

KDP Reasoned VOICE provides current information for educators and interested stakeholders to reference when advocating a position on an educational issue. Developed by members of the Kappa Delta Pi Public Policy Committee, KDP Reasoned VOICE is divided into five sections: (1) summary of current events related to the topic; (2) key background information related to the topic; (3) expert opinions; (4) Kappa Delta Pi's position on the topic; and (5) references and further reading. Advocates are encouraged to conduct their own investigations to verify and supplement this information.

The authors of this issue of KDP Reasoned VOICE are **Nathan Bond** and **Raymond Dagenais** (Research and Publications Subcommittee Co-Chairs) with other members of the KDP Public Policy Committee, including Marcia Bolton, Carrie Gaffney, Nel Noddings, Taryn Ortiz, Anna Shults, Faye Snodgrass, and William Sterrett.

ISSUE NO. 2: COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Current Events

The advent of the accountability movement has increased attention on content standards, student achievement, and teacher effectiveness. Although these issues have provided a focus, educators and interested stakeholders have not been united in terms of what these components mean. As a result, many people are frustrated by the “apples and oranges” dialogue that has resulted from various states’ efforts. In 2009, an “unprecedented effort” among state governors and state commissioners of education resulted in the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), which has been widely adopted and implemented across the nation (Kendall, 2011, p. 1). The Common Core offers the possibility for shared dialogue and effort in realizing improved teaching and learning, and what this means for today’s educator is a question of utmost importance.

Key Background Information

What are the Common Core State Standards?

According to the Common Core website, “The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.”

Information retrieved from www.corestandards.org

Who supports the Common Core State Standards Movement?

More than 60 organizations and groups support the movement. Supporters include: The College Board, the American Federation of Teachers, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the International Reading Association, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, the National Education Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, ASCD, the National PTA, and the U.S. Department of Education.

Information retrieved from www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/statements-of-support

What are some key changes with the Common Core Standards?

The new standards raise a number of questions and challenges for schools: reading across the curriculum, explicit teaching of writing, more informational text, aligned curriculum materials, higher standards, the third-grade threshold, and professional development (Gewertz, 2012). David Pearson, a professor at Berkeley, states, "I think these standards have the potential to lead the parade in a different direction, toward taking as evidence of your reading ability not your score on a specific skill test or how many letter sounds you can identify or ideas you can recall from a passage, but the ability to use the information you gain from reading, the fruits of your labor, to apply to some new situations or problem or project. That's a huge change."

What is the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?

According to the Smarter Balanced website, "Smarter Balanced is a state-led consortium working collaboratively to develop next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. The consortium involves educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups in a transparent and consensus-driven process to help all students thrive in a knowledge-driven global economy. The consortium's projects are funded through a four-year, \$175 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, comprising 99 percent of activity resources, with the remaining support provided through generous contributions of charitable foundations."

Information retrieved from www.smarterbalanced.org

Which U.S. states are involved in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?

The following 25 states are participating in the consortium: Alabama, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

What are some of the questions associated with the Common Core?

The Common Core website addresses some of the questions that are frequently asked about the content and quality of the math and English Language Arts standards, the process by which the standards were developed, and the implementation of the standards.

Information retrieved from www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/myths-vs-facts

What are some differences between K–5 and 6–12 Common Core English Language Arts Standards?

The Common Core Standards require that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language become a shared responsibility within a school or institution. The standards for K–5 reflect the fact that most or even all of the instruction a student receives at these levels comes from one teacher alone and, as such, include expectations for the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in a range of subject areas. Literacy standards at these grade levels are not mentioned.

At the secondary level (grades 6–12), the standards are divided into two sections, one for English Language Arts and the other for History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical subjects. The standards are divided this way to reflect the belief that teachers in other subjects play a role in the development of literacy. In the secondary grades, those who teach the subjects of ELA and Reading will use the Common Core ELA Standards as their content area standards. Those who teach Social Studies, Science, and all other technical subjects must use their state content area

standards while embedding and infusing the Common Core Literacy standards. This approach forces the concept of interdisciplinary instruction of literacy where all teachers will become reading and literacy teachers, which is the sole concept of the literacy standards within the Common Core Standards Initiative.

Information retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>

What Experts Say

In Support of the Common Core Standards

In addition to the more than 60 organizations that support the movement to Common Core Standards, McTighe and Wiggins (2012) suggest five big ideas about how the Common Core State Standards can translate to classroom practices. In their article "From Common Core Standards to Curriculum: Five Big Ideas," they explain potential misconceptions and offer recommendations for designing a coherent curriculum and assessment system for realizing the promise of the standards.

