How Business Leaders Can Support College- and Career-Readiness:
Staying the Course on Common Core

A White Paper by the Committee for Economic Development

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CED
Committee for Economic Development

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For decades the Committee for Economic Development (CED) has offered nonpartisan, reasoned solutions to the nation's most pressing issues. CED's work in education policy centers on ways to better prepare students for the 21st century workforce from early childhood, through K-12, and to postsecondary education and beyond, encompassing all aspects of individual and workforce development. These efforts date back to a 1959 publication, when CED stated that business has "a responsibility, as citizens, to participate in the local, state and national effort to improve schools."

In 2013, CED launched a project to support the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a set of high-quality, internationally-benchmarked standards in English language arts and math that are voluntarily adopted by states. The launch comes nearly 30 years after CED published a landmark study on the heels of *A Nation at Risk*, calling for higher standards, among other reform strategies. CED's support for implementation of the Common Core is being carried out through the business-led College- and Career-Ready Task Force, which includes spokespersons made up of CED Trustees and others. These business leaders have a keen understanding of the knowledge and skills students need to become competitive in the global workforce, and thus provide unique insight to the public and policymakers as to why enacting high-quality standards is both a civic and economic imperative.

As part of this project, CED is pleased to release this White Paper to provide:

• An overview of the Common Core State Standards;
• The status of the standards' implementation;
• A plan of action for CED Trustees and other business leaders to help advance the standards; and,
• A list of additional resources developed by CED and other organizations in support of high-quality standards for education.

We wish to express our gratitude to our consultant, Lori Meyer, for her excellent work in researching and writing this paper. We would also like to thank our Education Subcommittee, Task Force members, CED's Executive Vice President, Mike Petro, and Communications and Outreach Consultant, Joe DiBlasi, for their input. In addition, we want to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their generous support of this project.

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Executive Summary

This policy statement calls for new directions. The nation is at an important crossroads. Acknowledging decades of evidence that the American Dream is slipping away from future generations, states have embarked on an effort to establish a common set of standards for mathematics and English language arts aligned to the expectations of postsecondary institutions and the workforce. The final product, the Common Core State Standards, provides clear and consistent learning goals for students in Kindergarten through grade 12.

The Common Core was met with bipartisan support in nearly every state upon its release in 2010. A majority of schools are now on the long and winding road of implementation, working to provide high-quality curriculum that is aligned to the standards, professional development to help teachers build their knowledge and understanding of the Common Core, a range of student assessments aligned to the standards, and accountability measures to ensure students are prepared for postsecondary learning and entry into the workforce. Schools are also working hard to increase awareness for parents and caregivers.

Unfortunately, the effort is at risk. The uninformed, the misinformed and those concerned about the potential for government overreach have joined forces to put pressure on policymakers to halt the initiative, much to the dismay of business leaders who heralded the move to ratchet up education standards to align with the needs of employers.

There are key ways that business leaders can help to bring the Common Core State Standards vision to fruition.

1. Build—and share—your knowledge and understanding of the Common Core and why it's important. Learn about what the Common Core is, and isn't. Develop your own talking points about why the Common Core matters. Share what you know about the Common Core, especially with parents who need to better understand why the Common Core makes a difference for their child's future.
2. Champion efforts to keep the Common Core. Backpedaling to lower standards is not a reasonable alternative. Voice your support for the Common Core to elected officials to ensure your state keeps its commitment to higher college- and career-ready standards.
3. Implementation of the Common Core. Educate stakeholders about implementation and how far-reaching and challenging it can be. Partner with schools and other interested stakeholders to create solutions for your community.

As teachers, school leaders, students and policymakers roll up their sleeves to tackle the implementation phase, it is vital that business leaders show their support for the Common Core. Abandoning the effort now will only put the prosperity of generations of American youth at greater risk.

Introduction

For the first time in the nation's history, a majority of students in the United States are learning based on a common set of standards for mathematics and English language arts (ELA) that will prepare them for the demands of the 21st century. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) provide a clear, consistent framework for what students should know at each grade throughout their K-12 education, aligned to the expectations of colleges, career training programs and the workforce.[1] The standards level the playing field for students, rich or poor, black or white, and set the stage for collaboration on a range of tools to support teaching and learning.

What follows is a discussion of the Common Core from idea, to development, to adoption, an overview of implementation, and an action plan for business leaders to show support for the Common Core.

First, some context on why the Common Core is needed.

The Pipeline Problem

The facts and figures detailing the failings of America's public schools are well worn:

• Despite recent improvements, only 80 percent of students graduate from high school on time. Further, disaggregated data show that only 73 percent of Hispanic students and 69 percent of black students graduate in four years, compared to 86 percent of white students, highlighting a persistent gap in outcomes for minority students.[2]
• Among those who graduate from high school, only 66 percent enroll in a two- or four-year program the following fall.[3]
• Twenty percent of those students must take a remediation course.[4]
• Only 31 percent of those students at two-year institutions earn a degree or certificate in three years; only 59 percent of students at a four-year institution finish in six years.[5]
• Among youth ages 16-24, many who have

disengaged from the education system, the unemployment rate is 16 percent—nearly twice the rate of older workers.[6]

Why is this troubling? Because employment projections indicate a growing need for a better-educated and more highly-skilled workforce, as employers nationwide know all too well. Consider this: 4.7 million jobs went unfilled in the United States this summer, yet 9.7 million adults were unemployed.[7] By 2020, the portion of jobs requiring some level of postsecondary education will reach 65 percent.[8] Unless student outcomes in the United States improve significantly, demand will not be met, and the implications for society as well as for individual students are grim. Indeed, the cost of lost economic opportunity for a high school dropout is estimated at $258,240 over a lifetime, and $755,900 for society as a whole.[9]

What's equally concerning, many countries are poised to surpass the United States in the race to dominate the global economy.[10] Although recent figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that higher education attainment in the United States is still relatively high for 25-64 year olds—the fourth highest among 37 OECD and G20 countries—other countries are gaining on the U.S. The United States ranks 14th out of 37 countries in the percentage of 25-34 year olds who have attained higher education, at just 42 percent compared to young adults in Korea who lead the pack at 65 percent.[11] The OECD report tells a similar story when looking at the front end of the education pipeline where programs yield the greatest return on investment: the United States ranks 28th among 38 countries in the percentage of 4-year-olds participating in early childhood education.[13]

Business leaders are acutely aware of these failings. In a recent survey of Business Roundtable members, 95 percent indicated a skills shortage within their company.[14] In another survey, 40 percent

THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

RIGHT NOW, THE U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM IS NOT PREPARING ENOUGH STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS IN COLLEGE AND A CAREER.

