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The Common Core State Standards: How did we get here and do we even like it?

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TEACHING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:
How Did We Get Here and Do We Even Like It?

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Abstract: In 2010, the Common Core State Standards were introduced to the nation as a set of voluntary education standards. Since then, 42 states and the District of Columbia have voluntarily adopted these standards. Scholarship shows that many educational experts, parents, and politicians have voiced their opinions on the Common Core. However, there is little research on the opinions of teachers. As teachers are the ones implementing and teaching the Common Core, my research study focuses on how six educators in Rhode Island have embraced the Common Core in their classrooms. My research has found that teachers generally like the new standards as they encourage critical thinking, allow for collaboration between teachers across the country, and are more rigorous than previous state standards. However, teachers are frustrated by the continual changes to standards, as they have had to re-write curricula to new standards multiple times in the last twenty years, they generally dislike online testing, and are often frustrated by the lack of specialization in the standards for English Language learners and students with disabilities. In this thesis I will explore how we came to adopt these standards, how teachers view them, and how students have faired since the adoption.

This senior thesis is dedicated in three parts.

To Luke for telling me "you can do it" every day of this process.

To my Mom and Dad for supporting me in every way humanly possible.

And lastly to the teachers and professors who have encouraged me to never stop learning and have inspired me to instill that into others through education.

Table of Contents:

Chapter 1:

An Introduction

On June 2nd, 2010, unbeknownst to many, the Common Core State Standards were introduced to the world at Peachtree Ridge High School, in Suwanee, Georgia. The Common Core State Standards were a new concept, one set of education standards in English and Mathematics that would be common across the country (Rothman 9). This set of standards would go on to create much uproar, controversy, and change in the education system of the United States. This controversy caught my attention in 2013 when I attended a public hearing at the Connecticut General Assembly and listened to testimony of parents, teachers, educators, students, and community members on why they thought Connecticut should or should not sign on to adopt the new standards. So many testifiers were using their three minutes allotted to make passionate cases on the subject. I was enthralled, these standards had already been adopted in my home state of Rhode Island, and I wanted to know more. Through educational studies classes at Trinity College and my own self-driven research I began to understand just what the Common Core State Standards meant for education.

The best introduction to what the standards are comes directly from the Common Core State Standards website itself.

> The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live. (Common Core Initiative)

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are academic standards. This is not the first standards movement in the United States, but it is the first standards movement that has united the states under one common set of standards. Some may ask, "Why do all the states

need common standards?" We know that according to the Constitution, all power not given to the federal government is given to the states, so states control their own education systems. In the foreword of *Something in Common,* by Robert Rothman, James B. Hunt, longest serving Governor of North Carolina and a founder and supporter of the common standards movement has given why the country needs common standards: equity. No student should receive a better or worse education based on his or her geographical location (Rothman x). A student living in an urban area should be held to the same academic standards as a student living in a suburban town.

Equity in education also becomes incredibly important when looking at transient students. Let's look at a possible scenario. In school District A, second graders learn multiplication in September and begin division in January. However, in District B, second graders learn both at the same time. If a student from District A moves to District B in December, she will already be three months behind in division. With common standards, all schools are teaching the same thing around the same time. This provides equity for all students, whether they have to move or not. This is just one of many reasons people have gotten on board with the Common Core.

On the other hand, one argument that is made often and loudly about the Common Core State Standards is that they are an overreach of the Federal Government. As mentioned before, we know through the 10th Amendment to the United States Constitution that the Federal Government does not have control over the education system. Conservative commentator Glenn Beck's book, *Conform,* is filled with sensationalist claims about the Common Cores takeover of the American education system. In his book he quotes columnist George May, saying that the Common Core is "the thin end of an enormous wedge [that] is designed to advance in primary

and secondary education the general progressive agenda of centralization of uniformity" (Beck 88). Though Beck's scholarly qualifications are low, having only attended one college level course, he is very outspoken on the topic of the Common Core, and his books are filled with ideas that are echoed through blogs and online discussion boards about the standards. However, the idea of uniformity is one that needs to be addressed.

When the ideas of standards came around in 1994, states shot down the idea of common standards. The first group of states to band together and create common standards were Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont ,and Maine, who created the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), "in order to produce a better-quality test a less cost than any of the states could do on their own" (Rothman 52). If these four states were able to come together over common standards, why couldn't others? Rothman argues that the NECAP's success set the idea of standards into motion (52). As for the claim they are a federal overreach, a few different groups, including Achieve, The Alliance for Excellent Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Hunt Institute, and the National Governors Association (NGA), made the standards themselves, not the federal government. However, the involved parties knew that a project led by a national institute would fail, so the NGA and the CCSSO took on the leadership of this endeavor (Rothman 62). At the first meeting of this new effort, the state leaders signed onto an agreement that they would participate in a "state-led process that will draw on evidence and lead to development and adoption of common core state standards in English language arts and mathematics for grades K-12" (Rothman 62). When signing that agreement they made it clear that this initiative was *not* in fact a federal one, but a state one.

Another issue many people have with the standards is that they were written by "companies." Yes, it is true that private companies were involved in making the standards.

Creating the standards took the efforts of many dedicated individuals, including "educators, content specialists, researchers, community groups, and national organizations, including and advisory group of experts from Achieve, ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers" (Kendall 1). Diane Ravitch, education historian, published an article on her blog about the lack of classroom teachers involved with the creation. However, many people in the creation work groups had teaching experience and the National Council of Teachers of English and the national Council of Teachers of Mathematics were invited to critique various drafts of the standards, along with parents, teachers, business leaders, and members of the general public (Kendall 2).

So we know who created the standards, but what are they? I think that that is best answered by first outlining what the standards are not. This is done at the beginning of the Common Core State Standards document distributed to teachers and available for download on the Common Core's website.

It is imperative to understand the Common Core State standards *are not a curriculum*. "The standards define what all students should are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach" (Common Core State Standards for English 9). In the document itself there are often side notes or suggestions on appropriate range and content of materials used, however, the Common Core State Standards Initiative said, "While the Standards make references to some particular forms of content… they do not, indeed, cannot, enumerate all or even must of the content that students should learn. The Standards must therefore be complemented by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum consistent with the expectations laid out in the document" (Dunkle 49).

The Common Core State Standards were designed with four key goals. The standards needed to be research and evidence based, aligned with college and work expectations, rigorous, and internationally benchmarked (Common Core State Standards for English 3). These four goals set the foundation for designing the standards and made it clear that these standards identify the skills required of students to succeed in college or in a career. Research had previously shown that businesses and colleges were disappointed in the increasing amount of remediation required to bring newly graduated students up to speed with college expectations or the working world (Kendall 27). These standards should help eliminate the need for remediation.

When the standards were introduced in 2010, they were just standards. The states themselves would need to come up with systems of implantation, assessment, remediation, and professional development, much more on their own. Schools would have to re-write curricula and revamp their professional development to reflect the new standards. Robert Rothman points out that, "faced with limited resources, states could not conceivably develop all necessary materials and prepare all teachers at once; rather, states proposed to stage the implementation so that they test the materials an expand training over time " (Rothman 126). Finding quality materials that are aligned to the Common Core must have been difficult at the beginning stages, as not many materials were available.

One material that was important but not readily available in 2010 when the standards were unveiled was the core-aligned assessments. In 2012, almost all of the adopting states had signed onto one of two consortia that were working to create new core-aligned assessments, the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) or the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) (Rothman 122). However, as these tests were not readily available at the beginning stages of implantation, schools had to either make do with the

tests the currently were using or create a new system. For example, Massachusetts did a three year, phase-out type of testing where they slowly began dropping old content while replacing it with new core-aligned content (Rothman 122). Implementing the standards took time, and the standardized testing that assessed the students' ability to meet the standards has only just begun. Rhode Island, the state we will be studying, has only completed one year of practice PARCC testing and one year of actual PARCC testing.

John Kendall put it well when he explained the name itself, "the nature of the *core* is of an essential, irreducible set of knowledge and skills, while *common* suggest a social contract and all that it implies: share benefit and equitable treatment" (27). Understanding the effects of the Common Core State Standards will take time, as the full effect will not be met until a student completes all thirteen years of school under one set of standards. The students in the transition between the Common Core and previous state standards are not truly representative of core-based learners, as they went through other standards previously.

As mentioned previously, the Common Core State Standards are often surrounded by controversy. There are many arguments in support of the Common Core and there are even more arguments against the Common Core. These two arguments are the two main schools of thought dividing scholars on their opinion. In section I will explain the various viewpoints of scholars and how they perceive Common Core State Standards, what they believe to be benefits and what they see as problems or faults.

Scholarship in Support of the Common Core

Many people support the Common Core State Standards. One of the most prominent supporters is Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. His support is often cited in newspaper articles and his speeches. In 2013, Duncan highlighted some of the benefits of the Common Core

State Standards in a speech given at the American Society of News Editors Annual Convention, in Washington, D.C. He claimed that "When these standards are fully implemented, a student who graduates from a high school in any one of these states—who is performing at standard—will be ready to attend and succeed in his or her state university without remedial education." He truly believes that the Common Core State Standards are the most progressive and important change to education since the historic Brown versus Board of Education (Duncan). As the visible leader of our education department and the figurehead for education in America, Duncan's support is worth a lot.

Agreeing with Arne Duncan, Cheryl Dunkle, a teacher, principal and scholar, argues that the Common Core is better for teachers as well as students. As the Common Core affects students and teachers the most, Dunkle's scholarship brings a special perspective, as has had first hand experience in the classroom. The standards, according to Dunkle "adopt instructional materials for the entire state" or allows "the adoption of textbooks and other resources to the individual districts" (Dunkle 54). This is different from the textbook driven curriculum that used to be in place, which can give teachers the ability to create and design their own lesson plans to fit their student's needs. Arne Duncan has also spoken about the standards leniency for teachers, saying that the new standards "give teachers the space and opportunity to go deep, emphasizing problem-solving, analysis, and critical thinking, as well as creativity and teamwork. They give teachers room to innovate." This innovation has been considered one of the most positive aspects of the Common Core State Standards.

The standards are also beneficial to anyone moving between states or towns. Oftentimes when moving, students fall behind because of the sequencing of districts is different. Student mobility can cause both behavioral and academic problems (Hartman). Dunkle and Duncan both

agree that the Common Core State Standards help eradicate issues for highly mobile students. Dunkle points out that with the new standards being common among all states, "Parents and students can feel confident that moving to a new school or district will not disrupt the learning sequence or cause redundancy in learning" (Dunkle 48). In his speech on the Common Core in 2013, Duncan echoes Dunkle saying "the child of a Marine officer, who is transferred from Camp Pendleton in California to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, will be able to make that academic transition without a hitch, instead of having to start over in a widely different place academically." This idea of continuity between states is what the Common Core is focused on, creating equal education for all students *regardless* of where they live.

Robert Rothman is another scholar who is in support of the Common Core. His book, *Something in Common,* is considered one of the most extensive reviews of the standards themselves. Rothman views the standards positively saying, "the Standards represent a significant step forward in American Education" (Rothman 11). However, Rothman, through his extensive research, believes that the standards will only work if the proper amount of support and preparation is given, "Only when teachers make the Standards part of their everyday classroom instruction, when they are prepared to teach them effectively…will they have a chance of improving student learning" (119). Rothman understands that the standards themselves will get the education system nowhere, unless they are properly implemented through the classroom teachers. Rothman's positive view of the standards is not absolute; his study explains that the standards will only work if the many facets are working together to create a strong support system for teachers, students, and curriculum writers.

Scholarship against the Common Core State Standards

When thinking of educational, scholarly opinions, it is impossible not to consider the opinion of Diane Ravitch. In other scholarship, many cite her as a leader on the opposing side, "Opposition has come from both conservative activists who are concerned about Federal influence in schools and from educators such as Diane Ravitch, who are concerned about the process by which he standards were developed and the ways in which they are to be assessed" (Rycik 52). As one of the leaders in the field of education, Ravitch's endorsement on the Common Core State Standards would help ease the minds of many. Ravitch was originally waiting to see results of the Common Core before making a decision. She has often been a supporter of common standards, on her blog she wrote "I have long advocated for voluntary national standards, believing that it would be helpful to states and districts to have general guidelines about what students should know and be able to do as they progress through school." One would assume that she would be pro-Common Core. However, in 2013, Ravitch made her opinion clear, stating that she cannot possibly support the Common Core State Standards. On her blog she explains why, "The Common Core standards have been adopted in 46 states and the District of Columbia without any field test. They are being imposed on the children of this nation despite the fact that no one has any idea how they will affect students, teachers, or schools. We are a nation of guinea pigs, almost all trying an unknown new program at the same time." Ravitch's explanation does not say she thinks the standards will fail but instead, that even though the standards might possibly be very successful, she cannot support the Common Core State Standards because there is too much to lose if they are unsuccessful. She compares the standards to a new drug, arguing the FDA would never allow people to take an untested drug, so why should we allow our students to learn by untested standards. Furthermore, Ravitch claims that

states also only joined the Common Core initiative because of the monetary gain. She claims that states like Massachusetts had higher, more in-depth standards, but when offered Race to the Top funding the state ditched previous standards and adopted the Common Core State Standards instead. Diane Ravitch is not alone in her opinions, as there are many scholars who are against the Common Core.

