

# **A Qualitative Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions of Common Core State Standards in Agricultural Education**

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## **Abstract**

*After the implementation of No Child Left Behind in 2002, national educational standards reform has supported the idea that improvements in education can result from rigorous standards that uniformly evaluate learning. Educational assessment, however, is under increased scrutiny and teachers, students, as well as educational policy makers struggle to balance curriculum reforms. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to determine the perceptions of agricultural education teachers regarding implementing Common Core State Standards in their programs. Data were collected through five structured interviews conducted with agricultural education instructors adopting the Common Core State Standards curriculum within their classrooms and analyzed using the constant comparative method. Overall, teachers were positive about the implementation of Common Core State Standards in their programs; however, teachers acknowledged challenges to implementing these standards, including a sense of voicelessness and complacency. Teachers also expressed a perception of helplessness with the ever-changing cycle of educational initiatives.*

Keywords: Common Core State Standards, Curriculum Standards, Teacher Perceptions

## **Introduction**

In discussions of educational accountability, a widely publicized issue has been the implementation of state curriculum standards into general education programs. By the 2014-15 school year, 43 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories were expected to fully implement the educational standards known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014a). After enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, national educational standards reform has supported the idea that improvements in education can result from rigorous standards used to uniformly evaluate learning. Educational assessment, however, is under increased scrutiny as teachers, students, and educational policy makers struggle to balance curriculum reform.

In agricultural education these issues can be particularly confusing, as teachers not considered to be involved in core academic coursework are still required to implement standards seemingly not related to the goals of their educational programs. Agricultural education programs are frequently challenged to justify their curricula and provide reinforcement of English/language arts and math standards. Programs such as agricultural education and other Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are often

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expected to adopt similar standardized benchmarks as those established in core content areas as well as assume responsibility for improving students' test scores (Burke, 2011). To best prepare agricultural education teachers for this, an understanding of how accountability measures, such as the CCSS, impact the classroom environment is critical to teacher success.

The development of standards-based reform is not new to education. States have been developing their own education standards during the past 20 years. By the late 1990s, 49 states had their own independent state education standards (Rothham, 2012). A push toward national standards followed as educational policy makers attempted to close the gap between differences in state standards. The result was the development of NCLB, which required proficiency in reading and math but allowed states to determine their own levels of performance (Rudalevige, 2003).

In 2008, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano assembled a task force consisting of experts in higher education, resulting in a report titled "Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World Class Education." This report is credited with serving as the foundation of the CCSS (Bidwell, 2013). The adoption of these standards represented a move toward streamlining education in English/language arts and math as part of K-12 Education. The CCSS are comprised of grade-specific standards with emphasis on reasoning and higher-level thinking skills. These standards were designed to allow teachers some flexibility in determining their daily teaching methods under the larger umbrella of K-12 English and math educational standards (Thompson, 2013). For example, according to the CCSS Initiative (2014b), an example of a ninth/tenth grade reading information standard would be to "cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information" (p. 61). This standard could be addressed specifically through educational activities designed and facilitated by the teacher.

In support of educational accountability standards, policy makers and state supervisors of education argued that a common set of educational standards promotes a more rigorous learning environment allowing students to receive a high quality learning experience (McDonnell, 2013). Due to the emphasis on individual scores, teachers and administrators often note standards-based reform creates additional focus on struggling learners and encourages more individualized educational practices (Desimone, 2013). A study by Richardson and Placier (2001) described this sense of teacher accountability as an increased interest in student learning that did not always exist before the implementation of standards-based reform. Teachers perceived they were personally accountable for district results and needed to incorporate standards into their teaching. The CCSS also address student learning by the development of assessments aligned to standards and establishing accountability measures to encourage school and teacher participation (Desimone, 2013). Teachers are key contributors to the successful implementation of standards-based assessment (Cohen, 1995).