GRADUATION

**88%** of employers need more from employees

TOO MANY STUDENTS FAIL TO GRADUATE ON TIME.
On average, more than 1 million students fail to graduate on time each year. [1]

AMONG THOSE WHO DO GRADUATE, TOO MANY AREN'T PREPARED FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL WORK.
Half of all undergraduates pay for remedial courses to cover what they should have learned in high school, at a cost of nearly $7 billion annually. [2]

AND TOO MANY AREN'T PREPARED FOR THE JOBS THAT AWAIT THEM.
Eighty-eight percent of employers say employees need higher levels of learning and deeper knowledge. [3]

ENSURING THAT STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE PAYS BIG AT THE INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL.

EARNINGS **65% HIGHER** **4-YEAR DEGREE** VS **HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA**
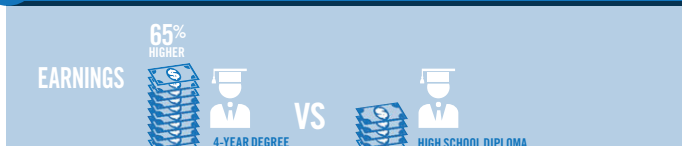
The median earnings of a bachelor's-degree recipient during a forty year full-time working life is 65 percent higher than that of a high school graduate. [4]

$263,000,000,000 LOST

If everyone from the Class of 2012 had graduated from high school, the nation's economy would likely have benefitted from $263 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes. [5]

THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS WILL HELP ENSURE THAT STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL PREPARED FOR BOTH COLLEGE AND A CAREER.

SKILLS **HIRED!**

These state-developed standards set consistent guidelines for what students should know at each grade level so they graduate with the knowledge and skills–such as active listening, reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing–that colleges and employers are looking for. [6]

77% POSITIVELY INFLUENCE

Nationwide, 77 percent of math and English language arts teachers believe that the Common Core State Standards will positively influence their students' ability to think critically and use reasoning skills. [7]

LET'S SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY AND SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON CORE

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[1] Editorial Projects in Education, "Diplomas Count 2012: National Graduation Rate Keeps Climbing; 1.1 Million Students Still Fail to Earn Diplomas," special issue, *Education Week* 31, no. 34 (2012).

[2] J. Scott-Clayton, P. M. Crosta, and C. R. Belfield, *Improving the Targeting of Treatment: Evidence from College Remediation* (Washington, DC: the National Bureau of Economic Research, 2012), http://www.nber.org/papers/w18457 (accessed February 27, 2014).

[3] The Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Raising the Bar: Employers' View of College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn* (Washington, DC: Hart Research Associates, 2010), http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2009_EmployerSurvey.pdf (accessed February 27, 2014).

[4] S. Baum, J. Ma, K. Payea, *Education Pays 2013: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society* (New York: The College Board, 2013), http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf (accessed February 27, 2014).

[5] The Alliance for Excellent Education estimated the additional lifetime income if one class of dropouts were to graduate by using an economic input-output model created by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc.

[6] A. Carnevale, N. Smith, J. Strohl, *Recovery: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Public Policy Institute Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/recovery2020.fr.web.pdf (accessed February 27, 2014).

[7] Scholastic, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, "Primary Sources," http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/2013preview/impact.htm (accessed February 27, 2014).

of employers said high school graduates are not sufficiently prepared for entry-level jobs.[15] On their wish list of knowledge and skills: the ability to effectively communicate (89 percent), critical thinking and analytical reasoning (81 percent), the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings (79 percent), the ability to analyze and solve complex problems (75 percent), and the ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions (75 percent), among others.[16]

This gap between the knowledge and skills of prospective employees and the knowledge and skills that employers need is a growing concern in the United States. The skills gap highlights a fundamental flaw in the education pipeline: it's not just about increasing secondary and postsecondary graduation rates. *What* students learn in school matters, as well.

Standards as a Tool to Improve Student Outcomes

The idea of setting standards for what students should learn is not new. The standards-based reform (SBR) movement in the United States dates back as early as the 1980s. The landmark report, *A Nation At Risk*, followed by the 1989 Education Summit in Charlottesville, laid the groundwork for SBR, followed by decades of federal and state policy, which helped to build much of the framework that exists today.[17]

Until recently, that framework centered on each of the 50 states individually developing, adopting and implementing a unique set of standards for what students should know across a range of subjects. Results from studies of the quality of these state standards were often mixed.[18] Where one study found fault with the quality of a state's standards, another gave a stamp of approval.[19] What had slowly evolved over two decades was a hodgepodge of standards that varied greatly in scope and depth from one state to the next. It also became increasingly more difficult to ignore the lack of alignment between what students were learning in K-12 schools, what students were learning in postsecondary institutions, and what was needed for entry into the workforce. Researchers, policymakers, business leaders and practitioners alike felt there was room for improvement.

