

# 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