Across the United States, the collective movement towards curriculum standardization includes several challenges to teachers in their individual classrooms. Specifically, *teaching to the test* has been cited in educational literature as a primary concern of teachers who are required to implement curriculum standards in their courses (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Firestone & Schorr, 2004; Gallagher, 2010; Porter, 2000). Smith and Kovacs (2011) found the implementation of standardized testing increased the perceived pressure that teachers felt to raise test scores, a belief that their unique skills and abilities were being devalued, and overall frustration with their field. They found these results to be especially predominant in low-income and low-performing schools.

In a 2012 report, Meeder and Suddreth sought to define the level of CTE involvement in the implementation of CCSS. They identified a substantial gap in CTE's involvement and implementation with Common Core. State educational leaders expressed the need for CTE and Common Core to work together and for CTE teachers to develop materials and resources to support the Common Core standards. Despite the stated need for states to work together, this study reported nearly one-half of the responding states had no CTE representation involved in implementing CCSS. McKim, Lambert, Sorensen, and Velez (2015)

found agriculture teachers in Oregon to consider themselves somewhat familiar with CCSS for both math and English/language arts and were incorporating the standards in some areas of their instruction.

Accountability is often cited as a concern by teachers, and this can be especially problematic for those who are not tied to the core curriculum areas (Meeder & Suddarth, 2012). Agricultural education programs readily incorporate science, literacy, and math, but how are teachers coping with the added pressure to incorporate CCSS in their classrooms?

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is the Factors Affecting Curriculum Implementation model identified by Phakisi (2008). For policy and practice to develop through the use of educational assessment, teachers must be willing to acknowledge the value of curriculum standards and open to aligning their instruction with established standards (Gregoire, 2003). Gregoire (2003) described additional factors for successful conceptual change in teacher education, such as motivation, time, stress, and ability. Phakisi (2008) identified three primary factors affecting the implementation of new curricula: policy-factors, teacher-related factors, and support-related factors (see Figure 1).