Big Idea #1: "The Common Core Standards have new emphases and require careful reading" (p. 1). Although many teachers claim that they already teach the standards, the Common Core differs from the existing curriculum and seeks to prepare students for post-secondary education. If teachers do not thoroughly understand the standards and adjust their instruction accordingly, then no real improvements will likely occur.

Big Idea #2: "Standards are not curriculum" (p. 3). In other words, the Common Core State Standards are the *what*, not the *how to*; they specify outcomes in English Language Arts and Math without dictating teaching methods. Educators decide how to design engaging, effective teaching methods and materials that will help their students to meet the standards.

Big Idea #3: "Standards need to be 'unpacked'" (p. 4). States and districts need to break the standards into four broad categories: long-term transfer goals, overarching understandings, overarching essential questions, and a set of recurring cornerstone tasks.

Big Idea #4: "A coherent curriculum is mapped backwards from desired performances" (p. 6). "The key to avoiding an overly discrete and fragmented curriculum is to design backwards from complex performances that require content," note the authors (p. 6). "Thus, the first question for curriculum writers is not: What will we teach and when should we teach it?" They continue, "To design a school curriculum backwards from the goal of autonomous transfer requires a deliberate and transparent plan for helping the student rely less and less on teacher hand-holding and scaffolds. Accordingly, we should see an increase, by design, in problem- and project-based learning, small-group inquiries, Socratic Seminars, and independent studies as learners progress through the curriculum across the grades" (p. 9).

Big Idea #5: "Standards come to life through assessments" (p. 9). The new standards are a set of criteria for building and testing local assessments. The standards should not be tested one by one; rather, rich, complex performance tasks can assess a number of standards. These are the kinds of assessments currently being designed by the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia.

Information retrieved from

http://grantwiggins.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/mctighe_wiggins_final_common_core_standards.pdf

Against the Common Core Standards

Some education experts remain skeptical about the implementation of the Common Core Standards, including Diane Ravitch, Stephen Krashen, *Education Week* founder Ronald A. Wolk, and Alfie Kohn, citing a lack of evidence about the standards' effectiveness.

1994 KDP Laureate Nel Noddings wrote, "The Common Core is a costly mistake. It is hard to oppose the Common Core State Standards when many highly respected colleagues have worked so hard to produce them. However, I believe the CCSS movement will do little to improve education, and it continues to consume funds and time that would better be employed on other projects.

"I will comment here on just one great fault in the CCSS: *Writing down exactly what students should learn and be able to do does not ensure that they will do so.* We should have learned this from past experience. Remember the 'behavioral objectives' movement? The follow-up with 'competencies'? And, in teacher education, 'dispositions'? We still do not know how to teach many of the things we so easily establish as desired outcomes. Further, we seem unwilling to admit that we may need to establish very different goals for students with different aptitudes and interests."

More Pros and Cons of Common Core Standards

Derrick Meador, an administrator and author, outlines the pros and cons of the Common Core Standards. In his online article, he presents 10 arguments for each side of the debate.

Information retrieved from <http://teaching.about.com/od/assess/f/What-Are-Some-Pros-And-Cons-Of-The-Common-Core-Standards.htm>

KDP's Views on Common Core: Are We There Yet?

Two years ago, Kappa Delta Pi established the Public Policy and Advocacy Committee. One of the committee's first tasks was to craft a set of public policy statements that reflected the long-standing foundational beliefs of KDP. In the profession during this time, educators and other stakeholders have focused more attention on the expectations and standards regarding effective teaching and learning. As a result, the Common Core Standards and alternative sets of expectations emerged from this work. It is interesting to consider the origins of the current work. As far back as 1911, KDP established beliefs regarding teaching and learning that are evident in the current standards efforts.

Examples of KDP Public Policy Stances and Position Statements:

<http://www.kdp.org/aboutkdp/positionpapers.php>

KDP believes:

- Student achievement should be viewed in terms of social/interpersonal, critical thinking, and communication skills.
- Educators incorporate global learning communities to leverage achievement in our 21st century learning environment.
- Students should have access to appropriate resources and effective instruction. (Kappa Delta Pi Public Policy Committee, n.d.)

The following examples of current expectations and standards relay a similar message.

- “Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.” (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1)
- “Finally, science is fundamentally a social enterprise, and scientific knowledge advances through collaboration and in the context of a social system with well-developed norms.” (Board on Science Education, 2012, p. 27)
- “Use appropriate tools strategically.” (Common Core State Standards for Mathematics: Standards for Mathematical Practice #5)

Current attempts to define expectations and standards have their basis in beliefs such as those articulated by KDP. Future efforts may look like a tapestry woven from fundamental beliefs and experiential applications of standards expectations. In response to the question, “Are we there yet?” the answer is “probably not.”

References and Further Reading

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