Elements of Standards-Based Reform

- **Academic expectations for students**

- **Alignment of the key elements of the educational system**

- **Assessment of student achievement**

- **Decentralization**

- **Support and Technical Assistance**

- **Accountability**

As summarized in the 2008 RAND publication, *Standards-Based Reform in the United States: History, Research and Future Directions* by Laura Hamilton, Brian Stecher & Kun Yuan.
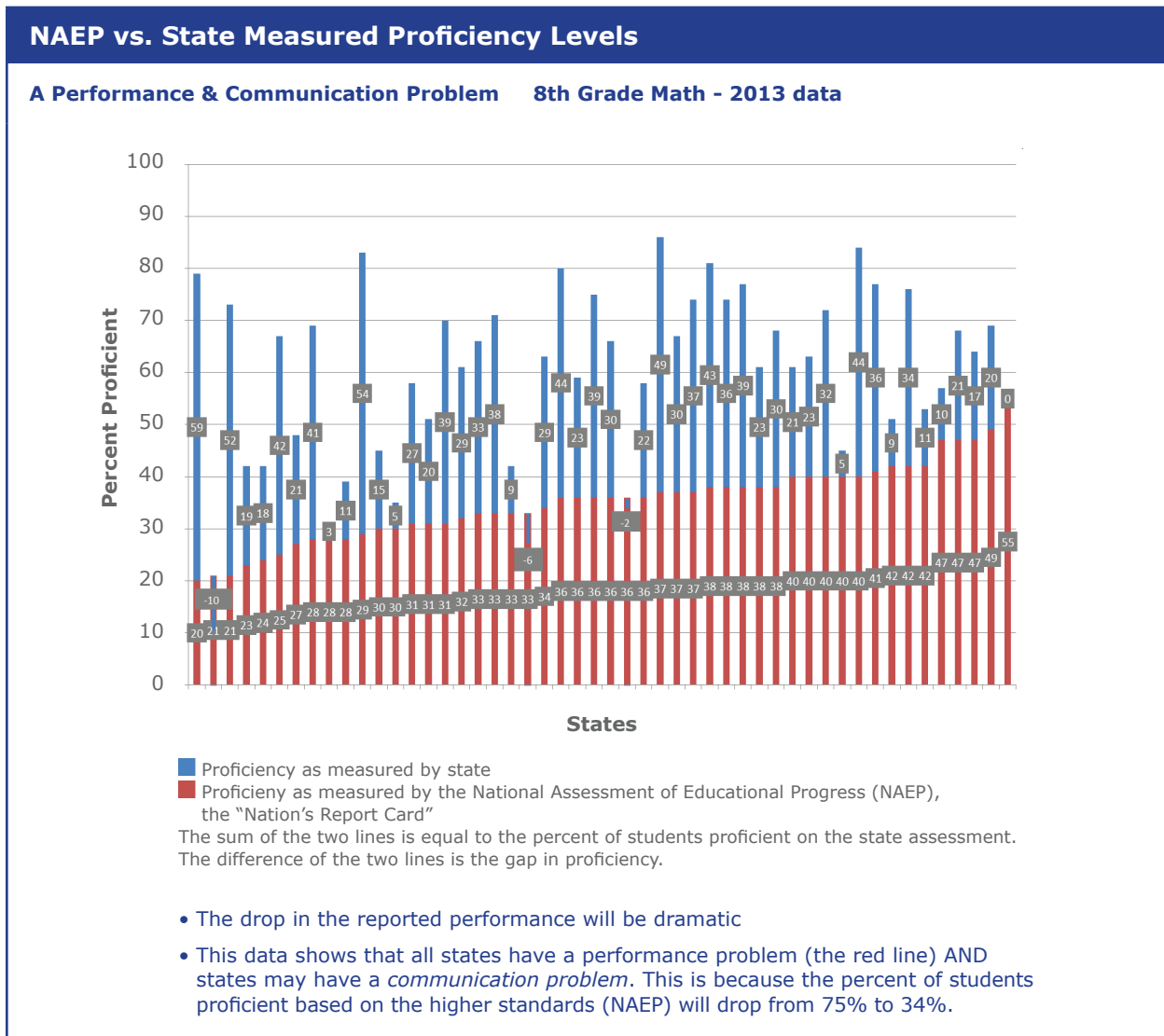
An Overview of the Common Core
From Idea to Development to Adoption

There was a growing need to address the uneven patchwork of academic standards from state to state, subject to subject, and grade to grade. In addition, education stakeholders increasingly sought to collaborate among states in the development of high-quality standards, as well as new and better tools and policies.

The Impetus for Developing Common Standards

The need to improve upon the first generation of state standards to better align them and connect them to what students needed to know across the continuum from cradle-to-career became increasingly clear. Several factors contributed, but

NAEP vs. State Measured Proficiency Levels

A Performance & Communication Problem   **8th Grade Math - 2013 data**

■ Proficiency as measured by state
■ Proficieny as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the "Nation's Report Card"
The sum of the two lines is equal to the percent of students proficient on the state assessment. The difference of the two lines is the gap in proficiency.

- The drop in the reported performance will be dramatic
- This data shows that all states have a performance problem (the red line) AND states may have a *communication problem*. This is because the percent of students proficient based on the higher standards (NAEP) will drop from 75% to 34%.

From presentation by Richard Lane to the Committee for Economic Development's Education Subcommittee on April 14, 2014, "Common Core State Standards: What They Are, Why They Are Important & The challenges Ahead."

one stands out: the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 focused a spotlight on huge discrepancies in proficiency from one state to another on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the national assessment given periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, and technology and engineering literacy.[20] The NAEP scores also raised a question about how states were defining proficiency, or more to the point, where they were setting the bar.

State and national leaders coalesced around the idea of common standards for a number of reasons. A number of governors wanted to improve academic performance as a way to ensure the nation's economic success, driven by international comparisons.[21] Others were driven by state to state comparisons, concerned that the "patchwork of state standards under the NCLB law set inconsistent goals for reading and math."[22] Still others saw common standards as an opportunity to set higher expectations grounded in the use of the most up-to-date evidence.[23] In the end, there was no shortage of

compelling reasons as to why it should be done, but how it should be done was not as clear.

For several years there was a debate about the best strategy for developing high-quality standards. Some called for national standards to be developed and enforced by the U.S. Department of Education, some called for a private entity to develop standards that states could adopt voluntarily, while others called for states to join together to lead the development of a set of common standards.[24]

This was not the first attempt at common standards. Indeed, back in the early days of SBR there was a failed attempt at creating national standards to address the same crisis that still exists today. The effort was ultimately deemed politically infeasible and abandoned largely because of the long-held devotion to local control of education throughout the United States.[25] The sting of that defeat was not forgotten. Ultimately consensus grew for a state-led effort, headed by the members of the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), which officially launched in 2009.[26]

Preamble to the Common Core

The Common Core State Standards define the rigorous skills and knowledge in English language arts and mathematics that need to be effectively taught and learned for students to be ready to succeed academically in credit-bearing, college-entry courses and in workforce training programs. These standards have been developed to be:

- **Fewer, clearer, and higher, to best drive effectively policy and practice;**

- **Aligned with college and work expectations, so that all students are prepared for success upon graduating from high school;**

- **Inclusive of rigorous content and applications of knowledge through higher-order skills, so that all students are prepared for the 21st century;**

- **Internationally benchmarked, so that all students are prepared for succeeding in our global economy and society; and**

- **Research and evidence-based.**

Excerpt from the Common Core State Standards Initiative Standards-Setting Criteria, online at: http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Criteria.pdf

The Process for Developing the Common Core

The development of the Common Core was a state-led process, which began in 2009 and lasted just over a year and focused on English language arts and mathematics. Forty-eight states, two territories and the District of Columbia signed on to support the development, as did countless other member organizations, business and industry groups and policymakers. The development of the standards involved formal work groups, state groups and feedback groups that included teachers and content experts, as well as a committee that provided validation of the process. In addition to input from teachers and content experts, the standards were also informed by the best state standards already in existence, as well as feedback from the general public.