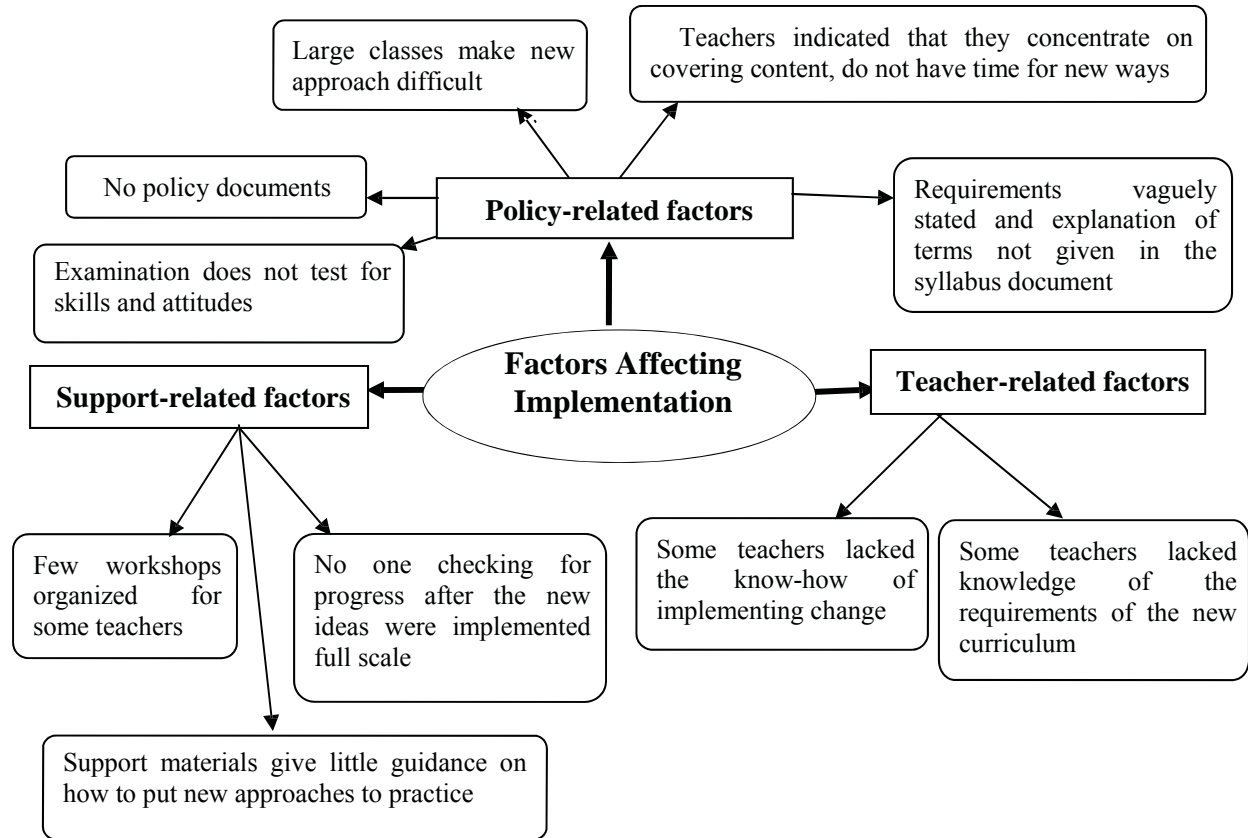


Figure 1. Factors Affecting Curriculum Implementation (Phakisi, 2008).

Support-related factors are one of the primary forces related to the success or failure of curriculum implementation. Common approaches to curriculum reform involve a top-down approach where initiatives come from a central agency or governmental authority and trickle down to teachers (Phakisi, 2008). This model, common in many countries, is often cited as being successful if accompanied by a high level of teacher training and support, monitoring, and feedback (Hall & Hord, 2006). Yet, a disconnect often exists

between the curriculum designers and those implementing the curriculum in their classrooms (Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2006).

Closely related to support factors is the understanding of how teachers will implement change in their classrooms. These teacher-related factors acknowledge the concerns some teachers may have related to the curriculum and strategies for implementation in their individual situations. These factors are often incorporated through direct training and interaction with teachers involved in the adoption process. A lack of appropriate training, however, can cause misunderstanding, frustration, and unwillingness to participate in the curriculum change process (Fogleman, McNeil, & Krajcik, 2010).

The last category of factors, as identified by Phakisi (2008), are policy-related factors. This final category focuses on the specific policies enacted by schools to make implementation possible. Policy-related factors support teachers by having clear school policies and procedures for implementation in place, and ensuring requirements, such as testing and class sizes, support the curriculum change. Policy-related factors are specific to the school situation as teachers attempt to navigate the change expectations along with their usual workload.

Teachers are considered key to successful implementation of curriculum change. Yet, these changes are often criticized for being stressful because teachers are required to move outside of their comfort zones and modify their teaching practice (Fogleman et al., 2010). This study attempted to better understand the factors involved with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in agriculture classrooms in New Mexico.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

A more thorough understanding of the benefits and problems associated with the implementation of the CCSS in agricultural education may enable teacher education programs to better prepare teachers to enter classrooms where common core integration is expected. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to determine the perceptions of agricultural education teachers regarding the implementation of Common Core in their programs. This study sought to address two research objectives:

1. Examine agricultural education teachers' experiences with the implementation of Common Core State Standards;
2. Identify agricultural education teachers' perceptions of the positive and negative aspects of Common Core State Standards implementation in agricultural education programs in New Mexico.

