

Growing Awareness, Growing Support: Teacher and Voter Understanding of the Common Core State Standards & Assessments

Since June 2010, 46 states and Washington DC have chosen to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) – K-12 standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy developed through a multi-state initiative led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. As implementation of the standards is underway, new common assessments also are being developed that will align to the CCSS. Together these Common Core State Standards and assessments will provide an important foundation for transforming education and making college and career readiness a reality for all students.

These new standards and assessments will directly impact over 42 million students in K-12 public schools and 2.7 million educators teaching in those schools across the country. Through nationally commissioned polling, Achieve has been monitoring voter and teacher awareness and support for the CCSS. The first national poll was conducted in August 2011¹ followed by a newly released poll, conducted in May 2012.²

KEY FINDINGS

- Voters and teachers strongly support common standards and assessments. Voter support remains strong regardless of age, education level, race, ethnicity, or party affiliation.
- There has been a significant increase in awareness of the Common Core State Standards among teachers since August 2011, while awareness of the CCSS continues to be very low among voters.
- The more teachers know about the CCSS, the more positive impression they have of the standards. Similarly, voters who are aware of the Common Core hold a net favorable view of the standards.
- A majority of both voters and teachers support the CCSS assessments and support holds when more information on the assessments is provided.
- However, there are mixed reactions to some specific components of the new assessments, although voters and teachers are fairly consistent in their views on the highest and lowest rated assessment components.

It is not surprising that public awareness of the Common Core State Standards remains low given that implementation efforts are just now underway for the standards, and that the assessments are under development. It is also not surprising – but it is heartening – to see awareness growing steadily among teachers, with support holding strong, as implementation takes root across states. The challenge is to maintain public – and educators’ – enthusiasm for the CCSS and related policies as they move from being an “idea” to becoming real in classrooms. It is clear that getting more – and more frequent – information into the hands of all stakeholders is critical to building and maintaining support over the course of the standards’ and assessments’ implementation.

¹ On behalf of Achieve Inc., Public Opinion Strategies conducted a national survey of N=800 registered voters and N=160 public school teachers. The survey was conducted between August 14-16, 2011, and has a margin of error of $\pm 3.5\%$ for voters and $\pm 7.8\%$ for teachers. For more, see www.achieve.org/PublicPerceptionCCSS

² On behalf of Achieve Inc., Public Opinion Strategies and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research conducted a national survey of N=1,000 registered voters and N=500 public school teachers. The survey was conducted between May 6-10, 2012, and has a margin of error of $\pm 3.5\%$ for voters and $\pm 4.4\%$ for teachers. For more, see www.achieve.org/GrowingAwarenessCCSS

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Common Core State Standards: Low Voter Awareness; Growing Awareness among Teachers

Compared to August last year, there has been little change in how much (and how many) voters know about the Common Core State Standards. Awareness is much higher among public school teachers and has been on the rise since last year, which is to be expected given the investment many states, districts, and organizations have made in professional development around the new standards.

In August 2011, more than two-thirds of teachers (68%) reported hearing “a lot” or “some” about the Common Core State Standards, with nearly half (46%) having heard “a lot.” Today, almost nine in ten teachers say they have heard “a lot” (65%) or “some” (22%) about the standards.

How Much Seen/Read/Heard About The CCSS	Voters		Teachers	
	Aug 2011	May 2012	Aug 2011	May 2012
Nothing	60%	60%	13%	6%
Not Much	21%	19%	17%	7%
Some	13%	14%	22%	22%
A lot	6%	7%	46%	65%

While voters who already had heard about the Common Core State Standards were somewhat mixed in their assessment of them last August (37% favorable, 34% unfavorable); today they hold a net favorable opinion (42% favorable, 28% unfavorable) of the standards.

Survey respondents were read a brief description of the CCSS: *“These new standards have been set to internationally competitive levels in English and math. This means that students may be more challenged by the material they study, and the tests they take will measure more advanced concepts and require students to show their work.”*

When provided this brief description of the Common Core State Standards, 77% of voters supported implementing them, further reinforcing the conclusion that more knowledge about the CCSS leads to a more positive view of the standards. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of teachers also support the standards (72%), slightly down from last August.

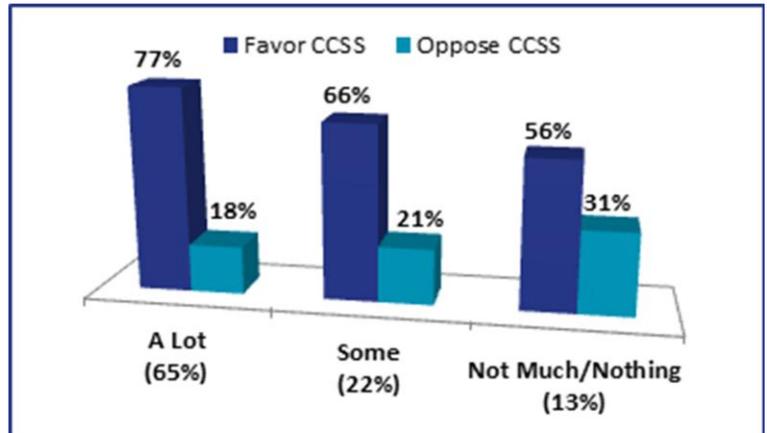
Importantly, the more teachers know about the Common Core State Standards, the more positive their impression, with the highest favorability ratings among those educators who know “a lot” about the CCSS. This reinforces the importance of regular and sustained communication about the CCSS and related policies as implementation continues. The data also suggest that opposition among teachers is somewhat concentrated among those with the least amount of knowledge about the standards.