Fast-forward four years, and credit or blame for those who were involved has become a particular point of contention, with some sources claiming that teachers in particular weren't involved in crafting the standards. Yet, according to some of the individual teachers who participated in the process, as well as the national associations that represent them—the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—numerous teachers were involved in the development of the Common Core at several key junctures.[27] Other content-specific groups representing educators were also included in the process, including: the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.[28]

Numerous teachers were involved in the development of the Common Core at several key junctures.

Nearly 10,000 comments were submitted during the two public comment periods, which helped to inform the final standards. The response to the draft standards "was a mix of praise and skepticism."[29] Lack of career readiness knowledge and skills and criticisms of specific aspects of the math or ELA standards (like not enough emphasis on problem solving or algebraic reasoning) were among the comments.[30] Some reviewers also raised concerns that the draft standards were too rigorous or ambitious for a single year.[31] Yet, other reviewers felt the draft standards hit the marks on rigor and clarity, and did a good job of balancing content and application.[32]

Shortly after the release of the final Common Core State Standards, the Washington, DC-based Fordham Institute, which has a history of studying content standards dating back to 1997, conducted an analysis to compare the Common Core with individual state standards in mathematics and English language arts. Among the findings:

- Mathematics: The Common Core standards were clearer and more rigorous than the math standards in 39 states.
- English Language Arts: The Common Core standards were clearer and more rigorous than the ELA standards in 37 states.
- Mathematics & English Language Arts: The Common Core standards were clearer and more rigorous in both math and ELA in 33 states.
- Nearly a dozen states had ELA or math standards that were as clear and rigorous as the Common Core in the analysis. Only California, Indiana and the District of Columbia had ELA standards superior to the Common Core.[33]

The Final Product

The Common Core State Standards were released to the public in June of 2010. The final standards provide learning goals, delineating what students are expected to learn at each grade level in order to graduate from high school prepared to succeed in entry-level jobs, introductory academic college courses and workforce training programs.[34] The Common Core does not specify how the goals should be taught or which materials should be used. Those decisions are left to local teachers, principals and superintendents. The standards include grade-by-grade standards in English language arts and mathematics for grades K-8, and for high school, 9-10 grade standards and 11-12 grade standards.

English language arts (ELA) standards. The standards define literacy expectations needed for entry into college and the workforce. The K-12 grade-specific standards define end-of-year expectations and

> **The final standards provide learning goals, delineating what students are expected to learn at each grade level in order to graduate from high school prepared to succeed in entry-level jobs, introductory academic college courses and workforce training programs. The Common Core does not specify how the goals should be taught or which materials should be used.**

a cumulative progression targeted to the end of high school. The ELA standards address reading, writing, speaking and listening. Previous state standards addressed reading and writing, but rarely

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**Example from the English Language Arts Standards
Speaking and Listening, Grades 11–12**

Comprehension and Collaboration:

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

Excerpt from the Common Core State Standards, online at: http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R/.

> **Example from the Mathematics Standards**
> **High School Statistics and Probability, Interpreting Categorical and Quantitative Data**
>
> **Summarize, represent, and interpret data on a single count or measurement variable:**
>
> Represent data with plots on the real number line (dot plots, histograms, and box plots).
>
> Use statistics appropriate to the shape of the data distribution to compare center (median, mean) and spread (interquartile range, standard deviation) of two or more different data sets.
>
> Interpret differences in shape, center, and spread in the context of the data sets, accounting for possible effects of extreme data points (outliers).
>
> Use the mean and standard deviation of a data set to fit it to a normal distribution and to estimate population percentages. Recognize that there are data sets for which such a procedure is not appropriate. Use calculators, spreadsheets, and tables to estimate areas under the normal curve.

Excerpt from the Common Core State Standards, online at: http://www.corestandards.org/Math/Content/HSS/ID/.

tackled speaking and listening[35]—a weakness in the education pipeline often identified by employers. There are other important shifts, as well. The CCSS create a "staircase of increasing complexity," in both text and vocabulary.[36] The standards also require students to "read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on evidence in the text."[37] Finally, the standards shift the types of content-rich text to include more non-fiction. In Kindergarten through Grade 5 the CCSS call for a 50/50 split between fiction and non-fiction. In high school, the shift to non-fiction becomes even greater.

Mathematics standards. Previous state-level standards in math covered a vast number of topics, with little depth, often referred to as the "mile wide, inch deep" problem.[38] The Common Core math standards are intended to be more focused and coherent, honing in on fewer topics in greater detail while linking interconnected concepts across the grades. The new standards also stress an equal focus on conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency and application. The

math standards are in two parts: domains (i.e., the "what") and practices (i.e., the "how"). Domains include categories such as operations (e.g., addition and multiplication) and algebraic thinking. The practices cover the process aspects of math. For example, "explain patterns in the number of zeros of the product when multiplying a number by powers of 10, and explain patterns in the placement of the decimal point when a decimal is multiplied or divided by a power of 10. Use whole-number exponents to denote powers of 10."[3]

Adoption of the Common Core

Once the Common Core standards were finalized, it was up to individual states to decide whether or not to adopt the standards. Following the release of the final standards in 2010, 46 states and the District of Columbia chose to voluntarily adopt the Common Core, which meant that more than 80 percent of the nation's students would have comparable learning goals for the first time in American history. Republicans and Democrats alike supported the new college- and career-ready

Federal Involvement in the Common Core

The federal government's role in the Common Core has been hotly contested of late, despite no involvement in the development or management of the standards state-led initiative. In late 2009, the U.S. Department of Education launched a $4.35 billion competitive grant program, known as Race to the Top (RTTT) to spur innovation in states. States were eligible for RTTT dollars if they agreed to adopt college- and career-ready standards, including but not limited to, the Common Core. As part of RTTT, the Department also awarded $330 million to two testing consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

Today, NGA and CCSSO continue to lead the CCSS initiative. These two lead organizations will make decisions about the timing and substance of any future revisions in partnership with states.