The main advocate for the Common Core is often considered to be Bill Gates and the Gates Foundation (Rycik). The Gates Foundation and the Obama Administration are tied together in various ways, and many believe that this gave leeway for the Gates Foundation to push the Common Core through to the administration. As secretary of Education, Arne Duncan was able to pick his staff, for chief of staff he chose Margot Rogers, a top Gates official. He also hired James Shelton was hired as deputy secretary and had previously been a program officer at the Gates Foundation (Layton). The federal government has no control over educational standards, but with Race to the Top offering 4.3 billion dollars in grant money "was a clever way around federal laws that prohibit Washington from interfering in what takes place in classrooms. It was also a tantalizing incentive for cash-strapped states" (Layton). This argument suggests that states did not sign up for the standards due to their belief in their efficacy, but for the millions of dollars they would receive in federal funding if they participated.

Scholars Randy Bomer and Beth Maloch are also against the Common Core State Standards. In their article *Relating Policy to Research and Practice: The Common Core Standards*, they give two main arguments against the standards. First, they argue that the standards are "a project built upon irreconcilable assumptions about what is important in a good education" (Bomer and Maloch 39). They speculate that though the standards say they are preparing students for college and career readiness, the standards start the focus on university

style learning far too early, leaving early education teachers the task of teaching college and academic literacy to young students (40). Defining what society thinks is a "good education" is not an easy task, as there are many social, cultural, religious, and other beliefs that mold individual opinions on education.

Bomer and Maloch also argue that the standards are too focused on reading, writing and math. The standards themselves do not address things such as civic responsibility, social change, art, literacy as reflection, or any type of personal growth. Instead these standards argue that students go to school in order to learn to go to school some more" (40). Bomer and Maloch do not support the Common Core's focus or college readiness based standards.

Some suggest that the standards themselves are not ruining education but should not be so absolute. Dr. Robert Mathis asserts that he cannot support the standards in their current capacity and instead suggests they become low stakes advisory guidelines to improve local curriculums (Mathis 3). His first argument against the Common Core State Standards aligns with the main argument of Diane Ravitch; the standards were never field-tested making their adoption a huge risk for the students. Mathis' second argument is that the Common Core State Standards were written under the assumption that common standards will allow for American students to compete on at global level. However, " Research support for standards–driven, test-based accountability systems is similarly weak. And nations with centralized standards generally tend to perform no better (or worse) on international tests than those without" (Mathis 3). With no data to back up the claim that the standards will allow students to compete and beat students from other countries, the Common Core, in the eyes of Mathis, should be more of a guideline than a requirement.

The two 'chief architects' of the Common Core State Standards in ELA, History, Science

and Technical Subjects, are David Coleman and Susan Pimentel. Some argue that these two are not qualified for this job, as neither who are educators, researchers, or reading specialists (Kern 75). With no experience in the classroom, Coleman and Pimentel might not have the experience necessary to create a set of standards that are practical and achievable.

Some researchers believe that the standards were built upon unrealistic ideas of what schools have been teaching. Research by Gamson et al explains that many false claims were made, like reading texts in school have become easier, and that higher text complexity will increase academic rigor, which research shows to be unproven (Kern 76). If the core standards were built upon the belief that higher text complexity will makes students work hard, but there is no evidence to back that theory up, then students will most likely be struggling even more to be proficient on harder tests. This claim could lead a researcher to doubt whether or not the standards were created with credible and extensive enough research.

Another issue with the Common Core State Standards that comes up in various research is the lack of transparency and public involvement. The standards were adopted hastily, without letting many people know, especially American voters (Toscano 412). The standards are going to influence the curriculum, which some Americans see as overreach from the government. The conservative view seems to be a popular, many conservative citizens are displeased with the way in which the standards were implemented in schools. Toscano points out that the new standards will not "reflect the desires of parents and local communities. Schools will become increasingly alien, colonizing units among communities that embody a different set of local traditions and values and then schools their children attend (416). This view reflects the conservative ideals of non-governmental school systems, where the parents and community deicide what gets taught in schools instead of the local, state, or federal government. Conservatives also worry that there is

no structure set up to check accountability, as there is no governmental or other body to penalize low scores (Toscano 417). Conservatives also worry that the group that created the standards was not elected or representative of the ideas of the citizens, "[they] hold no political authority, leaving parents and participating states without any legal recourse to alter them" (Toscano 418). This is similar to the main concern of Diane Ravitch. Since the standards were never field tested, what will parents or schools be able to do if they firmly believe something is not working? Toscano validates Ravitch's fear, in that there is nothing concrete that people can do to stop these standards at the present time.

Some scholars argue that the Common Core standards are taking away the intellectual freedom of teachers, and forcing standards that rely on wrote memorization and very little critical thinking (Wexler 174). The standards have also been called elitist. Wexler argues that the ELA standards based in arts specify that students should learn what art is beautiful and transcendent, but that there is not clear evidence on who decided what art is important. This is considered elitist by Wexler, as there are many forms of art, not just classical and traditional art (Wexler 174). Wexler goes as far to say that David Coleman, president of the College Board and one of the 'chief architects' of the Common Core has presented an ideology that "reflects the meta-narrative of Western culture, the constructed image of the ideal and normal (white) human form and the rejection of the strange and atypical and all variation therein (Wexler 174). The idea Common Core State Standards are based in what the dominant white culture views as important, not what each community or family finds important, has proven to be controversial.

Some argue that the Common Core State Standards cannot be stopped. However, Mercedes Schneider disagrees. Schneider is a teacher in Louisiana but also an educational scholar. In her book *Common Core Dilemma* she delves into the question "Who owns our

schools?" Schneider was in her fifteenth year of teaching when her school adopted the standards. After initial excitement, Schneider is now opposed to the Common Core State Standards. She claims, "CCSS is a hurriedly produced product intended to impose high-stakes outcomes onto those without power over it. In general CCSS is not owned and valued by those required to institute it- current American public school teachers and administrators nationwide. This alone makes the CCSS destine to fail" (Schneider 3). She says in her book, however, that the standards can be changed "the course down the CCSS path is not irreversible" (Schneider 5). Like Toscano, Schneider sees the CCSS as a government instrument that takes local control away from schools (5). This is the leading argument among conservative Americans.

With the Common Core State Standards came the introduction of two standardized tests, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, better known as PARCC, and the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium, otherwise known as the SBAC. Some scholars believe that these standardized tests are not working. Valarie Strauss wrote an article for the *Washington Post* observing that "member states are pulling out of the consortia and declaring that they are designing their own state tests, which threatens the notion of uniform assessments that allow state-to-state comparisons, a notion that is the heart and soul of the Common Core initiative (Rycik 2). If states are pulling out of the two tests that measure the success of the standards themselves, there is no accountability or proof whether the standards are improving student's education. Though states may design their own tests, it will allow for comparability between states, which means the idea that the standards are *common* will not be able to be proven.

Some believe that the Common Core State Standards are good, *in theory*, but not the educational reform needed to fix the countries problems. Research by Wolk states, "If a majority

of American youngsters were to graduate from school with the knowledge and skills embodied in these standards, they and the larger society would benefit enormously. But that would require a miracle" (Wolk 1). Though the standards themselves have good intentions, they will not fix the American education system. Wolk gives four reasons, the inability for the government to fix the inequality low-income students face in education, lack of training for teachers for the implantation of the new standards, the organization and scheduling of traditional schools does not serve the requirements for the new standards, and the lack of financial resources to provide better educational equality to allow the standards to be equally taught throughout the nation (Wolk 1). He suggests that the standards be limited to grades K-6, where they can be taught from the beginning and not forcing them onto students in middle and high school who will have various levels of learning in their past that might not be up to standards.

Stephen Krashen supports this argument, who does also believes that the real issue in education is poverty. Krashen explains that the standards were brought about because many feared we were not competing well internationally. However "analyses of our international test cores have revealed that American international test schools are nowhere nearly as bad as critics claim and that they have not declined…in fact, when we control for the effects of poverty, American students rank near the top of the world" (Krashen 38). This argument is echoed throughout scholarship on education, claiming the real issue in education is economic inequality, and that standards will not change that.

Conclusion

There is not an extensive amount of scholarship on the Common Core State Standards, as they have only been a part of education for five years. However, the scholarship has lead me to believe that many scholars do not support the CCSS for a multitude of reasons. In this research I

plan to find out what the educators think of the CCSS and how it works in the classroom, as many of the scholars are only looking at the standards in theory, not in practice.

Chapter 2

The Common Core State Standards: How Did We Get Here?

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and discuss the reform movements in education that happened before the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The three main reforms I will be discussing are the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the Race to the Top grant competition that began in 2009. These three educational initiatives set the groundwork that allowed for the introduction of the Common Core State Standards. This is evident through the changes seen in the education system such as increased accountability, a focus on educational equality, state standards, and other initiatives that will be examined in this chapter.

In 2001, before anyone had heard of the Common Core State Standards, a new law was passed and implemented throughout United States. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, or NCLB, was a reauthorization and renaming of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) with a focus on Title I. ESEA was designed to promote equality in education across all states, and enforces high standards through school accountability. Created in 1965, by Lyndon B. Johnson, ESEA has been at the forefront of American Education for 50 years.

When ESEA was first introduced in 1965 it was designed to help schools fulfill, to the fullest extent, their responsibility to provide all students with equal education opportunities nationally. It offered grants to districts with low-income students, federal grants for libraries and textbooks, scholarships for low-income college residents, and other monetary provisions to improve curriculum through state-sponsored educational agencies ("*Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965"*). President Lyndon B. Johnson, a former teacher, understood that the

issues that faced the poorer citizens, and so he launched his "War on Poverty," which included ESEA (Hansan 1). Johnson understood that class divisions created the achievement gap:

> In recognition of the special educational needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance… to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children (Section 201, Elementary and Secondary School Act, 1965).

Through Title I funding, Johnson's War On Poverty allocated one billion dollars to schools that served high concentrations of low-income students (Hansan 1). Why do lower income districts need more money? Traditionally, school funding comes from property taxes, this system "guarantees that wealthy districts will have more to spend on their children than districts with concentrated poverty" (Poole 1). However, with Johnson's Title I funding, schools with higher concentration of lower income students receive extra money that is believed the help increase the equality of education received across all districts, as it makes up for the larger sums schools receive when they have higher property taxes in the surrounding neighborhoods.

The idea that federal aid is going to increase the value and equality of education depends on the belief that school was the only opportunity students had in obtaining upward mobility (Jeffery ii). ESEA's deliberate focus on funding schools with lower income students perpetuated the idea that more money would help lower income students achieve at similar rates to middle income students, which would then allow them to get jobs after graduation and leave poverty. (Jeffery ii). President Johnson believed and supported this notion. The adoption of this new federal education policy, according to scholars, "marks the assumptions by the federal government of its appropriate and long overdue role in assuring educational opportunity for all

American children" (McKay 427). Some constitutionalists or more conservative minds have argued that the federal government was over reaching when implementing ESEA. They argued that the federal government does not have the constitutional authority to make educational policy, as it is not listed in the constitution, therefore, according to the 10th amendment, is a states right. However the attorney general at the time of ESEA's introduction and other legal resources claimed that there was not a violation of state and local control over education (McKay 427). Whether it was a violation or not, ESEA became one of the biggest educational reforms in American History and it is still legal educational policy today.

In 1966, as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, sociologist and theorist Dr. James Coleman did a study on educational equality in the United States. Coleman administered more that 600,000 questionnaires to students in first, third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth graders in 4,000 different schools (Jeffery 120). The questionnaire was designed to measure the skills which are important for getting a job, maintaining said job, and then moving up to a better job (Jeffery 120). Coleman analyzed all the results from his questionnaires and created a report called *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, which is commonly referred to as *The Coleman Report.* This report is essential for understanding the problems with ESEA because its results shed light on the issues within the program itself.

The *Coleman Report* of 1966 contradicted many things that Lyndon B. Johnson claimed ESEA would help. Coleman found that values promoted in ESEA such as, "higher quality of teachers and curricula, facilities, or even compensatory education had only a modest impact on students' achievement" (Hansan 1). The Title I and Title II funding, which benefitted schools with high concentrations of low-income students, seemed to be a great source of educational funding that could potentially help many failing students succeed. This seemed like an exciting

opportunity for students living in poverty, "yet confident as administrative planners were that education provided an exit from poverty, their measure fell far short of their expectations. By 1970 it was apparent ESEA fund had minimal impact on the conditions of poverty. Poor children in ESEA Programs did not improve their skills significantly (Jeffery 121). The questionnaires highlighted, for one of the first but not last times, the growing achievement gap between white and minority students (Jeffery 121). The most relevant finding however was not that white dominant schools had better facilities and opportunities than minority dominant schools. Roughly, each school had similar facilities, curriculums and services, but the issue came from two different areas. First, students background factors explained between 30-50% of the achievement variances seen for all groups of children and 10-25% of the variance of the individual's levels of achievement (Jeffery 121). Coleman also found that students of color were more likely to be affected by other students than students of majority backgrounds, as students from the majority tended to have already supportive backgrounds were less likely to be influenced by peers (Jeffery 121). Through the *Coleman Report* the country learned that allocating more and more money towards lower-income schools would not actually fix the poverty-driven achievement gap.

