Covering Standards & Testing In the Common Core Era

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
January 12, 2015
Dear Colleague,

Welcome to Chapel Hill! We’re so pleased you could join us for this Education Writers Association seminar, Covering Standards and Testing in the Common Core Era.

This academic year marks a critical juncture for the Common Core, as most states gear up to assess students on the shared standards for the first time, and as some states, especially in the South, rethink their commitment to the standards. In this intensive, one-day seminar, we’ll help you make sense of this unfolding and fast-evolving story.

Our speakers will help you take political stock of the standards, to better understand the growing opposition over the past year and what it means for the future of this enterprise. We’ll take a deep dive into the latest survey data, not only to look at attitudes toward the standards but also to reveal where the rollout really stands. You’ll hear from educators grappling with the day-to-day realities of bringing the standards to life in classrooms.

A trio of education journalists will share their strategies for covering the Common Core. In addition, we will probe the assessment landscape: where states stand, what tests they plan to use, and how the new exams differ from prior ones. We’ll help reporters with strategies to cover the buildup to the testing and make sense of the results.

There’s no shortage of compelling angles to pursue in the complex story of the Common Core. As you explore these issues, our hope is that you come away from our time together poised to cover this critically important subject more astutely and effectively than ever. Thank you for making time in your busy lives for this gathering. And I can’t wait to see how you use what you learn!

Sincerely,

Caroline Hendrie

EWA thanks the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for hosting today’s seminar. EWA also thanks the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for helping to make this event possible. EWA retains sole editorial control over all its programming and content.
Covering Standards &
Testing in the Common Core Era
Freedom Forum Conference Center, School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, N.C.
Monday, January 12, 2015

Agenda

8:00 – 8:30 a.m.   Breakfast

8:30 – 9:00 a.m.   Welcome and Introductions
- Caroline Hendrie, Education Writers Association
- Susan King, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Bill McDiarmid, UNC-Chapel Hill

9:00 – 10:00 a.m.  Taking Political Stock of the Common Core
It’s no secret that the standards and forthcoming tests have drawn increasingly strong criticism over the past year. Why has the Common Core become so controversial, especially in the South? What do the midterm election results mean for implementation and state support? And what happens in states that have called for a review or even rescinded the standards?
- Lt. Gov. Dan Forest, North Carolina
- State Sen. John Legg, Florida
- Michael McShane, American Enterprise Institute
- Former Gov. Beverly Perdue, North Carolina
- Moderator: Erik Robelen, EWA

10:00 – 10:20 a.m.  Common Core in the Southern Political Context
How are policymakers and politicians confronting the pushback against the new standards? And what are the potential implications for their support—or opposition—in the next election cycle?
- Ferrel Guillory, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Moderator: Jane Stancill, The News & Observer

10:20 – 10:30 a.m.  BREAK

10:30 – 11:30 a.m.  Making Sense of the Evolving Assessment Landscape
This school year marks the first time that most states will test students on the Common Core. At the same time, many states have backed away from their plans to use shared assessments and are choosing their own tests. Where do the states stand? How different will their new exams be from prior tests? And what are key questions reporters should keep in mind as they cover the first round of test results?
- Gregory Cizek, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Scott Norton, Council of Chief State School Officers
- Moderator: Jeffrey Solocheck, Tampa Bay Times
Agenda continued

11:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. Surveys: What Educators and the Public Are Saying About Common Core
Lots of recent surveys have sought to gauge support by educators and the public for the standards and testing. Learn what the sometimes-conflicting results reveal. And find out where district-level implementation of the Common Core stands, based on extensive national polling of school district officials.
- Maria Ferguson, Center on Education Policy
- Erik Robelen, EWA

12:15 – 1:00 p.m. LUNCH

1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Common Core in Action
Educators talk about their on-the-ground experiences with the Common Core standards and the impact on students of applying them in the classroom.
- Stefanie Buckner, Buncombe County (N.C.) school district
- Sandy Chambers, Wake County (N.C.) school district
- Vicki Kirk, Greene County (Tenn.) school district
- Moderator: Liana Heitin, Education Week

2:00 – 3:00 p.m. How They Did It: Journalists Share Their Stories
Education Week, The Hechinger Report, and NPR Education are diving deeply into the Common Core. Learn more about their strategies for bringing the rollout of the standards to life, from covering debates over textbooks to the special challenges for rural school districts and how to creatively cover the math Common Core.
- Liana Heitin, Education Week
- Jackie Mader, The Hechinger Report
- Cory Turner, NPR Education
- Moderator: Denise Smith Amos, Florida Times-Union