### **Methods**

A basic qualitative approach was utilized for this study as defined by Merriam (2009). Merriam (2009) contended that basic qualitative studies are the "most common form of qualitative research found in education" (p. 23). Thus, basic qualitative studies are defined as 1) being based in social constructivism, 2) developed based on prior research, 3) composed of small sample sizes, 4) using data that is collected through interviews, observations or archival data, and 5) developing reported results based on observations and data collected. Merriam (2009) supported the use of this approach in an effort to gain a more thorough understanding of how individuals interpret and assign meaning to different experiences. Although Merriam (2009) also recognized some of the added dimensions of qualitative research such as a phenomenological study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and critical qualitative research, she argued the basic qualitative approach is a valid method to help promote a true understanding of the "meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (p. 22). This was deemed the most appropriate approach to use because the study participants had different perspectives regarding their acquisition of knowledge about and implementation of Common Core standards at the school and district levels.

To develop the interview protocol, a thorough review of the literature was conducted and questions were adapted from a similar interview protocol conducted by Cheng (2012). The interview questions were further reviewed by a panel of experts representing three different universities and considered appropriate for the purpose and objectives of the study. External experts were selected based on one of three criteria: 1) previous research in CCSS and its impact on educators, 2) expertise in secondary education and 3) experience in qualitative research design. Although the interview guide provided a framework for the study face-to-face interviews, probing questions were also used to expand on participants responses to obtain a more detailed and in-depth understanding of their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

## Participants

A criterion sample (Patton, 2002) was used to select teachers who were already implementing the Common Core in New Mexico. The agricultural education supervisor for New Mexico was contacted and asked to compile a list of teachers who had started integrating CCSS extensively into their curriculum. The agricultural education supervisor provided a list of five teachers (see Table 1). All five teachers were contacted electronically and agreed to take part in the study. An in-depth interview was conducted with each teacher, which lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) to develop themes. Transcripts were reviewed and themes were developed independently. Three researchers collaborated to condense and refine the themes reported.

Table 1

*Selected Personal and Professional Characteristics of Interview Participants*

Participant	Sex	Years taught	Grade level taught
1	Male	27	9 - 12 Agriculture
2	Female	16	9 - 12 Agriculture
3	Male	22	9 - 12 Agriculture
4	Female	2	7 - 12 Agriculture and 9th grade Science
5	Female	8	7 - 12 Agriculture

Subjectivity is not “composed of lenses that you can put on or take off, but rather that each of us live at the complex and shifting intersections of identity” (Glesne, 2011, p. 154). To that end, researchers should “report faithfully these realities and rely on voices and interpretation of informants” (p. 6). Two of the three authors have extensive knowledge and experience in the field of agricultural education. The third author has extensive knowledge in qualitative research and data analysis and in data collection methods such as interviewing.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted the importance of credibility, consistency, dependability, and transferability in qualitative research. In an effort to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study, the researchers practiced self-reflexivity. Tracy (2010) encourages researchers to engage in the process of self-reflexivity by “being introspective, assessing their own biases and motivations, and asking whether they are well-suited to examine their chosen sites or topics at this time” (p. 842). In this study, the researchers

used dialogue and written statements to identify and articulate potential biases and assumptions related to the research (Merriam, 2009) and determined it was appropriate to move forward with the examination of this particular topic. In addition, detailed information about the research process was provided in an effort to be very transparent (Tracy, 2010). A peer examination process was utilized to assure the emerging themes were consistent and representative of the data (Merriam, 1995). Although quantitative research stresses the importance of generalizability, the goal of the qualitative approach is “to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many” (Merriam, 1995, p. 57). As a consequence, a thick description of participants’ experiences was included to allow readers to potentially transfer the research and make its findings valuable and applicable to a variety of contexts or situations (Tracy, 2010).

## **Results**

After analysis of the interview transcripts, five themes emerged from the two research objectives. Two major themes emerged in regard to objective 1: 1) impact of preparation, and 2) difficulty navigating the standards. Three additional themes were derived for objective 2: 1) overall positivity for the CCSS, 2) little impact on individual teaching practice, and 3) frustration with the educational reform process.

