

# Solutions for Urban Education Reform: Are Common Core State Standards the Answer?

## A Commentary

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It is no surprise that *No Child Left Behind* is receiving substantial criticism in the academic world. Teachers, parents, students, administrators, and researchers are discovering that overarching standardized testing is punitive and inadequately serving American students. With the dusk of *No Child Left Behind* in 2014, federal legislation has suggested for the Common Core curriculum to take its place. To date, forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense have approved this aforementioned curriculum change (Jones & King, 2012). This means, all states except Alaska, Nebraska, Minnesota, Texas and Virginia have adopted the Common Core Standards for curriculum upgrading and replacement.

The dawn of the Common Core curriculum is already receiving substantial federal attention. There are currently mathematics and literacy standards written for the 2014-2015 school year. Once accepted, participating states will focus on state benchmark assessments, which will

monitor student achievement. Many educators are questioning this federal initiative (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012; Jones & King, 2012; Saunders, Bethune, Spooner, & Browder, 2013). Some educators question Common Core's difference from *No Child Left Behind*. With the pressure to implement a nationwide curriculum, there is growing question on what curriculum material will be deemed important for national standards. Because there has been little progress with curriculum multiculturalism, the national benchmarks created by federal administration will assumingly be written through the same lens as past curriculum models. All in all, this poses several questions in the relevancy of another system of standardized assessments. Some of these questions are addressed throughout the *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals* first issue entitled, "The State of Urban Education: Implications, Directions, and Policy Reform for Increasing Student Achievement." Authors critically examined educational topics, methods, and practices that – like Common Core State



Standards – will heavily impact the status of urban education in the United States.

In the first article, “Equity in Education: The Relationship between Race, Class, and Gender in Mathematics for Diverse Learners,” Debra Rohn analyzes mathematics education for its practicality and functionality for students. Different realities of race, class, and gender are examined based on achievement and equity among subgroups. With the growing push in Common Core to enforce mathematics achievement, these subgroups are ever pertinent to school, district, state, and national success. As the article mentions, the issues of equity become complex when compounding variables like race, class, and gender are factored (Rohn, 2013). This is an area of educational reform that needs further attention. Even when considering the implementation of Common Core standards, educational access and equity will most likely undergird new curriculum initiatives.

In the second article, “Effective Writing Instruction for African American Speakers,” Crystal Glover examines similar curriculum issues that factor into the newly adopted Common Core standards. Whereas the Common Core State Standards have a language arts and writing component, there is little indication of how these new standards will accommodate diverse languages and learner needs. Meaning, although the standards are considered as more holistic in comparison

to No Child Left Behind (Jones & King, 2012; Schmidt & Houang, 2012), the diversity within the curriculum content as it pertains to cultural hegemony and refuting grand narratives are not discussed in detail. As the article mentions, one effective way to teach African American students is to be mindful of cultural speech patterns (Glover, 2013). Teacher preparations and professional development programs must continue to supplement curriculum models that lack diversity or cultural relevance.

Eugenia Hopper takes a more theoretical approach in the third article. “*A Dichotomy of Necessary Behaviors and Implementation of Constructivism in Urban Schools*,” acknowledges the implementation of Common Core curriculum standards. As mentioned in the article, the attempts to standardize skills and knowledge nationwide stemmed from the desires to make American students more globally competitive (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hopper, 2013). Because the standards are written in a way to build upon prior knowledge, the importance for focusing on underserved urban areas is increasingly important.

The last manuscript is an educational policy brief written by Howard Menand. In, “Educational Policy Developments in North Carolina and its Impact on African American Students,” Common Core is examined for its impact on African American students. Questions from this article permeate the importance of reexamining curriculum models that will



specifically impact underserved students (Menand, 2013). More specifically, how will students who lack basic skills respond to these curriculum changes? While the article highlights North Carolina specifically, the same holds true for each U.S. state and territory that has transitioned to Common Core standards. If Common Core is a one-size-fits-all model to ensure streamlined and consistent academic success for its students, how will this new model accommodate all students?

Aside from the replacement of *No Child Left Behind* standards, state and federal governments must recapture the persistence of globalization and American student competitiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Schmidt & Houang, 2012). Changing state standards is only a topical effort. The urgency surrounding instructional methods, teacher quality, and the re-centering of teacher professionalism is an area that must be intertwined with the heightened complexity of national standards (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012). While implementation of Common Core standards is still debatable, it is only one piece to the complex urban education puzzle.

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