

Finding a Way Forward

October 2014

Superintendent Views on the Impact of New York State's Education Reforms

A survey of New York school district superintendents on the Common Core, state testing, educator evaluations and the general direction of public education.



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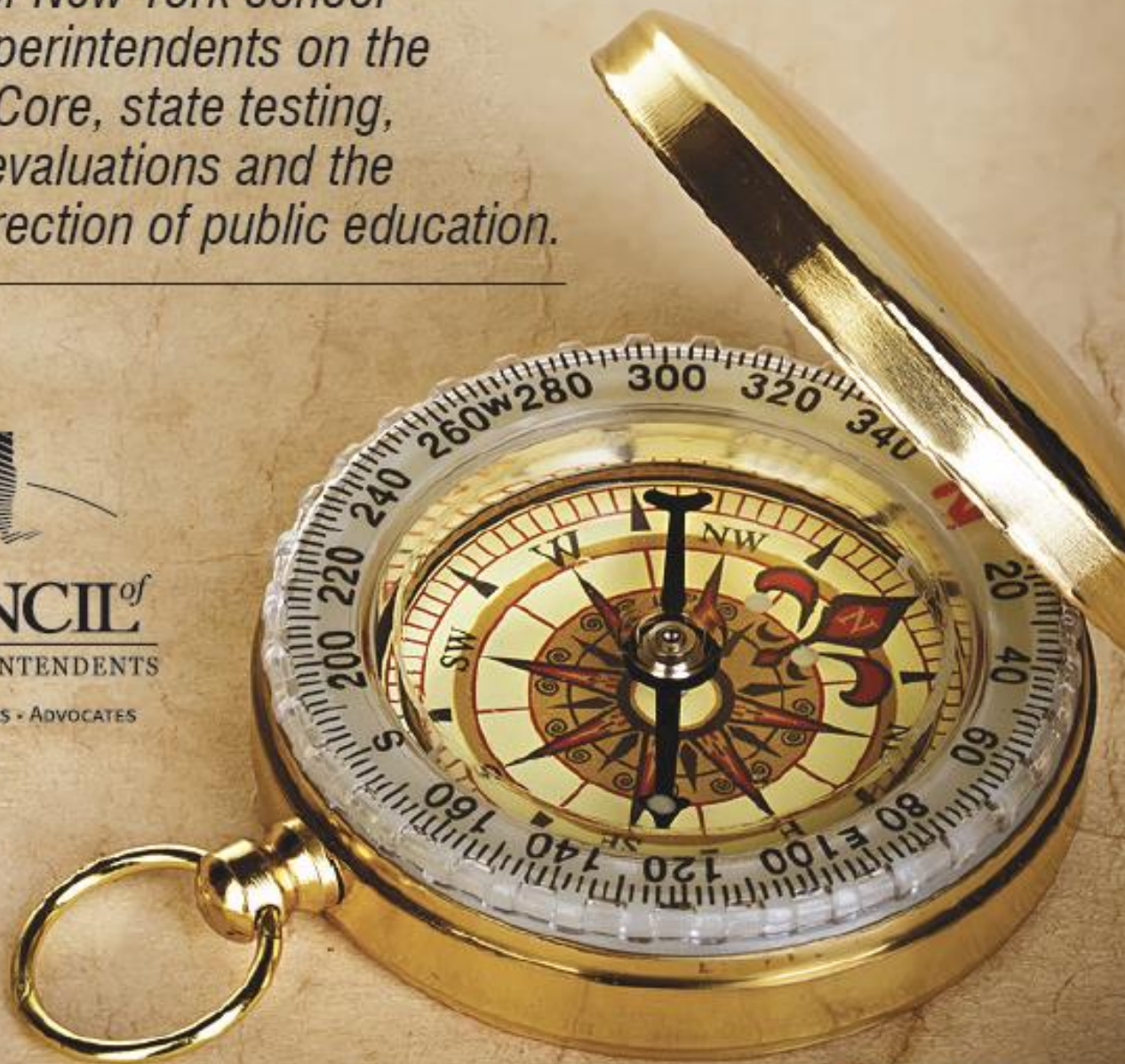


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Highlights.....	1
I. Overview.....	2
II. Common Core Learning Standards	6
– Impact of the Standards – Superintendent Perceptions	
– How big a lift?	
– Teacher Perspectives – As Interpreted by Their Superintendents	
– Common Core Modules	
– Stay the Course?	
III. Testing/State Assessments	13
– State Testing – Impact on Teaching and Learning	
– Uses of Grades 3-8 State Assessments	
– “Opting-Out” – Test Refusals	
IV. Teacher and Principal Evaluations	18
– Impact of Evaluations as a Whole	
– Impact of Specific Evaluation Components	
– Perceptions of Teaching Quality and the Impact of APPR	
– Interpreting the Statewide Results	
– Releasing Evaluation Results	
– Impact of New Teacher Evaluation requirements – Perceptions by District Type, Region, and Poverty Level	
V. Looking Back – and Forward	25

HIGHLIGHTS

Common Core Learning Standards

- Over 80% of superintendents believe the Common Core Learning Standards are having a positive impact on the quality of education in their districts' schools (85% for English language arts; 83% for mathematics).
- A majority of superintendents (54%) favor keeping the Common Core, *but making modifications*, over continuing to use the Standards as written (42%). Only 4% support abandoning the Common Core and returning to the state's prior standards.
- Common observations in open-ended comments: The standards are having a positive impact. They are not the problem, poor implementation is (or was). Increased testing due to the teacher evaluation law and increased stress over testing is causing controversy. Some of the standards or curriculum modules need to be recalibrated, especially in early grade English language arts and middle level math.

State Assessments

- More superintendents say state testing requirements have a positive impact than negative on their district's efforts to improve teaching and learning, but the shares fall short of a majority: 45% positive, 37% negative for the grades 3 through 8 state assessments; 48% positive, 22% negative for high school Regents exams.
- Common observations in open-ended comments: There should have been a slower transition to Common Core-based assessments. There is too much emphasis on tests and testing. Some of the tests are too long, especially in the early grades. Linkage of state tests to teacher evaluations has compounded stress over testing and hurt support for the entire reform agenda.
- Over 35% of superintendents reported that more than 5% of students opted-out/refused to take grades 3-8 state assessments, creating the prospect that schools will fall short of the 95% participation rate target set in federal school accountability requirements. 57% of Long Island superintendents reported test refusals greater than 10%, nearly double the rate of any other region.

Annual Professional Performance Reviews (Teacher and Principal Evaluations)

- 50% of superintendents said that new Annual Professional Performance Review requirements are having a positive impact on improving teaching; 45% see a positive impact in improving school leadership.
- Digging deeper, however, just one component of APPR is seen by a majority of superintendents as having a positive impact on improving teaching – the “other 60% measures”, including classroom observations. For the remaining components, majorities responded, “neutral/no effect.” Related, APPR is seen as having a positive impact on one type of employment decision – identifying specific improvement needs of individual teachers.
- Common observations in open-ended comments: It was a mistake to implement APPR before the Common Core was securely off the ground. The testing components create negative distractions. APPR has led to more careful and valuable classroom observations. APPR is excessively burdensome, requiring the same level of evaluation with all teachers, strong or weak.

Overall Direction

- 61% of superintendents reported that controversies over state policies had a negative impact on teaching and learning last year; 16% said the negative impact was significant. 30% of superintendents expect controversies to grow; 31% expect controversies to continue at about the same level. 9% said their schools experienced a significant negative impact last year *and* that they expect controversies to grow.
- More superintendents (47%) answered that public education in New York State has moved in the right direction than wrong direction (39%) over the past four years. This result is not a resounding endorsement for the state's demanding reform agenda, but neither is it the rejection that news accounts and anecdotal comments might lead observers to anticipate.
- Superintendents of upstate, city, rural, and higher poverty school districts are generally more positive about the Common Core and other state initiatives than their colleagues. The Lower Hudson Valley is generally most skeptical, Central New York most positive.
- Taking a longer view, superintendents overwhelmingly believe the quality of education students receive in the state's public schools today is better than 20 years ago (75% better, 11% worse).

I. OVERVIEW

It is hard to get the right answers if you are asking the wrong questions.

Recent surveys have reported declining public support for the Common Core Standards, both nationally, and in New York State.¹ Some observers have speculated that the Common Core's standing suffers because of frustrations with related but separate education reform initiatives – student testing and new teacher evaluations. Most opinion polls have failed to ask all the right questions, however.

This summer, the New York State Council of School Superintendents conducted a survey of its members, inquiring about the impact and trajectory of major state reform initiatives: the Common Core Learning Standards, Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPR – teacher and principal evaluations), and state student assessments, which play a part in the first two initiatives.

School district superintendents exercise a pivotal role in implementing state and federal education initiatives. On a day-to-day basis, classroom teachers, aides, principals, business officials or others may bear the brunt of carrying out new policies. But in the first instance, superintendents are called upon to lead in their implementation – to take policies conceived for the whole state or nation and make them make sense for the distinctive communities they serve. As the professional leaders of their school systems, they are the first to be held accountable if execution fails or falters. With their prominence, they are also often leaders in shaping local understanding of statewide or nationwide policy initiatives and their effects.

Reactions to the Reforms

We did not ask superintendents whether they support the Common Core. We asked a more essential question: “How do you see the Common Core Learning Standards affecting the quality of education in your district’s schools?” ***Over 80 percent of superintendents responded that they see both sets² of Common Core Learning Standards producing a positive impact on education.***

Expectations among superintendents for positive effects from state testing and educator evaluation requirements are much lower – 50 percent or less. The results are not resounding votes of confidence in these other reform efforts, but neither are they crushing rejections that news reports and anecdotal accounts might lead observers to expect.

A strong majority of superintendents (69 percent) do anticipate a positive impact on teaching from one aspect of the evaluation system – they say that due to APPR, they are conducting classroom observations more carefully and achieving more value as a result. Related, the new system is seen as positively affecting one type of employment decision – identifying areas for improvement for individual teachers. At best, superintendents seem to be withholding judgment on other aspects of the evaluation system and its value for other employment decisions. Student testing-based components of the evaluations are commonly seen as a distraction, at best.

¹ Siena College Research Institute. "Voters Say Corruption Is Serious Problem." 11 Aug. 2014. Web. 12 Aug. 2014.

Bushaw, William Jr. and Valerie Calderon. "Try It Again, Uncle Sam: The 46th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan*. 20 Sept. 2014: 9-20.

Henderson, Michael B., Paul E. Peterson, and Martin R. West. "2014 Education Next Poll: No Common Opinion on the Common Core." *Education Next*. 18 Aug. 2014. Web. 20 Aug. 2014.

² i.e., for English language arts and mathematics.

The survey's final question asked, "Given all that has gone on in education over the last four years, would you say efforts to improve the quality of education in New York State have moved schools in the right direction, wrong direction, or had little impact at all?"

Even with all the controversy of the last two school years, and even with painful budgeting challenges many districts have confronted, more superintendents answered that these efforts have moved education in right direction than the wrong direction, by 47 percent to 39 percent. Again, this result is not a sweeping endorsement for the state's reform agenda, nor an outright rejection.

One unavoidable conclusion from the survey is that school superintendents – leaders in reform implementation – are not unified in their perspectives on the efficacy of the state's reforms. Generally, superintendents serving city, rural, upstate, and higher poverty school districts are positive in their perceptions of reform initiatives than their colleagues elsewhere. But two points should be kept in mind about these differences:

- First, all superintendents' responses reflect the real experiences of their schools in carrying out state reform priorities.
- Second, opinions are not uniform within regions or groupings: whatever their circumstances or their views, all superintendents will find some colleagues in every other region and grouping who share their opinions.

The Right Questions

The survey's findings do not point toward a single clear "to do" list of actions that schools and policymakers should take to fulfill the best hopes of the state's reform agenda. The results suggest more questions needing to be asked and answered to find a way forward.

A first step is to recognize and respect that informed and thoughtful differences in opinion do exist, then seek either to reconcile them, or find optimal adjustments.

In open-ended comments submitted with the survey, criticisms of reform implementation were widespread, especially the decision to launch the new educator evaluation system and Common Core-based state tests in the same year, instead of allowing schools, teachers, and students to adapt to the changes in learning expectations first. What has been done cannot be undone, however.

Related, a sentiment expressed by some superintendents about state level actions and debates over the past school year went along the lines of, "You gave us a job to do, let us do it. Stop making changes." Some have also said that continued state-level disputes have fueled harmful local controversies.

These perspectives raise questions whether further policy adjustments can be worthwhile. However well-justified, changes in state policy require changes in local practice. Will potential gains be worth a new round of disruptions in schools, especially given that some superintendents are finding value in reform initiatives as presently constituted? The question is especially pertinent to debates over the Common Core Standards themselves.

The Council has said that the Common Core Learning Standards are "promising, not perfect." Although over 80 percent of superintendents see the new standards having a positive impact on education, more (54 percent) prefer keeping the Common Core but making modifications over keeping the standards as written (42 percent). Returning to the state's prior standards is supported by almost no superintendents. It makes sense to identify improvements that could be made to the standards and to determine whether concerns relate to the standards, or to curriculum modules designed to support the transition in teaching the standards. The modules can be changed more easily than the standards.