When discussing the implementation of CCSS in their programs, participants primarily discussed how their respective schools prepared them for the transition to implement Common Core in their courses. A substantial difference emerged in the amount of professional development and training the participants had received, ranging to little or no training to extensive training and personnel dedicated to the integration of Common Core. Three of the participants had not received any training about Common Core and the integration of its standards. In contrast, participant three’s school had a full-time coach and participant two’s school had participated in Common Core-related professional development for two years. Participant two estimated her school district had invested “hundreds of dollars per teacher in materials for handbooks, guides, implementation ideas, that kind of thing. And they continue to do so. It’s not leaving our district anytime soon.”

Of the teachers in the study who had not received training, support existed for the concept of CCSS implementation, but so did reservations to the introduction of the Common Core in their agriculture classes. Participant five perceived the curriculum was “pushed on the teachers.” In discussing the challenges of training, participant two stated her school administration selected teachers to receive training and had them return to train others; however, this practice was not entirely seamless. To that end, participant five stated:

They don’t come back and train anybody or they don’t share that information, they send people that probably are not the most forward minded people that can grasp [CCSS] and understand it and break [the training] back down for everybody else to grasp and understand.

In regard to the implementation of CCSS, a second theme emerged as teachers reported they found it difficult to navigate all of the information contained in the standards. Teachers supporting the implementation of Common Core perceived they were provided flexibility in their teaching, but time had to be committed to planning lessons that adequately fit the standards. The challenge of implementing Common Core did not reside in teaching lessons using the standards, but instead preparing lesson plans that correctly cross-referenced the standards. Participant one explained:

You have to use your imagination a little bit because it’s not very defined. But it does give that flexibility no matter if you are teaching in [city and state] and teach the way I teach or you teach, or the way [a colleague] teaches. You are going to have those differences in how they teach and what they teach.

Regarding objective two of this study, teachers were asked to discuss the benefits and challenges of the CCSS. Overall, the participants seemed to have positive perceptions. Most participants described the positive impact of the standardized curriculum on their teaching practice. Participants also recognized the

opportunity for agricultural education to make a positive contribution to the implementation efforts of the CCSS. In participant five's school, rich collaborations occurred between teachers when targeting identified areas for student performance. She further explained:

One of the things that they have really started focusing on is that our kids needed help in reading, writing, and analyzing texts and so the English department is working on it in one regard and then they have had the elective teachers work on it for another approach just so the kids are continually exposed, continually doing the same things and sometimes the kids won't connect with it in a core subject, but because it's in Ag or computers or something that they like they find a deeper connection and it kind of clicks for them that way.

Several participants in the study acknowledged the valuable contributions of agricultural education to the implementation of Common Core. Participant four expanded on the opportunities for core content integration:

What I like about Common Core is you know, ag teachers, you know, they don't teach just ag. We teach history, we teach science, we teach math, we teach language arts, but that kind of helps me be a better language arts teacher. When I do a writing assignment it kind of helps show me what exactly I need to expect from my kids at that level that they are on. That's the only thing I really enjoy about it.

Participant four reminded teachers that the mission of teaching agricultural content had not been abandoned, but instructional approaches had to be adjusted. She also acknowledged the end goal of higher achieving students:

I think that the strengths of it are that the kids are continually held to the same expectation across the board. We still have our content, and I know that sometimes our teachers have felt like we've abandon our content standards and we've abandoned what we are supposed to be teaching. I've heard several of my colleagues say "well I didn't sign up to be an English teacher, I'm not here to teach math." And I think that's the wrong attitude to have because we are in it together, and if our kids can't read and if they can't do math and if they can't pass the standardized tests, we are not going to see them in our elective classes anyways because they are going to be in remedial classes to make up for that. So, I think it benefits all of us to work together.