3:00 – 3:15 p.m. BREAK

3:15 – 4:00 p.m. Scenarios for Covering Standards and Testing
Reporters team up in small groups to strategize on the most effective ways to cover a set of news developments related to the Common Core standards and assessments.
- Emily Richmond, EWA

4:00 – 5:00 p.m. Your Turn: Brainstorming Story Ideas
EWA leads an interactive session in which participants work together to develop a list of compelling and consequential stories on standards and testing to produce for their audiences in the months to come.
- Caroline Hendrie, EWA
Speaker Biographies

Stefanie Buckner is a high school math instructional coach for the Buncombe County, N.C., school district. She previously spent nine years in the classroom teaching high school math—pre-algebra to AP Statistics—in both rural and suburban settings. Buckner is a National Board Certified Teacher and is active in the mathematics education community. She conducts professional development workshops for teachers on a regular basis and is currently serving on the Achieve Peer Review Panel as a juror. Contact her at stefanie.buckner@bcsemail.org or @stefanieBnc.

Sandy Chambers, a Tar Heel born and bred, received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has been an educator for 19 years and a principal for the past 10 years in two counties: Durham and, currently, Wake County. Prior to the principalship, she was a first-grade teacher and literacy-intervention teacher for five years, then moved into administration as an assistant principal. Currently, she is the principal of Brier Creek Elementary, a year-round school in Raleigh, N.C. Contact her at schambers@wcpss.net or @DrSandyChambers.

Gregory J. Cizek is a professor of educational measurement and evaluation at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His scholarly interests include standard setting, validity, test security, and testing policy. He is the editor of the “Handbook of Educational Policy” (1999) and “Setting Performance Standards” (2001, 2012), co-editor of the “Handbook of Formative Assessment” (2010), and author of multiple books and other publications, including “Detecting and Preventing Classroom Cheating” (2003), “Addressing Test Anxiety in a High-Stakes Environment” (with S. Burg, 2005), and “Standard Setting: A Practitioner’s Guide” (with M. Bunch, 2007). He provides expert consultation on testing programs and policy, including as a former member of the National Assessment Governing Board and on an advisory panel for the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Cizek has also worked on test development for a statewide testing program and served as an elected member of a local board of education. He began his career as an elementary school teacher. Contact him at cizek@unc.edu.

Maria Voles Ferguson is the executive director of the Center on Education Policy at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., a bipartisan, nonprofit organization focused on programs and policies that support the nation’s public schools. Before coming to the Center, Ferguson served as the vice president for policy at the Alliance for Excellent Education, a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization. She also previously was the director of the National School Boards Foundation. Ferguson was a political appointee in the Clinton administration, serving as the director of communication and outreach services for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. She began her career as a journalist, working for Cox Newspapers, the Associated Press and U.S. News & World Report magazine. Contact her at mferguson@email.gwu.edu or @mvferg.

Dan Forest is the first Republican lieutenant governor to be elected in North Carolina in more than 20 years, and only the second since 1897. Forest is a registered architect. He and his wife, Alice, live in Raleigh with their four children, ages 9 to 21. After receiving two degrees from the University of North Carolina Charlotte (UNCC), Forest became a leader in the business community, having served as office president and senior partner of the state’s largest architectural firm. As lieutenant governor, Forest serves as the president of the North Carolina Senate and as a voting member of the State Board of...
Education and the State Board of Community Colleges. Among other duties, he is also the chairman of the Special Committee on Digital Learning, and chairman of the Energy Policy Council. Contact him at Jamey.Falkenbury@nc.gov or @LtGovDanForest.

**Ferrel Guillory** is a professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the founding director of the Program on Public Life, which has worked to bring scholarship to bear on the public agenda and leadership in North Carolina and the South. Guillory is a co-founder of EducationNC, a nonprofit organization, launching in January 2015, devoted to covering and analyzing public education news in North Carolina. He serves on the board of trustees of the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching. Through MDC Inc., a Durham-based nonprofit, Guillory has co-authored eight “The State of the South” reports. He also co-authored the book, “The Carolinas: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: An Exploration of Social and Economic Trends, 1924-1999” (Duke Press, 1999). Before going into academia, Guillory spent more than 25 years as a newspaper and magazine journalist. He received his bachelor’s degree from Loyola University New Orleans, and a master’s degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Contact him at ferrelg@email.unc.edu or @FerrelGuillory.