But new changes would resurrect old issues. How could changes be implemented in ways that avoid missteps of the first iteration? How could districts with resource limitations be supported, especially now

that state resources will be more limited with the coming end of federal Race to the Top funding? Would gains in the soundness of revised standards justify the disruptions created by their introduction?

Literally “stopping the Common Core” is not possible. If the standards were abandoned immediately, what would schools teach? Federal law mandates annual testing in grades 3 through 8 – what standards would those assessments measure? Would schools be expected to throw out all that has been done over the last three or four years? Some contend it is not possible to assess the worthiness of the Common Core Standards without taking into account problems with their implementation, a fair point. But would not implementation challenges arise with another wholesale redefinition of expectations for schools and students?

More than the Common Core, even more than the new educator evaluation requirements, testing mandates and practices evoke skepticism amid superintendents and controversy among parents and the public. Over the past year, the Board of Regents, State Legislature and Governor have all acted to resolve criticisms of excessive testing and unfair consequences from Common Core state assessments. School districts and their unions have made changes to local APPR plans to reduce student testing arising from that state mandate.

Perhaps all these actions will quell the controversies. The current school year seems to gotten off to a calm beginning in most communities. But the state will still face decisions over testing: whether to adopt assessments developed by a multi-state consortium or continue with state-developed tests; what to address in a comprehensive contract for test development (the current contract with Pearson expires in December 2015); working with districts to plan a realistic transition to computer-based testing; and how to phase-in Common Core expectations for Regents Exams. Will all these decisions be resolved in ways that build confidence among educators and families that state assessments add value for student learning?

No public enterprise matters more to the future welfare of New York State than education. So expectations set for schools and their students should be a topic of vigorous and far-ranging debate. That debate cannot be constructive, however, unless it is accurately informed and honest in acknowledging complexity. The Council’s survey is an attempt to illuminate that debate with the perspectives of the men and women who always lead in striving to make policies work for the children they are intended to benefit.

An online survey consisting of 30 questions was administered between July 23 and August 9, 2014 using *K12 Insight*, a corporate partner of the Council. Completed surveys were submitted by 324 superintendents, a response rate of 47.2 percent.

To analyze trends across districts, superintendents were asked for several pieces of descriptive data, including their district’s regional location, character (city, suburb or rural) and estimated student poverty level – the percentage of students qualifying for the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Superintendents were also asked to what extent various considerations constitute problems for their schools, including for example, low community expectations, teaching quality, and general funding adequacy. Responses can be cross-tabulated to assess relationships between school problems and policy reactions.

REGIONS USED IN THIS REPORT:

Long Island: Nassau and Suffolk Counties

New York City

Lower Hudson Valley: Putnam, Rockland, Westchester

Mid-Hudson Valley: Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan, Ulster

Capital Region: Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren, Washington

Mohawk Valley: Fulton, Herkimer, Montgomery, Oneida, Schoharie

Central New York: Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Tompkins

North Country: Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence

Southern Tier: Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga

Finger Lakes: Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, Yates

Western New York: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Niagara

To what extent, if any, have the considerations listed below been problems for your school district?

	Low Community Expectations	Parental Support	Student Achievement	Quality of Teaching	Administrative Capacity to comply with CCLS, APPR & State Testing Requirements	Professional Development to Support Implementation of CCLS, APPR, State Testing	General Funding Adequacy
-- Significant problem/Somewhat of a problem --							
Statewide	8% / 38%	15% / 49%	21% / 58%	6% / 52%	35% / 48%	33% / 49%	62% / 32%
Type							
City	24% / 52%	54% / 42%	60% / 40%	12% / 76%	32% / 52%	36% / 48%	84% / 16%
Suburb	2% / 23%	3% / 35%	14% / 45%	4% / 41%	26% / 52%	16% / 64%	43% / 48%
Rural	10% / 46%	18% / 57%	20% / 68%	6% / 57%	42% / 44%	44% / 39%	71% / 23%
Region							
Long Island	0% / 20%	0% / 35%	8% / 45%	0% / 39%	14% / 60%	14% / 58%	36% / 46%
Lower Hudson Valley	3% / 17%	7% / 17%	21% / 35%	0% / 38%	37% / 43%	10% / 70%	37% / 53%
Mid-Hudson Valley	15% / 35%	0% / 75%	25% / 65%	15% / 55%	35% / 35%	25% / 40%	55% / 35%
Capital Region	15% / 35%	28% / 35%	30% / 50%	10% / 55%	43% / 40%	35% / 48%	65% / 28%
Mohawk Valley	6% / 63%	19% / 63%	19% / 75%	13% / 56%	44% / 38%	50% / 44%	69% / 31%
Central New York	17% / 39%	30% / 44%	39% / 48%	9% / 57%	39% / 48%	39% / 52%	70% / 26%
North Country	10% / 44%	20% / 56%	20% / 66%	7% / 59%	44% / 49%	56% / 32%	76% / 24%
Southern Tier	14% / 45%	21% / 59%	10% / 72%	3% / 55%	41% / 38%	35% / 52%	71% / 29%
Finger Lakes	5% / 41%	9% / 59%	25% / 61%	5% / 57%	34% / 61%	41% / 52%	71% / 25%
Western New York	5% / 53%	18% / 61%	18% / 74%	5% / 58%	34% / 45%	34% / 40%	76% / 21%
Estimated Student Poverty Percentage (% of pupils eligible for federal Free & Reduced Price Lunch Program)							
0 to 10%	0% / 3%	0% / 8%	3% / 24%	0% / 24%	19% / 59%	14% / 62%	35% / 49%
11 to 20%	2% / 9%	2% / 23%	2% / 52%	2% / 37%	33% / 44%	26% / 56%	42% / 42%
21 to 30%	0% / 39%	0% / 61%	11% / 70%	2% / 64%	36% / 50%	34% / 61%	73% / 23%
31 to 40%	7% / 37%	7% / 57%	15% / 78%	13% / 41%	37% / 48%	35% / 46%	67% / 26%
41 to 50%	11% / 54%	26% / 60%	26% / 69%	4% / 61%	36% / 47%	34% / 50%	65% / 32%
51 to 60%	11% / 56%	23% / 62%	36% / 52%	7% / 67%	46% / 43%	48% / 34%	66% / 33%
61 to 70%	36% / 43%	57% / 43%	29% / 64%	7% / 57%	14% / 64%	36% / 36%	86% / 14%
71 to 80%	30% / 40%	30% / 60%	70% / 30%	30% / 60%	50% / 30%	40% / 40%	80% / 20%
81 to 100%	0% / 60%	40% / 60%	80% / 20%	0% / 100%	40% / 20%	20% / 40%	80% / 20%
Not sure	0% / 0%	0% / 0%	0% / 0%	0% / 0%	100% / 0%	100% / 0%	100% / 0%

II. COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARDS

The Common Core Learning Standards have become a lightning rod. The Republican nominee to become New York’s next Governor has formed a “Stop Common Core” party to appear on November’s ballot. A recent Siena College survey found 49 percent of voters statewide believe implementation of the Common Core standards should be stopped, while 39 percent of respondents support continuing implementation.³

For most people outside the education profession, “Common Core” is the only name they have to attach to whatever might now disturb them about schools, whether their concerns center on what is being taught, how it is being taught, how it is being tested, how educators are evaluated, or what data is gathered about individual students. Even among education professionals, it may not be possible to entirely sift out sentiments about other reform activities.

Impact of the Standards – Superintendent Perceptions

Two recent national polls inquired about support and opposition for the Common Core. Though phrased differently, both reported steep declines in support both among the general public and teachers. The surveys also found wide variances in understanding of what the Common Core actually comprises.⁴

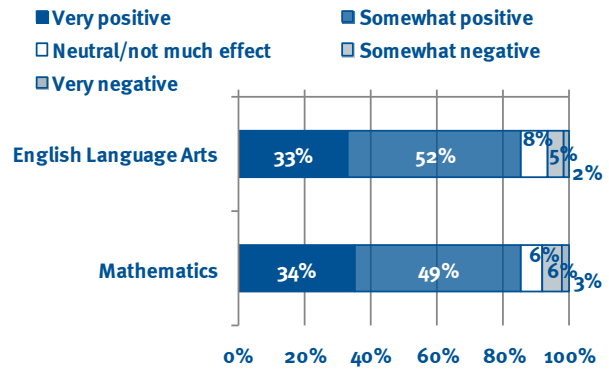
We asked superintendents a more crucial question: *“How do you see the Common Core Learning Standards affecting the quality of education in your district’s schools?”*

We added, *“In this question we ask you to attempt to focus on the standards themselves, apart from issues related to how they have been implemented or assessed.”*

Statewide, 85 percent of superintendents anticipate the Common Core English language arts standards having a very positive or somewhat positive impact on education quality; 83 percent anticipate positive effects from the mathematics standards.

In open-ended comments, many superintendents shared aggravations over how the standards and other reform initiatives were implemented.

How do you see the Common Core Learning Standards affecting the quality of education in your district’s schools?



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The Common Core Standards are not and never were the problem. Higher expectations are what are absolutely necessary for our children to remain competitive in the global economy. The industrial age is over. This generation of learners needs to be educated in a much different way than preparing them for the jobs of yesteryear... Unfortunately the APPR component was mandated ... to roll out first, causing widespread political discord. Common Core was collateral damage of this unfortunate situation and was given a black eye that it did not deserve. I think most teachers are beginning to figure this out but it will take years to repair the damage done. -- Capital Region Rural

I do not believe the Common Core Standards by themselves are the issue. I believe the issues lie in the implementation and the introduction of so many changes at the same time. APPR has complicated the issue by linking student's scores (for a newly developed assessment) with teacher rating. Linking the two scores together should have been the last step in full implementation of the Common Core and the APPR. -- Mid-Hudson Valley Suburb

I believe that the standards are so significantly different, that we still have not been able to adequately explain/help staff & parents understand them. I also believe that folks are confusing varied elements of the state's reform agenda and calling all of it "Common Core." The standards, assessments, curriculum and new supervision system (that is simply being implemented at the same time) are all related, but the standards are the "Core." -- Western New York City

³ See footnote 1 above.

⁴ See footnote 1 above.

Favorable perceptions of the standards are most prevalent among city superintendents, with over half anticipating *very* positive effects from both the ELA and math standards. In all but two regions (the Lower Hudson Valley and Mohawk Valley), positive effects are anticipated from both sets of standards by more than 80 percent of superintendents. District chiefs in Central New York and the Southern Tier gave the most positive reviews.

Expectations for positive impacts were somewhat higher – approaching 90 percent – among superintendents who see parental support for education and student achievement in meeting current standards as significant problems in their districts.

How do you see the Common Core Learning Standards affecting the quality of education in your district's schools?: English Language Arts

	Very Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neutral/ Not Much Effect		Very Negative	Not Sure
			Somewhat Negative	Very Negative		
Statewide	33%	52%	8%	5%	2%	2%
Type						
City	52%	20%	12%	8%	4%	4%
Suburb	27%	51%	10%	6%	4%	3%
Rural	33%	56%	6%	4%	1%	1%
Region						
Long Island	25%	58%	8%	2%	4%	2%
Lower Hudson Valley	17%	41%	10%	17%	7%	7%
Mid-Hudson Valley	42%	42%	5%	5%	5%	0%
Capital Region	31%	51%	8%	10%	0%	0%
Mohawk Valley	13%	50%	19%	6%	0%	13%
Central New York	57%	35%	4%	4%	0%	0%
North Country	20%	71%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Southern Tier	38%	55%	3%	3%	0%	0%
Finger Lakes	39%	50%	11%	0%	0%	0%
Western New York	45%	45%	8%	0%	3%	0%

Estimated Student Poverty Percentage (% of pupils eligible for federal Free & Reduced Price Lunch Program)

0 to 10%	14%	57%	14%	5%	8%	3%
11 to 20%	40%	45%	10%	2%	2%	0%
21 to 40%	32%	50%	8%	6%	1%	3%
41 to 60%	31%	59%	5%	5%	0%	1%
Over 60%	54%	21%	14%	7%	4%	0%

How do you see the Common Core Learning Standards affecting the quality of education in your district's schools?: Mathematics

	Very Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neutral/ Not Much Effect		Very Negative	Not Sure
			Somewhat Negative	Very Negative		
Statewide	34%	49%	7%	6%	3%	2%
Type						
City	50%	25%	8%	8%	4%	4%
Suburb	30%	48%	10%	5%	4%	4%
Rural	35%	53%	5%	6%	2%	1%
Region						
Long Island	25%	58%	8%	2%	4%	2%
Lower Hudson Valley	24%	38%	10%	17%	3%	7%
Mid-Hudson Valley	32%	47%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Capital Region	37%	47%	3%	11%	3%	0%
Mohawk Valley	6%	63%	13%	6%	0%	13%
Central New York	61%	35%	0%	4%	0%	0%
North Country	32%	51%	7%	7%	0%	2%
Southern Tier	31%	62%	0%	3%	3%	0%
Finger Lakes	43%	41%	14%	0%	2%	0%
Western New York	41%	49%	3%	5%	3%	0%

Estimated Student Poverty Percentage (% of pupils eligible for federal Free & Reduced Price Lunch Program)

0 to 10%	24%	46%	14%	5%	8%	3%
11 to 20%	38%	45%	5%	10%	0%	2%
21 to 40%	34%	46%	9%	6%	1%	3%
41 to 60%	32%	56%	3%	5%	2%	2%
Over 60%	52%	30%	7%	7%	4%	0%

How big a lift?