If the main components of ESEA are not actually working, why were they re-adopted in 2002 by George W. Bush? Coleman, in the 1980's came up with a term for the many intangible resources that are made up from social and personal relationships and institutions. Coleman termed "social capital" and argued "educational expectation, norms, and obligations that exist within a family or a community are important social capital that can influence the level of parental involvement and investment, which in turn affect academic success" (Coleman). Social

capital is not the focus of any of the educational reforms after the Coleman Report was published, even though it was commissioned by the Department of Education.

The introduction to ESEA states the purpose of the reform is for the government to ensure all children have access to equal and fair, high-quality education. ESEA made it mandatory that each student, school, and teacher is provided with "high-quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials are aligned with challenging state academic standards" (ESEA sec 1001). ESEA's reform laid the foundation for the Common Core State Standards in this introduction by promoting state standards and academic assessments by aligning state provided materials, such as text books and curriculum planning materials, with the new state standards, ensuring each school had equal access to these materials.

In 1983 another study was commissioned, this time called *A Nation at Risk,* which was a report of the National Commission on Excellence under President Regan. It warned that the United States was not going to be able to compete internationally unless the country continued to increase the skills of the work force (Hurst et al 1). This spurred the various reforms in the 1990's, including the re-adoption of ESEA in 1994. Many schools adopted reforms from *A Nation at Risk* as it argued,

> "Declines in education could be reversed, and recommended that state and local high school graduation course requirements be strengthened, higher academic standards be established, more time be spent in school, the preparation of teachers be improved, and that elected officials across the nation be held accountable for making the necessary improvement" (Vinovskis 9)

After publication, the four categories in which the major reforms took place were standards, assessment, and accountability, school finance reforms, teacher training and school resources, and school choice options (Hurst et al vii). These are all important reforms, however, the first reform, standards, assessment and accountability set the standards movement into motion, allowing for states to make their own standards that would eventually lead to the Common Core.

In the 1990's there was a movement to bring academic standards to our schools. These standards, one of the four categories of reforms that began with *A Nation at Risk,* were created to hold schools accountable for the achievement levels of their students (Hurst et al. viii). In the years 1995-2000 the number of schools with English Language Arts standards rose from 20 states to 49 states, math standards grew from 25 states to 49 states and science standards grew from 23 state to 46 states, with 49 states testing achievement in 8th grade and 36 states testing achievement in 4th grade (Hurst et al. viii). All of the reforms that took place, other than the reauthorization of ESEA in 1994, were taken directly at the state or local level, and though they may have been influenced by ideals presented by the President or the secretaries of education, no federal government reforms took place.

The next big reform that utilized the power of the federal government was the reauthorization of ESEA in 2001 under its new name, No Child Left Behind. Signed into law by President Bush with strong bipartisan support it is said that,

> "NCLB puts teeth into the previously existing requirement - initiated through 1994 ESEA reauthorization, called the Improving Americas Schools Act - that states demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" in helping disadvantaged students meet demanding academic standards. While it grants states receiving ESEA funds surprising latitude in creating or

selecting tests to measure academic achievement, NCLB is strict about what results these tests must show and the consequences for falling short" (Fritzberg 69).

The goals of No Child Left Behind were clearly outlined in the legislation. "NCLB had six priorities: (1) higher accountability for results; (2) more choices for parents; (3) teachers who were highly qualified; (4) the encouragement of scientifically proven educational methods; (5) greater freedom for states and communities; and (6) flexibility of funds" (Brueck et al. 18). These goals, like those of ESEA, were strong, reasonable goals, that if achieved would most likely improved education. However, setting goals and fulfilling goals are not the same thing. NCLB required that each state be accountable for its students, making each state reach a certain level of "proficiency" on state-given standardized tests by 2014 (Bauer 1). During the 1990's many states had already begun instituting a test-based accountability system, this was the defining characteristic of NCLB, which was modeled after the states that already had these systems in place (Dee 1). No Child Left Behind required not only that schools measure the achievement levels of their students but also put it into writing that, by the 2013-2014 school year, all American students must be proficient in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science, and schools are required to improve in at least a linear fashion toward that end (Fritzberg 74). This was the first time students across the country began to be required by the federal government to take standardized tests.

This highlights the most significant difference between ESEA in its original form and its reauthorization under No Child Left Behind is high stakes testing. With No Child Left Behind, all students' grades three through eight were required to complete standardized testing in math and reading (NCLB). Test scores were then linked to federal funding, schools that did not show increased proficiency on standardized testing lost federal funding (A. Jackson 1). However, after

a few years, there was enough data available for studies to be done on these tests and this method of accountability. The National Education Policy Center published a statement saying, "there is no evidence that any test score increases represent the broader learning increases that were the true goals of the policy — goals such as critical thinking; the creation of lifelong learners; and more students graduating high school ready for college, career, and civic participation" (A. Jackson 1). Instead of focusing on the "true goals" of NCLB, most teachers ended up teaching to the test, as their jobs and salaries were tied to whether the school increased proficiency. The intent of No Child Left Behind was to provide equal education, but unfortunately, the outcomes did not reflect this and many schools and students suffered because of it.

In a 2010 research study designed to test the achievement of students under No Child Left Behind, researchers tested both math and reading achievement of fourth and eighth graders. The researchers compared results of student achievement by looking at scores from students that come from schools that had varying degrees of exposure to state-school accountability systems (Dee 1). In the end their results argue that, "the accountability provisions of NCLB generated large and broad gains in the math achievement of 4th graders and somewhat smaller gains for 8th graders. Our results suggest that NCLB accountability had no impact on reading achievement for either group" (Dee 1). This research study was conducted in 2010, four years before every school in the country was supposed to have 100% proficiency. However, there was not one standard level of "proficiency" which allowed each state to create its own standards. President Obama pointed out the problem with this system, as states kept lowering their standards to keep up their proficiency levels, "...in order to avoid having their schools labeled as failures, some states, perversely, have actually had to lower their standards in a race to

the bottom instead of a Race to the Top," (A. Jackson 1). This was where the educational system began to turn away from No Child Left Behind.

The lack of standardization of what was "proficient" gave way for the federal government to create a path to the Common Core through "waivers" and Race to the Top (Bauer 1). With schools failing, the Obama administration allowed schools to opt out of the NCLB testing and instead adopt the Common Core and the tests that evaluate their validity, the SBAC and PARCC tests. "The Obama administration has offered states the chance to waive some requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in recognition that parts of the law are dated. …Waivers are needed because No Child Left Behind is broken in significant ways" (Ayers et al. 1). To apply for waivers schools must present a reform in innovative ways that focus on accountability. This has allowed for schools to abandon No Child Left Behind completely and join the Obama administrations "Race to the Top."

Race to the Top is a competitive grant of 4.35 billion dollars offered by the United States Department of Education as a way for schools to gain money for measured improvement. According to the White House, "Race to the Top has ushered in significant change in our education system, particularly in raising standards and aligning policies and structures to the goal of college and career readiness (*"Race to the Top"*). Race to the Top has helped drive states nationwide to pursue higher standards, improve teacher effectiveness, use data effectively in the classroom, and adopt new strategies to help struggling schools" (*"Race to the Top"*). However, not everyone was on board at the beginning.

Many people argued that the federal government was coercing states to adopt the Common Core State Standards and other Race to the Top initiatives by tying them to federal funding. For example, "The National Conference of State Legislatures characterized the RTTT

program and similar federal efforts as 'federal coercions masquerading as inducements'" (LaVenia et al. 150). Others claimed that because there were budgetary shortfalls, states that were monetarily vulnerable were easily swayed into federal programs that assured them money (LaVenia et al. 150). Though some saw this as a federal overreach, others saw it as a way to ensure that all states were creating rigorous academic standards that would create college and career readiness for all students across the country (Rothman 80). Rothman argues in his book *Something in Common* that Race to the Top was not a product of the federal government, but instead an effort by the state governors in both parties to increase rigor in schools to create a set of standards (CCSS) that would allow students to compete globally. He also points out that the CCSS were in works before President Obama took office (Rothman 80). Race to the Top opened the door the Common Core State Standards to enter through.

The Race to the Top initiative, whether a federal coercion tactic or not, was introduced to our school systems in 2009 by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2009. Race to the Top was funded with money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. With this initiative and new grant money available, states were in a competition for points, which could be gained through six different categories. Each state was competing for federal grant money that they could use to improve schools across all the districts within their state. The first two states to win were Tennessee and Delaware followed by Florida, Ohio, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Georgia, North Caroline and New York (D. Jackson 1). Other states have also won grant money since Race to the Tops initial competition.

The competitive categories in Race to the Top had goals had similar to those outlined in ESEA. The categories included Great Teachers and Leaders, 138 points, State Success Factors, 125 points, Standards and Assessments, 70 points, General Selection Criteria, 55 points, Turning

around the Lowest-Achieving Schools, 50 points, and Data Systems to Support instruction, 47 points (Race To The Top). In the Standards and Assessments category, 40 points could be earned if, and only if, states adopted the Common Core State Standards. The Obama administration used Race to the Top to get many of the states on board with the Common Core State Standards without having to pass any legislation or take any votes.

In 2014, after four years of Race to the Top, President Obama has publicly claimed that it was a success. Obama explains that funding from Race to the Top is positively affecting twenty-two million students, 1.5 million teachers, and 40,000 schools across the country (D. Jackson 1). After Race to the Top, eighty percent of students were graduating high school (Shabad 1). Eighteen states have received federal grant money to expand their educational spending to the tailored needs of their states. Through the Race to the Top Initiative, forty-two states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act has recently been renewed under a new name, overturning its previous renewal, No Child Left Behind. The new authorization is called the Every Student Success Act and President Obama signed it into law on December 10th, 2015. There is very little information on the new act. However, we do know that the goals of ESSA are to fix the problems of No Child Left Behind, while still embodying the ideas of equal education (Korte 1). President Obama said the following in reference to why we need to step away from NCLB,

> The goals of No Child Left Behind, the predecessor of this law, were the right ones: High standards. Accountability. Closing the achievement gap. But in practice, it often fell short. It didn't always consider the specific needs of each community. It led to too much testing during classroom time. It often forced schools and school districts into cookie-cutter reforms that didn't always produce the kinds of results that we wanted to see. (Korte 1)

President Obama saw that this "cookie cutter" idea of fixing education did not work, as every state, school, teacher, and student has individual needs. ESSA is moving away from direct

federal control of education, giving the authority back to the states. For example, standardized testing is still required, but may be administered whenever the school wants and the school can choose the testing method (Korte 1). States must submit accountability plans to the Department of Education, and though they have given broad expectations of what must be included, the states will have control over the accountability goals. This is different from NCLB as before schools had to have continual increased achievement every year, or a federal takeover was imminent (Korte 1). Before any real critiques or praises of this new act can be considered viable, we must first see how it works in our school systems.

In the last fifty years the education system in our country has gone through many reforms. Each one has had great influence over what is taught, how we teach it, who pays for it, and more. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 has perhaps been the most influential, as it is continually reauthorized and edited to fit our countries needs. The 1990's gave us the various standards movements at the state level, and No Child Left Behind brought us to a more national level. All of these movements lead the way for Race to the Top, the competitive grant program that introduced the Common Core State Standards. President Obama hit the nail on the head when he said "cookie cutter" reforms would not fix our education system. The Common Core Sate Standards allow a baseline set of requirements, which states can adopt. Once adopted, schools can tailor lesson plans to their own students to make a more unique educational experience that works for them. This would not have been a possibility if the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top had not been implemented beforehand. These reforms at the national level, along with smaller reforms at the state level have cleared the way for the Common Core State Standards.

Chapter 3

The Common Core State Standards: Do Teachers Even Like It?

To know if the Common Core State Standards will benefit students, people must be patient as the standards are so new. However, I think that a great marker of success is whether or not the teachers are on board. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the Common Core State Standards from the perspective of teachers who are implementing the standards every day. Sure, the standards writers will know about them, the test designers know the standards as well, and educational experts will always have opinions on the standards, but only teachers will see just how the Common Core shapes the classroom. Looking at the perspective of those who chose to be professional educators will allow us to understand whether the standards are working on the most basic level.

In order to better understand this perspective, I interviewed six teachers in different grades and subjects on their experiences and understanding of the Common Core State Standards. Each teacher comes from a different district in the State of Rhode Island. As all names and towns have been changed, I will give a brief description of each teacher's district and background. I chose Rhode Island for this study as Rhode Island adopted the standards early, so teachers have had a few years to fine-tune their techniques and lessons to fit those of the standards.

Districts

In order to fully understand each teachers' experiences, first one must understand the context in which each teacher is teaching. I have gathered data on the state of Rhode Island and also each town in order to better understand the makeup of each school district.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island, the smallest state, is home to a population of approximately 1,052,567 people. Of these people, 81.4% are white, 5.7% are African American, 6% are Asian, .1% are Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 3.3% identify as two more races, and 12.4% identify as Hispanic or Latino. (Census 2016) The median household income for the state of Rhode Island is $56,423, this is $2,940 more than the national median household income. In Rhode Island 13.6% of the population is living below the poverty line and 61.2% of people own their own homes. As for levels of education, 85% of the population has received a high school degree or higher, and 31.3% of the population has a Bachelor's Degree or higher. According to the Rhode Island Department of Education, there are 66 Local Education Agencies in Rhode Island. These districts are comprised of 32 regular school districts, made up of single municipalities, 4 regional school districts, made up of more than one municipality, 4 state operated schools, one regional collaborated LEA and 25 charter schools. (Rhode Island Department of Education) My interviews took place at 5 regular school districts, and one regional school district.