Theme four focused on the impact the participants perceived the CCSS had on their teaching practice. Several participants indicated CCSS had minimal impact on their classroom teaching. Participant one stated nothing had changed in the way he taught, but he explained the standards had to be addressed differently. In addition to the former *Agriculture Content Standards and Benchmarks*, core content standards for science, reading, and writing needed to be incorporated, but basically remained "the same lesson" (Participant four). Participant two also considered the inclusion of CCSS to be similar practice to what he had done in the past. He elaborated, "Common Core doesn't change what I do, it doesn't change who I am, it doesn't change what I teach. I am going to teach what I need to teach and be done with it." In addressing changes since the implementation of Common Core, participant five stated that though it may seem like a big task and hard to understand, "once you get it, it makes it easier. Just go ahead and do it, embrace it."

The participants also discussed their perceptions of what the adoption of the Common Core in New Mexico might mean for other agriculture teachers. Although they did not appear concerned about the impact of the standards on their own classrooms, they did perceive it would result in substantial changes to the teaching practice of some other teachers. As participant one explained: "If you weren't teaching, you better get on the bus and start teaching because as an agricultural education teacher the days of training judging contests from August to April are over, for some [laughing], for some."

Participant three also acknowledged that change may be hard for others, especially if they had taught agriculture for a number of years. Though changes still needed to be made in how she wanted to

teach, she expressed being at an advantage by being new to the profession and thought it may be easier to adjust to new changes and requirements. Participant three elaborated:

You know, the benefit of me being a second year teacher and still being new to everything is I am not being as bombarded with it as these teachers that have been doing it their own way for 15, 20 years. So I think it's going to be an easier transition for me than the rest of them. But I think it's going to take away a little of my own style and what I want to teach. You know, as teachers, we know what our kids want to learn and need to learn and I think it will take away from that a little bit.

Even though the overall perception of implementing CCSS was positive, teachers also described some of the challenges that accompanied implementation. Through theme five, participants primarily described the ever changing cycle of educational initiatives and their perception of voicelessness and complacency in regards to the implementation and accountability associated with CCSS.

When explaining the changes resulting from implementing CCSS in the classroom, participant one described how the state curriculum had been more concise and understandable than the CCSS. To illustrate this point, he pointed to a large three ring binder of standards and benchmarks and compared it to a larger stack containing the Common Core standards and stated, "we can go from this [points to a large three ring binder] Standards and Benchmarks of Agriculture to this [indicates a larger stack of papers]. This is the Common Core of Agriculture." Participant one further elaborated that it was a positive change, but required the matching of the current New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks to CCSS necessitating more preparation and time. In illustrating his point, he used a fellow teacher's experience as an example:

I had a teacher tell me he did his lesson and the principal said, 'this is a great lesson, your evaluation was perfect.' The teacher stated, 'that's because all day yesterday I didn't do nothing, those kids watched a video while I sat here at my desk and prepared the stuff for this one [lesson]. I look great today, for this one hour, but yesterday, those kids watched a video. But I look good today, don't I?'

Participants also discussed the challenges of learning the requirements and acknowledged standards often change which demands flexibility on the part of the teacher.

You've got to figure out what they want you to do, and it may not be the way you were trained, and it may not be the way of whoever you student taught with. None of these things may be the same, but if I have learned nothing in eight years, education continues to change and to evolve and it's all about embracing change and at least learning to live with change.

Though instructors acknowledged these requirements and the difficulties that accompanied them, it seemed teachers remained positive about the specific changes resulting from Common Core. Participant one stated:

Everybody thinks it was just another hoop to jump through. I mean if you have been around 20 years, there have been Common Core and standards and benchmarks, and school-to-work, and high achieving school and this and that and the other, and Common Core is not just one of those hoops. It's a way to trying to get the nation on track with everybody teaching the same thing.

As a result of the changing educational initiatives and the perceived lack of training, teachers expressed they did not have a voice in the policy making process. Despite this being a federal initiative, the implementation in local schools often led teachers to perceive being left out of the decision making process. To have a stronger understanding of the reasoning behind Common Core, teachers perceived it would be important to have buy-in regarding the process. Participant three explained:

When you have buy in, when you have understanding of what is about to happen, it makes things totally different, and [with the implementation of Common Core] there was no buy in, there was no understanding. It was, this is the way it is and this is the way it is going to be and that's the way it is.