A year ago, in endorsing the Common Core but calling for adjustments to put implementation on track, the state’s seven major education leadership organizations said the new standards, “...represent the most significant increase in student expectations New York schools have ever faced.”⁵ Our survey supports that interpretation.

We asked superintendents, *How significant would you say are the changes in day-to-day classroom instruction required by the Common Core Learning Standards?*

Over 98 percent of superintendents called the shifts required by both sets of new standards either very significant or somewhat significant. The changes required by the new math standards were seen as especially demanding, with 72 percent calling the instructional changes for math very significant, compared to 44 percent for English language arts.

How significant would you say are the changes in day-to-day classroom instruction required by the Common Core Learning Standards?			
	Very significant	Somewhat Significant	Not significant at all
English Language Arts	44%	54%	2%
Mathematics	72%	28%	1%

Variations in responses across districts by character, region, and poverty level were narrower for this question than for most others in the survey.

Given that the math standards are seen as requiring greater instructional changes than English language arts, it is somewhat surprising that year-over-year gains in students deemed meeting standards on state grades 3-8 state assessments were greater for math than for ELA. Perhaps recognition of the greater shifts required by the math standards induced more focused efforts to revise instruction. Also, as explained below, use of state-provided curriculum modules was more prevalent in mathematics than in English language arts.

Teacher Perspectives – As Interpreted by their Superintendents

By last count, there were 205,256 public school classroom teachers in New York State⁶ – perhaps a greater number of people than in any other single occupation. Repeated surveys have shown that teachers are the source the public most trusts in understanding

⁵ New York State Educational Conference Board. “Common Ground on the Common Core.” 30 September 2013.

⁶ New York State Education Department. 2012-13 Personnel Master File.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

It is VERY difficult to separate the CCLS from how the reform agenda has been implemented - curriculum, instruction and assessment all together define education. I also do not see how the CC Shifts are standards. When the [prior] NYS standards were rolled out there was uniformity in approach - across all districts - uniformity in understanding with teachers and administrators - this is clearly not the case with the CC implementation. The message from NYSED "adopt, adapt or ignore" - does not give vision and direction to such an important initiative. The modules were very late in development and release, the new 3-8 battery of tests lack transparency on so many levels - they have created distrust amongst parents and teachers. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

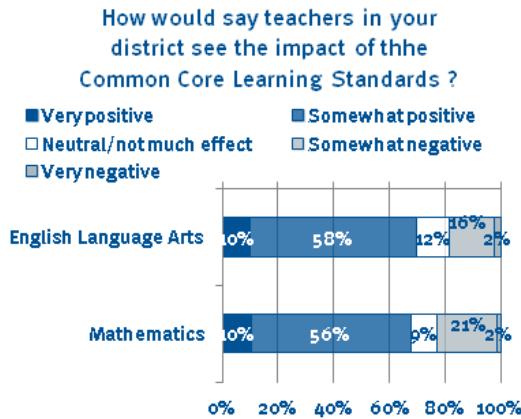
The implementation was severely flawed which cast a shadow over the content of the standards. I think over time our teachers and parents will appreciate the increased rigor once they get over the mistakes on the worksheets and the lack of information to support special education students in meeting the standards among others. -- North Country Rural

It's not the standards, it is the implementation timeline and the concurrent implementation timelines of the APPR and DDI. It is also the annual State testing that seemed to come faster than the curriculum; as a result, we have many students recently refusing to participate and as a result three out of our four buildings covering grades 3-8 will not be able to make AYP even with averaging participation over two years. The last minute development and implementation of SLOs has resulted in over-testing of children. -- Mid-Hudson Valley Rural

The standards are fine and set a common minimum performance and expectation level of instruction. The problem has and continues to be the implementation and timeline of the reform. Guidance and materials have been inadequate and rushed. In addition, the implementation of a new evaluation instrument, tied to a new reform initiative, was not well thought out and put into place with a political motivation. -- Capital Region Suburb

education issues.⁷ It is probably not possible to sustain support for any substantial education initiative without buy-in from teachers.

The Council does not have the capacity to survey teachers throughout the state. But we did ask superintendents for their perceptions of how teachers in their schools are responding to the Common Core Learning Standards. Superintendents believe approximately two-thirds of their teachers hold positive opinions about the impact of the standards on educational quality.



Common Core Modules

A few superintendents wrote that they found it impossible to evaluate the impact of the standards without accounting for missteps in their implementation. Second-guessing execution of state education reforms became one of Albany’s most popular pastimes over the last year. We did not directly ask superintendents to offer their own verdict on reform implementation. But again, responses to invitations to offer open-ended comments were generous in supplying critiques.

We did inquire about one of the distinguishing aspects of New York’s reform agenda – curriculum modules developed through the State Education Department to assist schools with Common Core implementation.

Reliance on the modules was greater in math than English language arts, and greatest in elementary grades, declining progressively through middle school and then high school.

⁷ Bushaw, William Jr. and Shane J. Lopez. “Betting on Teachers: The 43rd annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.” *Phi Delta Kappan*. September 2011. (See table 29).

Also, Hart Research Associates. “Public School Parents on the Promise of Public Education: Nationwide survey among parents of children in public K-12 schools, conducted July 2013 for the American Federation of Teachers.” July 2013.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

It remains difficult to sell the learning standards simply because of the tarnish associated with the very poor introduction. Teachers, now that they are more familiar and we have had time to 're-tool' them, do realize the positives, however, parents remain angry. Unfortunately this has left us a steep hill to climb... -- Mid-Hudson Valley Suburb

Implementation of the Common Core tied to the APPR, during a financial crisis, has caused negative teacher reaction to what is a great set of standards and practices. Classrooms and teachers need to change to prepare kids for the world of tomorrow, not the one of the past. -- Capital Region Rural

What scared teachers was the size of the modules. Their initial reaction was if one unit takes "40 days" there is no way I can implement them. I've found educators can be very literal, and thus many teachers took the modules to be, "you either used them whole or not at all." It took administrative intervention to have teachers realize they could take pieces. I will be interested if we can track results between schools that heavily implemented modules and those that did not. The standards have provided rural schools, with a clear set of expectations for teachers, who often are not of the same quality as suburban schools. The standards help superintendents push aside a community's low expectations. -- Capital Region Rural

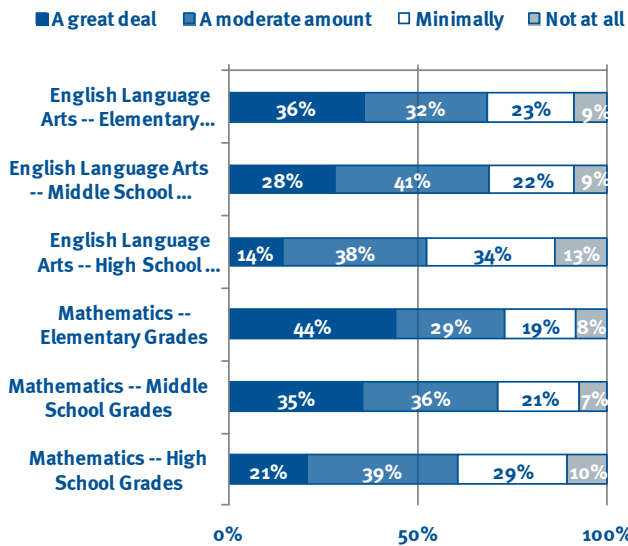
The modules are excellent; however they do not allow for differentiation of instruction. The ELA modules do not include enough instruction or opportunity for the teaching of writing... The math modules have improved our students' math ability although we do not know how this will transfer to the state assessments. We have had great difficulty securing the materials listed in the modules. We have had to use reserve funds to purchase some... There have been many delays in receipt of the materials from vendors. We are not told when the modules are changed; causing great concern among the faculty and administrators. -- Long Island Suburb

Community remains confused with the distinction between what Common Core Standards are and the abundance of testing 3-8. Generally speaking, testing is viewed as highly negative among parents and yet higher academic standards are supported. However, Common Core Standards get a bad reputation because of the tie with 3-8 testing. -- North Country City

Reliance on the state modules is higher among city and rural districts than suburbs and generally higher in upstate and higher poverty school districts.

Superintendents who reported their districts relied upon the state modules a great deal were notably more likely to anticipate *very* positive effects from the CCLS on educational quality – an average of 49 percent versus 28 percent for other districts. Multiple factors are at work, however. Again, poorer districts were more likely to report heavier reliance on the modules *and* to report concerns with parental support, another factor which correlated with favorable views of the standards.

To what extent did your district rely on the modules developed by the State Education Department to implement instruction aligned with the Common Core Standards?

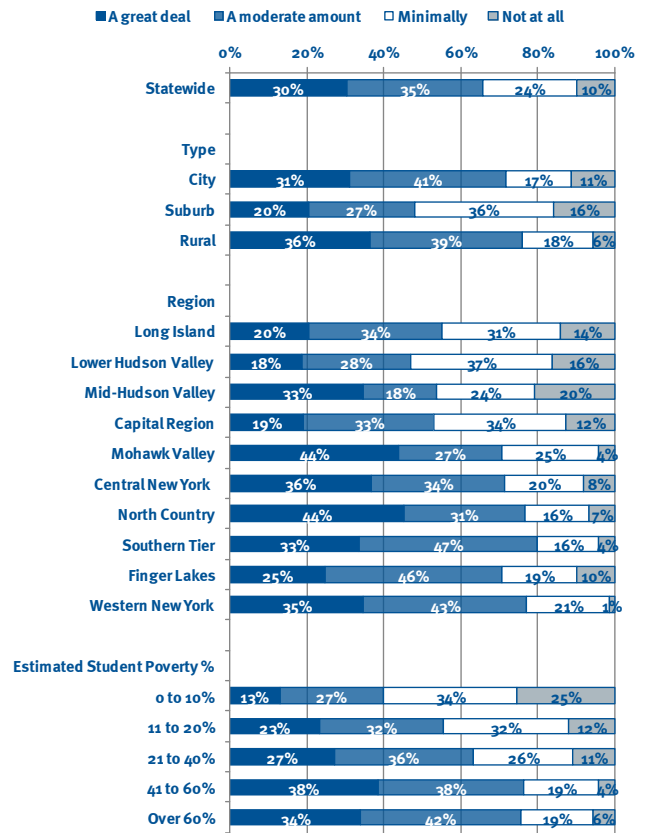


Stay the Course?

We have summed up the Common Core Standards as “promising, not perfect.” Various superintendents have questioned the developmental appropriateness of the standards at some grade levels, for example. As noted, state and national surveys have found evidence of declining support for the Common Core and some politicians – in New York and other states – have called for abandoning the new standards altogether.

We asked superintendents for their position on whether to stay the course with the Common Core as written, revert to the state’s prior standards, or keep the CCLS but make modifications. By 54 to 42 percent superintendents statewide favored retaining the Common Core but making modifications over keeping the standards as currently written. Only 4 percent support a return to the state’s prior standards.

Average reported reliance on SED Curriculum Modules, ELA & Math, all grade levels



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I do think that the state needs to recalibrate the level of rigor, especially in the early grades (Tolstoy in 3rd grade seems ambitious). The modules were useful to illustrate CC expectations, but hard to integrate piecemeal into an established curriculum, and not universally strong enough to supplant our curriculum. As a result, they probably fell short of achieving the usefulness we would have hoped. ...[T]his high-performing district already had a very strong curriculum and academic results. So what the CC has done is displace some of the richness of the program and co-curricular offerings for students, particularly at the elementary level; in order to ensure an effective transition from our successful approach to higher order thinking to the CC’s approach and to prepare for the accompanying assessments. -- Long Island Suburb

The Standards are not bad. Some are certainly not developmentally appropriate - especially in math. -- Finger Lakes Suburb

But again, there were deep differences across regions. For example, 65 percent of Central New York superintendents would stay with the current standards as written; only 11 percent of their colleagues in the Lower Hudson Valley would do so.

A high percentage of superintendents who cited low community expectations for schools as a *significant* problem favored persevering with the standards as written (60 percent). Interestingly, 61 percent of superintendents citing administrative capacity as a significant problem nonetheless endorsed modifying the CCLS.

Superintendents might support a “stay the course” position because they see the standards as on target, or because, as one small city leader said, “My district does not have the resources to make another round of changes.”