**Liana Heitin** is an assistant editor for Education Week and the co-author of the Curriculum Matters blog. She writes about Common Core math, as well as STEM education, social studies, and arts education. Previously, she covered teacher policy issues, including evaluation and professional development, as the associate editor for Education Week Teacher. She also worked as a health care reporter for Atlantic Information Services and as an editor for WETA's LD OnLine website. Prior to becoming a reporter, Heitin taught elementary special education in a public school through the Teach For America program in Arizona and worked as a private reading specialist. She has an M.Ed. in cross-categorical special education from the University of Phoenix and a B.A. in English from Wesleyan University. Heitin's essays on teaching were featured in the book, “The Ultimate Teacher: The Best Experts' Advice for a Noble Profession” (HCl Books, 2010). She lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband. Contact her at lheitin@epe.org or @LianaHeitin.

**Caroline Hendrie** is the executive director of the Education Writers Association, the national professional organization for members of the news media who cover education. She leads strategy, development and programming for the nonprofit organization in support of its mission to increase the quantity and quality of education coverage to better inform the public. Hendrie was herself an award-winning education journalist for more than two decades, with experience covering education from early learning through postsecondary schooling at the local, state and national levels. From 1996 to 2010, Hendrie held various reporting and editing positions, including managing editor, at Education Week. Hendrie started at daily newspapers in Connecticut and spent seven years as state education writer and editor at The Record, a daily newspaper based in Bergen County, N.J. She is a graduate of Wesleyan University. Contact her at chendrie@ewa.org or @chendrie.

**Susan King**, the former vice president for external affairs for the Carnegie Corporation of New York, became the dean of the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication in 2012. She is also the school's John Thomas Kerr Distinguished Professor. Prior to Carnegie, King worked for nearly five years at the U.S. Department of Labor as the assistant secretary for public affairs and as the executive director.
of the Family and Medical Leave Commission. Her journalism career included stints with ABC, CBS and NBC News. King was also an independent journalist reporting for CNN and ABC Radio News. She was a local television news anchor at stations in Buffalo, N.Y., and Washington, D.C. She has hosted the “Diane Rehm Show” and “Talk of the Nation” for National Public Radio. King has a bachelor’s degree in English from Marymount College in Tarrytown, N.Y., and she earned her master’s degree in communications from Fairfield University in Fairfield, Conn. Contact her at sky@unc.edu or @susking.

Vicki Kirk is the superintendent of schools for Greene County, Tenn., a rural system serving approximately 7,000 students in Appalachia. She holds a bachelor’s degree in medical technology, a master’s degree in teaching and a doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis, all from East Tennessee State University. Kirk has worked in education for 24 years as an eighth grade science teacher, an assistant principal and an assistant superintendent for instruction prior to her current position. She has served on Tennessee’s Core Leadership Council and is currently a member of LIFT (Leading Innovation for Tennessee) and the Governor’s Council on Career and Technical Education. Kirk resides in Greeneville, Tenn., with her husband. Contact her at kirkv@greenek12.org @drvickikirk.

Senator John Legg is a Florida native. He was first elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2004 and served four terms. In the House, Legg served as the chairman of the Pre-K–12 Committee and during his final term, he served as Speaker Pro-Tempore. In 2012, Legg was elected to the Florida Senate, District 17. This district serves southern Pasco County and the northwestern portion of Hillsborough County. Legg is the chairman of the Pre-K–12 Committee. Previously, Legg served for two years as the Senate Education Committee Chairman. Legg is a Florida-certified classroom teacher, who taught in the classroom for more than 10 years. He earned his associate degree from Pasco-Hernando Community College and both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of South Florida. Legg and his wife have five children. Contact him at Browne.Jim@flsenate.gov or @SenatorJohnLegg.

Jackie Mader is the Mississippi bureau chief for The Hechinger Report, where she writes about early and K-12 education, poverty, and other issues that intersect with Mississippi’s education system. She is also a rural education writer for Education Week. Recognition of her work includes a 2013 Front Page Award for In-Depth Newspaper reporting from The Newswomen’s Club of New York, as well as the 2014 Nellie Bly Cub Reporter Award from the New York Press Club for her work in Mississippi. She received a bachelor’s degree from Loyola Marymount University and a master’s degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Prior to attending Columbia, she taught special education in Charlotte, N.C., and trained first-year teachers in the Mississippi Delta. Contact her at mader@hechingerreport.org or @jackiemader.