Teachers also felt that policy makers did not fully understand what it takes to develop lessons to meet the requirements. Participant four elaborated: "It feels like we are asked to do more with less, and not just less in terms of money, but less in terms of time, in terms of preparation. Often, more time is devoted to lesson preparation than actual teaching."

Another participant stated: "The paperwork is overwhelming as you are trying to search and reference the Common Core. You hire me to teach, you don't hire me to do paperwork, so the only people you have left are the ones who have too many years to get out of teaching."

In addition, teachers were skeptical of Common Core as they described concerns regarding the consequences of not adequately meeting the standards. In describing an elementary school teacher's experience, participant one stated:

If a kid does not pass these tests and if he is not up to the grade after, or a special education student does not pass, [a teacher's] evaluation is affected, no matter how well she teaches them, and if that kid doesn't get it, [the teacher] can be reprimanded and/or fired based on the Common Core standards.

Finally, in addition to their own challenges, teachers were also concerned about the impact of Common Core on students. CCSS no longer allowed for a high level of flexibility and teachable moments. In addressing policy, participant three wanted to remind policy makers of an important point:

Don't forget that all kids learn differently. Kids have different learning styles, they learn at a different rate and it seems like this Common Core is just trying to drill the kids to learn the exact same thing in the exact same way, at the exact same time, and I think they need to keep in mind that there are those different ways to learn, people process things differently and they need to take that into consideration again.

## **Discussion**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

It is important to understand the challenges and successes that agricultural education teachers experience as they begin to navigate the implementation of CCSS in their programs. This study sought to better understand how teachers in the early phases of the curriculum change process might experience change in their classrooms. Phakisi (2008) identified factors related to successful curriculum implementation as falling into three general categories: support-related factors, teacher-related factors, and policy-related factors (see Figure 1). Teachers in New Mexico addressed needs in regard to these areas.

Support-related factors explored through this study found teachers perceived a lack professional development offerings and training options were available to them. These support factors are often identified in the literature as critical to curriculum implementation and successful buy-in (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hall & Hord, 2006; Rothman, 2012). Even though the Common Core standards have been adopted for inclusion in New Mexico, a standardized approach to professional development and support for teachers does not exist across the state. The participants' engagement in professional development varied widely based on their school districts' initiatives. Similarly, teachers in the study by McKim et al. (2015) reported a lack of adequate training specific to CCSS. The absence of Common Core preparation has created some challenges as participants navigated the daunting handbook of standards. A large time commitment was required on the part of teachers to incorporate CCSS into lesson plans and to report results. The instructors who received support from administration were able to implement Common Core more easily than those who were on their own. The success of CCSS, therefore will be impacted by the types of in-service and pre-service training provided to teachers. In other states, the lack of cohesive training for CCSS has contributed to increased opposition and criticism, as well as a lack of ownership among teachers (Liebtag, 2013; King, 2011).

Overall, teacher-related factors were the least concerning area of CCSS adoption. Participants' perceptions of the Common Core were positive. They expressed minimal change in their own teaching practice and recognized the contributions agricultural education could make in reinforcing core academic content. Participants did however express a high level of concern within the area of policy-related factors, not specifically directed the Common Core, but about the cyclical nature of educational initiatives and a perception of their voicelessness related to educational policy.

An Achieve survey study of state CTE directors and CCSS coordinators was conducted in 2011 to determine how to make better transitions between CTE classrooms and core academic programs when implementing CCSS (Meeder & Suddreth, 2012). From this research, several strategies were identified that would help facilitate the integration of CCSS into CTE programs. Strategies such as developing a common definition of college and career readiness, involvement of CTE in the planning stages of CCSS implementation, sharing resources and communication between academic and CTE instructors, and updating instructional materials could all be beneficial in the adoption process. The use of cross-disciplinary teams could give teachers a voice in the curriculum integration process (Meeder & Suddreth, 2012).