District A

The first school district we will call District A. This district is made up of a single town with a population of 21,430, 16.9% of the residents are under the age of 18. The town has 2,390 students being taught by 343 teachers at 6 different schools. (*InfoWorks*) This town has less diverse racial makeup to the state, with 95.7% of the population identifying as white, 1.2% identifying as African American, 1.3% of the population identifying as Asian, 1% of the population identifying as two or more races and 1.4% identifying as Hispanic or Latino. (Census 2016) The people living in this district have higher percentages of high school grads and college degrees, with 92% having at least a High School Diploma, and 34.8% having a Bachelor's

Degree or higher. The higher levels of education might explain a higher median household income of $71,305. This district has 9.2% less people living in poverty than the state average. (Census 2016)

The teacher from this district is a 1st grade teacher with eighteen years of teaching experience under her belt. She has also had experience teaching Kindergarten, second grade, and sixth grade. These eighteen years of experience mean that this teacher was teaching before the implantation of the Common Core State Standards (Personal Interview).

District B

The second school district we will talk about will be District B. This city has a population of 71,148 (Census 2016).Of this population, 23.3% are under 18 and there are 9,022 students being taught by 1,099 teachers at 16 schools (InfoWorks). This city, like other urban areas in the state, has more diverse racial makeup, 66.5% of the population is white, 13.4% of the population is African American, 1.5% of the population is Asian, .1% of the population is Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, with 6.1% of the population identifying as two or more races and 19.7% identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The median household income of this city is $40,578, which is $15,845 less than the state median income. In District B, 19.3% of people are living below the poverty level. Of this population, 76.8% of people have received a high school degree or higher and 45.0% of people have received a Bachelor's Degree or higher (Census 2016).

The teacher in District B currently teaches math classes for grades 7-12. She teachers Intervention Math, Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and College Math currently, but has previously taught Pre-Algebra, and Geometry. She has been teaching for four years, which means she taught for less than half a year before the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (Personal Interview).

District C

District C is the least wealthy community we will be looking at. This city is home to 441,228 people, with 25.8% of people living below the poverty level. The racial makeup of this city is 77.7% white, 6.4% African American, 5.4% Asian, 4.3% two or more races and 14.2% Hispanic or Latino. Of the 441,228 people, 75.9% are high school graduates, and 13.6% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. The median household income for District C is $35,216, which is $21,207 less than the state median household income (Census 2016). This district has 5,908 students being taught by 483 teachers at 9 different schools (InfoWorks).

The teacher in City C is a special education teacher who focuses on math. She has been teaching for 12 years and has taught in coordination with the math department to help in the following classes: Algebra 1, Geometry, Applied Math (a class for those who opt out of Algebra 2) and Senior Math. Her case is a little different from other teachers as she is a push in resource teacher who aids a subject teacher in a mixed ability classroom. A push in resource teacher is someone who goes into a regular classroom to aid students with special needs, as opposed to pulling the students out of class into a specialized classroom (Personal Interview).

District D

The second town, fourth district we will be looking at is District D, where the population is only 13,147. This town is the wealthiest with the median household income being $92,727, which is $36,304 more than the state median income. This town has a 93.2% white population, .8% African American population, 4.1% Asian population, .1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander population, 1.4% two or more race population, and 1.7% Hispanic or Latino population. In Town D, 6.1% of the population is living below poverty. Of the people living in

Town D, 95.8% have graduated high school and 59.7% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher (Census 2016).

The teacher I interviewed in Town D is a High School English teacher. She has been teaching high school English for 16 years and has taught "every class ever offered except sophomore English," and currently teaches AP English Literature, Honors British Literature, the Alternative Learning Program and American Literature (Personal Interview).

District E

The most urban district we will look at has a population of 178,042, we will call this District E. This district is made up of one city where 49.8% of the people are white, 16% are African American, 1.4% are Asian , .1% are Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 5.6% are two or more races, and 38% identify as Hispanic or Latino (Census 2016). This is the biggest district we will look at with 23,867 students being taught by 2,003 teachers cross 39 different schools (InfoWorks). Of the non-school aged population, 72.8% have received a high school degree or higher, and 28.5% have received a Bachelors degree or higher. The median household income in District is $37,514, which is $18,909 less than the state median household income. Though this is not the lowest median household income, this district does have the highest rate people living in poverty of all the districts we will be looking at, with 29% of the population living in poverty (Census 2016).

The teacher for District E is a Middle School English teacher. She has been teaching in this district for 24 years, and though he taught 7th grade once, she has taught 8th grade for the rest of the time. She has been teaching since before standards were a thing and brings a lot of experience to the table (Personal Interview)

District F

The last district examined is a regional district comprised of two small towns. I will refer to this district as District F. The first town, Town 1, has a small population of 6,117 people. In this town, 96% of people are white, .8% are African American, 1.3% are Asian, 1% are two or more races and 2.1% identify as Latino. Of the non-school aged residents, 96.8% have a High School Degree or higher and 34.7% have a Bachelors degree or higher. In this town, the median household income is $80,987, $24,564 more than the state median household income. Also, 5.6% of people are living below poverty (Census 2016). The town that shares a school district with the first town is very similar, we will call this Town 2. The population is 6,613, only a few hundred more than that of Town 1. In the second town 95.5% of the people are white, 1.2% of the people are African American, .6% are Asian, 1.35 are two or more races, and 2.6% identify as Hispanic or Latino. Of the non-school aged population, 89.3% have a High School Degree or higher and 35.5% have a Bachelor's Degree or Higher. The median household income for the second town in this district is $83,340, which is $26,917 higher than the state median household income. It is interesting that Town 2 has a higher median household income than Town 1, but Town 2 also has a higher rate of people living in below the poverty level, 9.4%, which is 3.8% higher than Town 1 (Census 2016).

The teacher in District F has been teaching for 15 years. She previously taught fourth and first grade, but currently teaches 3rd grade and has been doing so for 13 years. She teaches all subjects within the third grade except specials (i.e. music, physical education, etc.) and has been teaching since before the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. (Personal Interview).

Professional Development

Teaching is often a lifetime career. Some of the teachers I interviewed had been teaching for over ten or twenty years. When a new change comes about in the education, we cannot expect the training a teacher received in college to prepare them. Luckily, most schools participate in some sort of professional development (PD) annually. However, through my interviews I have learned that the PD for the Common Core State Standards was not in fact *standard* and actually varied quite a lot by district.

Professional development comes in many forms including full day seminars, web seminars, consortiums, and teacher collaboration. In District A and District F, professional development consisted of a four hour "common core walk through" (Personal Interview). These two teachers explained that they received one four-hour session where the Common Core State Standards were presented in book form, and the instructor pointed out differences and similarities between old and new standards. When asked if she found that the professional development helped her feel ready to teach the Common Core State Standards she responded "I feel as though the PD offered an introduction to the new standards, but it was the collaboration with my collogues and work done independently in my free time that allowed me to feel prepared to teach to the CCSS" (Personal Interview). The teacher in District F responded to the same question saying "absolutely not" (Personal Interview). For these two teachers, four hours of Professional development was not enough to make them feel comfortable to teach the standards.

Four hours seems like no time at all when looking at the Professional Development received in District E and District D. Originally, my hypothesis was that the wealthier the District, the more Professional Development for the standards. However, though District D is the wealthiest district, District E has the largest percentage of people living in poverty. In District D,

teachers were required to go to three six-hour sessions on how to properly implement the Common Core State Standards in a classroom. In District D teachers attended multiple conferences and web seminars. Interestingly, District D was involved in a consortium of six districts all learning about CCSS and pulled out after the first day as the administration of the school thought it was poorly run.

Both districts received ample Professional Development but when asked if the Professional Development helped the teachers feel ready to teach to the new standards the answers were telling. In District E, the teacher said, "I think that they gave us what they could and then everybody really just had to jump on and go with it" (Personal Interview). This sentiment was echoed throughout my interviews. The teacher in District D also echoed this sentiment saying that the Professional Development wasn't great, "It was more of what we did on our own. The training was just poorly done" (Personal Interview). Even the schools that received the most extensive Professional Development did not provide their teachers with enough training. Though I am sure the teachers worked together to figure out how to best teach these standards, it is not acceptable that the proper Professional Development was not given.

Student Involvement

Students are probably the most affected by the Common Core State Standards, as they are the ones learning to them and being tested on them. I asked the teachers whether or not students in their classrooms understood and talked about the Common Core State Standards. As expected, the answers varied by teacher. In District C, third graders, and District F, first graders, the teachers both said similar things. Students know that the Standards exist, but to them they are too confusing. In District C, the teacher went to a local educational store and bought a set of the standards on cards with the real standard on the front and a children's version on the back. She

said she talks about the standards at the beginning of each unit, but usually just in "kid-friendly" terms.

In High School and Middle School most students are able to comprehend the ideas of standards. In District D the teacher explained that sometimes the teachers talk about the standards and sometimes they don't, it depends on the teachers preference. The Middle School English teacher said something similar, explaining that they post learning objectives that line up with the standards, but the kids don't pay attention to the actual standard numbers or anything. The High School Math teacher in District A pointed out that the students really just know that the Common Core State Standards are the reason they have PARCC testing.

Teaching Style and Support

In a sample as small as six, it seemed important to as ask the teachers how their colleagues viewed the standards. The teacher in District F said that the teachers she knows are not very supportive of it because veteran teachers did not create them, therefore the standards are not always developmentally appropriate. In District A, the teacher explained that its not that the teachers don't like the Common Core State Standards, they really just want standards that will last more then a few years and address the needs of all students, especially those with IEP's or students who are English Language Learners. This came up again in my interview in District D. The High School English teacher in District D put it nicely saying,

> There is I also think that [teacher] are frustrated because we're already doing a lot of this anyway, we've always been rigorous, so now everyone is like, 'here we go again.' Every five years there is a new set of standards, there's a frustration level because you get a curriculum written and you turn around and there's a new set of standards and the curriculum needs to be re-written and its ridiculous because a good teacher is a good teacher is a good teacher and doesn't really need this (Personal Interview).

One thing that stuck out to me was that multiple teachers mentioned was their interviews that they miss their creativity and freedom. For example a Spanish Professor from Brown University

approached the teacher in District E about having her class do a Spanish version of a Shakespeare play, but now, with the new standards the core classes are pretty structured as the teachers have to cover a certain amount of standards in a certain amount of time. The teacher in District F said that it was hard for the teachers who had spent years developing lessons on something such as fractions, but then the Common Core State Standards changed the way fractions were taught from fractions of a group to fractions on a number line, so all the lesson plans didn't fit and had to be re-done.

The third grade teacher in District F also explained that because of the Common Core State Standards her teaching style had to change. I think it was interesting when she pointed out that now all the teachers are teaching the same thing on the same day, whereas before they had to teach everything but could do it in the order or timing of their choosing. In District E, the middle school English teacher said she also experienced a lot of changes in her teaching style. It has changed from content questions to more in depth learning. For example, her students are supposed to read *The Giver*. Before the Common Core State Standards students reading this book would have to answer many content questions, however now she uses the book as a vehicle to teach skills and strategies.

Curriculum and Control

Knowing who is in charge of a district's curriculum also helps in understanding how teachers feel about the standards. For example, in District D, the English teacher is the head of the English Department for the entire school district, meaning she organizes and runs the curriculum planning. Therefore, she has total control over how the standards are taught to her students. This differs from District E, where the district hires consultants to create the curriculum, or in District F, where the teachers meet with a curriculum director to learn how they will be teaching to the

standards. This has caused teachers to feel that they have less control in the classroom. The third grade teacher in District F said that she has "less control now because you really have to follow these exact standards" (Personal Interview).

Gaps in Education

One of the biggest issues brought up in my interviews was the transition between GSE's, the previous standards, and the Common Core State Standards. The teacher in District C Under the GSE's in Rhode Island, 9thgraders learned specific math concepts, but under CCSS they were pushed down to 8th grade, so the students who started the Common Core State Standards in 9th grade missed all the concepts that were *now* being taught in 8th grade. The high school Math teacher from District A also agree with this saying "the discrepancies' between the old and new curriculum for reach course caused students to fall behind in many areas and the new pacing did not allow for extra time for explanations and such to aid in understanding" (Personal Interview).

Testing

In Rhode Island, before the Common Core State Standards, every public school had to participate in the NECAP testing. When the Common Core State Standards were introduced two new types of test were made available. The two tests, Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), were offered for states to choose. Rhode Island selected the PARCC testing which is designed for students to take online to test their ability to reach each Common Core State Standard. The testing is most likely the most controversial aspect of the Common Core so I asked teachers how their students responded.

Third grades in District F loved taking the PARCC test online according to my interview with their teacher. She explained that her students took the test online this year, which was fun for them, making the length of the test more manageable. Her only concern was the various technical problems they had during their trial year, students were constantly getting logged off of the testing application, some couldn't even log in, and there were many problems. So for the real test, after the pilot, they decided to have the schools IT staff on call, in the building, and every time a student was logged out or had an issue, an IT person was there to help. She pointed out that this is great, except it's a timed test, so that student would have to record the time they lost and make it up after (Personal Interview).

