

Strong Support, Low Awareness

Public Perception of the Common Core State Standards

In June 2010, the final Common Core State Standards (CCSS) – K-12 standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy developed through a multi-state initiative – were released. Since then, 45 states and Washington DC have chosen to adopt the new standards as their own. Implementation efforts are underway in most of these states, providing an important foundation for transforming education and making college and career readiness a reality for all students.

Despite the widespread adoption of the standards – which will directly impact the over 42 million students in K-12 public schools across 45 states and the 2.7 million educators teaching in those schools – it has been unclear what, if anything, the public knows and thinks about the CCSS and related reforms.

To explore the public's awareness of and support for the new Common Core State Standards and aligned common assessments Achieve commissioned a national poll¹ in August 2011.

KEY FINDINGS

- Generally, public education is considered to be a very or extremely important issue to voters across the board. However, only about one in ten voters – and educators – believe public education is working pretty well right now.
- There is strong support among voters and teachers for common standards. The support is strong regardless of age, education level, race, ethnicity or party affiliation.
- The Common Core State Standards are in the early stages of implementation and awareness among the general public is very low. Awareness among teachers is significantly higher.
- Among voters who are aware of the Common Core State Standards, there is a mixed impression of the CCSS, with essentially the same percentage having a favorable and unfavorable view. Among teachers who are aware of the Common Core, there is generally a more favorable view.
- There is strong support for common assessments among states, but also disagreement as to how the results of the assessments should be used. The general public strongly supports using the results for a full range of accountability purposes, while teachers are more skeptical of using test results for such purposes.

It is not surprising that awareness of the Common Core State Standards and common assessments remains low given that implementation efforts are just underway. The voting public favors the idea of states having common standards and assessments and when given additional information about the CCSS, their support remains high. The challenge now is to maintain the public's—and educators'—enthusiasm for these initiatives as the CCSS and related policies move from being an “idea” to becoming real in classrooms.

Improving Public Education is an Important Issue

Improving the nation's public schools is a matter of great importance to voters and teachers alike. More than three-quarters of those surveyed (78% of voters, 79% of teachers) said “Improving the quality of public education” was extremely or very important. In fact, “Improving the quality of public education”

¹ On behalf of Achieve Inc., Public Opinion Strategies conducted a national survey of 800 registered voters between August 14-16, 2011, which has a margin of error of $\pm 3.46\%$. The poll “oversampled” teachers—one-fifth of the respondents (160) were public school teachers. The margin of error for the results involving teachers is higher, at $\pm 7.75\%$.

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ranked only behind “Job creation and economic growth” and “Reducing the federal budget deficit and government spending” in importance to voters and teachers.²

AMONG VOTERS		Top Issue	AMONG TEACHERS	
Extremely Important	Extremely/Very Important		Extremely/Very Important	Extremely Important
47%	91%	<i>Job creation and economic growth</i>	91%	46%
41%	80%	<i>Reducing the federal budget deficit and government spending</i>	81%	45%
37%	78%	<i>Improving the quality of public education</i>	79%	48%
30%	65%	<i>Securing our borders and addressing the issue of immigration</i>	66%	28%
26%	66%	<i>Combating terrorism at home and overseas</i>	71%	31%
21%	60%	<i>Investing in alternative energy sources</i>	51%	20%
16%	44%	<i>Reducing taxes</i>	42%	15%

Democrats, Republicans and independents all believe that improving public education is an important issue, but they put different emphasis on its importance. Among respondents who identified themselves as Democrats, 43% said it was extremely important to improve public education, while among those who identified themselves as Republicans, 26% said it was extremely important. Among independents, the percentage was 39%.

Change is Needed, But How Much?

Voters and teachers agree that changes are needed in public education, but they disagree on the degree of change that is required. Just 8% of voters and 11% of teachers believe public education is “working pretty well now.” However, 57% of voters responded that “major changes” or a “complete overhaul” is needed in public education, while among teachers, that percentage was about 37%.

How much change is needed?	Voters	Teachers
Working Pretty Well Now	8%	11%
Some Changes Needed	35%	50%
Major Changes Needed	35%	29%
Complete Overhaul	22%	8%

Support for Common Standards

Support for common standards is high, with 66% of voters—and 65% of teachers—saying it is better for all states to have the same standards at each grade level in math and English language arts than it is for each state to set their own standards. This level of support is virtually unchanged from a similar poll

² It should be noted that at the time the survey was conducted, the U.S. Congress was in a debate over raising the debt ceiling.

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given in May 2010³, when 65% of respondents supported states having common standards at a time when only one state had yet to adopt the Common Core State Standards.

A majority of respondents who identified themselves as Republicans, Democrats or independents also support common standards. However support for common standards among Democrat and independent respondents is higher than support among Republican respondents.

