were developed using the following criteria:

- Aligned with expectations for college and career success
- Include both content and the application of knowledge through high-order skills
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards and standards of top-performing nations
- Clear and realistic, so educators and parents know what they need to do to help students learn
- Consistent across all states, so that students are taught to the same standard no matter where they live
- International competitiveness – informed by other top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society.

The Common Core Learning Standards do **not** tell teachers how to teach. Standards help teachers focus on the knowledge and skills their students should have at the appropriate education level. With these clear targets, teachers will continue to devise their own lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum and how their schools are operated.

Five-Point Plan of Action

We must support all our partners in education – from colleges, to school boards, to classrooms, and to every family’s kitchen table – to make the Common Core Learning Standards a reality for every student across the state.

We cannot fail.

Moving the reform efforts back on track will require concentrated attention on implementation of the new standards, classroom by classroom.

To support these efforts, we must:

1. **Campaign to build understanding.** Build universal understanding and support for the value and importance of the Common Core Learning Standards for our students, their parents, our educators, and the community – by instituting a statewide campaign to explain the benefits of the Common Core and the steps needed to ensure successful implementation.
2. **Invest in professional development.** Invest in critical and ongoing professional development to implement the shifts required by the Common Core. Seek greater financial support from the Governor, Legislature, Board of Regents and Education Commissioner to make this investment in our educators and students.
3. **Ensure adequate funding.** Ensure adequate state and federal funding to give all classroom teachers and educators the tools, instructional materials, and technology they need to help all students meet these most rigorous standards, including extra help for students most at-risk of falling short of the standards.
4. **Assess concerns with student testing.** Reassess the state’s approach to assessment – student testing. Recognize that standardized testing is only one component of a total system of teaching and learning. Reconsider the balance between tests to hold schools and educators accountable and tests to help educators diagnose strengths and needs of individual children. Address the most pressing concerns of parents and educators regarding testing, including:
 - the number of tests students are required to take – especially in early grades;
 - how much time students spend taking tests – both the number of days and the length of time;
 - the need for timely assessment feedback and more transparency in standardized testing in order to identify areas where students may need extra help; and
 - the lack of technology available in many schools to fully support online testing.
5. **Establish a process of ongoing review and refinement.** Seek meaningful engagement for key stakeholders to review and refine the implementation of the Common Core. Improve ongoing implementation efforts by ensuring adequate time and more appropriate sequencing of Common Core initiatives – from standards to curriculum to instruction to assessments – to enable educators to properly implement new standards and advance learning by students.

We owe it to our students to get back on the right track – as every student deserves the best education we have to offer, to support and encourage them as they enter the more and more demanding global economy.

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE BOARD

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*Speaking on behalf of parents, teachers, administrators and board members
from every one of New York's public schools - and for the students they serve.*
