



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



OKLAHOMA REPEALS COMMON CORE: Educator and Business Groups Criticize State's Decision to Replace Common Core with Standards from 2010

On June 5, **Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin (R)** signed legislation to repeal and replace the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Oklahoma with the Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) standards that the state used from 2003 to 2010. With Fallin's decision, Oklahoma joins South Carolina and Indiana as the only states to withdraw from the CCSS, which have been adopted and continue to be implemented in more than forty states.

Unlike South Carolina, which gives the state until the 2015–16 school year to adopt new content standards and leaves the CCSS in place until then, Oklahoma's legislation action is immediate and forces the state to go back to the standards it used four years ago.

"This decision will throw many schools into chaos as they prepare for a new academic year," **Shawn Hime, executive director of the Oklahoma State School Boards Association** told the [Oklahoman](#). "It also represents a significant waste of the time and resources schools have spent on the transition over the last four years. This decision is not good for Oklahoma's schools, and it's not good for Oklahoma's kids."

In addition to lost time and resources, the state will also have to "cobble a new test together," according to [Oklahoma Department of Education Spokeswoman Tricia Pemberton](#).

Sandy Boyd, chief operating officer of Achieve, told [Politico](#) that Fallin's action was a "huge step backward." Boyd also pointed out that only 25 percent of Oklahoma's eighth graders scored proficient on the [2013 Nation's Report Card](#) in math and only 29 percent reached proficiency in reading. Those percentages rank the state forty-fifth in math and in a tie for forty-first in reading. "It's disappointing," Boyd said. "The [Common Core] standards were good in January, the standards are still good in June."

Boyd's comment refers to a speech that Fallin, who also chairs the National Governors Association (NGA),¹ gave on January 15 in strong support of the Common Core. When delivering the [NGA's annual State of the States address](#), Fallin said the Common Core "is not a federal program" and "is also not a federal curriculum," adding that "educators and school districts will still design lesson plans, choose appropriate text books and drive classroom learning."

Upon signing the Oklahoma legislation on June 5, Fallin blamed her change of heart on "federal overreach" that "tainted" the CCSS. "We cannot ignore the widespread concern of citizens,

¹ The NGA and the Council of Chief State School Officers spearheaded the state-led effort to develop the CCSS.

parents, educators, and legislators who have expressed fear that adopting Common Core gives up local control of Oklahoma's public schools," Fallin said. "The words 'Common Core' in Oklahoma are now so divisive that they have become a distraction that interferes with our mission of providing the best education possible for our children. If we are going to improve our standards in the classroom, now is the time to get to work."

Others believe Fallin, who is up for re-election in November, was reacting to political pressure.

"Governor Fallin once supported the ambitious Common Core State Standards because she knew they were necessary to put Oklahoma's children on a path to a better future," [said Carmel Martin, executive vice president of policy at the Center for American Progress](#). "Her decision represents yet another example of tea party tactics aimed at scoring political points on the backs of our nation's kids prevailing over a practical bipartisan coalition made up of business organizations, the civil rights community, military leaders, teachers, and parents."

The reaction from the business community was also negative.

"Governor Fallin's decision to sign HB 3399 into law is a massive disappointment to the educators, administrators and business leaders who have fought for years to ensure that Oklahoma's students reap the benefits of internationally-benchmarked but locally-controlled academic standards," [said Tulsa Regional Chamber President and CEO Mike Neal](#). "Governor Fallin and the Oklahoma Legislature have reneged on their promise to Oklahoma's students, bending to political hysteria at the expense of our children and the quality of our future workforce."

[U.S. Chamber of Commerce Vice President of Education Policy Cheryl Oldham](#) said Fallin's decision "essentially sets the state back four years and marks a conscious step away from high academic standards in favor of lower standards."

The legislation Fallin signed directs the Oklahoma Board of Education to create new, more rigorous standards by August 2016. Upon signing the legislation, Fallin said that Oklahoma was "capable of developing [its] own academic standards that will be better than Common Core."