Learn more about Race to the Top, online at:http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html.

standards, a remarkable achievement in a period marked by partisan gridlock. In most states, the state board of education formally adopted the standards, but some states required approval from other state-level policymakers, such as the governor, the state legislature or the chief state school officer.

Recently, a handful of states have backed out of using the Common Core: Indiana, Oklahoma and South Carolina. The Governor of Louisiana is also taking steps to move away from the Common Core, although other policymakers and educators in the state are proceeding with implementation despite his objections. Other states are at risk of dropping out as well, largely due to political pressures aimed at governors and other state-level policymakers from a range of constituents that include the uninformed, the misinformed and those concerned about the potential for government overreach.

Implementation of the Common Core

For those states that chose to adopt the Common Core, the next phase of work shifts closer to home as implementation plans are being developed and executed in partnership with schools and districts. "Saying you're for ... standards is almost the easy part," noted one expert who added, "there are 999 tough issues that will follow."[40] States and districts need revamped curriculum and instructional materials aligned to the CCSS, professional development aligned to the new standards, assessment tools to gauge student learning, and new accountability measures. In essence, full systems reboot.

Reports about implementation efforts surrounding the Common Core are just beginning to trickle in so it's difficult to generalize about the state of affairs; however, a few themes are emerging:

- Implementing the new learning goals will require changing many aspects of policy and practice, which is complex and requires a comprehensive, systemic approach.
- Stakeholders are being forced to come to terms with the reality that implementation takes time, and doesn't always follow a linear path.
- A miscalculation at the front end of the Common Core State Standards initiative about the need to build understanding among the full range of stakeholders is costing the effort dearly, as those working in the trenches to implement the new standards are stuck in the middle of political warfare.

The next section covers background on the progress being made and some of the bigger challenges states and schools are facing.

Progress and Challenges

By 2011, all but one of the states that adopted the CCSS had a formal implementation plan in place.[41] The final state developed its plan by 2012.[42] The scope and breadth of the state plans varied greatly in the early stages of implementation, highlighting the complexity of the issues. Most plans now include a focus on professional development, curricular resources, teacher evaluation and accountability. However, as states have continued to build out their plans and carry out various components, buy-in for the Common Core has grown more politically charged, adding another layer of complexity to an already complicated and potentially expensive endeavor. Despite this, promising practices and even a few success stories are emerging, yet it's evident mid-course corrections are needed for some of the states' implementation strategies to ensure that teachers and students have sufficient time with the Common Core before high stakes are attached to the standards.

Aligning curriculum and instruction. This is one of the most critical aspects of implementation because it sits at the front of a long line of changes that need to happen in order for teachers and students to reap the benefits of the Common Core learning goals. Yet, report after report indicates mixed progress four years after the release of the standards. Perhaps the most perplexing issue: how to gauge what is aligned, and what isn't aligned to the CCSS.

In the past few years, vendor-produced materials claiming to be aligned to the Common Core have flooded the marketplace, overwhelming teachers and curriculum directors alike. Yet, numerous reports indicate the marketing on the book jacket doesn't always reflect the truth. Louisiana was one of the first states to call attention to the problem in 2012, when state officials announced they were prepared to "reject every math and reading textbook submitted by publishers in its most recent adoption cycle, citing concerns that the materials are not fully aligned to the Common Core."[43] Researchers preparing to publish two independent studies concur that textbooks marketed as Common Core-aligned are still anything but.[44] Anxious to provide teachers with resources for the classroom, 68 percent of school districts report plans to purchase Common Core-focused instructional materials.[45]

To address the need, many states are providing Common Core-aligned resources online.[46] The most robust offerings include sample instructional plans that address the Common Core across all years and subjects, models of teaching and learning in action, and formative assessments. Other strategies involve tools or even vetting panels set up to review materials. A number of states and districts are using a tool developed by the Washington, DC-based group Achieve, called EQuIP (Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products), which grew out of a collaborative between Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island.[47] The tool is designed to increase the supply of materials aligned to the CCSS and to build the capacity of teachers to evaluate the quality of instructional materials. It's also been suggested that an independent source develop a *Consumer Reports*-type analysis of instructional materials.[48]

While states and districts work to piece together solutions, one early analysis highlighted the mixed success of implementing the Common Core in the absence of high-quality materials.[49] As the authors put it, "districts are in the near-impossible situation of operationalizing new standards before high-quality curriculum and tests aligned to them are finished." While some of this problem simply boils down to the time needed to develop high-quality materials aligned to the Common Core, four years after the release educators are becoming increasingly frustrated.

Providing teachers with high-quality professional development. An often-cited criticism of first-generation standards was that states did little to build the capacity of educators to implement the standards, which greatly impacted their ability to improve teaching and learning.[50] It should therefore come as no surprise that state implementation plans prioritized this issue at the outset of the Common Core rollout. Yet, who should provide training, what is being offered, whether it's useful and even how many teachers have received professional development aligned with the Common Core are all questions that often lack clear answers among education stakeholders.

In a survey of state education officials, only 10 states reported that 75 percent or more of math and

ELA teachers participated in CCSS professional development during the 2012-2013 school year.[51] Yet the same policy scan found that CCSS-aligned curricula were already being taught in 30 states, pointing to a troublesome gap in connecting two critical elements of the education system: professional development and curriculum resources.

In another national survey of teachers, 49 percent reported feeling prepared to teach the Common Core standards to their students as a whole, roughly two years after the standards were adopted in most states.[52] To some this is a good sign of progress, but to others it's not enough, particularly teachers feeling squeezed by new assessments and looming teacher evaluation systems that will hold them accountable for results.