Bill McDiarmid, named dean of the UNC School of Education in 2009, has focused his research and professional activities on improving teacher learning and reforming teacher-education programs. Prior to Chapel Hill, he served on the faculty at the University of Washington, Seattle, where he led the Carnegie-funded “Teachers for a New Era” project, a national initiative to use evidence, such as performance assessments of pre-service teachers, to improve teacher education. McDiarmid serves on the edTPA Policy Advisory Board, which is working to establish a national teacher-assessment system that generates data to inform improvements in teacher-preparation programs. He has taught at the University of Alaska-Anchorage, the University of Alaska-Fairbanks and Michigan State University. He also taught
high school history in Athens, Greece, and was a Title I teacher in a remote Alaska Native village. McDiarmid earned a bachelor’s degree from The University of North Carolina and a doctorate from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education. Contact him at mrhobbs@email.unc.edu.

**Michael McShane** is a research fellow in education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. He is the author of the book, “Education and Opportunity,” editor of the forthcoming volume “New and Better Schools,” and co-editor of “Teacher Quality 2.0” and “Common Core Meets Education Reform.” His commentary has been published widely in outlets such as USA Today, The Washington Post, and The Huffington Post. He is a former high school teacher and earned his Ph.D. in Education Policy at the University of Arkansas. Contact him at michael.mcshane@aei.org or @MQ_McShane.

**Scott Norton** joined the Council of Chief State School Officers in 2012 as the strategic initiative director for Standards, Assessment, and Accountability. In this role, he supports all states in their work to implement college- and career-ready standards, high-quality assessments, and next generation accountability systems. Norton previously served as the assistant superintendent of the Office of Standards, Assessments, and Accountability at the Louisiana Department of Education. Prior to working at the education department, he was a public school teacher in Louisiana. Norton holds a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and Supervision from Louisiana State University. Contact him at melissa.mcgrath@ccsso.org or @ScottNorton1001.

**Bev Perdue** was elected North Carolina’s 73rd governor in 2008, becoming the first woman to hold that office. She considers her efforts in education innovation and reform to be the hallmark of her more than 25 years in public service. Her “Career & College: Ready, Set Go!” agenda was a comprehensive approach to keeping students on grade level, improving graduation rates and increasing the number of students seeking college degrees or career training after high school. At the end of her tenure as governor, North Carolina’s high school graduation rate topped 80 percent for the first time. She also worked to integrate technology into education, including through a statewide broadband network for public schools and higher education institutions. After leaving office, she founded and now chairs DigiLEARN, a non-profit organization aimed at accelerating digital learning opportunities for all ages. Contact her at pcunningham@educationpost.org or @GovBevPerdue.

**Emily Richmond** is the public editor for the Education Writers Association. She coordinates programming and training opportunities for members, and provides individualized reporting and writing help to journalists. She also authors EWA’s “The Educated Reporter” blog. Prior to joining EWA, she was the education reporter at the Las Vegas Sun, where she covered local, state and national issues. Recognition of her work includes awards from the Associated Press News Executives Council and the Nevada State Press Association. Richmond was a 2011 Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Wellesley College and a master’s in journalism from Stanford University. Contact her at erichmond@ewa.org or @EWAEmily.

**Erik Robelen** is EWA’s deputy director. He plays a key role in conceptualizing and developing seminars and other events, edits and writes for the EWA website, and shares in the organization’s strategic leadership. Before joining EWA, he worked for 15 years as a reporter and editor at the national newspaper Education Week. As an editor, he oversaw coverage of teaching, standards, assessment and
curriculum. As a reporter, he wrote widely on K–12 issues, including federal and state policy; charter schools and school choice; standards and testing; and teaching and curriculum. Previously, Robelen was an education analyst and writer at ASCD, a national education organization, and worked as a reporter and editor at Inside Washington Publishers. He earned a bachelor's degree from Dickinson College and a master's degree in English from the University of Virginia. Contact him at erobelen@ewa.org or @ewrobelen.

Cory Turner edits and reports for the NPR Ed team. He's led the team's coverage of the Common Core while also finding time for his passion: exploring how kids learn — in the classroom, on the playground, at home and everywhere else. Before coming to NPR Ed, Turner was senior editor of All Things Considered. As the show's editor, Turner was its narrative custodian: story architect, correction czar, copy writer and polisher, guardian of the show's "voice," and the person by the phone when the hosts had an emergency question. Prior to that, Turner lived in Los Angeles and worked at NPR News with Tony Cox and News & Notes with Ed Gordon. In 2007, he won two Salute to Excellence Awards from the National Association of Black Journalists. In 2000, Turner earned a master's degree in screenwriting from the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts. There he wrote a short film that has seen more of the world than he has, ultimately screening at the Sundance Film Festival and selling to HBO. He also wrote a feature film for Magnolia Pictures. Contact him at dcturner@npr.org or @NPRCoryTurner.