

## *Voter Perceptions: Common Core State Standards & Tests*

Since June 2010, 46 states and Washington DC have adopted 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. Implementation of the standards is underway in all of these states with 35 states planning to have fully implemented the standards by the end of the 2013-14 school year, and the remaining 11 states with plans for full implementation by the end of the 2014-15 school year. The new CCSS-aligned common assessments currently under development and being field tested this spring will be ready for full administration in the 2014-15 school year.

These standards and assessments will impact students in K-12 public schools across the United States and the educators teaching in those schools. Through nationally commissioned polling, Achieve has been monitoring voter awareness and support for the CCSS. The first national poll was conducted in August 2011<sup>1</sup>, the second poll was conducted in May 2012<sup>2</sup>, and this third poll was conducted in November 2013<sup>3</sup>.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- For the third straight year, there is majority support for states to have the same standards and tests rather than their own standards and tests.
- Most voters are still unaware of the Common Core State Standards, and among those who have heard at least something, opinions are nearly equally divided.
- However, upon hearing a brief description, a solid majority of voters support implementing the CCSS standards and tests.
- For the first time, this research looked at testing and accountability after the Common Core State Standards have been implemented. The majority of voters agree that if test scores drop as the new CCSS assessments are implemented it is only to be expected since students and teachers need time to adjust to the new assessments, and we should give the standards and tests time to work.
- Most voters would favor giving teachers and students time to adjust to the new expectations before there are consequences for test results, with most voters favoring a one to two year adjustment.
- Still, voters want teacher evaluations and student testing to continue during the adjustment period.

Public awareness of the Common Core State Standards remains low despite the fact that the standards are currently being implemented in classrooms across 35 states and the new common assessments are nearing completion. Even with low levels of awareness about the standards, a plurality of voters support implementation. And, when voters are read a brief description of the Common Core State Standards, a strong majority of voters say they favor implementing the standards in their state. The challenge is to

---

<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.achieve.org/PublicPerceptionCCSS).

<sup>2</sup> 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  $\pm 3.1\%$  for voters and  $\pm 4.4\%$  for teachers. For more, see [www.achieve.org/GrowingAwarenessCCSS](http://www.achieve.org/GrowingAwarenessCCSS).

<sup>3</sup> On behalf of Achieve Inc., Public Opinion Strategies and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research conducted a national survey of N=800 registered voters. The survey was conducted between November 14-18, 2013, and has a margin of error of  $\pm 3.5\%$  for voters. For more, see <http://www.achieve.org/VoterPerceptionsCCSS>.

## Voter Perceptions: Common Core State Standards & Tests

continue to educate the public about the CCSS and related policies as the standards become a reality in the classroom and teachers, students, and parents adjust to the new, higher expectations demanded by the standards. It is clear that getting more – and more frequent – information into the hands of all stakeholders is critical to building support over the course of the standards’ and assessments’ implementation. Evidence found in this research makes it plain that the public is hearing something about the standards, but the source of this information is often hostile to the Common Core State Standards. This survey makes clear that it’s incumbent upon supporters to make the case for the standards to voters.

### Common Core State Standards: Low, but Increasing Voter Awareness

Compared to previous data, there has been an increase in how much (and how many) voters know about the Common Core State Standards. Only 39% of voters reported knowing “Nothing” about the standards, down from 60% in May 2012 and 16% of voters reported knowing “A lot” about the standards, an increase from 7% in May 2012. However, of those who are aware of the Common Core State Standards (N=483), impressions of the standards are mixed (37% favorable, 40% unfavorable). It is likely this mixed number is attributable to CCSS opponents who in the past year have made their opposition known through all media outlets, leaving a more negative “impression” among voters.

How Much Seen/Read/Heard About The CCSS	Voters		
	August 2011	May 2012	November 2013
Nothing at all	60%	60%	39%
Not much	21%	19%	24%
Some	13%	14%	21%
A lot	6%	7%	16%

However, when all voters were asked if they favored or opposed implementing the CCSS in their state, 40% were in favor, with 14% strongly favoring implementation, while only 25% were opposed to the standards’ implementation.

