

The Capitol in the Classroom:

Implementing the Common Core in an Era of Coercive Federalism



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Overview

What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

- Set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and ELA for grades K-12
- Created in 2009 by state education chiefs and governors
- Adoption of the Common Core is voluntary
- Stemmed from the Race to the Top Initiative of 2009



New York's Common Core Timeline

- Common Core adopted in NY in 2010
- Full implementation in 2013-2014 school year
- Disagreement and controversy has surrounded the Common Core since its introduction.
- September 2015: New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's announcement to overhaul the state's current implementation strategy for the policy.
- Led to the creation of the Common Core Task Force, a group charged with the task of investigating the implementation failures of the Common Core in New York State.

Research Question

By looking at the implementation of the Common Core in New York State, what are the limitations of coercively implementing education policy?

Methods

I employed qualitative research methods:

- Interviews
 - Two public school teachers, both heavily involved in the New York State Teachers' Union
 - New York State Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner
 - Superintendent of New York school district
 - Executive Director of High Achievement NY, a Common Core advocacy group
- Newspaper articles
 - *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*
- State-issued reports
 - The Common Core Task Force Report

Key Findings

Logistical implementation failures:

- Rushed rollout of the standards
- Model curriculum and lesson plans created by the state were not readily available. Lesson modules were improperly timed.

High support for the standards:

- New standards aim to develop critical thinking skills, as opposed to a content-based approach to learning.

Tying the teacher evaluations to the Common Core-aligned assessments contributed to its failure:

- Caused debate over the Common Core to escalate beyond the standards themselves.
- In respect to education decisions, Governor Cuomo's popularity decreased as the power of the teachers' union increased.

Power of Parents:

- 2015 'opt-out' movement was a key factor in overhaul decision
- At least 1 in every 6 students opted out of state testing in 2015

Implications/Conclusion

- Power over education will shift back to the states
- Common Core Standards will remain, implementation strategy will change
- Limits to coercively implementing education policy
- Best implementation done when policy addressed locally