Of all the teachers, the teacher in District C was the only one to come out and support the PARCC Testing. In District D the teacher applauded the new test for being more challenging than NECAP, but criticized the technological aspects. This teacher explained that her school is 1:1, so every student has his or her own Chromebook for school. She said that student do a lot of reading in textbooks from the book closet, but also do a fair amount of reading on their tablets. With this in mind, she still disvalued the PARCC test for not being able to actually test students on their knowledge.

> When Kids take PARCC online, which most districts in Rhode Island did, it can cause a major issue. There are kids with attention issues; there are kids that have disabilities that are not well served by taking this test on a computer. And kids haven't grown up reading on a computer, and reading on a computer is a completely different animal than reading on paper and I thank that that is not accounted for with this test… We don't read online anywhere near the amount that we would need to in order to truly measure…their ability to read and analyze online (Personal Interview).

Other teachers echo this sentiment as well. For example, the teacher in District E told a great story of the time she decided to take an online practice PARCC test in order to see what her students would be going through. I asked her to talk about the tests and she said, "We take

PARCC and it's the one thing that makes me want to jump off a cliff. I was forced to do [an online test] before we took them last year. I though I was going to cry and get a headache, I had to put my head down" (Personal Interview). If this is the response of a teacher who has been teaching for 24 years, has a Masters in Education and two grown children, imagine the response of the students.

The Money Machine

I have taken this term from the High School English teacher in District D. When I asked her for any final thoughts she had on the Common Core she started off saying no and then exclaimed, "I know what I want to! The money machine, it's all about the money and it makes me ill" (Personal Interview). I asked for her to expand and she explained that when the Standards were introduced there was panic with teachers and within schools to make sure everything they were teaching was "common core aligned." She said,

> The people making money developing garbage and just slapping "Common Core State Standard aligned" on top of the material is inexcusable. There is so much substandard material out there because teachers were desperate for materials and districts were desperate to say that they were Common Core aligned and that they were teaching what kids needed to be successful on the PARCC. Now vast amounts of money have been wasted by people buying things that were awful (Personal Interview).

This waste represented a problem not with the Common Core itself, but with people taking advantage of the sudden implementation as a way to make easy profits off of subpar products.

The Common Core and Special Education

One district and teacher that I would like to pay special attention to, is District C. The teacher in this district that I interviewed is special education math teacher. Her job is as a push in resource teacher, meaning she goes into classrooms that have mixed ability students and aids the subject teacher by helping students one-on-one or in small groups (Personal Interview). When I asked her if she thought the Common Core State Standards were easily applicable in a special

education classroom she laughed. I asked her how the students with special education needs have faired with the new standards, as the standards are the same for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. She then explained that because the Common Core State Standards are a higher level of mathematical skills than some of the students in the special education program can handle and the increased pace of learning, there is no time to focus on remediation, so it is very hard on the students with special needs. The students all are held to the same academic goals via the new standards. The teacher said that the new standards "contradict how we are supposed to have individualize education [students with disabilities] with IEP's, but when they have so many things that they have to earn under the common core, sometimes we just have to keep moving along and they never master what they need to know" (Personal Interview). Students with disabilities are at a disadvantage when it comes to the Common Core State Standards, as there is very little room for individualized plans within the standards.

Is it Working?

This question is loaded, is it working is a lot to ask one teacher. I asked them instead if they thought the Common Core State Standards are going to help prepare all students for college or a career. I chose this wording because that's what the standards are supposedly designed to do. The overall impression I got from the teachers is that they think the standards will help students prepare for college or a career *if* that student wants to go to college or a career. A third grader might not be thinking about what they want to do when they grow up, or might say they want to be in the MLB or a Rock Star, which in all honesty, could happen. But the third grade teacher in District F said that she tells her students the Common Core State Standards are a stepping stone, it will help them when the grow up. In District D the high school English teacher explained that the standards are prepared those students who want to go to go, but that its "an absolute

disservice to kids who don't want to go to college, who have other skills and passions, its horrible for those kids. It's horrible because not everyone needs to know about 17th, 18th, and 19th century American Lit" (Personal Interview).

As for District C, the Special Education Math teacher agreed that those students who want to go to college would definitely benefit from the Common Core. However, she pointed out that the population of students she deals with, students with intellectual and physical disabilities, are not on the college track. Many special education students will go onto a career or junior college (though I am not saying they cannot go onto four year college), and they don't see a connection between their algebra Common Core State Standards and the life they plan to live after school.

So is it working? Overall, the teachers had positive reactions to the Common Core in their interviews where they highlighted the many benefits that new bring to education. However, the standards are not perfect. They were designed with the intent of preparing every student for college or a career, but teachers say the standards are limiting their students to academic pursuits, and forcing the non-interested students to become tied to academic benchmarks that are irrelevant to their futures.

Chapter 4

The Old Standards Versus the New Standards

Since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, states have had to adjust from using their old standards to the new ones. In this chapter, I will analyze the standards that Rhode Island previously used, the *Rhode Island and New Hampshire Grade Level Expectations (GLE)*, as compared to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Though there are many standards, I have decided to look at English Language Arts standards for grades K-5, which the Common Core State Standards refer to as English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, and the Grade Level Expectations (GLE) refer to as Reading. I will also talk about the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics as well as the K-8 GLE's for Mathematics. In this section I will argue that the Common Core State Standards provide a clearer, more in-depth set of college and career standards that encourage critical thinking. The standards also provide teachers with all the relevant information on how to attain each standard while leaving room for teacher independence and local control over curriculum.

With the Common Core State Standards, all students are to receive instruction and assessment in every standard. However, the previous standards, the GLE's, were divided between two categories, local and state, with all state level standards being considered fair game for state testing through the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), and the local standards being left up to the discretion of the district to assess (GLE 1). Right away it seems as if the GLE's are more of a suggestion than real standard because half of the standards were not assessed at the state level. The NECAP test was the only true assessment of the GLE and as one teacher stated in her interview, "NECAP was kind of the lowest common denominator test and we all hated that test and thought it was ridiculous" (Personal Interview).

Having all the standards as fair game for assessment brings more accountability to teachers to make sure they are actually covering all the required standards.

The four goals of the Common Core State Standards are as follows:

1. Fewer, higher, and clearer to best drive effective policy and practice;
2. Aligned with college and work expectations, so that all students are prepared for success upon graduating from high school
3. Inclusive of rigorous content and applications of knowledge through higher-order skills so that all students are prepared for the 21st century
4. Internationally benchmarked so that all students are prepared for succeeding in our global economy and society
5. Research and evidence based
   (Common Core State Standards for Reading, 2010)

English Standards

Both sets of English standards come in a document that lays out the purpose of the standards, how to read them, how to categorize them, and how to label them, and then the standards themselves. Right away it is easy to spot the differences.

The introduction to the GLE sates "The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Reading GLE have been developed as a means to identify the reading content knowledge and skills expected of all students, for large-scale assessments of reading" (GLE for Reading 1). The Common Core State Standards shift away from content-based assessments and focus instead on college and career readiness. The English standards do this by providing college and career readiness anchors, "The CCR standards anchor the document and define general, cross-disciplinary literacy expectations that must be met for students to be prepared to enter college and workforce training programs ready to succeed (CCSS for Reading 4). The CCR anchors are the basis of the Common Core State Standards in English. The difference between the two standards here is that the GLE were assessment based standards, students must know this

specific content as it will be on a test, where as the focus of the Common Core are skill based standards, which focus on what students must know this *skill* in order to succeed after school.

First, I will delve into the design of the standards. The introduction to the previous Rhode Island standards say that GLEs are meant to capture the "big ideas" of reading that can be assessed, without narrowing the curriculum locally (1). The Grade Level Expectations are divided into a few parts and come in two categories. The beginning of each standard, or "the what" is called the stem, for example the stem of Reading Standard 10 for Kindergarteners is as follows: "Demonstrates understanding of concepts of print during shared or individual reading by…" (GLE for Reading 5). This stem indicates what they need to understand, which in this case is concepts of print. The second part is the specific indicator, which for reading standard ten there are four, with the first being "distinguishing between printed letters and words" (GLE fore Reading 5). This part of the standard is considered "the how", so in this case, how will students demonstrate that they are meeting the standard. This standard only applies to kindergarten and first graders; afterwards there are no "concepts of print" standards.

The Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts are divided into sections that are referred to as "strands." The "strands" consist of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language, and a college and career readiness anchor standard, or CCR anchor, heads each strand (CCSS for Reading 8). The anchor standards also come in four categories, key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas and range of reading and level of text complexity. The following are the *Craft and Structure* anchor standards for English Language Arts &Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects:

<u>Craft and Structure</u>

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in at text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of the text. (CCSS 10).

Every standard under this college and career readiness anchor standard will focus on building the skills necessary for every student to be able to do all of the above. As mentioned previously the standards are not a curriculum, however, the standards booklet gives suggestions on how to best build a strong foundation for student growth. For example, on the anchor standards page there is a side note that encourages students "read widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts" (CCSS for Reading 10). This section does not tell the teacher what books or text to use, which leaves content decisions to discretion of either the teacher or the curriculum designer. Each school district in Rhode Island, our case study, has a different approach to designing the curriculum, as some teachers are responsible for the design of the curriculum whereas other teachers work with a curriculum consultant or director.

To understand the reasoning behind each standard it is important to know how the writers of the standards define "college and career readiness." The reading standards are aimed at seven college and career readiness goals. Students are who are college and career ready in Reading demonstrate independence by becoming self-directed learners, who seek out and use resources such as teachers, peers and print or digital references (CCSS for Reading 9). Students will also build strong content knowledge in a wide variety of subjects by completing research and being good listeners (9), this idea is the most similar to the old standards, which focused greatly on

content knowledge. In an interview with a teacher, when asking about the shift in standards she replied,

> The other big way it has changed is there is a huge emphasis on reading to learn, so instead of teachers being the purveyors of information and expecting students to take notes based on the wise pearls of wisdom that fall from our lips, I do more of having and expecting students gather the information that I otherwise would have just given them. And so I think there is a little bit better preparation, I have more in the forefront understanding that these kids will have to read thousands of pages of reading in college that their professors will never once mention and they'll be tested on it (Personal Interview)

The shift from content based to skill based standards is crucial, as it changes the focus on teaching students facts, information, and data to teaching students how to learn. The new standards change teacher preparation, the new set of standards "requires a shift in framing one's teaching away from preparation for a single test and toward the development of students higher level and critical thinking skills in preparation for their entrance into college or career (Burns et al. 8). This focus on cultivating students' critical thinking skills highlights the focus on college and career readiness. According to the Common Core State Standards document, college and career readiness also includes responding to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline, meaning they can adjust their work to reflect the type and style of the assignment, audience, or tone (9). Students who are college and career ready comprehend as well as critique, not only should they be active listeners and readers, they should be continuously questioning the accuracy of assertions and the thoroughness of research (9). College and career readiness also includes the efficient use of technology and media to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use whole (9). One drawback to this college and career readiness goal is that students need to have access to technology to completely master this concept. In District C we learned that not all schools are able to provide technology to their students on a regular basis.

The teacher in District C shared that after being on the verge of bankruptcy, her school is at a disadvantage,

> It's hundreds and thousands of dollars to equip the schools with the technology that they need… unless we get grant funding or [the school] comes into a windfall of money I'm not even sure what's going to be happening this spring. And our kids are at a disadvantage because we are supposed to be working with technology ongoing all year long…and we just don't have the technology so it puts the students at a disadvantage" (Personal Interview).

This is a huge problem with the Common Core State Standards, as they are voluntary, and only the states that won Race to the Top received any funding. For students to be tested on computers, it would make sense for them to be learning on computers, but realistically, not all schools can afford to switch to the one-to-one computer/student ratio.

The last college and career readiness goal is the understanding of multiple perspective and cultures. This goal is focused on encouraging students to continually seek to understand other perspectives than their own, in order to incorporate other worldviews, from varieties of time periods of time, which will allow them to be work with people collaboratively with respect of past diverse experiences (9). These seven goals are the foundation on which the Common Core State Standards of Reading are built upon. Each strand, reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language have their own set of anchors. The designers and authors of the Common Core State Standards, "have made careful use of a vast and growing body of evidence that includes scholarly research, surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and work force training programs, and assessment data identifying readiness of successful college and career performance" (Dunkle 38). Basing the standards with this data in mind, the creators were able to create standards that will better prepare students for life after high school. However, one complaint that I have heard from teachers is that these goals are strictly about college and career readiness, which is great for those who value education and want to go onto an academic

life after high school, but multiple teachers in interview said these standards put those who do not want to go onto college a disservice, with one teacher going as far as saying, “Its like we are trying to create an army of people who all think the same way,” when asked if she thought the standards were preparing everyone for a college or career (Personal Interview).

The Common Core State Standards are fluid, with each grades’ standards building directly off of the standards for the year before. The anchor standards apply to all grades, with the extent and rigor of the standards becoming more challenging as the student progresses. Below, we see the progress of the first three standards under the craft and structure strand of ELA. We see below the three standards attached to the craft and structure strand of the Reading standards for grades K-5.