To ground the discussion, survey respondents were read a brief description of the CCSS: *“Over the last few years a new set of educational standards were developed for English and math for students in grades K through 12. They are called the Common Core State Standards and are now being taught in classrooms in 45 states and across the country. The standards were developed under the guidance of state governors and state school chiefs who relied on teachers, content experts, and higher education faculty to help draft and review them. The goal of the standards is to help all students have the knowledge and skills they need in English and math so that they will be prepared as they leave high school and enter the workforce or go on to college, and that all students would be held to the same expectations, regardless of their state, school, or district.”*

When provided this brief description of the Common Core State Standards, 69% of voters supported implementing them, with 36% strongly favoring the standards, reinforcing the conclusion that more knowledge about the CCSS leads to a more positive view of the standards. Only 23% of voters opposed implementing the standards with 8% not knowing.

By almost a two-to-one margin, a majority of voters sided with supporters when provided with the key arguments of the CCSS debate. Fifty-nine percent of voters agreed with supporters who believe that the CCSS are *“more challenging for students so that they will be better prepared for college and careers by*

## Voter Perceptions: Common Core State Standards & Tests

*the end of high school...that there has been too much “teaching to the test” in the past and these standards change that by emphasizing real learning and real world skills, like critical thinking and problem solving.”*

Only 31% of voters sided with opponents of the CCSS who contend that the standards have *“not been tested in the classroom and there is no evidence they will work or improve education in our state...that the standards are an attempt to federalize education by imposing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to teaching and measuring student ability.”*

These findings demonstrate the importance of supporters of the CCSS making their case strongly and consistently to voters. With just basic factual information, support numbers rise suggesting that initial “impressions,” even if negative, can change.

### CCSS Assessments: Majority Support among Voters

Two-thirds of voters (66%) supported implementing CCSS assessments – as described to survey respondents as *“new tests that are designed to help determine what students know and can do, and whether they are on track to graduate from high school ready for college or the workforce. Over time, these new tests would replace the current end of year state tests being given here in (INSERT STATE NAME).”* Nearly one-third of voters (31%) strongly favored implementing these new assessments. Only 22% were opposed to new tests.

Support for CCSS When Provided Brief Description	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
<b>All Voters</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<i>Male</i>	<b>32%</b>	<b>65%</b>
<i>Female</i>	<b>39%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<i>18-44</i>	<b>31%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<i>45+</i>	<b>40%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<i>White</i>	<b>31%</b>	<b>67%</b>
<i>African American</i>	<b>53%</b>	<b>81%</b>
<i>Hispanic</i>	<b>48%</b>	<b>77%</b>
<i>Less Than College</i>	<b>38%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<i>College +</i>	<b>32%</b>	<b>65%</b>
<i>Republican</i>	<b>28%</b>	<b>61%</b>
<i>Independent</i>	<b>25%</b>	<b>65%</b>
<i>Democrat</i>	<b>46%</b>	<b>80%</b>
<i>Northeast</i>	<b>37%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<i>Midwest</i>	<b>33%</b>	<b>72%</b>
<i>South</i>	<b>37%</b>	<b>67%</b>
<i>West</i>	<b>34%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<i>Public School Moms</i>	<b>42%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<i>Public School Dads</i>	<b>24%</b>	<b>58%</b>
<i>Teacher/Education Households</i>	<b>30%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<i>Union Households</i>	<b>37%</b>	<b>68%</b>
<i>Support Tea Party</i>	<b>30%</b>	<b>56%</b>
<i>Not Support Tea Party</i>	<b>38%</b>	<b>75%</b>

A majority of voters disagreed that a drop in test scores means the CCSS are not working. Instead, most voters agreed an adjustment period is to be expected and that the standards should be given time to work. Additionally, there was overwhelming support for giving teachers and students time to adjust before there are consequences for the CCSS test results.

