The Common Core: Myths vs. Facts

Myth: The new Common Core State Standards and tests are not an improvement from what we had before.

Fact: The Thomas B. Fordham Institute compared the Common Core to New Jersey's previous standards in math and English-language arts and found that the Common Core State Standards were more rigorous and more clearly written than New Jersey's old standards.[1]

Under the old math and ELA standards, many students in New Jersey were still entering college and the workforce without the skills they needed to be successful. New Jersey adopted the Common Core State Standards, which are more rigorous and require more critical thinking, to curb this problem.[2]

With a new and improved set of math and ELA standards, New Jersey adopted new tests to make sure that students are meeting academic goals. During the 2014-2015 school year students will be given the PARCC assessment, an online assessment desifgned to test critical thinking skills, through open-ended responses and multiple step problems. These types of questions require students to show their work and support their answers. In addition, given that the ACT is offering computer-based testing in 2015, other college entrance exams may decide to move toward computer-based testing as well.[3] Practicing computer-based tests now will serve as good practice for students.

The new assessments are also important for teachers because they will help them determine if their students are on track. Teachers use the data from tests to develop interventions for struggling students and build stronger lesson plans that meet the needs of all their students.

Myth: The Common Core will not teach practical life skills students need, like handwriting and cursive.

Fact: The Common Core focuses on developing communication and critical thinking skills, but it does not prohibit schools and teachers from covering subjects like handwriting and cursive.

Myth: The Common Core will eliminate classics such as Shakespeare from the curriculum.

Fact: The Common Core State Standards do not prohibit the teaching of any specific novel or historical text. The Common Core does include a focus on the use of nonfiction texts, increasing students' exposure as they move from kindergarten to 12th grade. The purpose of this is to ensure that students not only understand fictional texts, but can also read, comprehend and evaluate more technical nonfiction texts as well.

Myth: The Common Core was imposed by the federal government.

Fact: New Jersey, along with over 40 other states, voluntarily adopted the Common Core. The standards were developed through a state-led initiative spearheaded by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers.[4] The federal government has provided some funding to assist states in their transition to the Common Core but has never required adoption of the standards.[5]

1 "The State of the Standards," Thomas B. Fordham Institute, accessed May 30, 2014, *http:// edexcellencemedia.net/ publications/2010/201007_state _education_standards_common _standards/NewJersey.pdf.*

2 "Common Core State Standards: Preparing Students for College and Career," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed July 16, 2014, *http://www.state.nj.us/education/ sca/#.*

3 "ACT Announces Plans for Computer-Based Administration," ACT, accessed August 8, 2014, *http://www .act.org/newsroom/releases/view .php?lang=english&p=2827.*

4 "Standards in Your State," Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed July 16, 2014, *http://www .corestandards.org/standards-in-your -state/.*

5 "Race to the Top Assessment Program," U.S. Department of Education, accessed July 16, 2014, *http://www2.ed.gov/programs/ racetothetop-assessment/applicant .html.*

Myth: The Common Core dictates what teachers can and cannot teach.
Fact: The Common Core outlines goals for what each student should know, not the curricula used to get them there. As in the past, all decisions about how to teach the standards—including which books students read—will be made by educators at the school and district level.[6]

Myth: The Common Core is a one-size-fits-all approach to education.
Fact: The Common Core describes the same learning goals for all students, regardless of what school they attend, so that all New Jersey students graduate from high school with the skills they need to succeed in whatever they choose to do. However, districts, schools and teachers will still be able to develop their own programs for meeting the goals. They will still have the power to adjust curricula and tailor lesson plans to fit each student's needs.

Myth: New Jersey had no time to prepare for the Common Core and PARCC assessments.
Fact: New Jersey adopted the Common Core in 2010 and since then has made a very deliberate and gradual transition. The standards were phased in over three years between the 2011-12 and 2013-14 school years, during which time the NJDOE provided professional development, an optional model curriculum and instructional resources such as the Educator Resource Exchange.

The state has also worked to slowly transition to the new standardized tests that will measure how well students have mastered the standards. Approximately 77 percent of all New Jersey school districts volunteered to field test the Common Core-aligned PARCC assessments in the 2013-14 school year, which will keep the state on track to fully implement the PARCC assessment in 2014-2015, five years after the standards were first adopted.[7]

The success of the Common Core will ultimately depend on how districts and schools implement the standards and PARCC assessments. This can only be done effectively with the ongoing support of the NJDOE. We will continue to monitor this process and offer input or support as necessary to ensure the smoothest transition possible.

Myth: The Common Core requires all students to have a computer or iPad.
Fact: Individual schools will continue to decide what technology students and teachers will use.

Myth: Students have less access to computers because of the new assessments.
Fact: School leaders will have a large window of time to give the new tests. Each school leader is encouraged to design a testing schedule and make the necessary arrangements to minimize this problem.

Myth: By adopting the Common Core, New Jersey will be required to collect students' personal data, such as eye scans or fingerprints, to be shared in a national database.
Fact: New Jersey will not give the federal government identifying information about our students, nor will it have to collect biometric data to adopt the Common Core. In addition, there are a number of federal laws that prohibit the U.S. Department of Education from creating a national database of student information.[8] In January 2014, New Jersey and 33 other states reaffirmed in a letter to Education Secretary Arne Duncan that students' personally identifiable data will not be shared with any federal agency.[9]

Myth: Private companies will be able to access student data and use it to market products to students and their families.
Fact: All identifying student information is protected by federal law from being shared with any third party, including private companies, without parent consent. Adoption of the Common Core does not require states, districts or schools to contract with technology or data firms.

6 "Common Core State Standards: Preparing Students for College and Career," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed July 16, 2014, *http://www.state.nj.us/education/sca/#.*

7 "Update: PARCC Field Testing," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed July 16, 2014, *http://www.state.nj.us/education/sboe/meetings/2014/May/public/Update%20on%20PARCC%20Field%20Testing.pdf.*

8 "College- and Career- Ready Standards," United States Department of Education, accessed March 4, 2014, *http://www.ed.gov/k-12reforms/standards.*

9 Catherine Gewertz, "State Chiefs to Arne Duncan: We Won't Share Student Data," EdWeek, January 24, 2014, accessed March 4, 2014, *http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/USED%2520Letter_FINAL_01-23-14-3.pdf.*

10 "College- and Career- Ready Standards."