<p>It is better for all states to have the <u>SAME STANDARDS</u> at each grade level in math and English so students across the country have to meet the same expectations.</p> <p>...Or...</p> <p>It is better for all states to have their <u>OWN STANDARDS</u> at each grade level in math and English so each state can be sure that the standards reflect their own priorities.</p>	All	Dem	Ind	Rep
Common Standards	66%	70%	69%	56%
Own Standards	31%	29%	27%	43%

Support for Common Assessments

A majority of voters and teachers would also like to see states have common assessments rather than having each state create its own test. When asked whether it is better for all states to give the same test or for each state to create their own test, 65% of voters and 64% of teachers said they would rather see states give common assessments. Support among voters is virtually unchanged from a year ago.

Support for common assessments crosses all party lines, with Republicans showing much stronger support for common assessments than common standards.

<p>It is better for all states to have the <u>SAME TESTS</u> at each grade level in math and English so students across the country have to meet the same expectations.</p> <p>...Or...</p> <p>It is better for all states to have their <u>OWN TESTS</u> at each grade level in math and English so each state can be sure that the standards reflect their own priorities.</p>	All	Dem	Ind	Rep
Common Assessments	63%	71%	58%	65%
Own Assessments	33%	27%	39%	30%

Little Awareness of the Common Core State Standards Among Voters

While there is broad support for common standards, awareness of the actual Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is extremely low.

³ Achieve (2010). *Achieving the Possible: What Americans Think About the College- and Career-Ready.*
www.achieve.org/achievingthepossible

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Have Heard about Common Core State Standards (CCSS)? (Voters)	Voters	Teachers
Nothing	60%	13%
Not Much	21%	17%
Some	13%	22%
A lot	6%	46%

Not surprisingly, awareness is much higher among public school teachers. More than two-thirds of teachers (68%) have heard “a lot” or “some” about the Common Core State Standards, with nearly half (46%) having heard “a lot.” However, 30% of teachers did say they had heard “not much” or “nothing” about the new standards.

Among the respondents who have some awareness of Common Core, their impression is very mixed. Among voters, 37% have a favorable opinion, while 34% have an unfavorable opinion. Another 30% have no opinion or are not sure.

Teachers who have some awareness of the CCSS have a much brighter impression. Nearly 60% have a favorable impression, while just 15% have an unfavorable impression.

When given some background on the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments – specifically on the goals of the new standards and how tests may change – 79% of voters and 80% of teachers say they favor implementing the Common Core State Standards, reinforcing the importance of communicating broadly about the CCSS and related policies.

Strong Disagreements over Using Assessments for Accountability

Voters overwhelmingly are in favor of using the results of assessments for the purposes of accountability for school districts, schools and teachers. More than 80% of voters said it was acceptable to use test data for holding districts and schools accountable and three-quarters of respondents said it was acceptable to use test data to hold teachers accountable.

Among teachers, there is far less support for using test data for accountability. A slim majority of teachers (51%) believe it is acceptable to use test results to hold districts and school accountable, but only 39% believe this data should be used for teacher accountability.

Both teachers and voters strongly agree that the tests can be used to improve instruction – over 90% of voters and 86% of teachers find it acceptable to use test scores to identify students falling behind who need extra support, while over 90% of teachers and voters said it was acceptable to use test scores to identify students who are excelling and need additional learning opportunities. And, 78% of teachers and 88% of voters said it was acceptable to use tests to identify professional development or training needs for teachers.

Implications of Strong Support, Low Awareness

What do these results mean for education reform moving forward? For one, the survey data suggest there is solid support among voters and teachers for the Common Core State Standards. Yet, it is critical to note that we are in the early phases of implementation; voters and teachers support the idea and goals of common standards and assessments, but this may change as implementation makes the idea of

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CCSS and related policies real and voters become aware of the changes that must occur in schools to meet raised expectations.

Additionally, this survey reveals there may be some reluctance on the part of teachers to make the sort of major change that voters seem to welcome; this is particularly evident in voter versus teachers' views on accountability and the use of assessments. It's important to note that those educators who had a baseline of understanding about the new standards generally were supportive and most teachers *are* open to change, just not a complete overhaul of the system.

Currently there is broad support for the CCSS and aligned policies but to maintain that support state leaders and advocates must redouble their efforts to increase awareness and understanding of the education reforms they have adopted, prepare the public for the changes ahead, and communicate clearly the goals and benefits of reform to individuals, communities and their states.

Achieve is a bipartisan, non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, work, and citizenship. Achieve currently is working with 35 states through the American Diploma Project Network to design and implement policies that aim to close the expectations gap. Achieve also serves as the project management partner for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), one of the two multi-state assessment consortium developing common assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards and is managing the state-led process for the development of Next Generation Science Standards. For more information see www.achieve.org