Kindergartners:	Grade 1 students:	Grade 2 students:
Craft and Structure		
4. Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.	4. Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.	4. Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.
5. Recognize common types of texts (e.g., storybooks, poems).	5. Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types.	5. Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.
6. With prompting and support, name the author and illustrator of a story and define the role of each in telling the story.	6. Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text.	6. Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

Grade 3 students:	Grade 4 students:	Grade 5 students:
Craft and Structure		
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.	4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).	4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.
5. Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.	5. Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.	5. Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.
6. Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.	6. Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.	6. Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

(Common Core State Standards, Reading Standards for Literature K-5, Pages11-12)

The fluidity of the standards seems that it could be beneficial to students, who would constantly be building upon lessons they already have mastered. First, in the craft and structure

strand of the Reading standards we know (see section on craft and structure anchors) students are expected to be able to interpreted words and phrases, analyze the structure of texts and assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of text (CCSS for Reading 10). In Kindergarten, students are learning how to address words that they do not know. In first grade, students should have mastered how to ask questions about words they do not know and should also be able to identify words associated with feelings or the senses. By the fifth grade students should be able to identify all of the previous standards as well as understanding figurative language. I would like to compare this to the standards below, the GLE in Reading for grades K-5: Vocabulary Strategies.

READING **Kindergarten – Grade 5**

Rhode Island and New Hampshire Grade Level Expectations *LOCAL* (GLEs) for grades K-5
Including New England Common Assessment Program (*NECAP-STATE*) GLEs for Reading in Grades 2-5

Vocabulary: Vocabulary Strategies (R-2)					
End of Grade K LOCAL ONLY	**End of Grade 1 LOCAL ONLY**	**End of Grade 2 STATE ASSESSED**	**End of Grade 3 STATE ASSESSED**	**End of Grade 4 STATE ASSESSED**	**End of Grade 5 STATE ASSESSED**
R–K–2 **Students identify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by…** • R–K–2.1 Using strategies to unlock meaning (e.g., activating prior knowledge, using cues, using context clues, or asking questions) (Local)	**R–1–2** **Students identify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by…** • R–1–2.1 Using strategies to unlock meaning (e.g., activating prior knowledge, using cues, using context clues, or asking questions during read-alouds or text reading) (Local)	**R–2–2** **Students identify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by…** • R–2–2.1 Using strategies to unlock meaning (e.g., knowledge of word structure, including common base words and suffixes, such as "thick-est," "hope-ful;" or context clues, including illustrations and diagrams; or prior knowledge) (State)	**R–3–2** **Students identify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by…** • R–3–2.1 Using strategies to unlock meaning (e.g., knowledge of word structure, including prefixes/suffixes and base words, such as "un-covered;" or context clues; or other resources, such as dictionaries, glossaries; or prior knowledge) (State)	**R–4–2** **Students identify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by…** • R–4–2.1 Using strategies to unlock meaning (e.g., knowledge of word structure, including prefixes/suffixes and base words; or context clues; or other resources, such as dictionaries, glossaries; or prior knowledge) (State)	**R–5–2** **Students identify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by…** • R–5–2.1 Using strategies to unlock meaning (e.g., knowledge of word structure, including prefixes/suffixes and base words; or context clues; or other resources, such as dictionaries, glossaries; or prior knowledge) (State)
(GLE R-2 assumes a variety of text and increasing text complexity across grade levels. See Appendix F for descriptions of increasing text complexity.)					

(Grade Level Expectations, Kindergarten-Grade Five, page 8)

The GLE standards also focus on understanding words. However, the standards are not as detailed as the Common Core State Standards. For example, the standards identify which types of vocabulary each grade should be focusing on, literal vs. non-literal, allusions, and figurative language. The GLE in vocabulary focus on vocabulary strategies and breadth of vocabulary (GLE for Reading 3) These standards are show barely any progress, with the changes in each standard by grade year being underlined, we see that the standard for grade four and five is literally the exact same. These standards are not as rigorous as the Common Core State Standards

as they are not progressing every year, and the ones that do progress do so in such an incremental way that they move forward slowly.

In interviews with a the teacher from District C I learned that the standards are taught on a strict timeline, "and we have to move at such a fast pace to cover everything that needs to be covered and there's really no time to do remediation, everything is on a timeline (Personal Interview). This timeline differs from the timeline of the GLE's. Unlike the Common Core, the GLE list standards by what should be mastered by the end of one grade, for example, all of the grade two standards are listed as "end of grade 2," so as long as a teacher covered each standards by the end of the year or before end of the year testing, they were fine. If a teacher needed to spend more time on one standard than another in order for their students to really master something, they could. This differs from the Common Core State Standards, as the standards go in a specific order and there are many of them, teachers find that "It's definitely more structured now, and consistent throughout the grade level, we are all pretty much doing the same thing on the same day. Whereas we had a little more freedom before common core standards, we still had to teach things but not necessarily in the same exact order and hitting the standards every day" (Personal Interview). Now, with the Common Core State Standards all teachers are following a strict curriculum that *should* guarantee they reach every standard.

Math Standards

The math standards under the Common Core State Standards are different from previous state standards. In the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, the standards are divided into two areas, Mathematical Practice and Mathematical Content, with the practice standards describing areas of expertize students must develop throughout grades K-12 and the content standards are organized by differently, as math is a trickier subject (Kendall 20). There are eight standards of Mathematical Practice.

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively
3. Construct viable arguments and critique reason of others.
4. Model with mathematics.

5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.
(Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, pages 6-8)

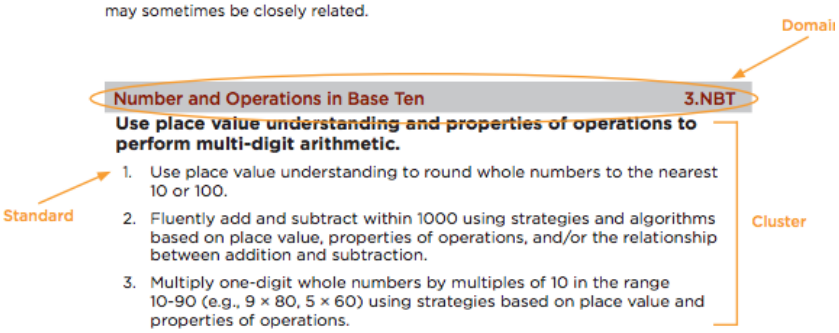
Unlike the Common Core State Standards for reading, there are no anchor standards for math. Instead, the Mathematical Practice standards serve as the overarching goals of the content standards. These goals are based on the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics process standards of problem solving (2006), reasoning and proof, communication, representation, and connections along with mathematical proficiency standards identified in *Adding it Up*, a research report published by the National Research Council. These standards include adaptive reasoning, strategic competence, conceptual understanding, procedural fluency and productive disposition (CCSS for Mathematics 6). This differs from previous state standards which are said to focus on coverage of content, where as the new standards are based on focus and coherence (Kendall 22). The old standards, the GLE's were organized in four content strands; Numbers and Operations; Geometry and Measurement; Functions and Algebra; and Data, Statistics, and Probability, along with two process strands; Problem Solving, Reasoning and Proof; and Communication, Representations, and Connections (GLE for Mathematics 1). The process standards are imbedded into the content standards so that the content is learned in a comprehensive fashion that includes the process (GLE for Mathematics 1). The GLE's are harder to understand, as the process standards are imbedded in the standards but not easy to find. In the two diagrams below we can see the different ways the standards are set up and explained to the teachers who are reading and implementing them.

How to read the grade level standards

Standards define what students should understand and be able to do.

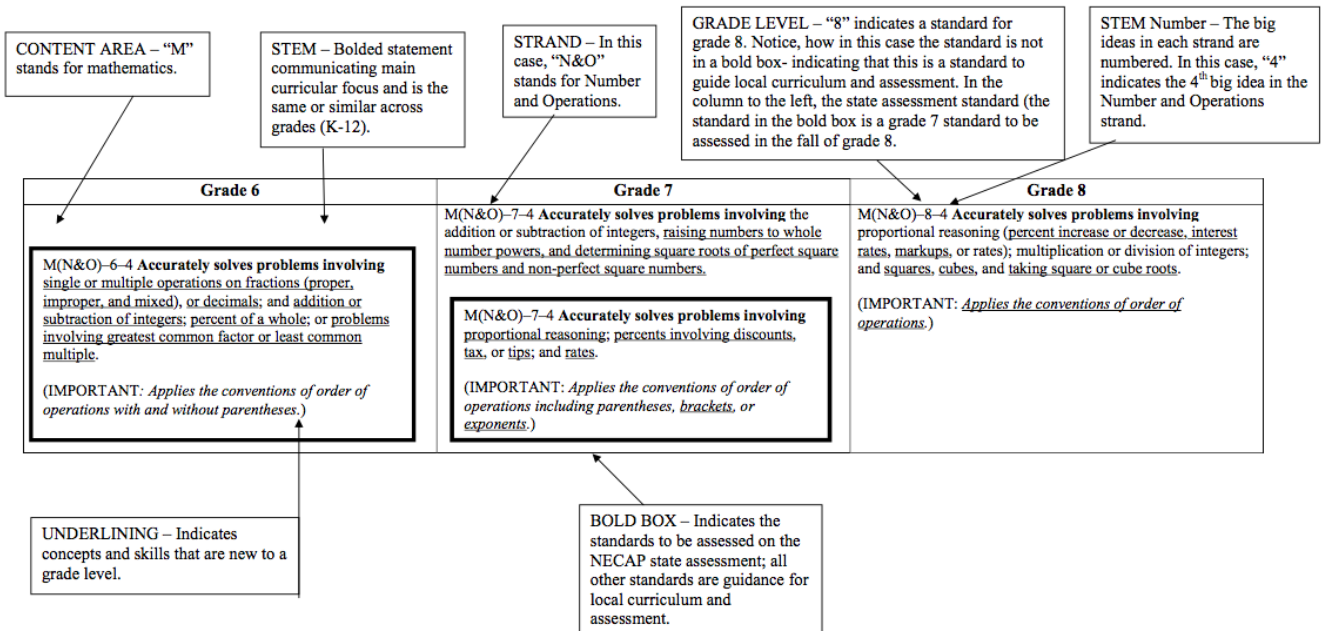
Clusters are groups of related standards. Note that standards from different clusters may sometimes be closely related, because mathematics is a connected subject.

Domains are larger groups of related standards. Standards from different domains may sometimes be closely related.



(Common Core State Standards, Mathematics, page 6)

Reading the Mathematics GLEs



(Grade Level Expectations, 2006, page 2)

The two diagrams above show the layout. The layout of the Common Core State Standards seems much more concise and easy to read, as compared to the diagram of the GLE which looks messier and has many arrows one must follow to understand the standards.

According the Common Core itself, the standards for Mathematical Practice identify the ways in which students should be engaging with the subject matter (CCSS for Mathematics 8). The Content Standards are more complex; they are "a balanced combination of procedure and understanding (8). The standards themselves shift away from content based standards and move to a focus on conceptual understating. Though the Process Standards of the GLE are similar to the Mathematical Practice standards, they are not as easily identifiable within the standards themselves. The Mathematical Practice standards have their own page with full descriptions on what the standard writers mean by each standard. The standards themselves, in the Common Core, are first identified in a grade specific overview with the main content goals of each strand identified on the left side of the page and the correlating practice standards identified on the right side of the page. Then, each standard is broken down into smaller chunks that each student should be able to complete. However, the Process Standards are imbedded into the GLE and the "Reading the Mathematics GLE's" diagram does not identify the Process Standards.

One complaint of the Common Core from parents is the new way of teaching math (Wong). However, I would like to re-state that the Common Core State Standards do not dictate how teachers should be teaching the subjects. Any shift in curriculum comes from the curriculum designers. It is important to identify why a shift in curriculum could happen. With the new standards, the years in which student learn concepts changed as well. Now, "teachers will find subjects as fractions addressed as early as 2nd grade…probability and statistics begins in 6th grade, and students begin working at expressions of ratio and proportion in 7th grade. In 8th

grade, students are expected not only to apply the Pythagorean theorem but also to prove it" (Kendall 25). The way in which teachers are teaching math to younger students has changed since the student's parents were in elementary school. This has caused much controversy with parents, as they don't know how to help their children with their homework. Many parents blame the Common Core for this, when really the curriculum design determines how teachers will teach to the new standards (Wong). In 2015, the Westerly Parent Academy in Rhode Island offered a three-part class for parents to learn how to help their students with their homework (Smith). This class in Rhode Island was not the first however, Nevada has held classes, Khan Academy has put out webinars for parents, and even some community colleges have been offering classes on how to help students with Common Core aligned math (Wong). The concentration and description below comes from the class offered in Westerly. It identifies the new way in which students learn about the foundation of numbers, so instead of memorizing addition, subtraction, division and multiplication charts they can fully understand the concepts of what they are adding, subtracting, dividing and multiplying.