A number of states and districts are offering homegrown professional development for teachers. One promising, and often-cited example, is Tennessee, which provided 40,000 teachers with professional development during summer training sessions in 2012 and 2013—reaching two-thirds of the state's teaching force in the span of a year.[53] Evaluations show the intense push in Tennessee is already paying off: student test scores rose more quickly in participants' classrooms compared to test scores in non-participants' classrooms.[54] Yet, state departments of education and districts in many pockets of the country are struggling to provide the quantity of high-quality training needed to get all teachers up to speed on the new standards.

Pre-service training is also proving to be tricky. In a recent look at the state of implementation in year four, one dean of education argued that any training that goes beyond building awareness of the Common Core moves to job-specific training, which falls outside of the realm of teacher preparation programs.[55] Another dean offered a different perspective: while teacher education programs are intended to focus on theory, the ultimate goal is to prepare them to go into the field.[56] These differences get at the heart of a decades-long debate about teacher training programs. One that is long overdue for a resolution, but not likely to be resolved anytime soon.

Developing and administering new assessments.
Assessment has very recently become one of the
more contentious issues in the Common Core
debate; caught in the crossfire of accountability
fears, implementation feasibility, cost concerns and
growing competition for market share.

A number of states moved quickly to create
piecemeal strategies to assess progress as larger-
scale efforts geared up. In a 2012 policy scan, 27
states reported that they had embedded CCSS
items in current state tests or removed non-aligned
items.[57] States also reported that they were working
with districts to address pass-rates, which are
projected to be lower once assessments aligned to
the higher Common Core standards kick in.[58]

Looming much larger than the state efforts
to cobble together mid-course assessment
mechanisms, is the effort of two testing consortia
funded by federal Race to the Top dollars. The two
consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness
for College and Career (PARCC), and Smarter
Balanced Assessment Consortium, are governed
by state members.[59] Each is charged with creating
next-generation assessments aligned to the
Common Core by the end of the 2014-2015 school
year. The assessments are aimed at helping teachers
gauge student progress during the year (formative
tests), as well as providing end-of-year exams. The
new assessments also do away with the paper-and-
pencil exams taken by generations of Americans,
by moving to an online delivery system. Beyond
alignment to the Common Core, the consortia
address several long-standing complaints about
assessments in the U.S.: slow turnaround of student
results; a lack of information to help teachers
refine instruction; the inability to measure growth
over time; and limited "fair and reasonable"
accommodations for students with disabilities and
English language learners.[60]

Both consortia piloted exams in the spring of
2014 and public opinion seems to mirror that
of the CCSS implementation so far: a good,
critical step forward, but there's still work to
be done. The exams move beyond the previous
standardized multiple-choice tests of decades
past,[61] but questions remain about the ability of
districts to meet the technology needs of the new
assessments. Further, concerns among teachers and
administrators are growing as accountability looms
large, particularly teacher evaluations.

*Gauging the cost of implementing the Common
Core.* The final standards were released at the peak
of the Great Recession, a time when state and local
governments were strapped for cash. As a result,
the prospect of a new initiative, especially one as
far-reaching as the Common Core, has been a
tough sell for many.

A 2012 study found that, depending on decisions
about curriculum materials, assessments and
professional development, states could save as
much as $927 million or spend as much as $8.3
billion on Common Core implementation.[62] The
$927 million estimate relies heavily on technology,
providing most materials and training online,
while the $8.3 billion price tag is business as
usual: hardcopy textbooks, paper-pencil exams
and in-person professional development. Another
mid-range estimate puts the cost at $15.8 billion,
of which $10.5 billion includes one-time costs,
such as training teachers on the new standards,
purchasing new instructional resources aligned to
the Common Core and enhancing technology.[63]

The line item currently garnering the most
attention is assessment, particularly as the
consortia and other competitors hone in on per-
student costs. While experts say the per-student
increase will be minimal in comparison to past
generations of assessments, others argue the real
costs are related to the infrastructure schools will
need to administer the tests, such as additional
computers.[64] Regardless of the cost difference from
one state to the next, legislatures nationwide—
some already divided on the Common Core—
will likely see another round of battles over the
initiative as budgets are set. Indeed, the power of
the purse was on full display in 2013 when the
Michigan legislature blocked spending for the
Common Core, a decision that was later reversed.[65]

Public Awareness, Understanding and Support

While practitioners and education policymakers at the state and local levels are laser-focused on the development, adoption and implementation of the Common Core, much of the country still knows little about the effort. In 2011, a nationwide survey of voters found that awareness among the general public was very low—60 percent of voters reported they had heard "nothing" about the CCSS, while another 21 percent said, "not much."[66] Fast forward three years and surveys continue to show many Americans still don't know much about with the initiative. A June 2014 poll found that 47 percent of adults surveyed still had not heard of the Common Core.[67] That information gap has turned out to be a critical flaw in the rollout of the initiative, as states, districts and teachers scramble to bring parents and community members up-to-speed.

Beyond the information gap, attempts to derail the Common Core have grown with each phase of implementation. The reasons for the growing opposition range from content-specific worries to concerns about the role of assessment and accountability to opposition to a perception of federal intrusion. The result has been a media frenzy filled with myths and misconceptions about the Common Core that now has supporters on the defensive.

Teachers. Although support for the actual standards is strong among teachers, there is a very public debate over implementation and accountability. Three-quarters of public school teachers support the Common Core according to a survey by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a figure matched by a similar poll conducted by the National Education Association (NEA).[68] However, only 27 percent of teachers from the AFT survey say their district has provided them with the tools to teach the standards and 83 percent support a moratorium on consequences associated with new assessments.[69] Results from the NEA survey point to a myriad of needs identified by teachers: two-thirds had participated in professional development, but only 26 percent felt the trainings were helpful; 43 percent indicated a need for smaller class size; and 32 percent

identified a need for more up-to-date resources.[70] An additional 39 percent felt greater parent involvement was a key to successful implementation.[71]

Parents. Parents, one of the most vested stakeholder groups, are perhaps the least informed when it comes to the Common Core, and policymakers and educators alike acknowledge their support could make or break the initiative to raise standards. Studies have shown the benefits of family engagement, from higher grades and test scores to improved attendance, improved behavior and even higher graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates.[72] Yet in a recent Gallup poll, 31 percent of public school parents still say they know nothing about the Common Core State Standards; another 30 percent say they only know a little.[73] Among those who know about the new standards, 52 percent who live in a state implementing the Common Core said they had a positive impression of the Common Core, while 42 percent said their impressions were negative.[74] Some of the awareness gap could be a simple issue of nomenclature. For example, Florida renamed the CCSS to the "Next Generation Sunshine State Standards" following adoption. Some districts even refer to the curriculum resources designed to align with the Common Core under a different name. In Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, the CCSS materials are referred to as "Curriculum 2.0." These examples are not the norm in most states, however.