In an 18-point plan of mid-course corrections approved last February, the State Board of Regents called for the National Governors’ Association and Council of Chief State School Officers to periodically convene the states to review and update the Common Core Standards. The Regents said, “The review should include each state, including New York, gathering feedback from stakeholders including educators, higher education faculty, business leaders, parents, special education advocates, and bilingual education experts.”⁸ One challenge will be that, with the impending end of federal Race to the Top funding, the State Education Department may not have resources to support schools in adapting to any changes deemed desirable.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The district experienced success with the implementation of the CCLS and the utilization of modules only because the BOE supported the use of now seven teachers on assignment to lead professional development and implementation directly in the classroom. This was a tremendous initiative that was very costly and will need to be phased out in the next year or two. Very few districts have the resources to undertake this investment and while we are seeing the benefits in the classroom, we are experiencing some backlash from the "OPT OUT" contingent which is very large in our district. -- Long Island Suburb

I firmly believe these changes have been a catalyst for needed improvements in the teaching and learning within my district. I am not sure this would have happened without the accountability attached to the APPR, but the timing was difficult. The continued strain of funding puts an anchor on our progress as our ability to back efforts to support this change. The professional development and support in materials and personnel during this time of fiscal crisis has been extremely difficult. The implementation timeline and lack of supports provided by the state for parents damaged our effectiveness level to get the job done. With all of this being where we are - we cannot pull back now. We need to see the resolve to stay with these changes and hold firm the ground we have gained and not give in to reactionary politics. Allow us the time to reach mastery in the work we have begun as we strive to support our students in achieving the same. -- Western New York Rural

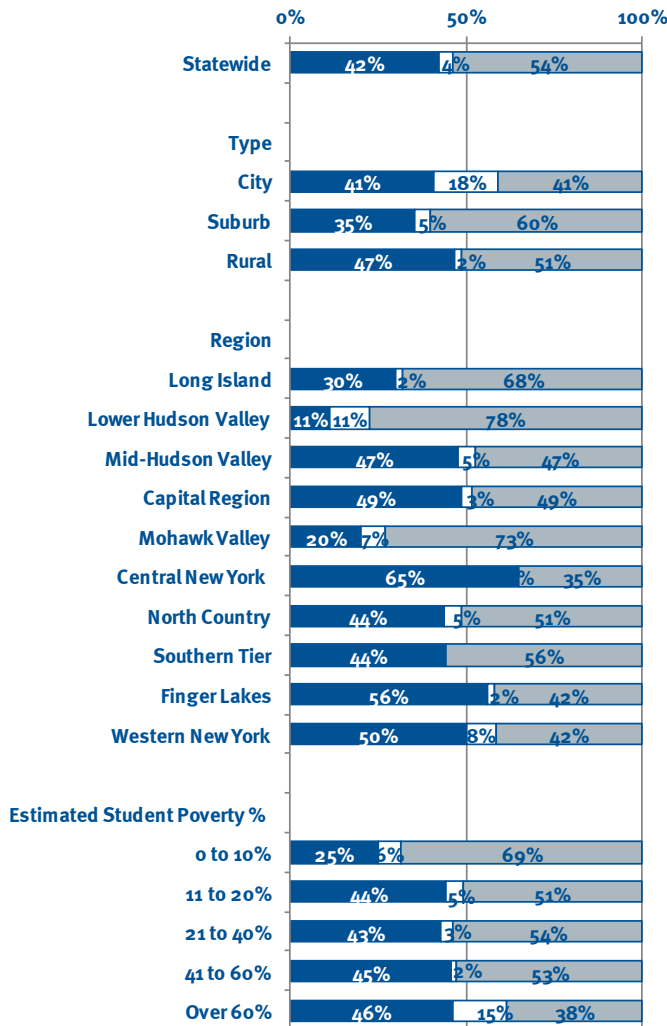
Stop changing everything based on politics. This is about teaching and kids. We can do it without the "help" from our politicians who have no understanding of the complexities of the issues. - North Country Rural

If NYS goes backwards with CCLS, I worry that the getting out will be far more difficult than the getting in, and it will only amplify the hyperpolitical influences affecting education policy shifts in the past six months. Indiana abandoned CCLS only to replace them with very similar standards. -- Western New York Rural

⁸ New York State Board of Regents. “Adjustment Options to Common Core Implementation.” 10 February 2014.

Which statement below comes closest to expressing your opinion?

- We should Continue to use the Common Core Learning Standards as currently written.
- We should abandon the Common Core Learning Standards and return to the state's prior standards.
- We should retain the Common Core Learning Standards but make some modifications to them.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

By many measures this is a high performing school district, and many in our district and community were satisfied with students earning a Regents Diploma. Our advanced students did very well and received numerous academic honors, awards, and scholarships, which overshadowed the fact that many of our general ed students were performing at mediocre levels and some required remedial courses in college. The CCSS requires teachers and administrators to truly evaluate the work they have been doing. Over the last 2 years many of our teachers have developed an understanding of the standards and what teaching to achieve them is all about. Most importantly our teachers have learned that our students can reach these higher levels of learning. New York needs to stay the course with the standards. -- Long Island Suburb

Many of the standards have demonstrated much effort in taking the simple and making it complex. Reading comprehension assignments that are now "evidence based" is not a new pedagogic theory in force. It is merely a change in verbiage. Although the standards are big on asking students to provide evidence to prove the validity of their answers the NYSED has provided no evidence that these standards will improve the quality of education. Furthermore, the standards have "dumbed down" curricular initiatives for schools that are above the standard. As a former social studies teacher I read with great amusement the "new" standards issued by the State in April. I remember this stuff being put forth in the 1960's and 70's almost verbatim. It was not adequate then and it is not adequate now. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

The CCLS are generally sound. A few modifications, particularly in primary grades ELA and Middle Level Math should be considered. Unfortunately, in my community, Common Core is now a dirty word for many parents due mainly to the tests. I don't know if the public perception of Common Core can be changed at this point. I think bold actions on the 3-8 tests need to be taken to recover credibility... -- Southern Tier Rural

III. TESTING/STATE ASSESSMENTS

As noted, student testing is a thread connecting the two major state initiatives that were fully commenced in 2012-13 – Common Core instruction and Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPR – revised procedures for teacher and principal evaluations). Tests are used to measure students’ attainment of the new standards and factors tied to student performance comprise 40 percent of the new educator evaluations.

When controversies over state education reform initiatives began accelerating in 2012-13, much of the criticism cited increases in student testing and emphasis on testing. To the extent students were actually experiencing increased testing, it was almost entirely due to district efforts to comply with APPR requirements mandating evaluation components measuring student performance. Due to budget cuts, the number of state-administered standardized tests has been reduced since 2010 (the State Education Department discontinued a middle level social studies assessment).

Anti-testing sentiments swelled with the first administration of Common Core–aligned grades 3 through 8 English language arts and mathematics assessments in spring 2013. There were many complaints that many higher-achieving students had been unable to finish the tests, and some children with disabilities gave up in tears.

Tumult over testing ignited again when results from those first assessments were released, in August 2013. Percentages of students deemed to be meeting standards declined by 24 points in ELA (from 55.1 percent to 31.1 percent) and nearly 34 points in math (from 64.8 percent to 31.0 percent). The tests are purported to measure whether students are on track to be “college and career ready” by high school. Some educators contended that results for their schools are contradicted by other established student achievement measures. Results in 2014 were modestly better in math and essentially unchanged in ELA.

Testing controversies led to a series of actions by the Board of Regents, Legislature and Governor Cuomo including restricting the use of standardized test in early grades, barring the inclusion of Common Core test results in permanent student records, limiting time spent on standardized testing, and deferring consideration of factors based on state Common Core tests in some teacher and principal evaluations.

Despite actions by state policymakers, tensions over testing are likely to continue to roil teaching and learning in some schools.

Within the next year, the state will need to decide whether to adopt tests developed by the multi state Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or continue to

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Despite improvements, the state assessments are narrow measures and thus limited in usefulness. For potentially identifying areas to work on they are fine, but the statistical sample is far too small to be used for teacher evaluations, there are too many other intervening variables to use them to rank schools, and too inconsistent with what we know about the elastic pace of child development to be used (3-8) to assess college-readiness. There has been a big jump in the number of minutes of state testing since 5 years ago, without commensurate improvement in the usefulness of the data. The HS tests are somewhat useful for predicting college readiness, but even Algebra in 8/9th grade is too far removed to be truly predictive. -- Long Island Suburb

The assessments based on the common core should not have been administered until the standards had been fully implemented. This cast the new assessments in the worst possible light and led to a strong parent movement against state assessments. This will possibly take years to overcome. -- North Country Rural

Allowing these significantly more challenging assessments to be implemented knowing how much of a drop in performance was going to occur was a major error. By integrating common core questions into current assessments, teachers and students could have made a smoother transition and SED and our schools would have taken less of a PR hit. Performance by other states on these assessments should have been the warning to try another approach. Instead, we penalized our students and teachers with assessments that we knew were far more challenging than they had time to prepare for. Shame on us. -- Capital Region Rural

Far too much emphasis at every level: federal and national, corporate, political, state, media. They are narrowing curriculum. Unnecessary pressure on teachers because of evaluation which causes narrowing of curriculum and killing innovation. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

develop tests on its own. Also, the state’s primary test development contract (with Pearson) expires in December 2015.

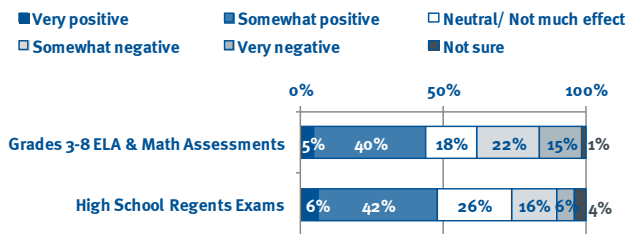
The Council’s survey asked superintendents for their perception of the impact of state testing on teaching and learning and whether they support or oppose use of state assessments in various school decisions. Questions also explored the occurrence of student test refusals – “opting-out” of state assessments.

State Testing – Impact on Teaching and Learning

We asked superintendents, “How would you evaluate the impact of current state testing practices and requirements on your district's efforts to improve teaching and learning?” Given all the controversies that have arisen, results were surprisingly positive. For both the grades 3 through 8 assessments and high school Regents Exams, more superintendents ascribe positive impacts than negative: 45 percent to 37 percent for the 3-8 assessments; 48 percent to 22 percent for the high school Regents Examinations.

The positive votes do fall short of a majority, however, and open-ended comments from superintendents paint a different picture. Many protested that problems arising from the assessments have turned teachers and parents against the entire reform agenda. Many also said the tests have not been useful in improving instruction, in part because of delays in getting results back to schools.

How would you evaluate the impact of current state testing practices and requirements on your district's efforts to improve teaching and learning?
Statewide Results



The narrow difference in positive reviews between the high school and earlier grade assessments is somewhat surprising. Only two of the Regents Exams have so far been aligned to the Common Core Standards (English and Algebra). Also, Regents Exams have been a part of the state’s education landscape since 1868; while annual grades 3-8 testing was instituted in 2006 in response to the federal No Child Left Behind Act. But Regents Exams did receive significantly fewer negative reviews – 22 percent versus 37 percent.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The assessments for the younger students are too long. It is counterintuitive to say that standardized assessment is inappropriate for grade 2 but grade 3 can have a full test. Much of the frustration we saw was on the third day. -- Capital Region Rural

The roll out of the 3-8 testing has been a major headache from the beginning as it was too aggressive and results were not shared in a timely manner. Also technical errors only exacerbated the issue. After over 2 years of issues, the state is now assertively consulting field or school based staff for feedback and input for improvement..."the cart before the horse"...again. I do not understand why a field testing year was not planned from the beginning. This would have allowed everyone to examine the process, artifacts and procedures with real life experience as a guide. -- North Country Rural

I believe the stress related around testing creates a negative learning environment for students. A teachers value to their' school becomes more about the test results than the other things they bring to the table on a daily basis. The public perception of schools, unfortunately, is tied directly to test results. -- Southern Tier Rural

There is no need to test annually. Benchmarking that is done in most district throughout the school year gives accurate data and provides for immediate instructional modifications as needed. ...The State of New York is obsessed with data and assessment. The people running the State should be obsessed with results. It would be helpful for them to set the targets and let the people in the field produce the results. The imposed regulations truly do not help most people to improve. -- Western New York Rural

SED's push to assess - and to utilize assessment results prematurely, has caused many of our parents to lose confidence in SED - and in the Commissioner. -- Long Island Suburb

The over-emphasis on them and the Byzantine and difficult-to-explain process by which data from them is generated makes them not particularly useful and causes them to distort the focus of the educational experience. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

Differences in responses across regions and types of districts resembled those reported for the Common Core: suburban and downstate superintendents were more negative; their rural, upstate, and higher poverty district counterparts were more positive.

Among the regions, Lower Hudson Valley superintendents saw the most negative effects on teaching and learning from state testing— 50 percent for the Regents Exams and 55 percent for the grades 3-8 assessments. Southern Tier superintendents were most positive about Regents Exams (65 percent), while Central New York leaders were most positive about the grades 3-8 assessments.

How would you evaluate the impact of current state testing practices and requirements on your district's efforts to improve teaching and learning?