> 'How would you add these two single-digit numbers?' asked one, as she writes 7+6 on a whiteboard.
> The teachers went on to explain ways to get to the answer: "doubles," "count on" and "bridge to 10."
> In doubles, the student finds the closest double and works from there. So, 7+6 becomes 6+6=12+1=13.
> In bridge to 10, students break one of the other numbers up to form a combination that makes 10.
> In 7+6, break up the 6 to make 3+3. Then, 7+3=10. 10+3=13.
> In count on, the student finds the largest number and adds to it, one by one. In 7+6, the student might count on 7, 8, 9, and reach 10. Add the remaining 3 to get 13.
> Children will eventually learn traditional algorithms, the educators explained, but will have a solid foundation in understanding what numbers mean and being able to justify their thinking.
> (Smith, Providence Journal, 2015)

The shift in the way in which teachers teach math has definitely been a reflection of the new standards, even if the standards did not specifically give lesson plans or instructions on how to teach. This has been a problem for students who have been caught in the middle of implementation. In personal interviews with teachers I learned that the students caught in the transition between the old and new standards were at a disadvantage. For example, students transitioning from the standards while also transitioning from middle to high school ended up missing important lessons.

> With the implantation there are a lot of problems, especially with the high school and middle school population, a lot of the standards that were addressed in the GLEs were pushed down, so that things that we covered in 9th grade algebra under the GLEs were pushed down into 8th grade math with the Common Core State Standards, so when they changed over the common core we had kids coming into the high school and we were supposed to teaching towards the common core standards however the kids didn't learn what they needed to have learned in middle school to be able to do what we needed to do in the 9th grade. (Personal Interview)

As teachers begin to become more familiar with the standards, potential educational material they can use, and their new curriculums, and students begin learning under the new standards from their introduction the education system in Kindergarten, the relative success or failure of the standards will become inherently apparent. I am a firm believer that we will not know if the standards truly work until we see the results of students who are learning with the Common Core State Standards for all thirteen years of public education. We cannot make assumptions on the core based on the results of the students who were forced to transition from one set of standards to another midway through their education. However, until students spend all thirteen years with one singular set of fluid standards, students stuck in transition may feel lost, as teachers are kept to a strict timeline and there is little time for remediation. This will continue to cause students, parents and teachers stress, which garners media attention and creates a firestorm of negative notions about the Common Core.

Chapter 5:

The Results are in: What it all Mean?

To see if the Common Core State Standards have actually had a positive or negative impact on students I will be exploring educational data and possible connections between the switch to new standards and education outcomes. This data is relevant to our understanding of the impact of the Common Core but is not directly correlated unless specified.

Graduation Rates

To see if the Common Core is helping students it is most helpful to look at high school graduation rates. Fortunately, Rhode Island Kids Count collects data year round and compiles it in charts and graphs that are simple to read. I would first like to turn our attention to Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows the overall increase in graduation rates since 2007. Rhode Island Kids Count defines high school graduation rate as "the percentage of students who graduate from high school within four ears of entering" (2016 RI Kids Count Factbook). As seen below, since 2007, the graduation rate in Rhode Island has increased from 70% in 2007 to 81% in 2014. The Common Core was introduced in 2010, and Rhode Island began implantation soon thereafter. Though the graduation rate has slowly been rising, it is worthwhile to point out that with the implementation of the Common Core the promising graduation rate increases continued.

In Figure 2, the data is divided by district. It is interesting to see that the poorest district, District C, has decreased its gradation rate from 60% in 2008 to 58% in 2014. District D, the wealthiest district had little to no change, with its graduation rate fluctuating between 94%. If the goal of the Common Core State Standards was to ensure all students are ready for college or a career by the end of high school, it is safe to say that not *all* students were ready after the first few years of implementation.

Figure 1

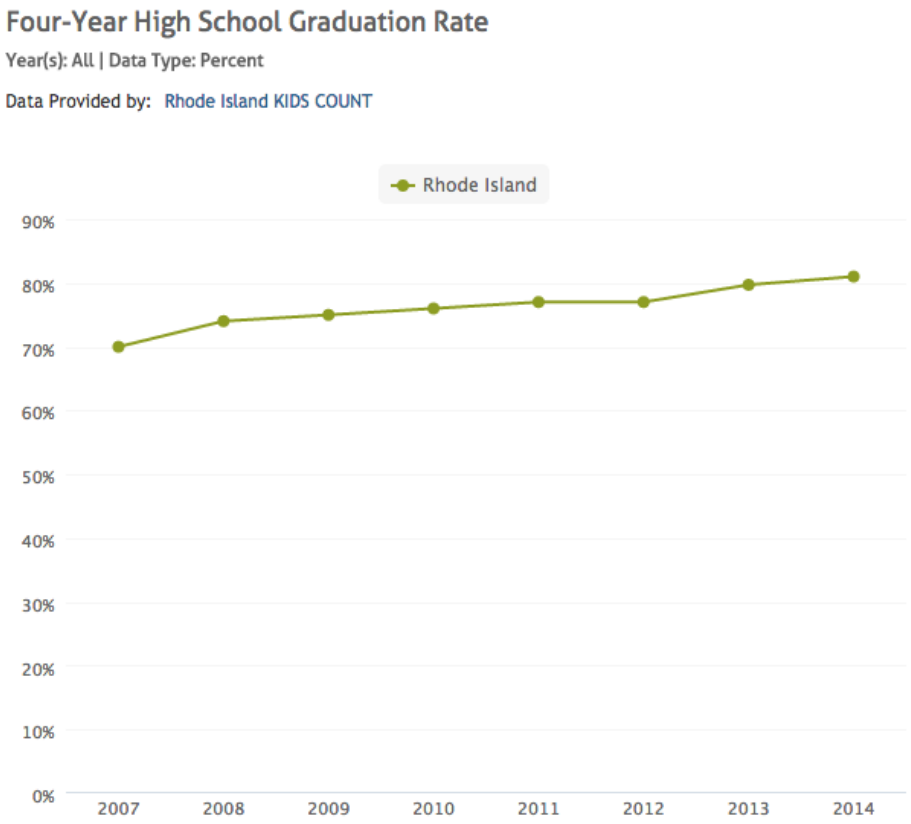


Figure 2
Graduation Rates by Year

Location	2008	2010	2012	2014
District A	88%	91%	94%	88%
District B	57%	58%	67%	80%
District C	60%	63%	65%	58%
District D	94%	96%	94%	96%
District E	63%	68%	65%	71%
District F	87%	89%	91%	90%

Source: 2016 RI Kids Count Factbook

Standardized Testing

Once the standards were put in place, schools needed to know whether or not their students understood what they were learning. With new standards there would also be new assessments. It is argued that without assessments, the standards will have little to no impact, "research and experience make clear that standards will not have an impact without related assessments. Assessments make the standards concrete; they describe the particular tasks students must accomplish in order to meet the standards" (Rothman138). In 2010, when the standards were unveiled, Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, awarded $330 million dollars to two testing consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for college and Careers (PARCC), and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), in order to create assessments that are in line with the standards ("*Information Relating to the Assessment Consortia"*).

The SBAC is a consortium of 29 states, 18 with governing authority, overseeing testing over 20 million K-12 students (Dunkle 97). States could either join the consortia as governing states or participating states. Governing states developed the original proposals and also appoint the state leaders who sit in the governing boards, whereas participating states agree to utilized the assessments that come out of the consortium ("*Information Relating to the Assessment Consortia"*). PARCC was a consortium made up of 26 states and Washington D.C. with 15 governing states, overseeing testing of over 31 million k-12 students (Dunkle 100). According to the PARCC website, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education, Ken Wagner, sits on the governing board of PARCC. Though many states originally signed up for these consortiums, not all gave the tests. According to the PARCC website, only 11 states, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Washington D.C., will be

administering tests in the 2015-16 school year. This decrease has in states participating in the consortia has been credited to budget constraints, as states have to pay for the test (Ujifusa).

Another struggle these consortia may face, other than budgetary restraints, is management. Many states have never worked together before on educational matters, especially ones of such high profile and high stakes. Also, each state has its own government with its own laws that could interfere with the planning process (Rothman 156). However, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine already had some practice with this, as they were all part of the New England Common Assessment program, which was considered a vital step towards creating national testing (Rothman 156). Some, like Glen Beck in his book *Conform* argue that standardized testing and the Common Core go hand in hand and that teachers hate it (Beck 106). However others, like Education International General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen would disagree, van Leeuwen put it best when he said, "teachers are not against testing. We invented it. However, we consider testing as a teachers' diagnostic tool not a political device" (Dunkle 92). If not used as a political wedge, a platform in order to gain supporters and gain political power, the ideas of assessments seems more than natural to me. In order to see how students are fairing in schools, whether the curriculums are working towards making sure students can reach the standards, whether teachers are able to teach, and whether students are able to learn based on the lessons designed around the standards, assessments seem necessary.

Proficiency

Rhode Island, as mentioned earlier, was previously part of the consortia of states that participated in NECAP testing, and now has opted to join the consortia of states using the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)**.** Finding data

comparing the two tests is not easy, as the tests are scored differently. However, there has been some discussion in the news with data provided by the Department of Education.

After the first year of PARCC testing, Rhode Island's scores were dismal. The results portrayed that, "only one in three students met the state standards in English and only one in four met it in math, according to the results of a new standardized test that Rhode Island shares with several other states" (Borg and Parker). The results can be seen in Figure 3 below.

When these results were unveiled, Rhode Island's Commissioner of Education, Ken Wagner, said that parents should not be concerned if their students scored much lower this year as compared to last year, as the NECAP test asked poor performance (Borg and Parker). Teachers also agree with Wagner, "From a pure substantive standpoint, PARCC is much more challenging than NECAP was, NECAP was kind of the lowest common denominator test and we all hated that test and thought it was ridiculous" (Personal Interview).

Another factor that could have contributed to low-proficiency scores on the new PARCC testing was the switch from paper testing to computer testing. This past year "Approximately 75,000 students took the test in English and math, 80 percent of them on computers. Statewide participation on the test was 90 percent with wide fluctuations across grade levels, schools and district" (Borg and Parker). This switch has been hard on students. In an interview I asked the teacher in district E about PARCC and she explained why she thought it would be hard it for her students to transition to the online test.

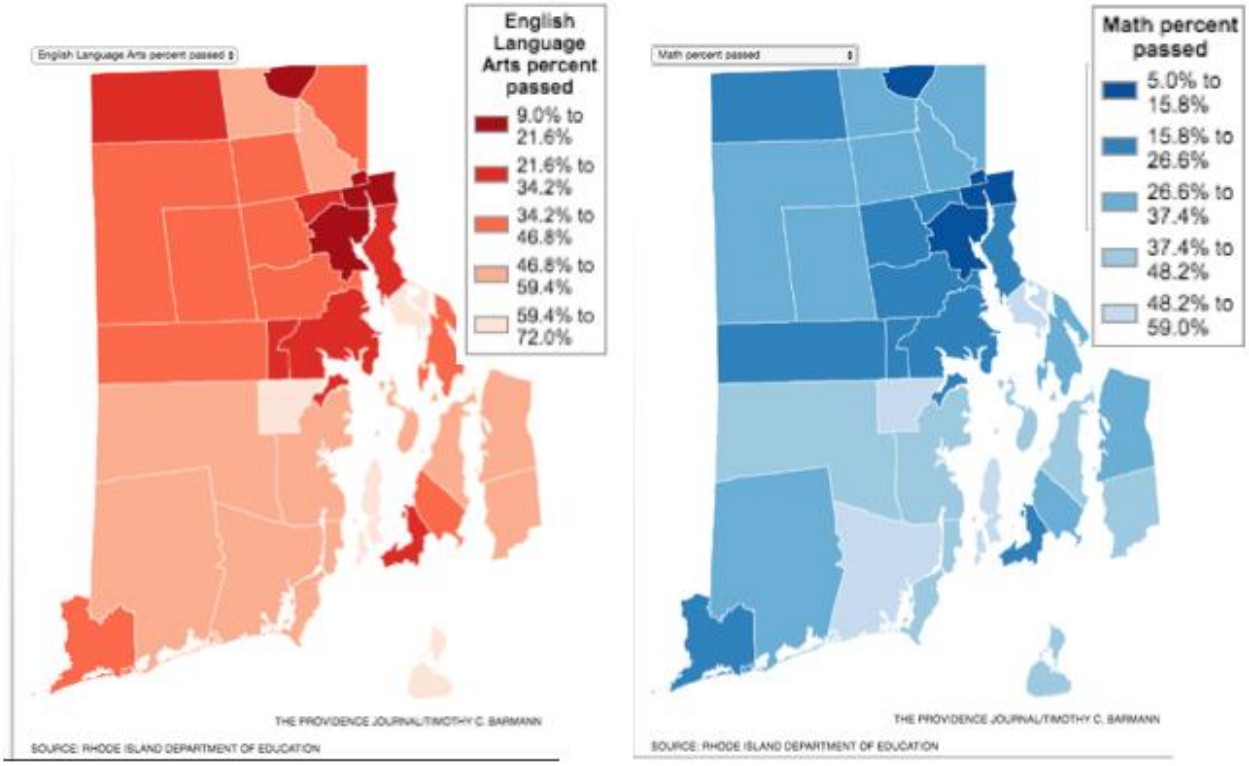
> I think that will be really hard for kids, with the paper and pencil, at least its in front of I them, with this you have to learn to drag and drop, highlight, and stuff, but in school you're always taught to mark up the text, and whenever you wrote and essay didn't you always pre-write and use graphic organizers? Now you turn the page and you write an essay and it's crippling, there is no room. They can probably use scrap and do that, and I'll encourage my kids to type out some notes, but it's so different from what we do in class, we're reading we're marking up text, the management of it is not the same (Personal Interview).