For those parents who are familiar with the Common Core, their concerns run the gamut. In Chicago, IL, some parents are underwhelmed with the quality of the instructional materials being used in the classroom.[75] In Connecticut, parents expressed frustration at not being included in the development process.[76] Others worry about how the higher standards will impact special needs students.[77]

While it remains to be seen where all of this is heading, there is an undeniable shift occurring in classrooms across the country as implementation marches forward. As policymakers and educators continue the hard work of implementation, there are ways that business leaders can help.

How Business Can Advance the Common Core Initiative

The economic and social imperative to ensure that students have the opportunity to succeed in school, work and life has never been greater. Many countries have already surpassed America in educational outcomes, and now the U.S. is faced with losing its status as the world's largest economy. The evidence is simply too dire to ignore. America's education system has not been working for students, for communities or for the economy for a long time. Business leaders, many of them parents themselves, are keenly aware of this. Yet, the effort to raise standards to better position students for success is at risk.

Here are some ways you can take action to ensure that students and teachers nationwide have access to the Common Core, a set of high-quality standards aimed at workforce readiness:

1. Build—and share—your knowledge and understanding of the Common Core and why it's important.
2. Champion efforts to keep the Common Core.
3. Support implementation of the Common Core.

Build—and Share—Your Own Knowledge and Understanding of the Common Core and Why It's Important

Learn about what the Common Core is, and isn't. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are *clear, consistent frameworks for what students should know at each grade level throughout their K-12 education. The CCSS are aligned to the expectations of colleges, career training programs and the workforce.* The CCSS help to level the playing field for students who are living, and will one day be working, in a global economy.

The CCSS *are not* a curriculum—national or otherwise. The CCSS *do not* tell teachers, or communities, what to teach. Detailed information about the development process and the final standards is available at www.corestandards.org. Take the time to read about the development

process and review the standards for both mathematics and English language arts.

Develop your own talking points about why the Common Core is important. There is no shortage of data—national, state and local—that demonstrate why this matters to individuals and society at-large, from the dropout crisis to college remediation to low postsecondary completion rates to the skills gap. Use data that speaks to you, information that you find to be the most compelling. Address different perspectives:

- Individual: Why this matters to you and your bottom line
- Community: Why this matters to your employees and the community where you live and work
- Global: Why this matters for the nation and the economy

Share what you know about the Common Core. As a business leader, you can play an important role in providing other business leaders, employees and community members with accurate, reasoned information about the Common Core and why it matters to your community, state and the nation as a whole. As you become comfortable with the Common Core basics, here are some ways you can share information:

- Informally, through conversation
- Share a concise, one-page document about the Common Core and why it's needed
- Offer your employees an opportunity to discuss their understanding of the Common Core, share concerns and ask questions as part of a group or individually
- Include information on your company's web site
- Offer to address local business organizations or community groups
- Organize local industry response

Help parents understand why the Common Core matters for their child's future. As a business leader, you can help parents understand the need for higher standards that align to college and workforce expectations. You are in the unique position of being able to inform parents of the growing skills gap firsthand. Use real-time examples to illustrate your own company's hiring challenges and the impact to the local community.

There are many ways you can help to inform parents:

- Address the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or other local parent organizations
- Write a piece for the PTA's newsletter
- Coordinate with district and school leaders to join back-to-school events and voice your support for the Common Core
- Offer to host an informational meeting for parents at a nearby coffee house during school hours

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As a business leader, you can help parents understand the need for higher standards that align to college and workforce expectations.

Champion Efforts to Keep the Common Core

Backpedaling to lower standards is not a reasonable alternative if the United States wants to maintain global competitiveness. States that choose to abandon the Common Core mid-course leave students and teachers in a state of flux as officials scramble to draft new standards, while taxpayers are stuck with the bill. Raising the bar on expectations for students is no easy task, and politicians need the support of business leaders more than ever to hold firm on the commitment to future generations of Americans.

Voice your support for the Common Core now. State-level decision makers need to hear from business leaders like you. Don't wait until

controversy arises. Governors, state legislators, state boards of education and state superintendents need to hear why this matters to you, your business and the community where you live. They need to understand the ramifications for abandoning the Common Core for individual students, communities and the entire state.

In the past, state and local business organizations spoke on behalf of business leaders, but individual engagement is also needed. Business leaders need to engage directly in the policy process in order to thwart attempts to abandon or defund the Common Core. You can also utilize your position and voice to partner with other stakeholders in this effort to be seen and heard. Be consistent and persistent.

Here are some ways you can voice your support for the Common Core:[78]

- Write an op-ed piece. Declare your support for the Common Core, urge state policymakers to stay-the-course, and remind them why the Common Core is a crucial step towards fixing the pipeline problem.

- Use social media to show your support for the Common Core in your state. Be sure to use the appropriate nomenclature for your state when referencing the standards.

- Meet with your state elected officials to voice your support for the Common Core or send a letter outlining your support for the Common Core and include your reasoning. Speak directly to your legislators; don't rely on your business organization to speak for you.

Business leaders need to engage directly in the policy process in order to thwart attempts to abandon or defund the Common Core.

Support Implementation of the Common Core

The political drama surrounding the Common Core is distracting and unproductive. It's time to shift the conversation away from the destructive mud-slinging to focus on supporting the educators, students and families on the front lines of implementation. State education agencies, state boards of education, local boards of education, school district personnel, principals and teachers all need the support of business leaders as they roll up their sleeves to implement the new college- and career-ready standards. Here are some ways you can help:

Educate stakeholders about implementation. Change is difficult. Implementation that spans multiple systems and supports won't happen overnight. Find parallels to experiences you've had implementing major changes in your own business and share them. Shine a spotlight on the long-term commitment districts are facing and the need for sufficient time, space and resources to reap the rewards. Highlight the value in acknowledging challenges and making mid-course corrections.