CCSS	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
All Teachers	33%	72%
All Voters	45%	77%
Male	46%	74%
Female	44%	79%
18-44	44%	78%
45+	45%	75%
White	43%	76%
African American	45%	81%
Less Than College	46%	77%
College +	44%	76%
Republican	44%	75%
Independent	46%	75%
Democrat	45%	82%
Parents	46%	76%
Non-Parents	45%	77%
Urban	49%	76%
Suburb	47%	78%
Rural	36%	70%

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CCSS Assessments: Majority Support among Voters and Teachers

Almost three-quarters of voters (74%) and nearly two-thirds of teachers (64%) support implementing the CCSS assessments – as described to survey respondents as new tests that are “being designed to help determine what students know and can do, and whether they are on track to graduate from high school ready for college and career. Over time, these new tests would replace the current end of the year state tests being given here in (INSERT STATE).”



Favor/Oppose Implementing CCSS among Teachers By (How Much) Seen, Read or Heard of CCSS

Once again, the more teachers know about the Common Core State Standards the more likely they are to favor implementation of the CCSS assessments. For example, 70% of the 65% of teachers who have heard “a lot” about the standards support their implementation, a percentage that drops to 46% of the 13% of teachers who have heard “not much/nothing” about the standards. This is likely because the assessments are viewed by informed educators as a natural component of the standards’ implementation process.

Among voters, the assessments – like the standards – garner majority support regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, education level, partisan affiliation, or region of the country.

CCSS Assessments: Shared Support and Concern for Some Components

Voters and teachers alike welcome various elements of the common assessments being contemplated by the states developing the PARCC assessments: that results are available within one to two weeks so educators can adjust their teaching; that the first optional test will be diagnostic and used to identify if students are “on track” or need assistance; and that the tests would be the same across participating states so that student, school, and district scores can be easily compared.

Voters also respond well to the concept that the second optional test would require students to show their work in a way that they can demonstrate their knowledge in math and English and their ability to

Common Assessments	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
All Voters	40%	74%
<i>Male</i>	41%	75%
<i>Female</i>	39%	73%
<i>18-44</i>	36%	74%
<i>45+</i>	43%	73%
<i>White</i>	38%	75%
<i>African American</i>	43%	68%
<i>Less Than College</i>	43%	75%
<i>College +</i>	36%	72%
<i>Republican</i>	43%	80%
<i>Independent</i>	38%	69%
<i>Democrat</i>	42%	76%
<i>Parents</i>	40%	75%
<i>Non-Parents</i>	40%	74%
<i>Urban</i>	41%	74%
<i>Suburb</i>	41%	77%
All Teachers	25%	64%
<i>A lot about CCSS</i>	31%	70%
<i>Some about CCSS</i>	14%	58%
<i>Not much/ Nothing about CCSS</i>	9%	46%

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apply it in real world situations; while teachers appreciate that the tests are being developed by states working with education and test experts, including classroom teachers.

However, there are some elements of the PARCC assessments that raise concern: that there are four tests/they will be given throughout the year; that the two required tests would be used for school, state and federal accountability purposes, and may also be used to evaluate teachers; and that students would take all the tests on a computer. While voters still react favorably to these components, they rate them lower than other components; and teachers are more skeptical towards them.

<i>Highest Rated Assessment Components</i>	<i>Lowest Rated Assessment Components</i>
<i>Test results are available within 1-2 weeks</i>	<i>Required tests will be for accountability purposes</i>
<i>First optional test will be diagnostic</i>	<i>Tests will be given throughout the year</i>
<i>Tests would be the same across states</i>	<i>Students will take all the tests on the computer</i>

It is important to note that after hearing about the various features of the common assessment system – even those components voters and educators find skeptical – support actually increased slightly for the implementation of the new assessments, going up to 82% of voters and 66% of teachers (up from 74% and 64% of teachers when only the general description was provided).

Implications: What Do These Results Mean For Implementing the CCSS and Common Assessments?

The survey data suggest there is continuing solid support among voters and teachers for the Common Core State Standards. Additionally, this first measure of attitudes toward CCSS-aligned assessments also suggests a solid baseline of support as the new tests are developed.

However, states are still in the early phases of implementation. While voters and teachers may support the idea and goals of common standards and assessments today, this support may soften as implementation makes the idea of CCSS and related policies real and voters become aware of the changes that must occur in schools – and specifically their children’s schools – to meet raised expectations.

It is critical to sustain and even ramp up efforts to educate teachers – including the details of the state’s implementation plan and what teachers can expect in the coming school year and beyond, particularly with regard to professional development, aligned instructional materials, and opportunities for cross-state collaboration. The more educators know about the CCSS, the more supportive they tend to be, both of the new standards and assessments, which is why the state’s implementation plan and communications plan for the CCSS and common assessments must be well aligned and integrated.

Voters also need to become more aware of the CCSS and what it means for students and parents. What will be different? How will the expectations change? What kind of support will be available for struggling students? Voters, like teachers, also need to understand how these changes fit into the broader reform agenda, why it’s important, and the value of the new standards to our education system, economy, and country.

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Currently there is broad support for the CCSS and common assessments 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 students, families, 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 consortia 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