	+ Somewhat/very positive		- Somewhat/very negative	
	Grades 3-8 ELA & Math Assessments		High School Regents Exams	
	+	-	+	-
Statewide	45%	37%	48%	22%
Type				
City	50%	38%	46%	33%
Suburb	36%	47%	37%	29%
Rural	49%	30%	56%	16%
Region				
Long Island	39%	45%	26%	28%
Lower Hudson Valley	22%	64%	25%	50%
Mid-Hudson Valley	16%	47%	47%	32%
Capital Region	43%	38%	51%	19%
Mohawk Valley	33%	47%	56%	25%
Central New York	64%	18%	55%	9%
North Country	49%	29%	54%	20%
Southern Tier	59%	21%	66%	7%
Finger Lakes	47%	35%	55%	19%
Western New York	58%	28%	53%	14%

Estimated Student Poverty %

	Grades 3-8 ELA & Math Assessments		High School Regents Exams	
	+	-	+	-
0 to 10%	28%	67%	31%	39%
11 to 20%	35%	44%	37%	24%
21 to 40%	41%	34%	51%	19%
41 to 60%	52%	28%	52%	17%
Over 60%	52%	33%	56%	30%

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I feel the standards are expecting us to increase the rigor of what we do for the betterment of children. My concern as it has always been is the testing component. When are we going to get it right and part of it getting it right is both the testing component and getting the results back to the districts in a much more timely manner so we can re-teach what the students have missed. It would provide us with focused instruction and assist students in strengthening their weaknesses to competencies. -- Mid-Hudson Valley Rural

I would like to see the state grades 3-8 assessments shortened in terms of the length of time. I understand that the annual testing regime is federally mandated; I just wish others did as well. Also, when we look at other high performing nations, it is not really about the rigor of the tests, that truly does need to increase (SED has been wise after the initial backlash to phase the CC tests in over many years). Rather, it is about having fewer tests, which again begs the federal issue. The old system with tests at the "gateways" was and should be adequate, grades 4, 8 and HS Regents. But again, I do not have a problem with increasing the rigor and importance of the tests----certainly not to the level of say South Korea, but they should have some significance. -- North Country Rural

Summer is the optimum time for data analysis and curricular/instructional planning based on DDI. Why can other states get their state assessment results back to the Districts in as little as 2 weeks? For us to get full reports in mid to late August truly wastes valuable time. -- Southern Tier Suburb

They should not be considered the only indicator for student success. They should not be the primary indicator for college and career readiness. There are many factors that are equally or more important. We should be considering additional indicators and get beyond this one size fits all mentality. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

Uses of Grades 3-8 State Assessments

We asked superintendents whether they support or oppose using the grades 3 through 8 state assessments for an assortment of school purposes.

Majorities of superintendents support using the state assessments to identify areas where students need extra help (56-10 percent) and to ensure all students are on track to meet graduation requirements (54-10 percent). A majority opposed using the tests as a deciding factor in whether students can be promoted to the next grade 57-9 percent.

Significant proportions of superintendents indicated they do not believe the tests provide information that can be used for the specified purpose. For example, 27 percent said they do not provide information that can be used to identify areas where students need help.

Throughout the survey, superintendents faulted state decisions around the teacher and principal evaluations – rushing the evaluations before the Common Core was securely off the ground, particularly given that part of the evaluations would be tied to student performance on Common Core-based tests.

“Opting-Out” – Test Refusals

One Mid-Hudson Valley superintendent wrote, “It seems parents’ anger over all things Common Core is being expressed in the only area that they see as having any control over, and that is assessment participation. It seems we now have an adult issue impacting students.” The release of state grade 3 through 8 assessment results last month invited renewed attention to the prevalence of test refusals/ opting out and its impact on results for individual schools.

Statewide, 8 percent of superintendents estimate that more than 20 percent of their district’s students refused to participate in the English language arts or mathematics assessments. At the other end, 21 percent of superintendents reported having no or fewer than 1 percent test refusals in ELA and 19 percent for mathematics.

Districts and schools can face negative consequences under the federal No Child Left Behind Act if fewer than 95 percent of students participate in these state assessments. For both subjects, over 35 percent of superintendents estimate opt-outs/test refusals above

Please tell us your opinion about using the state's grades 3 through 8 English Language Arts and Mathematics Assessments for the following purposes:

Possible Use of grades 3-8 state assessments	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neutral	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Do not believe assessments provide information that can be used for this purpose	
						Not sure	Not sure
To identify areas where students need extra help	20%	36%	7%	7%	3%	27%	2%
To ensure all students are on track to meet graduation requirements	17%	37%	15%	7%	3%	19%	2%
To rank or rate schools	3%	16%	10%	16%	30%	24%	1%
To evaluate the performance of teachers	6%	23%	9%	18%	19%	26%	1%
As a deciding factor in determining whether students can be promoted to the next grade	1%	8%	5%	16%	41%	28%	0%

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The idea that parents can opt out undermines the authority of the school to measure student progress. It has far reaching effects now that parents believe that they have a choice. We had parents state that their student should take no tests. (Including required screening and AIS assessments.) There is very little guidance or public information coming from NYSED about this situation. Yet districts are being held accountable. Parents say, Why should my child take a test that we know 50 percent of students fail? ... Other parents believe that they have a child who has been successful and do not want the blemish on their child's record... No matter what the reason is, parents are now empowered and schools have spent mega hours dealing with these types of issues instead of learning and teaching issues. -- Mohawk Valley Rural

The opt-out movement is GROWING on Long Island, particularly in the historically highest performing districts! -- Long Island Suburb

It is imperative that the State impose some type of push-back on the students whose parents advocated for their children to opt out. These parents based their actions on the idea that "nothing" would happen if their children chose to opt out. -- Western New York Rural

that threshold for their districts (36 percent for ELA; 39 percent for math).

Statewide, for both assessments, over one-third of superintendents reported that test refusals were up significantly compared to the prior year. For both subjects, over 70 percent reported opt-outs were up either significantly or somewhat compared to 2013. Only 2 percent reported fewer students refusing to take the tests.

There are some striking regional patterns in the responses to the opt-out questions. Fifty-seven percent of Long Island superintendents reported that over 10 percent of their students refused to participate in both sets of tests, more than two and a half times the statewide rates – 22 percent for English language arts and 23 percent for mathematics.

While Lower Hudson Valley superintendents generally give the most skeptical or critical reviews of state initiatives, they reported lower “opt-out” rates than the state as a whole – only 11 percent reported more than 10 percent of students refusing the tests.

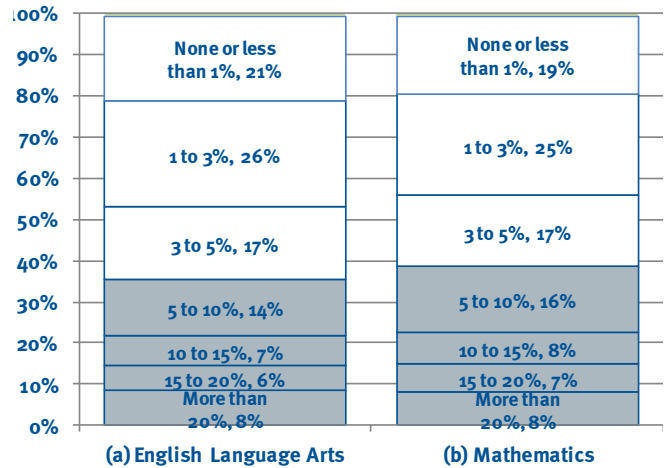
Consistent with anecdotal news reports from last spring, Western New York had the second highest estimated prevalence of opting out.

In all regions, more than 50 percent of superintendents reported an increase in test refusals over 2013. Long Island, Mid-Hudson and Central New York superintendents were most likely to report increases – 80 percent or more of superintendents in those regions reported increases in both subjects.

Opt-outs were reported as more prevalent in suburbs than cities or rural districts, and much more prevalent in the lowest poverty districts than elsewhere. Higher test refusal rates were also more than twice as common among superintendents who said student achievement in meeting current standards is not at all a problem, compared to those saying it is a significant problem.

Student achievement in meeting current standards:	% of superintendents reporting greater than 10% test refusals	
	ELA	Math
Significant problem	12%	13%
Somewhat of a problem	22%	23%
Not at all a problem	28%	28%

Superintendent estimates of percentages of students refusing to take spring 2014 grades 3-8 state assessments



	% of superintendents reporting greater than 10% test refusals		% of superintendents reporting increase in test refusals over 2013	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
Statewide	22%	23%	70%	72%
Type				
City	17%	25%	58%	65%
Suburb	31%	31%	79%	81%
Rural	16%	17%	64%	66%
Region				
Long Island	57%	57%	88%	88%
Lower Hudson Valley	11%	11%	68%	73%
Mid-Hudson Valley	20%	20%	80%	80%
Capital Region	8%	8%	65%	68%
Mohawk Valley	25%	20%	50%	56%
Central New York	18%	23%	86%	91%
North Country	10%	10%	70%	71%
Southern Tier	24%	31%	69%	69%
Finger Lakes	5%	5%	58%	62%
Western New York	31%	33%	61%	61%
Estimated Student Poverty %				
0 to 10%	50%	50%	83%	83%
11 to 20%	26%	26%	86%	86%
21 to 40%	17%	17%	69%	72%
41 to 60%	17%	19%	65%	67%
Over 60%	11%	15%	52%	56%

IV. TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATIONS

Some of the education policymaking done over the past year at both the state and national levels has resembled an effort to get toothpaste back in its tube – revisiting past actions with the hope of calming controversies that threaten to derail entire reform agendas. At both levels, policymakers have acted to sever implementation of the Common Core and new teacher evaluation procedures.

The State Education Department has been widely and enthusiastically thrashed for its performance in implementing the Common Core. But much of the discord that has engulfed schools originates from additional student testing installed to comply with the new educator evaluation system and from the decision to implement that system simultaneously with the first year of Common Core-based testing. That course was required by a law approved by the Governor and Legislature and by commitments made to Washington under the Race to the Top grant.

In Albany this year, legislative bills were passed to preclude negative consequences for both educators and students arising from performance on Common Core-based tests. In Washington, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan authorized states to defer inclusion of student performance-based measures in their educator evaluations, previously required as a trade-off for flexibility under federal waivers.

Impact of Evaluations as a Whole

From anecdotal exchanges, the picture that emerges is that school leaders do not believe the state’s Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) requirements produce benefits commensurate with their costs, either in time or money.

We asked superintendents, “How would you assess the impact of the APPR requirements as a whole in improving teaching and school principal leadership in your district’s schools?” The responses were surprisingly positive, given the anecdotal condemnation the evaluation system receives. Statewide, 50 percent of superintendents responding said the new evaluation system has had a positive impact on improving teaching and 45 percent said it has had a positive impact on efforts to improve school leadership. For both functions, 26 percent saw a negative impact.

But when we asked superintendents how they saw the new APPR requirements affecting four types of actual employment decisions, for only one did a majority (50 percent) report a positive impact – identifying specific areas of need for improvement for individual teachers; 36 percent saw a positive impact in identifying improvement needs for

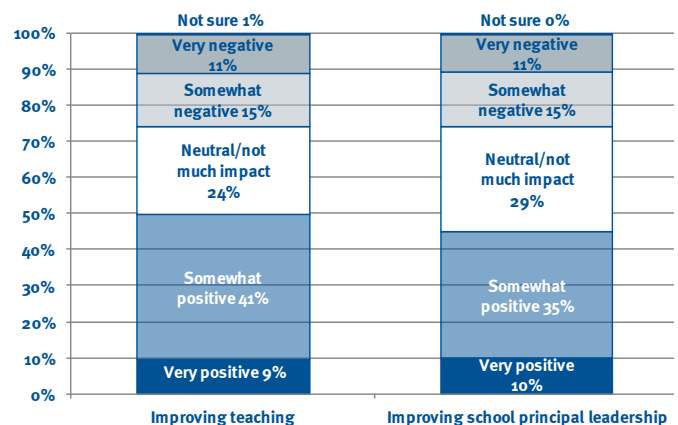
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I have very mixed responses to the APPR requirements. In some respects, I believe it is a waste of valuable time, effort and other resources. Almost everyone is highly effective or effective due the way the plans are negotiated. However, in other respects the process has led to some excellent and powerful professional development on shaping the classroom environment and practicing effective learning strategies. Principals were compelled to become instructional leaders, spending time in class-rooms and analyzing the teaching learning process. The teachers are much more engaged in professional development and students benefit from the new learning. So the bureaucratic aspect is ridiculously burdensome, but the impact on professional growth is significant. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

The mistake which was made, in my opinion, was tying teacher performance to these assessments before we really had time to work with the CCLS aligned assessments, understand their format and what they really tell us... In my opinion, this is the single biggest factor in the common core backlash we experienced this past year. The observation piece of the APPR has been very beneficial - we are using the Danielson Rubric - conversations between Principals and teachers have been very productive and are resulting in improved instructional practices. -- Western New York Rural

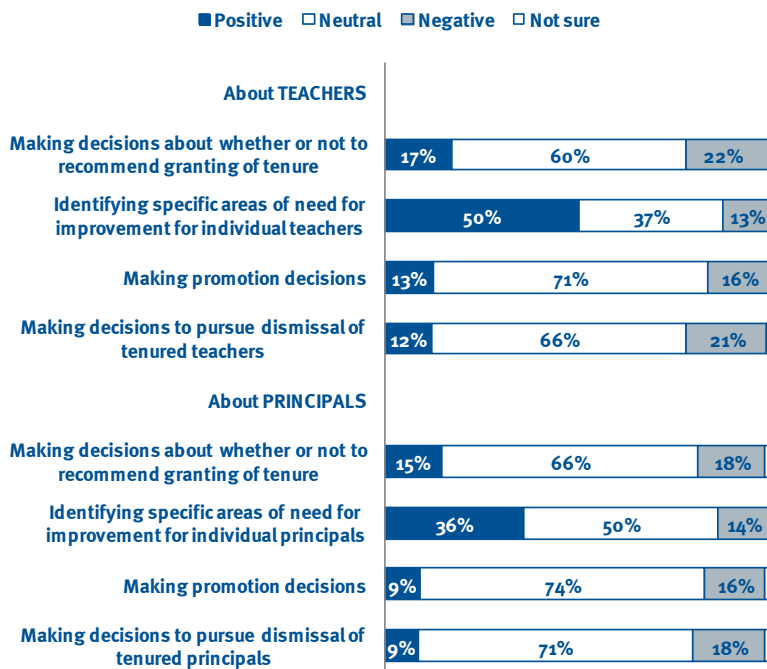
The APPR process is overly prescriptive and too time consuming. Time is taken from principals that could be used to assist struggling teachers. The most exemplary teacher has to go through the same process as all others. Wrong! -- Mid-Hudson Valley Rural

How would you assess the impact of the APPR requirements as a whole in improving teaching and school principal leadership in your district’s schools?



principals. In the other three areas, substantial majorities of superintendents saw a neutral impact or not much effect. Of the remaining superintendents, more saw negative impacts than positive. The high share for “neutral/not much impact” probably indicates some superintendents are withholding judgment on the value of APPR, while others are seeing its impact as limited to this point. By law, the results of APPR evaluations are required to be “a significant factor” in several specified types of employment decisions.