Yet to be seen is whether Oklahoma's experience in writing its own standards will mirror that of Indiana's, which became the first state to pull out of the Common Core when **Governor Mike Pence (R)** signed a law on March 24 requiring the state to adopt its own academic standards. On April 28, the Indiana State Board of Education adopted new standards in English language arts and math that are a "hybrid of the common core and prior Indiana academic standards," according to [Education Week reporter Andrew Ujifusa](#), who has been following the Common Core very closely through his "State EdWatch" blog. Ujifusa adds that analysts have remarked that Indiana's new standards are "in large part very similar, if not identical, to the common core in many areas."

[In a statement on states withdrawing from the Common Core](#), **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, said he "[prefers] to think of the glass as thirty-five to forty states full rather than three to four empty."

“The knowledge and skills that students need to be ready for college and a career do not differ from state to state,” Wise said. “That’s why I think states withdrawing from the Common Core to develop their own standards will eventually come back to the standards or something very close to them, as was Indiana’s experience. Even states that say they are rejecting the Common Core are doing it as ‘repeal-lite.’”



COMMON CORE AND OTHER STATE STANDARDS: New Survey of School Superintendents Association Finds Optimism About New Standards, but Concerns About Implementation

More than half (55.3 percent) of superintendents and administrators are at least two years into implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other college- and career-ready standards while 7.1 percent will begin implementing them in the 2014–15 school year, according to a new survey released on June 3 by AASA, the School Superintendents Association. More than 90 percent (92.5 percent) believe the new standards are more rigorous than previous standards while only 2.1 percent see them as less rigorous. When asked about implementation, superintendents report several obstacles, including assessments (73.3 percent), teacher training and professional development (65.2 percent), instructional materials (58.2 percent), and state support (52.3 percent).

“The findings in this survey clearly back the position of AASA—slow down and get it right,” said [**Daniel A. Domenech, executive director of AASA**](#). “This report shows that superintendents across the country agree that the new standards present an opportunity to improve student outcomes but only given enough time and resources.”

Even as some state lawmakers are distancing themselves from the assessments, most superintendents do not think that their state will pull out of the CCSS, the report finds. Of superintendents in Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, and Oklahoma, 74.8 percent say their state would “probably” or “definitely not” withdraw from the CCSS; only 3.9 percent say their state will probably pull out of the standards.

When asked about new teaching materials and textbooks, 79.8 percent of respondents say that materials have been difficult to find. “Our members have reported that they are not finding curricula are actually aligned to the new standards,” the report notes. “Companies have been marketing ‘Common Core–aligned’ materials that researchers find are also largely not aligned with the standards. The texts the researchers reviewed were found to not differ greatly from previous, pre-CCSS, texts; they lacked the higher-level thinking required by CCSS, and failed to cover 10 to 15 percent of the material stipulated in the CCSS.”

With proper texts and funding for new materials difficult to come by, teachers frequently must “produce and piece together their own materials and texts, while developing a new curriculum and implementing the new standards,” the report notes. “This reiterates the need for more time to properly implement the standards and iron out issues before adding the high-stakes testing.”

Regarding the new online assessments, only 9.7 percent of respondents say it is going “very smoothly,” while 60.3 percent say it is going with “some” or “great difficulty.” However, the

report adds that a major problem with the new assessments is the lack of necessary technology and bandwidth, rather than the test themselves. It cites a recent [Education Week article](#) on the trial run of tests designed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, finding that students believe the tests were harder than previous tests, but they enjoyed the style of the tests more than previous standardized tests.

Specifically, 41.9 percent of respondents say schools in their state are not ready to implement the online assessment while 35.9 percent say their state lacks the infrastructure to support online assessments. Only 10.2 percent of respondents say their state is “fully prepared in both funding and bandwidth capacity to implement online assessments” and only 35.7 percent say the same about their school district. The report notes that increasing the amount of money for the E-rate program, which provides discounted internet access to schools and libraries, “could help these technology issues.”