Support those on the front lines of implementation. States and districts are already making important progress in implementing the Common Core.

However, there is still a great deal of work to be done before anyone can fully assess the success or failure of the initiative. States are in the early stages of developing lesson plans and identifying curriculum resources aligned to the Common Core, assessments are being developed and piloted nationwide, and parents and students are just beginning to wrap their heads around what this change means.

Partner with schools and other interested stakeholders to create solutions for your community. Many states and districts have formal advisory panels, commissions, and school boards that allow for business to weigh in on innovative ways to improve the education system. Join one of these groups or approach state or district leaders about forming one to serve as a sounding board during the implementation phase of the Common Core.

These are just a few of the ways that you can support the Common Core in your community. Students must have the opportunity to achieve prosperity and success, and high-quality standards as part of a comprehensive education system aligned to postsecondary education and the workforce are an absolute necessity to achieving that goal.

Resources

Below is a sampling of resources to further build your knowledge and understanding of the Common Core State Standards, along with tools for supporting the Common Core; many are targeted to business leaders:

- Achieve: Business center for a college- and career-ready America, online at http://www.businessandeducation.org

- Achieve: Multiple toolkits on the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.futurereadyproject.org/future-ready-tools

- Alliance for Excellent Education & State Farm: An infographic showing the economic case for the Common Core State Standards, online at http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Common_Core_Infographic_Print1.pdf

- American Federation of Teachers: Debunking myths of the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.aft.org/issues/standards/nationalstandards/debunkingmyths.cfm

- American Institutes for Research: An overview of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Costs (SBAC), online at http://www.quickanded.com/2013/08/perspective-on-smarter-balanced-assessment-costs.html

- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Common Core State Standards assessment consortia, online at http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/images/publications/journals/pp_v17n01_infographic.jpg

- Business Coalition for Student Achievement: A communications toolkit about improving education policy for U.S. competitiveness, online at http://www.biz4achievement.org/files/Upgrade_%20America_Communications_Toolkit_2013.pdf

- Business Roundtable: Solutions to ensure the Common Core State Standards are successfully implemented, online at http://www.businessroundtable.org/sites/default/files/BRT%20Ed%20Priority%20Common%20Core%20Oct28.pdf

- Center for American Progress: An infographic illustrating higher education attainment and investments in education among select nations, online at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2012/08/21/29942/infographic-the-competition-that-really-matters/

- Center for American Progress: Fact sheets detailing how and why the Common Core State Standards will benefit numerous states that have implemented them, online at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/news/2013/12/04/80426/a-guide-to-the-common-core-state-standards/

- Center on Education Policy: A compendium of research on the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=438

- Collaborative for Student Success: A set of resources on the Common Core State Standards, including material for parents and policymakers, online at http://www.forstudentsuccess.org/resources/

- Collaborative for Student Success: A video of Republican Governors making the case for the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdL9BrZMw-0

- Committee for Economic Development: Presentation in April 2014 by Richard Laine of the National Governors Association to the Committee for Economic Development on the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.ced.org/pdf/Common_Core_State_Standards_Presentation_-_CED_Education_Committee_slides_-_Richard_Laine.pdf

- Common Core State Standards Initiative: A bipartisan mix of organizations representing parents, teachers, business leaders, and other key voices who have strongly supported the Common Core State Standards through respective statements, online at http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/statements-of-support/

- Common Core State Standards Initiative: A list of quotes from supporters of the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Quotes-from-Supporters.pdf

- Common Core State Standards Initiative: A map detailing the process each state and territory followed to adopt their new standards, online at http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/

- Common Core State Standards Initiative: How the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts differ from previous standards, online at http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/

- Common Core State Standards Initiative: How the Common Core State Standards in mathematics differ from previous standards, online at http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-mathematics/

- Common Core State Standards Initiative: Myths vs. facts about the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/myths-vs-facts/

- Council of the Great City Schools: A video (also in Spanish) about how the Common Core State Standards prepare students to be college- and career-ready, online at http://www.commoncoreworks.org/domain/157

- Data Quality Campaign: A compilation of resources and tools for effectively communicating education data, online at http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/why-education-data/communicating-data

- Data Quality Campaign: Advocacy points about data's role in supporting the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Cheat%20Sheet%20CCR.pdf

- Data Quality Campaign: An infographic showing why students do better when teachers are empowered with data, online at http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Data-Rich%20Year%20Infographic.pdf

- Education Commission of the States: The Progress of Education Reform: Who Pays the Tab for K-12 Education? online at http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/07/91/10791.pdf

- ExxonMobil: Numerous videos on why improving education is an economic imperative, online at http://www.letssolvethis.com/videos.php

- GE Foundation: How Business Can Support Core Standards—and Help Rebuild Education, online at http://static.foundation.gecitizenship.com.s3.amazonaws.com/foundation/files/2013/01/FINAL-GE-Foundation-Business-and-Education-Summit-White-Paper.pdf

- Higher State Standards Partnership: Numerous resources on the Common Core State Standards, including myths vs. facts, and links to other organizations that support the standards, online at http://www.thecommoncore.com/

- National Council of La Raza: An advocacy toolkit on the Common Core State Standards, including resources for building coalitions, online at http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/pages/CCSS_Toolkit.pdf

- National Education Association: A Common Core State Standards toolkit, online at http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Common-Core-State-Standards-Toolkit.pdf

- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices: Information on the Common Core State Standards, including links to trends in implementation, online at http://www.nga.org/cms/home/nga-center-for-best-practices/center-divisions/page-edu-division/col2-content/list---edu-right/content-reference-1@/common-core-state-standards.html

- National PTA: An overview for parents on what students will learn at each grade under the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2910

- National PTA and Hunt Institute: A video series on the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4158

- Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC): An overview of savings projected for PARCC tests, online at http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/CostFAQs07-22-2013.pdf

- Student Achievement Partners: A list of business leaders supporting the Common Core State Standards, online at http://www.achievethecore.org/common-core-intro-for-parents#letter

- U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation: Numerous resources on the Common Core State Standards, including opinion editorials, videos, and a map of the education landscape in each state, online at http://www.businessforcore.org/

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How Business Leaders Can Support
College- and Career-Readiness:
Staying the Course on Common Core

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