Impact of APPR in making employment decisions



Impact of Specific Evaluation Components

Similarly, only one of the four components used in calculating composite effectiveness scores was seen by a majority of superintendents as having a positive impact on efforts to improve teaching or school leadership. By law, evaluation scores are computed based 20 percent upon on the state growth score or a comparable measure determined locally for educators not covered by state assessments; 20 percent on locally assessed measures of student performance, and 60 percent on other measures, with at least 31 of the points for this component based on observations of the teacher’s or principal’s work using a state approved rubric. Sixty-nine percent of superintendents see the “other 60 percent measures” has having positive impact on improving teaching; 61 percent see that component as positively effecting efforts to improve school leadership.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

APPR has not given us any significant increase in our “actual” ability to manage staff. Like the idea that we would see reductions in mandates if it was approved the idea that APPR gave us more teeth into teacher accountability is simply not true. -- Western New York Rural

The APPR process has essentially made it more difficult to get rid of bad teachers. The observation rubrics have been helpful in getting focus on instruction. Student data from state tests are somewhat useful. The local assessments are all over the place - very time consuming and expensive - whether you buy them or develop them. The APPR process so far - is a boon to bad teachers - because it is so full of procedural issues and hoops to jump through - that school districts have great difficulty navigating given everything else going on. Those who negotiated this system have absolutely no concept about how systems work in public schools. The process needs to be simplified and made completely transparent - or it will fall of its own weight and complexity. -- Capital Region Suburb

APPR is a waste of time for admin and teachers!!! The same 5% of poor teachers are still out there-- Why the rest of the 95% have to pay the price of jumping through accountability hoops is absurd!! We have much better things to do, like teaching and learning for students, than this nonsense! -- North Country Rural

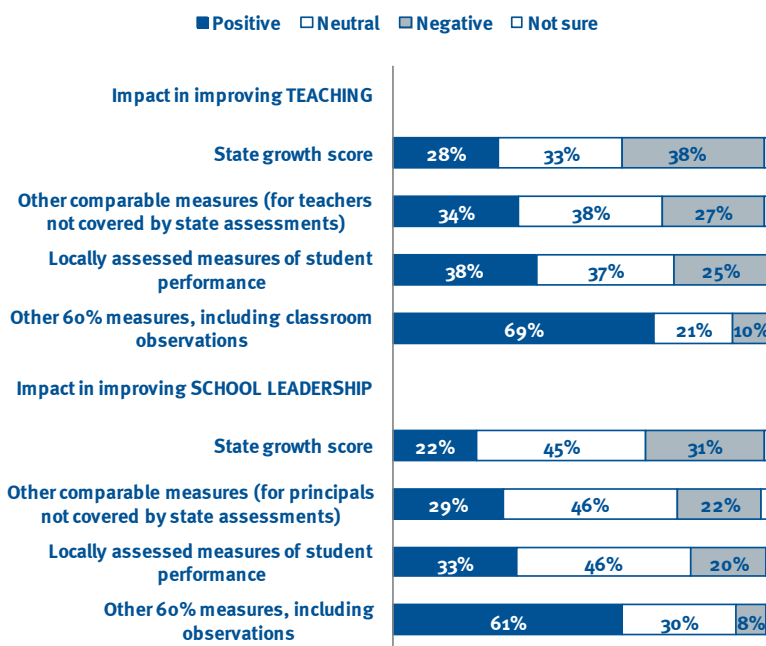
We had an effective teacher evaluation process prior to the frenzy about APPR. This strand has actually set us back on teacher improvement as the scores are so anxiety producing and misaligned with what we value in the classroom. Now, instead of conversations about improving instruction, teachers in our high performing district are quibbling over whether they got a 3 or a 4 on some minuscule subcomponent. I cannot believe this is what Danielson intended when she created her rubric. -- Capital Region Suburb

My experience is that the APPR processes and regulations have made it MORE difficult to release non-tenured teachers. My experience is that the wholesale replacement of our previous evaluation system with a new, APPR complain system has been detrimental to our evaluation and supervision process, as there is necessarily too much emphasis on the process, resulting in more superficial evaluation. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

The classroom observations that account for more than half the score on the other “60 percent” measures are the APPR component most likely to produce information that can be used to help identify specific areas of need for improvement for individual educators – information schools, principals and teachers can actually use to improve day-to-day performance.

APPR has required all districts to approach observations with more care, mandating the use of state approved rubrics, agreed to through negotiations with local unions. Many superintendents have said their evaluation systems were sound before the APPR changes, some report a negative impact from the state mandates. But many others have said the new requirements promoted valuable discussions resulting in consensus on what constitutes good instruction and how to identify it, and has led to a more purposeful approach to classroom observations.

Impact of APPR Components on Teaching and School Leadership



Perceptions of Teaching Quality and the Impact of APPR

We asked superintendents to what extent various conditions are problems for their districts, including “quality of teaching.” Eight percent of superintendents reported it is a significant problem, 58 percent said it is somewhat of a problem; and 42 percent reported it is not at all a problem.

Generally, superintendents who see quality of teaching as a problem for their schools are more positive in their perceptions of APPR. For example, those seeing a problem were about half again more likely to view APPR as having a positive impact in identifying

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The rubric for classroom observations has value. Building upon its value as a tool for feedback would be positive. State growth scores are questionable given the newness and changes in the tests. Normed tests should not be used for accountability purposes. -- Long Island Suburb

I think that using state test scores to evaluate teacher effectiveness is a huge mistake. There are too many variables that teachers cannot control. I am all for the evaluation of teachers and principals, but I firmly believe that it should be left to the administrators for each district. They are the ones that truly know whether or not a teacher/principal is good at what he or she does. To bring state test scores into it, does not always give an accurate picture of what a teacher/principal can do. -- North Country Rural

...No one is going to buy into the value added formulas, so the state needs to find another way to measure growth. Again, if we cannot explain it to parents, then it will not be accepted. The PhD's coming up with these formulas are disconnected to the reality of K-12 public opinion. I think NYSUT has a done a great job of making SED look like the bad guys, and thus the common core, testing and APPR. SED could help by revising their sample scoring conversion bands, which makes it nearly impossible for a teacher to be rated ineffective or even developing. -- Capital Region Rural

Teaching to a test is a big concern. While this is a practice which is frowned upon, the reality is that as long as teacher evaluation is tied to test results this increases the chances of this approach being taken and implemented in the classroom in a more widespread manner. -- Western New York Rural

The APPR has made us look more closely at the performance of teachers and our principal. The State growth scores are something we do not value, but must live with. We have found very positive results in more informal evaluation of classroom instruction and the conversations between administration and the teaching staff. Setting, monitoring and refining goals has been a very valuable activity. -- North Country Rural

The "other 60%" has been moderately helpful in systematizing good practices that were already more or less in place. They have also generated good conversations about teaching and learning. Test derived data has been far less useful and overly convoluted. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

specific areas of need for improvement for individual teachers (61 percent for those seeing a significant problem; 58 percent for those seeing somewhat of a problem; only 40 percent for those answering “not at all a problem”). But again, for none of the other three types of employment decisions did a majority of superintendents see a positive impact from APPR, whatever their perceptions of teaching quality in their schools.

On the other hand, superintendents saying quality of teaching is not at all a problem were especially negative in their opinions of the state growth score’s impact (47 percent negative, 19 percent positive compared to 35 percent negative, 35 percent positive for superintendents reporting a problem with teaching quality).

There was very little variation in responses on the impact of the “other 60 percent” measures, with positive reviews ranging between 67 and 70 percent.

Perceptions of State Teacher Evaluation Requirements and Teaching Quality as a Problem

	Significant problem (6%)	Somewhat of a problem (58%)	Not at all a problem (42%)	All Respondents (100%)
Impact in making employment decisions:				
Making decisions about whether or not to recommend granting of tenure	26%	21%	12%	17%
Identifying specific areas of need for improvement for individual teachers	61%	58%	40%	51%
Making promotion decisions	11%	17%	8%	13%
Making decisions to pursue dismissal of tenured teachers	21%	16%	6%	12%
Impact of APPR components				
State growth score	44%	34%	19%	28%
Other comparable measures (for teachers not covered by state assessments)	39%	34%	33%	34%
Locally assessed measures of student performance	50%	39%	34%	38%
Other 60% measures, including classroom observations	67%	70%	68%	69%

Interpreting the Statewide Results

Charlotte Danielson is one of the major figures in teacher evaluation policy and practice; she is the author of an observation rubric used by many school districts in New York State. Speaking at a Council conference last winter, she observed that evaluation systems serve two purposes: to support formal personnel decision-making and to improve instruction by advancing professional learning. Our survey suggests that superintendents, at best, are reserving judgment on APPR’s usefulness for the first function, but are finding value for the latter.

Similarly, the state growth score, based on Common Core assessments, has drawn the most attention, provoking controversy weakening support for the entire state reform agenda. But

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Upon lots of reflection I feel that our APPR is taking its toll on some (many?) teachers and same with administrators. I am in the midst of principal evaluations and all are sharing that the amount of time and paperwork is difficult for them. I have shared this before but it is important to remember as we consider workload and what this has done to our administrators... When I think about value-added- it is tough to assess as our process is thorough yet is this the best time spent for return? As for the teachers- the work on SLOs and having a score assigned is a big deal- despite efforts to reduce anxiety it is there. I keep asking - if out teachers and principals could spend over 100 meetings on something- is this the best topic? We are high performing and always had an effective APPR system - the current prescribed law has had a negative impact on improving instruction and leadership. -- Finger Lakes Suburb

The most positive effect of APPR in our region has been the necessary professional development for principals and supervisors, convening all of these folks many days from all parts of our region, which resulted in some consensus around which rubrics and electronic platforms to. More importantly, it required that all administrators throughout the region broadly agree on what good teaching is and what it looks like, in addition to how to observe and document it. This was unprecedented in our region, and far outweighs the value of the mathematical yahtzee that became the teachers' scores. These scores had little if any impact on instruction. In many cases some of our "high flying" teachers received effective and less stellar teachers received highly effective grades... -- North Country Rural

I would not design APPR this way. However, we have made decisions in this district that enabled us to use the APPR for improvement. First, we do not use tests strictly for APPR purposes... Rather we use prior performance as our baseline. Any assessment that is used for the local measure or for SLOs must count in a student’s grade or, as in the case of K-5, be used for RTI... Clearly the APPR has had an impact on what happens in the classroom. Our teachers and principals are focused on the state assessments and no longer can ignore or downplay the results. That has helped with getting people to embrace the CCSS. They are analyzing and using the data. We continue to struggle with an over reliance on test prep and testing, which our district needs to address... -- Long Island Suburb

superintendents are finding value in APPR’s impact on the traditional core of most evaluations – classroom observations.

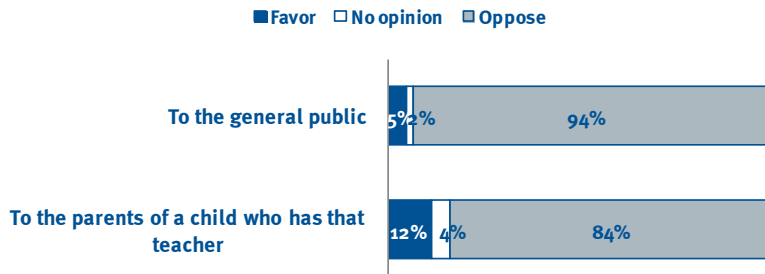
Corresponding with Council staff last fall, an upstate small city superintendent gave a pithy summation of APPR’s impact:

“The real learning [for educators] comes from the deep conversation that occurs between the lead evaluator and teacher. The testing component is a distraction.”