When asked *“knowing that test scores may drop as these new standards and tests are implemented, would you favor or oppose giving teachers and students time to adjust to the new expectations before there are consequences for test results?”*, voters were in favor of an adjustment period (81%) with 54% of those voters strongly favoring an adjustment period.

Support for Adjustment Period	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
<b>All Voters</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>81%</b>

Further, when asked about how much time teachers and students should be given to adjust to the new expectations before there are consequences for the results, 31% of voters favor one year, 27% of voters favor two years and 18% of voters favor three years or more.

## Voter Perceptions: Common Core State Standards & Tests

However, a majority of voters (78%) still want teacher evaluations, based at least in part on student test scores, to continue during the Common Core State Standards transition. Of that 78%, 33% would continue teacher evaluations as schools transition because these voters believe the evaluations are necessary to hold schools and teachers accountable.

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

The survey data suggest there is continuing support among voters for the Common Core State Standards.

This new poll was taken during a year when the majority of states are implementing and changing policies. In the 2012 poll report we warned that the high support the standards and assessments enjoyed may change stating, “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.”

As implementation has occurred there has been, in fact, a slight decline in favorability of the standards as expected, though there continues to be strong support for implementation of the standards and common assessments.

Currently there is strong 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. Those who support the CCSS must not only attend to the hard work of implementing the standards and new assessments but they must speak to voters often about the CCSS and the promise of higher expectations for all children. It is incumbent upon supporters to make the case for the CCSS and aligned assessments to voters – and not allow the issue to be defined by a noisy minority.

Support for CCSS Assessments When Provided Brief Description	Strongly Favor	Total Favor
<b>All Voters</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<i>Male</i>	<b>28%</b>	<b>61%</b>
<i>Female</i>	<b>34%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<i>18-44</i>	<b>31%</b>	<b>68%</b>
<i>45+</i>	<b>31%</b>	<b>65%</b>
<i>White</i>	<b>26%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<i>African American</i>	<b>57%</b>	<b>87%</b>
<i>Hispanic</i>	<b>40%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<i>Less Than College</i>	<b>33%</b>	<b>71%</b>
<i>College +</i>	<b>27%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<i>Republican</i>	<b>20%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<i>Independent</i>	<b>22%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<i>Democrat</i>	<b>43%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<i>Northeast</i>	<b>30%</b>	<b>63%</b>
<i>Midwest</i>	<b>31%</b>	<b>68%</b>
<i>South</i>	<b>33%</b>	<b>67%</b>
<i>West</i>	<b>28%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<i>Public School Moms</i>	<b>46%</b>	<b>75%</b>
<i>Public School Dads</i>	<b>23%</b>	<b>56%</b>
<i>Teacher/Ed Households</i>	<b>26%</b>	<b>63%</b>
<i>Union Households</i>	<b>32%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<i>Support Tea Party</i>	<b>22%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<i>Not Support Tea Party</i>	<b>34%</b>	<b>70%</b>

*Achieve is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit education reform organization dedicated to working with states to raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability. Created in 1996 by a bipartisan group of governors and business leaders, Achieve is leading the effort to make college and career readiness a priority across the country so that students graduating from high school are academically prepared for postsecondary success. When states want to collaborate on education policy or practice, they come to Achieve. At the direction of 48 states, and partnering with the*

## ***Voter Perceptions: Common Core State Standards & Tests***

*National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, Achieve helped develop the Common Core State Standards. Twenty-six states and the National Research Council asked Achieve to manage the process to write the Next Generation Science Standards. From 2010 to 2013, Achieve also served as the project manager for states in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, which are developing next generation assessments. And since 2005, Achieve has worked with state teams, governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders and business executives to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning key policies with the demands of the real world so that all students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to fully reach their promise in college, careers and life. For more information about the work of Achieve, visit [www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org).*