To increase buy-in, teachers should be able to recognize the new standards are meaningful and be willing to change their teaching to align with such new standards (Gregoire, 2003). The current study found teachers were in agreement about the idea of Common Core, but concerned with implementation and reporting. A difference existed between perceptions of those teachers who had received training and support from their school administration versus teachers who had not received any training before the implementation of Common Core in their classrooms. Teachers' comments stressed the importance of administrative investment and support materials provided prior to implementation. Teachers who had not received professional development training indicated a need for in-service and educational opportunities and without such, expressed a sense of voiceless and complacency. Their comments included "it seems like we are expected to do more with less" and "the paperwork is overwhelming."

Although policy documents on Common Core were available, teachers reported it was hard to relate Common Core to the previous New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. To incorporate CCSS, teachers acknowledged it would require a significant amount of time to both plan and report outside their teaching in the classroom. To address this concern, time in preparation and reporting may be reduced by providing additional training and communication by school administration and policy makers, this may also improve the perceptions of CCSS and other education initiatives.

Similar to previous research conducted by Smith and Kovacs (2011), the implementation of CCSS testing resulted in an increase in the internal pressure teachers felt to raise test scores. As a result of this pressure, teachers often believed themselves to be devalued in their teaching abilities which led to frustration. One teacher, though she agreed with Common Core, acknowledged she was no longer was allowed to teach how she wanted to teach in her preferred way and perceived that because of Common Core, opportunities for *teachable moments* were lost. In addition, another teacher reported being concerned about the undesirable consequences if students do not meet the standards under Common Core, because teachers would be penalized or *reprimanded* for poor outcomes without taking into consideration the characteristics and ability levels of students. This current study also confirmed the findings of Richardson and Placier (2001) in that teachers perceived being held personally accountable for school district results and the need to address specified learning standards in their teaching.

As noted by the participants, agricultural education has the opportunity to standardize curriculum and enhance core content. By implementing CCSS, agricultural content and laboratory experiences can easily incorporate math, science, and English within a context that encourages learning, such as the agricultural education classroom. Through agricultural education, students may connect with a core subject because it is presented in a form they enjoy and "they find a deeper connection and it kind of clicks for them that way" (Participant five).

### Recommendations

Although participants seemed to embrace CCSS, they also expressed concern the implementation of the curriculum could have a potentially negative impact on other teachers. Because this study was focused on a small number of teachers, it is important to examine the perceptions and experiences of a broader group of teachers in both agricultural education and CTE. States that have implemented CCSS are expecting teachers to come on-board implementing these learning standards in their program, but significant research and professional development may be necessary to determine if they are actually ready for the curriculum change.

Overall, this research described an area for improvement through teacher preparation programs. The variation in the lack of training among the participants raises an important question about the appropriate avenues for teacher training on CCSS. If schools are inconsistent in their training practices, where should these teachers be trained? Should training on the CCSS be initiated in teacher education programs? This may become an important issue to consider, especially with the need for recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.

This study sought to understand the needs of a small group of early CCSS adopters in agricultural education. Their experiences help to describe how teachers in New Mexico are adapting to curriculum change. Additional research is needed to better describe how other states are implementing this curriculum mandate. This research also highlighted a need for additional research on teacher educators' knowledge and perceptions specific to CCSS. Research should examine what type of instruction on the CCSS is currently being included in teacher education courses. In addition, how are math and English/language arts being included as part of agricultural education or CTE content? A more thorough understanding of how CCSS is being implemented on a state by state basis is needed to determine if the themes identified by this study are generalizable to others. If these trends are indeed consistent, what problems are occurring in other areas and what solutions are being developed to help agricultural education teachers successful implement CCSS? Phakisi (2008) acknowledges curriculum change is a complex process with a variety of factors involved in successful implementation. As curriculum change occurs, pre-service and in-service education is needed in various formats to help teachers implement change in their programs (Gibney, 2014).

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