Releasing evaluation results

A succession of state court rulings determined that results of individual teacher evaluations are subject to release under New York’s Freedom of Information Law. In response, legislation was enacted to provide for release of aggregate results by school and district, but limit release of individual results only to families requesting results for their child’s teachers. Superintendents overwhelmingly see releasing individual evaluation results as distracting from the work of improving teaching and learning. Only 5 percent support release to the public and only 12 percent support release even to parents.

Do you favor or oppose releasing results of individual teacher evaluations?



At least to this point, superintendents also report limited interest from parents in getting evaluation results. Seventy percent of superintendents reported receiving no requests and 27 percent received between one and five requests. Of the remaining 3 percent, total requests ranged between 10 and 30. No superintendent reported requests for all his or her district’s teacher evaluations. Long Island accounted for 37 percent of all the reported requests.

Impact of new teacher evaluation requirements – perceptions by district type, region, and poverty level

Looking across different district groupings, appraisals of the impact of the new evaluation requirements resemble reactions to other state reform initiatives covered in this survey.

Superintendents leading city, rural, and higher poverty districts tend to be more positive (or at least less negative) in their views of the impact of APPR on specific teacher employment decisions. For example, positive views among city superintendents outweigh

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Removing the useless test score data and maintaining the 60% aspect (teaching standards rubric) would have the greatest positive impact. Teachers and Principals are very focused on meeting the new standards set forth - other than their meaningless nature, test scores detract from the evaluation process. -- North Country City

The APPR is a mess, as it currently stands. Teachers understand how to write SLOs and "play the game" so that they score a 3 or 4 overall. The time invested in the observations by teachers and principals is counter-productive. In a rural school with 35 teacher/ bldg. and 1 administrator, the observation process becomes meaningless. The best part of the APPR are the conversations about teaching and learning -- but we were having those discussions before this. -- Capital Region Rural

There is absolutely no value in releasing results of individual/school/district teacher/principal evaluation results because the APPR plans as approved by SED are extremely different across NYS. Releasing the results gives parents and the public the impression that results can be compared when in fact they cannot because of how different the plans are across NYS...-- Capital Region City

I strongly oppose releasing scores. STRONGLY OPPOSE -- Long Island Rural

Upon lots of reflection I feel that our APPR is taking its toll on some (many?) teachers and same with administrators. I am in the midst of principal evaluations and all are sharing that the amount of time and paperwork is difficult for them. I have shared this before but it is important to remember as we consider workload and what this has done to our administrators... When I think about value-added- it is tough to assess as our process is thorough yet is this the best time spent for return? As for the teachers- the work on SLOs and having a score assigned is a big deal- despite efforts to reduce anxiety it is there. I keep asking - if out teachers and principals could spend over 100 meetings on something- is this the best topic? We are high performing and always had an effective APPR system - the current prescribed law has had a negative impact on improving instruction and leadership. -- Finger Lakes Suburb

negatives by 72 percent to 4 percent) on the impact of APPR in identifying areas in need of improvement for individual teachers. For superintendents identifying their school communities as suburban, the results were 41 percent positive 18 percent negative.

Across the regions, Lower Hudson Valley superintendents were typically most negative in their reviews of APPR’s impact on employment decisions, followed by their neighbors in the Mid-Hudson Valley. Western New York district leaders were most positive, on average, followed by those in the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier. Mohawk Valley and North Country superintendents were somewhat more skeptical than their colleagues elsewhere upstate.

Percentages of superintendents indicatng positive (+) and negative (-) opinions of the impact of APPR on specific employment decisions with teachers

	Granting tenure		Identifying needs for improvement		Making promotion decisions		Deciding to pursue dismissal of tenured teachers	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Statewide	18%	22%	51%	13%	13%	16%	12%	21%
Type								
City	52%	8%	72%	4%	25%	4%	28%	8%
Suburb	13%	31%	41%	18%	11%	20%	8%	28%
Rural	16%	18%	54%	11%	13%	15%	13%	18%
Region								
Long Island	20%	22%	45%	14%	12%	16%	8%	16%
Lower Hudson Valley	11%	46%	22%	29%	4%	32%	7%	50%
Mid-Hudson Valley	10%	30%	40%	25%	5%	20%	10%	35%
Capital Region	18%	16%	54%	8%	8%	11%	16%	16%
Mohawk Valley	13%	38%	38%	13%	6%	13%	13%	13%
Central New York	14%	14%	67%	5%	10%	14%	5%	19%
North Country	10%	24%	46%	15%	10%	20%	7%	20%
Southern Tier	21%	17%	55%	14%	18%	14%	17%	21%
Finger Lakes	12%	16%	63%	5%	21%	14%	14%	14%
Western New York	36%	14%	64%	11%	22%	11%	19%	17%
Estimated Student Poverty %								
0 to 10%	11%	25%	22%	22%	6%	25%	6%	25%
11 to 20%	12%	33%	43%	21%	10%	24%	5%	33%
21 to 40%	10%	23%	53%	7%	8%	13%	10%	16%
41 to 60%	18%	20%	57%	12%	16%	15%	13%	21%
Over 60%	54%	11%	61%	14%	29%	11%	36%	14%

Patterns in the reactions to the components making up the evaluation were not as consistent.

A majority of superintendents in all regions see positive impact from the “other 60 percent measures” (including observations), ranging from a high of 80 percent in Central New York to a low of 50 percent in the North Country. Some superintendents have said that completing observations as required by APPR is administratively challenging. In our questions regarding problems confronting school systems, North Country superintendents were most likely to cite administrative capacity in complying with state mandates as a significant problem (49 percent).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I believe the Governor should keep out of education at this point. The controversies we had that were attributed to the Common Core Standards, were, in essence, primarily a result of the APPR legislation. Any last minute reprieves were not consistent as far as HEDI ratings and took into consideration only ineffective and developing. We have politicized this when it doesn't need to be. FUNDING- lack thereof, GEA, and lack of mandates relief are the real issues facing public schools, not the Common Core Standards... The Gap Elimination Adjustment continues to be imposed upon schools when there is a purported surplus... If schools are to meet the challenges of raising standards, then we should fund the agenda properly. -- North Country Rural

The current APPR is not meeting the needs that it's intended to do. It's provided distraction from what we should be focusing on. It's not a valid system at all! Poor teachers are excellent at creating targets which suite them (and principals are assisting with SLO's for an entire school....too much). Good teachers are learning to set lower targets, which is not what we want. The former system, in my district, was excellent and provided a collaborative relationship for growth. This system is contentious and unproductive. It's definitely NOT meeting our needs. -- North Country Rural

It has significantly less value than our previous evaluation system in terms of staff growth, mentoring, open dialogue and collaboration. It became distracting to the educational process and was, in my opinion, the single biggest reason why the Common Core and associated assessments have not been embraced by the public. Without our teachers supporting such initiatives at the onset, we cannot be successful in any implementation. They are our best sales persons when they have ownership. In this issue, they felt as though they had none. -- Mid-Hudson Valley Suburb

APPR has prompted rich conversations about instruction that previously did not occur with regularity or structure. This is the main and maybe only benefit. -- Southern Tier City

I see a lot of paperwork and meetings and a system that was meant to be meaningful is now a system taking us away from face time with people. I have not been out of my office much this year as I spend my days doing calculations, reports, and following SED timelines on getting paperwork in... -- Mohawk Valley Rural

A majority of Lower Hudson Valley superintendents (54 percent) cited the state growth score as having a negative impact on efforts to improve teaching. Forty percent or more of superintendents in the Mid-Hudson Valley, Finger Lakes, and Western New York cited the growth score as having a negative impact. Fifty percent of Central New York superintendents said the growth score has had a positive impact.

Reviews of the other comparable measures (for teachers not covered by state tests) and locally assessed student performance measures are more mixed. City superintendents are again generally more positive and suburban leaders more negative. But rural superintendents reveal somewhat more skepticism about the evaluation components. Again, however, leaders in all three district types are predominantly positive in assessing the impact of the other 60 percent measures.

Percentages of superintendents indicatng positive (+) and negative (-) opinions of the impact of APPR components on improving teaching

	State Growth Score		Other Comparable Measures (for non-tested teachers)		Locally assessed student performance measures		Other 60% measures, including observations	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Staterwide	28%	43%	34%	27%	38%	25%	69%	10%
Type								
City	39%	26%	43%	4%	39%	13%	70%	4%
Suburb	29%	45%	29%	33%	37%	26%	64%	10%
Rural	27%	33%	36%	24%	39%	25%	72%	10%
Region								
Long Island	23%	39%	23%	29%	40%	21%	71%	4%
Lower Hudson Valley	22%	54%	29%	18%	36%	21%	57%	7%
Mid-Hudson Valley	25%	45%	25%	40%	30%	35%	60%	10%
Capital Region	24%	35%	35%	27%	32%	30%	73%	11%
Mohawk Valley	31%	25%	25%	38%	25%	19%	56%	19%
Central New York	50%	30%	60%	15%	65%	10%	80%	5%
North Country	23%	35%	23%	23%	30%	28%	50%	13%
Southern Tier	43%	25%	48%	14%	45%	17%	79%	14%
Finger Lakes	16%	44%	44%	33%	37%	30%	77%	5%
Western New York	40%	40%	29%	34%	40%	31%	77%	17%
Estimated Student Poverty %								
0 to 10%	17%	50%	11%	25%	29%	17%	75%	3%
11 to 20%	33%	45%	38%	36%	36%	38%	62%	14%
21 to 40%	26%	37%	37%	21%	39%	18%	72%	6%
41 to 60%	27%	34%	32%	28%	38%	28%	67%	11%
Over 60%	46%	31%	48%	30%	44%	22%	67%	19%

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Teachers and principals are too focused on the numbers in this system. The idea that you can distill everything a teacher or principal does down to some score between 0 and 100 is ridiculous. We are spending inordinate amounts of time on the paperwork, tallying, reporting, and meetings related to the number that really means nothing. I like that this system gets administrators into classrooms more often. I wish we could focus on the observations and conversations and not get weighed down producing all kinds of evidence in order to justify a number. The combination of APPR and Common Core all at once is why neither of these is being embraced. -- Finger Lakes Rural

APPR has increased the stress level of teachers. They don't have any confidence in the SLOs and many are so focused on how something affects the rating they are likely to get, that they stop looking at the impact on student learning. It has drawn the focus from their kids to themselves. ... While I like the Danielson Rubric, it has taken tremendous effort on our part to begin to get some degree of inter-rater reliability. It's a big lift. I worry that trying to implement APPR at the same time we are trying to overhaul the instructional delivery in a new CCLS world has caused some teachers to feel less favorable about the new approach to instruction, and it has led many teachers to openly complain about tests. It appears that teachers (directly or indirectly) are behind the growing "opt-out" test refusal that plagues certain parts of the state. I think that is a direct result of how the tests are used on their evaluations. -- Western New York City

Although the APPR plans have positive components associated with local assessment and the 60% component, the overall impact is negative as it stunts staff willingness to try new initiatives for fear of the "dip" that occurs when new programs are implemented. In addition, the overall plan is swept up in the negativity associated with the state test scores component. APPR is another fatally flawed initiative developed for the many in an effort to get at the few. Modification of the tenure laws would be a more productive use of legislative time...-- Long Island Suburb

If implementation of Common Core was done properly, I feel education could be headed in a better direction. The Regents Reform Agenda was pushed on everyone in an expedited manner that may prevent it from reaching its full potential. And I believe it does have potential to move education in New York. -- Mohawk Valley Rural

V. LOOKING BACK – AND FORWARD

The past school year was marked by exceptional discord over state policies – a level unseen by people now working in the field. Given all the controversy, what is the overall trajectory of public education in our state?

Taking a long view, superintendents overwhelmingly believe that education has improved over the past two decades. In the survey’s first substantive question, 75 percent of superintendents said they believe the quality of education children receive in New York State is better now than it was 20 years ago; 30 percent answered much better. Only 11 percent said quality has declined.

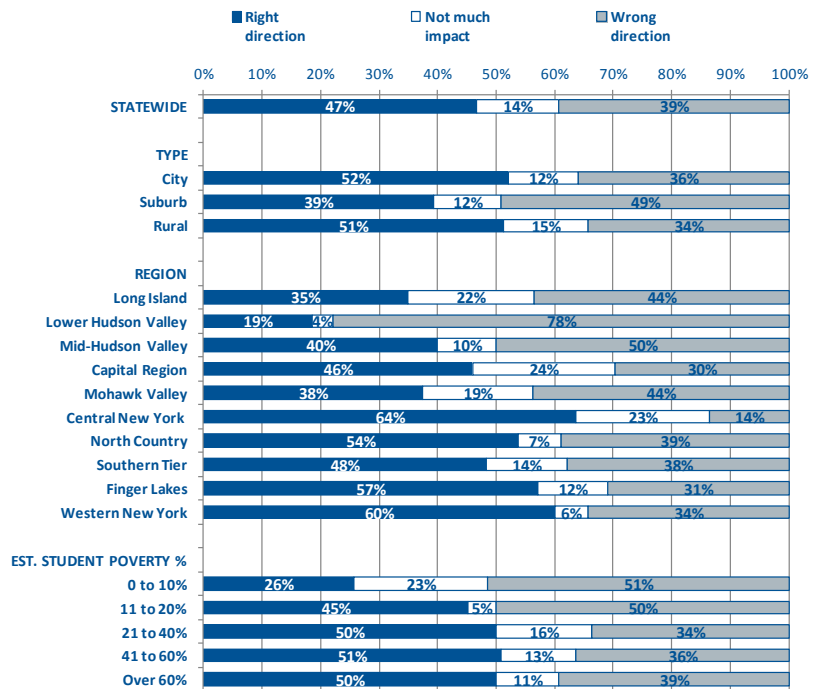
The survey’s final question asked for a shorter-term perspective: *“Given all that has gone on in education over the last four years, would you say efforts to improve the quality of education in New York State have moved schools in the right direction, wrong direction, or had little impact at all?”*

Even with all the controversy, more superintendents answered right direction than wrong – 47 percent to 39 percent. The result is not a resounding vote of confidence in the state’s reform agenda, but neither is it the thunderous rejection observers might anticipate.