When asked about the politics surrounding the standards, 73.3 percent of respondents believe the political debate has “gotten in the way of successful implementation,” according to the report. “The political backlash mostly stems from misunderstanding and misinformation, especially of the relationship between the standards and testing,” the report notes. “By serving as a scapegoat for all of the problems in education throughout the country, the new standards are attacked daily, and parents and other members of the community are damaging the chances of a smooth transition to the new standards.”

When responses were broken out between districts implementing the CCSS and those implementing other new college- and career-ready standards, the report finds that CCSS respondents “see the new standards as more rigorous than non-CCSS respondents, and respondents in high-poverty districts see them as a more significant change than respondents in low-poverty districts.” Specifically, 94 percent of CCSS respondents say that the new standards are “significantly” more rigorous, compared to only 78.3 percent of those working with new standards other than the CCSS.

When broken out by income, 55.8 percent of high-poverty districts say the move to the new standards is “significantly” more rigorous than the previous standards, compared only 23.2 percent of low-poverty districts,² as shown in the table to the right taken from the report.

How dramatically districts are changing		
	Low-poverty	High-poverty
More rigorous (significantly)	23.2%	55.8%
More rigorous (moderately)	69.5%	38%
No change	4.9%	3.7%
Less rigorous (significantly or moderately)	2.4%	2.2%

The report, *Common Core and Other State Standards: Superintendents Feel Optimism, Concern and Lack of Support*, is based on a survey of 525 superintendents and administrators representing forty-eight states in April 2014.

Common Core and Other State Standards is available for download at http://aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/AASA_CCSS_Report.pdf.

² The report defines high-poverty school districts as those where at least 60 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL). In low-poverty districts, 0 to 19 percent of students are eligible for FRPL.



THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE CONSENSUS REPORT: New Report Offers Comprehensive Plan on Improving Discipline While Minimizing Dependence on Suspension, Expulsion, and Arrest

A new report from the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center offers a comprehensive plan for educators, health officials, law enforcement agencies, juvenile justice officials, and others on how to improve school climate and address student misbehavior while keeping students engaged and providing a safe learning environment for all. The report, *The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged*, is based on a consensus derived from three years of work and interviews with more than 700 individuals representing school administrators, teachers, behavioral health professionals, police, court leaders, probation officials, juvenile correctional administrators, parents, students, researchers, and policymakers from across the country.

“Anyone who wants to make students feel safer in school, improve high school graduation rates, and close the achievement gap needs to have a plan to reduce the number of youth who are suspended from school,” said **Michael Thompson, director of the CSG Justice Center**. “This report provides that roadmap, and it is endorsed by a broad spectrum of interest groups that have a significant stake in this issue.”

The issue of school discipline has moved to the forefront as the consequences of suspensions and expulsions have become clearer and new data has revealed stark disparities in how discipline policies have been applied. According to the report, millions of students—mostly in middle and high schools—are removed from their classrooms each year for minor misconduct. A disproportionately large percentage of those disciplined are students of color; students with disabilities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth. Suspended students are at significantly higher risk of falling behind academically, dropping out, and coming into contact with the juvenile justice system.

Increasingly, schools and school districts have started exploring alternative ways to discipline students that “hold youth accountable, address victims’ needs, and effectively improve both student conduct and adult responses,” the report notes. Most importantly, these approaches help keep students in school and engaged.

According to the report, local and state governments must help schools reduce the number of students suspended, expelled, and arrested while also providing conditions for learning in which all students feel safe, welcome, and supported. Meeting these goals, the report notes, “requires the combination of a positive school climate, tiered levels of behavioral interventions, and a partnership between education, policy, and court officials that is dedicated to preventing youth arrests or referrals to the juvenile justice system for minor school-based offenses.”

