

# Common Core: Do What It Takes Before High Stakes

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America's public education system could be on the brink of a once-in-a-generation revolution. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for math and English language arts. The CCSS are a sharp departure from the too-common superficial sprint through huge volumes of material, asking students and teachers instead to focus on in-depth explorations of essential skills and knowledge. If implemented properly—namely, by ensuring that frontline educators are prepared to teach these rigorous new standards—we can provide all children with the problem-solving, critical-thinking and teamwork skills they need to compete in today's changing world.

But that's a big "if." As I recently told the Association for a Better New York, the Common Core standards will either transform the very DNA of teaching and learning, or they will end up in the dustbin of abandoned reforms. Unfortunately, many policymakers are proceeding recklessly, in ways that make the second outcome more likely.

In New York, assessments have been fast-tracked before other vital pieces are in place. Last month, students in grades 3 through 8 took math and English tests on material they may have never even seen. New curricula tied to the standards were announced just one month before the tests were administered. The failure to provide students and educators with the necessary time and support to adapt to these ambitious new requirements has caused heart-wrenching, destructive anxiety.

Even though many students were assessed on skills and content they hadn't been taught, test results in New York can be used to determine if students advance or are held back, to designate school performance, and to target schools for closure. They will constitute 20 percent of teachers' evaluations. Moving in this manner is an abdication of our moral responsibility to kids, particularly poor kids.

Developments like these, which certainly are not limited to New York, are why I am calling for a moratorium—not on the standards, or even on the testing, but on the high stakes attached to all of this—until the standards have been properly implemented and field-tested. Students still will be assessed. Teachers still will be evaluated. A moratorium on consequences in these transitional years will allow for midcourse corrections, as needed, in aligning the standards, curriculum, teacher training, instruction and assessments.

AFT members overwhelmingly support the Common Core standards—75 percent said so in a recent poll we conducted—but they also

## We can reverse the troubling trend toward low skills and high inequality.

say they haven't had enough time to put them into practice or share strategies with colleagues. Educators have joined parents, community members and opinion leaders to send more than 36,000 letters supporting the moratorium to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and to their state commissioners of education.

The AFT is working to help the Common Core succeed in classrooms across the country. [ShareMyLesson.com](http://ShareMyLesson.com)

is our online platform where educators can access and share their best teaching resources, with thousands of resources aligned to the Common Core standards. The AFT has trained hundreds of teacher-trainers in Common Core-aligned courses, and the AFT Innovation Fund provides grants to AFT affiliates trying to realize the promise of these standards.

The Common Core sets rigorous standards for all children, whether from Bed-Stuy or Beverly Hills, but high expectations must be matched with high levels of support, particularly for high-needs students. Poverty or near-poverty plagues nearly 1 in 2 children in America, and this week leading groups of pediatricians called for concerted efforts to aggressively combat this scourge. Wraparound services, early childhood programs and community schools—all of which help disadvantaged students reach their potential—are central to this mission.

We are engaged in a fight for the heart and soul of public education. As Jeff Bryant wrote this week on the Campaign for America's Future blog, "Fights to preserve and strengthen public schools ... are connected to much larger struggles over what kind of nation America is becoming." Proper implementation of the CCSS—and equal opportunities for all children to succeed—can help reverse the troubling trend toward low skills and high inequality that for too long has done a disservice to our students and our country.



Weingarten speaking to the Association for a Better New York about the Common Core State Standards.

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