We also asked whether controversies over state education policies negatively affected teaching and learning in their schools in 2013-14 and whether they anticipate those controversies to continue. These are the findings:

- 61 percent of superintendents said controversies over state policies did have a negative effect; 16 percent said the impact was significant. An additional 29 percent said there were controversies in their schools but those did not have a negative impact.
- 61 percent of superintendents also expect controversies to continue at at least the same level as the year past, with 30 percent expecting controversies to grow. An additional 29 percent anticipate controversies to continue but diminish.
- 9 percent of superintendents said the negative effect was significant and expect controversies to grow in the year ahead.

Given all that has gone on in education over the last four years, would you say that efforts to improve the quality of education in New York State have moved New York schools in the right direction, wrong direction, or have had little impact at all?

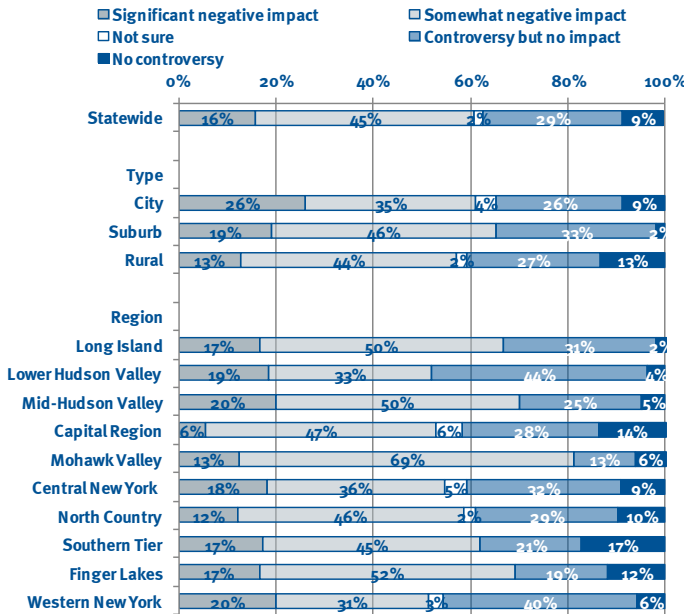


IN THEIR OWN WORDS

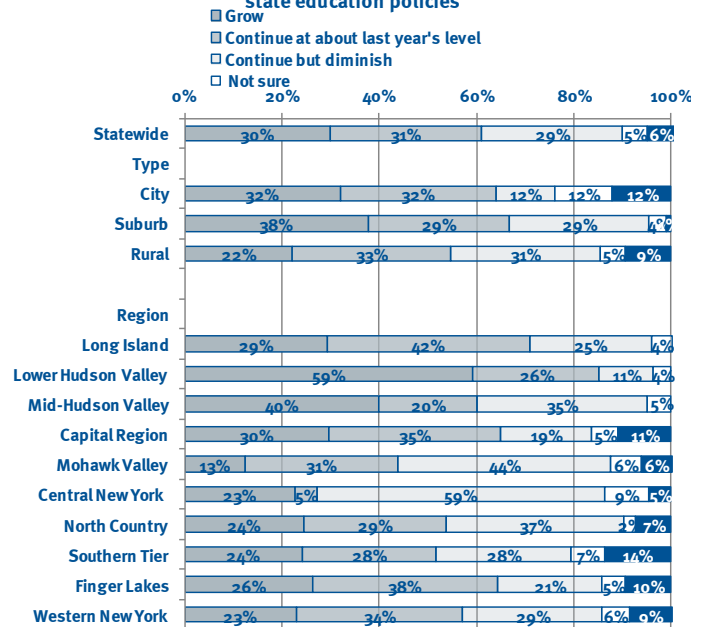
Implementation of the CCLS standards and SED’s curriculum materials are very positive steps toward improving education for all students in our state. Unfortunately, by demanding that APPR be implemented in parallel with the CCLS and most unfortunately, tying student performance on new common core assessments our governor and legislators have managed to create a controversy that has overshadowed the benefits of the CCLS implementation. Throw in the funding crisis, i.e. GEA, and our elected officials have put school districts a very difficult situation. -- Western New York Rural

The standards are, on the whole, positive, although they should be regularly evaluated by practitioners. The assessment system is a wrong-headed mess. Standardized assessments are rarely designed and administered in a way that provides useful data on individual student learning (with the exception of really bad or really good performers. To use them as a major component of significant decisions about individual students, teachers or principals is not effective and wastes enormous amounts of money, time and energy that would be better spent on teaching, learning and modest, common sense approaches to accountability. -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

Impact of controversies over state policies on teaching & learning



Expectations regarding continuation of controversy over state education policies



Looking across regions, Lower Hudson Valley superintendents were most likely (78 percent) to say education has moved in the wrong direction over the last four years, followed by their colleagues in the Mid-Hudson Valley (50 percent). Central New York superintendents led in saying education has moved in the right direction (64 percent), followed by Western New York leaders (60 percent). Superintendents of lower poverty districts are more likely to say education has moved in the wrong direction.

Superintendents in the Mohawk Valley most frequently said that controversies over state policies had a negative impact on teaching and learning in 2013-14 (82 percent), followed by colleagues in the Mid-Hudson Valley (70 percent), Finger Lakes (69 percent), and Long Island (67 percent). Lower Hudson superintendents were least likely to report a negative impact (52 percent), but led in expecting controversies to grow in 2014-15 (59 percent), followed by their Mid-Hudson neighbors.

Specific Initiatives and Right Track or Wrong

Unsurprisingly, superintendents who responded that public education has moved in the wrong direction over the past four years are more skeptical of state reform initiatives. Cross-tabulating responses, superintendents who answered that education has moved in the right direction were nearly unanimous in foreseeing a positive impact from the Common Core Learning Standards – 97 percent positive, 1 percent negative for the English language arts standards, for example. But roughly two-thirds of “wrong track” respondents also anticipate positive impact from the new standards.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

If the Common Core is the strongest aspect of the state's reform effort, it has been hamstrung by the controversy over the teacher evaluation issue. The evaluation model would have statistical issues even in a perfect world, but in the context of a shifting curriculum and assessment regime, it inspires little confidence and much defensiveness. That fear in turn erodes capacity to do the work necessary to implement the instructional shifts of the Common Core. Higher standards and critical thinking skills are the right direction, but manipulating the standards to serve both as an instructional tool and as a labor management tool has weakened them for both. -- Long Island Suburb

Regarding the last question you have lumped too much in there to really give a fair answer. CCLS are great. 3-8 ELA/Math testing has not been helpful. The APPR is a terrible non-productive time drain. It's not that no good has come of it, but it is exceptionally inefficient. If it has to be, why not legislate one "plan" for the whole state so we don't duplicate/multiply efforts towards the same goal? Furthermore, why not relax the unrealistic "every teacher every year" requirement that is burying our administrators....-- Capital Region Rural

On the question of whether to stick with the Common Core Learning Standards as written, 60 percent of superintendents responding “right direction” favor that option; 40 percent would keep them but make modifications. The keep but modify option is favored by 69 percent superintendents who see education headed on a wrong path; 20 percent of these district leaders would keep the standards as written.

Differences in reactions to the new teacher and principal evaluations are wider, but the widest variance in reaction is in response to the grades 3 through 8 state assessments: “wrong track” respondents see a negative impact by a 59-21 percent margin, while “right track” respondents see a positive impact by better than four to one (69 to 15 percent).

As with superintendents as a whole, assessments of the overall impact of the new educator evaluation requirements mask skepticism over its specifics. Both groups of superintendents report little impact on most employment decisions so far. Sixty-five percent of superintendents responding that education has been on the right path say that APPR has had a positive impact on identifying areas of need for improvement, but only 35 percent of superintendents in the wrong direction group do so. High proportions of both groups see a positive impact from only one evaluation component – the “other 60 percent” measures, including classroom observations. Half (50 percent) of superintendents who see education headed in the wrong direction see a negative impact from the state growth score.

A fair criticism of the question might be that it covers too much territory – more has been happening in New York schools than just the implementation of a comprehensive and controversial set of policy reforms. Four years ago, schools absorbed one of the largest cuts in state aid ever enacted. Three years ago, schools were required to begin budgeting in accordance with a tight property tax cap. Conceivably, a superintendent might support every policy reform covered in this survey, yet conclude that a succession of bad budgets compels answering that education has moved in the wrong direction. But on the question of to what extent is general funding

Perceptions of specific state initiatives and the overall direction of public education over the last 4 years

Impact of	Right Direction		Wrong Direction	
	+ impact	- impact	+ impact	- impact
Common Core ELA Standards	97%	1%	70%	15%
Common Core Math Standards	96%	1%	67%	16%
Grades 3-8 State Assessments	69%	15%	21%	59%
High School Regents Exams	71%	7%	26%	39%
APPR on teaching, overall	68%	15%	31%	40%
APPR on school leadership, overall	64%	14%	29%	37%

IN THEIR OWN WORDS
 Generally moved us in right direction but the lack of sensitivity to what it takes to move this system in any meaningful way - is disturbing. Piling on change has back-fired. We should have done common core implementation first - then aligned assessments and then teacher evaluation with aspect to student achievement data built-in. The Board of Regents sees the world through its rulemaking authority - not understanding how change really happens in organizations. -- Capital Region Suburb

Perceptions of the impact of APPR for teachers and the overall direction of public education over the last 4 years

Teacher employment decisions	Right Direction		Wrong Direction	
	+ impact	- impact	+ impact	- impact
Tenure decisions	27%	14%	7%	31%
Identifying improvement needs	65%	6%	35%	21%
Promotion decisions	20%	11%	7%	23%
Dismissal of tenured teachers	17%	14%	8%	29%
APPR Components				
State growth score	42%	27%	16%	50%
Other comparable measures (for teachers not covered by state assessments)	42%	21%	26%	34%
Locally assessed measures of student performance	46%	18%	33%	32%
Other 60% measures, including classroom observations	75%	5%	66%	12%

adequacy a problem for their schools, there is not much difference in the responses – high percentages of superintendents on both sides identified funding adequacy as a significant problem – wrong direction, 63 percent; right direction, 58 percent.

On the other hand, superintendents saying education is headed in the right direction are much more likely than their colleagues to identify low community expectations, parental support, and student achievement in meeting current standards as significant problems.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Politicians, media, activists at local, state, and federal level have completely lost sight of what school is all about and what learning is meaningful. After implementing a bad system, they are working to fix it. Fixing a bad system is still a bad system that just looks different. Those "in the debate" are all missing the point. The reformers in Albany and elsewhere are stuck on the wrong means of reform. The anti-reformers are stuck on bashing the reformers. The reformers are ignoring the educators. The anti-reformers only know what they don't like and don't want but do not respond to "Then what?" And somehow all the promises of addressing funding, mandates, and oppressive regulations have been swept back under the carpet. New York should be a bold and courageous leader with innovation and an attitude to rise above all of this, to attack root issues of poverty and social services, and to take care of every child.... -- Lower Hudson Valley Suburb

Despite the rhetoric, despite the disappointment in some areas of policy, despite the devolving tenor of public discourse, our schools are moving forward. As a testament to the passionate, dedicated professionals that are called to educate and serve our students, families, and communities in most cases schools are rising above the politics to keep focusing on what matters most - improving educational opportunities for all students. We do NOT need politicians to use election year politics as the lever to improve schools. We NEED to clear the way for concentrated, focused improvement efforts that increase student achievement and enhance student development in the "hard" and "soft" skills that are required to truly be College AND Career Ready... We need to revamp the APPR to better facilitate the crucial conversations needed for improvement of each of us, despite our ranking. We need to recon-textualize the purpose and scope of assessments of all types to increase formative assessment approaches that are proven to yield positive growth for students and limit summative assessments that are best meant to provide rank-and-sort information. We need to redefine what the CCLS are and are NOT in a manner that refocuses our work in schools on the "how" to support and challenge students to meet the increased expectations. Despite the political environment, I personally am more confident than ever that we have what it takes to ensure that everyone moves forward each day! The real question is will our elected leaders and State public servants have the will to create the conditions where we can both achieve and thrive in a changing world??? -- Finger Lakes Rural



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