The report offers real-world guidance to local, state, and federal officials on how to support educators and minimize school systems’ dependence on suspension, expulsion, and arrest to manage student behavior. It also examines how schools can implement these solutions while also promoting safe and productive learning environments that improve academic outcomes for all students while reducing their involvement in the juvenile justice system.

“There is no question that there are times when removing students from the classroom or school campus is necessary in the interest of safety or order,” the report notes. “When suspensions and expulsions become the default response to misbehavior, however, students do not feel safe and supported, the achievement gap persists, other educational goals are undermined, and more kids become caught up in the juvenile justice system.”

The complete report is available at <http://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/school-discipline-consensus-report/>.



THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION 2014: Annual Report Provides Updated Data on Education Attainment, Employment, and More than Forty Other Education Data Points

Between 1990 and 2013, the percentage of twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-olds with a high school diploma or its equivalent increased from 86 to 90 percent while the percentage of those who earned a bachelor’s degree or higher increased from 23 to 34 percent, according to *The Condition of Education 2014*, released on May 29 by the National Center for Education Statistics.

The report also finds narrowing gaps between the percentages of white students and students of color with a high school diploma or its equivalent, as shown in the table below.

Percentage of 25- to 29-Year Olds With a High School Diploma or Its Equivalent

Student Subgroup	1990 Rate	1990 Gap	2013 Rate	2013 Gap
White	90%	N/A	94%	N/A
Black	82%	-8 percentage points	90%	-4 percentage points
Hispanic	58%	-32 percentage points	76%	-18 percentage points
Asian/Pacific Islander	92%	+2 percentage points	95%	+1 percentage point

Although the gap has narrowed at the high school level, the report finds it has widened at the postsecondary level, as shown in the table below.

Percentage of 25- to 29-Year-Olds With a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher

Student Subgroup	1990 Rate	1990 Gap	2013 Rate	2013 Gap
White	26%	N/A	40%	N/A
Black	13%	-13 percentage points	20%	-20 percentage points
Hispanic	8%	-18 percentage points	16%	-24 percentage points
Asian/Pacific Islander	43%	+17 percentage points	58%	+18 percentage points

The growing gaps in postsecondary completion between white students and students of color are especially disturbing considering the growing importance of some form of postsecondary education in today’s economy. According to the report, individuals aged twenty-five to thirty-

four with a bachelor's degree (\$46,900) earned 57 percent more than high school completers (\$30,000) and more than twice as much as high school dropouts (\$22,900).

The report also reveals a steady decline in employment for individuals with less education. From 2002 to 2012, the percentage of young adults without a high school credential who were employed full-time declined from 60 percent to 49 percent; for those with a high school credential, the percentage declined from 64 percent to 60 percent. For individuals with a bachelor's degree, the rate increased from 71 percent to 73 percent.

These trends in employment were confirmed by the [May 2014 jobs report](#) released by the U.S. Department of Labor on June 6. According to the jobs report, the unemployment rate for individuals aged twenty-five or higher with at least a bachelor's degree was 3.2 percent. The unemployment rates for high school graduates (6.5 percent) and high school dropouts (9.1 percent) were roughly two and three times higher, respectively.

The Condition of Education 2014 also examines the impact on employment of the recent economic recession from 2008 to 2010. "In general, individuals with at least a bachelor's degree faced a lesser impact on employment from the recession than did high school completers and those who did not complete high school," the report notes. "From 2008 to 2010, the 14.3 percentage-point increase (from 18.2 to 32.4 percent) in the unemployment rate for males who did not complete high school and the 10.5 percentage-point increase (from 13.3 to 23.7 percent) for male high school completers were higher than the 5.1 percentage-point increase (from 4.7 to 9.8 percent) for males with at least a bachelor's degree."

The Condition of Education is a congressionally mandated annual report to policymakers about the progress of education in the United States. This year's edition includes forty-two different indicators on topics such as population characteristics, elementary and secondary education, and postsecondary education.

The Condition of Education 2014 is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014083.pdf>.

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