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Survey: School Superintendents see positives in Common Core Standards, but want changes; nearly all say controversies over standards, testing and teacher evaluations are hurting schools

Nearly all of New York’s school superintendents report that controversies over state education policies have had a negative impact on their schools, according to [a survey](#) released today by the New York State Council of School Superintendents.

Over three-quarters of superintendents see the Common Core Learning Standards as having a positive impact on education, but an even greater majority believes some changes to the standards are necessary. Superintendents give mixed grades to state tests, generally seeing them as useful for identifying strengths and weaknesses in instruction, but disagreeing, by 70 percent to 20 percent, that they are useful for evaluating teachers.

“Most superintendents regard the Common Core Standards as promising although not perfect,” said Council Executive Director Robert Reidy. “They see the state’s testing system as trying to serve too many purposes and therefore not showing enough value for educators and families in helping to improve instruction. Many see the linkage of tests to teacher evaluations as a driving force behind the controversies affecting their schools and worry those will undermine efforts they do see as promising.”

“Superintendents are on the frontline whenever new education policies are adopted – they are expected to take policies enacted for the whole state and make them work for all the distinctive communities they serve,” Reidy added. “Our report will give state policymakers a clear understanding of the challenges seen by the local leaders they hold accountable for executing their policies.”

What Leaders Think About the Common Core and State Assessments reports that:

- 96 percent of superintendents responding to the Council’s survey believe that “controversies over state having a negative impact on schools” is a problem in their districts; 64 percent called the problem “significant.”
- 79 percent of superintendents regard the Common Core Standards in English language arts (ELA) as having a positive impact on education; 77 percent see mathematics standards having a positive impact.
- 81 percent of superintendents favor some changes to the standards. Only 5 percent believe a “complete revision” is called for.

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- 61 percent of superintendents agree the grades 3 through 8 state assessments in ELA and math provide information useful for identifying general strengths and weaknesses in instruction.
- Superintendents are divided over whether the tests are useful for gauging whether students are on track to meet graduation requirements, with 47 percent agreeing and 41 percent disagreeing.
- By 70 percent to 20 percent superintendents disagree that the tests provide information useful for evaluating teachers; they are even more negative about using the tests to evaluate principals, with 15 percent agreeing and 73 percent disagreeing that the tests are useful for that purpose.
- “Opt-outs” (refusals to participate in the grades 3 through 8 assessments) were up sharply from 2014; with 67 percent of superintendents reporting that at least 20 percent of students refused the ELA assessment and 75 percent of superintendents reporting that at least 20 percent of students refused the math assessment. In 2014, only 8 percent of superintendents reported “opt-outs” of 20 percent or more for either test.

The report also includes observations from superintendents on the strengths and weaknesses of the state’s testing system and their suggestions for how it can be improved.

The Council conducted two on-line surveys. A first, in April and May explored opt-outs and strengths and weaknesses of the state assessment system; 45.3 percent of superintendents participated. A second survey, in August and September, sought perceptions of the Common Core Standards and usefulness of state assessments; 47.6 percent of superintendents participated.

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The New York State Council of School Superintendents is a professional and advocacy organization with over a century of service to school superintendents and assistant superintendents in New York State. The Council provides more than 750 members with numerous professional development opportunities, publications and personal services while advocating for public education and the superintendency.