This transition to computer based testing could have contributed to the lower scores, as we know from chapter 3, many schools do not even have the money to equip the school with enough computers. This causes a divide between those who live in wealthy districts and those who do not. District D is a 1:1 school, meaning each student has his or her own computer. This is vastly different from District C, where the school was on the verge of bankruptcy and students have very limited access to computers or other technology.

Data shows that students who took the PARCC exams on the computer statistically score lower than those who took the exam on paper (Herold). In Rhode Island, approximately 151,000 students took the PARCC exam. Schools were given the option of paper or computer based testing, and approximately 21.6% of students ended up taking the exam on paper (Herold). In English, 42.5% of students who took the exam on paper scored proficient, whereas only 34% of students who took the exam on a computer scored proficient. The scores for the Mathematics exam were not as drastically different, but 26.8% of students who took the exam on paper scored proficient, and 24.4% of the students who took the exam on a computer scored proficient (Herold). This causes me to believe that what the Teacher in District E said is true; students have a hard time taking the English test online, as they are not accustomed to reading on the computer. Commissioner of Education Ken Wagner said that in the results, "variability appears to be related primarily to student and system readiness for technology" (Herold). This is evidenced in a study done in Baltimore, Maryland. Officials in Baltimore County found that after analyzing the results from the 2014-15 PARCC exams, that students were 3%-9% more likely to score proficient on the Math exam if taken on paper, and 11%-14% more likely to score proficient on the ELA exam if taken on paper (Herold).

The results in Figure 4 show how the districts we discussed in Chapter 3 faired on the PARCC test. The results show that the wealthiest district, District D, had the highest percent of students reaching proficiency. Whereas the two districts considered the poorest, Districts E and C, have the lowest percent of students reaching proficiency. Overall the results show the income gap has affected scores, "in English, more than twice as many middle and upper-income students reached the standard than students from low-income families. In math, three times as many middle-income students reached the mark compared to their peers from lower-income backgrounds" (Borg and Parker). In the words of Gina Raimondo, Governor of Rhode Island, "Too many of our children do not have the skills they need to succeed in today's economy. Our kids deserve better..." (Borg and Parker). These results highlight that even with national standards, poverty is still a leading factor of the education gap.

Figure 3
English Language Arts and Math Proficiency by District



The Providence Journal/Timothy C Barmann

Figure 4
Average Proficiency by District

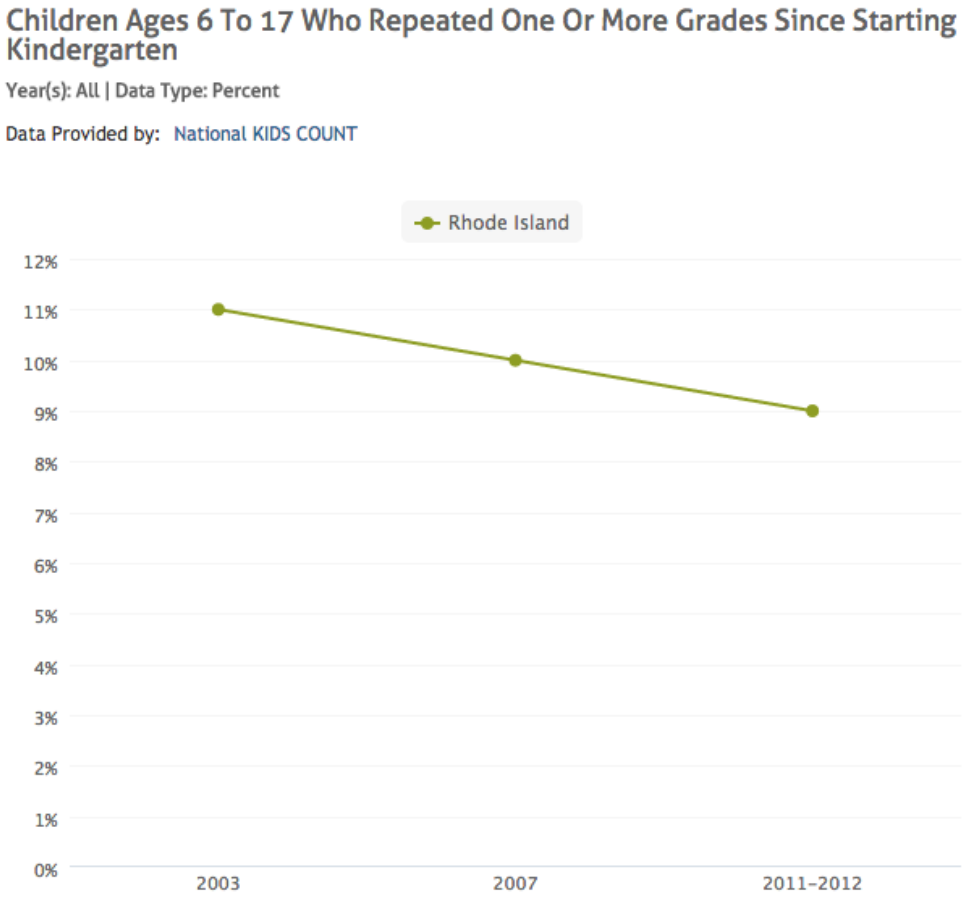
District	ELA % Proficient	Math % Proficient
District A	46.91	33.6
District B	22.90	14.45
District C	24.28	15.87
District D	67.3	55.72
District E	18.41	10.91
District F	54.13	49.3

Source: The Providence Journal/ Timothy C Barmann

Repeated Grades

Another interesting piece of data to look as is the percent of students ages 6-17 who repeated one or more grades since starting kindergarten, as seen in Figure 5. One complaint from teachers in their interviews was little time for rumination if students fell behind with the standards. However, clearly this has not caused increase in the percent of students who have fallen so far behind that they were required to repeat a grade. Since 2003, the percent of students who have had to repeat grades has decreased from 11% to 9%.

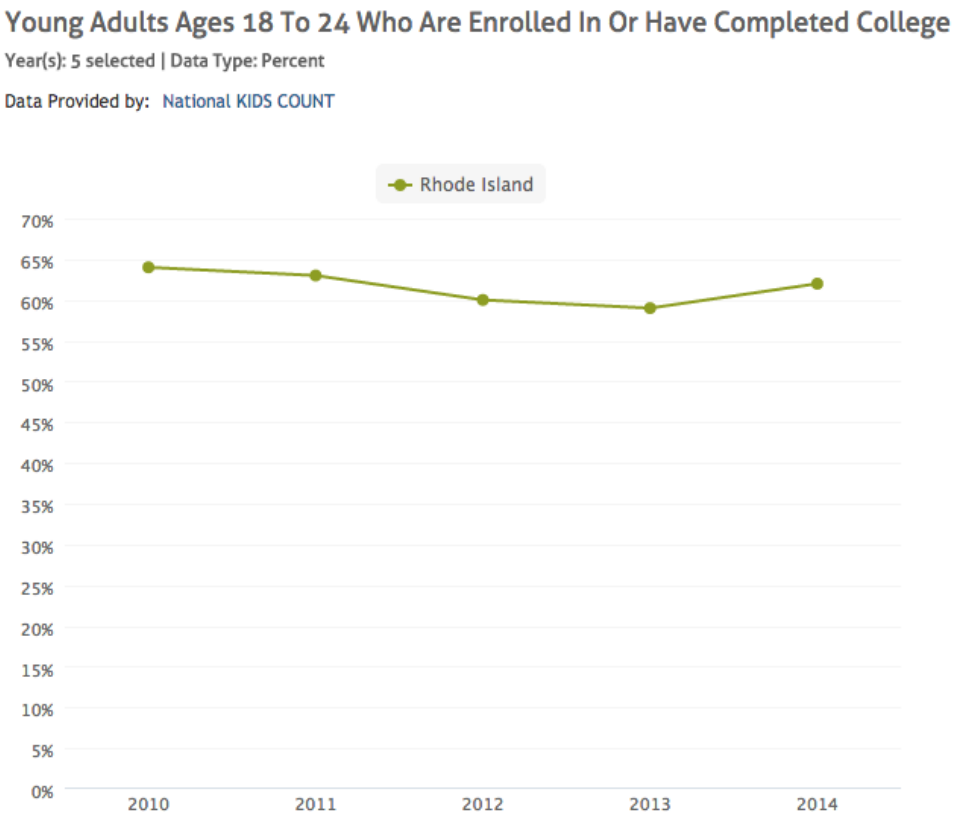
Figure 5



College Enrollment and Completion

Perhaps the most interesting set of data is seen in Figure 6. The entire emphasis of the Common Core State Standards is to make sure all students are College or Career ready. The English Standards themselves have College and Career Readiness anchors that each set of standards are based around. However, the data below shows that in Rhode Island, fewer adults aged 18-24 in are enrolled in or have completed college. In 2010, the year the standards were introduced, 64% of adults, aged 18-24, were enrolled in or had completed college. This number began to decrease until 2013, where it hit a low of 59%, and then increased to 62% in 2014.

Figure 6



Conclusion

Overall what this data highlights the most is that the effects of Common Core State Standards are still not known. Yes, we know that the results from the NECAP scores showed more students were proficient than the scores from the PARCC exam, and many people, teachers and administrators alike credit that to the increase in the rigorous aspects of the new standards. Many states have left the testing consortiums to try their own hand at creating tests. However, the results are so limited and so new, there has only been one year of testing, so there is no validity or reliability in assumptions made off of one years worth of scores. In order for the results of the Common Core State standards to be known, we must wait for students to have completed all thirteen years of schooling with the standards. Only then will we truly see the effects of the new standards. However, at the rate in which schools have been changing their standards, who knows if we will ever get there.

In this thesis I looked at the Common Core State Standards through multiple lenses. First, how did we get to where we are today? Understanding the historic timeline of education reforms that brought us to the standards was imperative for me to understand why the country needed national common standards in the first place. The country needed to provide every child, regardless of location, with a set of high quality learning standards that would help them gain the knowledge and skills needed for success in college or a career in a global setting (Kendall 1).

When these standards were adopted voluntarily by states, it became the role of the teacher to ensure his or her students were meeting them. After interviewing several teachers, I learned that many did not receive enough professional development, and that the implementation and transition was not easy. One teacher explained that even though her district provided professional development, “you’re not going to learn anything until you start doing it...they gave

us what they could and then everybody really just had to jump on and go with it" (Personal Interview). This trial-and-error transition timed proved hard for students caught in the middle, especially when the curriculum changed the order in which things were learned, leaving some students behind with little time for remediation.

However, the standards themselves offer a more cohesive structure, with each year's standards building upon the standards of the previous year. The overarching Anchor Standards in English Language Arts and the Mathematics Practice standards allow for a solid base of skills that students work to develop a little more each year. Compared to the old standards many consider the Common Core State Standards to be more rigorous. The original goal, "fewer, clearer, higher," established the expectation that the standards were to improve year after year (Rothman 78). They picked fewer to make sure that it was not a long grocery-type list of skills for students to be able to do that was too long and unattainable (Rothman 78). Clearer was important, as the writers did not want vague standards that would be left up to various teacher interpretations, instead they wanted clear standards that showed how students should be progressing (Rothman 79). And lastly, higher was critical when it came to designing the Common Core State Standards, as the writers wanted to honor the original intent of higher academic standards in the concept and design on the new ones, to ensure all students are ready for either college or a career in a globally competitive world (Rothman 79). When comparing the GLE to CCSS it is easy to follow the cohesive structure of the new standards to see how a child learning under a curriculum based around these standards would progress.

Change can be messy, uncomfortable, stressful, and controversial. This applies to change in our education system as well, as it "involved acquiring new materials and exploring new behaviors, practices, and policies that culminate in discovering and embracing new beliefs and

understanding of our work (Dunkle 8). As teachers continue to learn how to teach to the new standards, as the testing consortia work out kinks in their testing processes, as teachers and administrators re-evaluate curriculums that they now see as lacking, the people of the United States must be patient. We cannot possibly expect a significant improvement overnight, instead we must be continuously working, learning, and educating ourselves on how to best use these standards to create significant change in our education system that will provide every student with an equal learning opportunity based on rigorous standards that creates an atmosphere where students never want to cease learning.

Interview Guide

1. What grade and subject do you teach, and what previous grades/subjects have you taught?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Did you teach before the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?
4. Describe the Professional Development you received to support your work implementing Common Core Standards.
5. Did the Professional Development you receive help you feel ready to teach to the Common Core State Standards?
6. Do your students know what the Common Core State Standards are?
7. How often do you mention the standards to your students, if at all?
8. Has your teaching style has changed since the implementation of the Common Core State Standards?
9. Would you say most teachers you know are supportive or non-supportive of the Common Core State Standards?
10. Do you feel you have more or less control over what you are teaching with the Common Core State Standards as opposed to before the standards were implemented?
11. Do you feel that the Common Core State Standards are easily applicable in the classroom?
12. Do you have control over your curriculum, if not, who does?
13. Have your students participated in CCSS standardized testing, SBAC or PARCC, if so, how do you think it compared to previous standardized testing like the NECAP?
14. Do you feel the Common Core State Standards are going to help prepare all students for college or a career?

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