Covering Standards & Testing In the Common Core Era

The George Washington University Center on Education Policy
December 15, 2014
Dear Colleague,

Welcome to DC! 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. 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, including the often-neglected issue of instructional materials.

A pair of veteran 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 Center on Education Policy 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**

*Cityview Room, The Elliott School of International Affairs*  
*George Washington University, Washington, DC*  
*Monday, December 15, 2014*

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**Agenda**

8:00 – 8:30 a.m.       Breakfast

8:30 – 8:40 a.m.       Welcome
                      - Caroline Hendrie, Education Writers Association

8:40 – 9:40 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? What will the midterm election results mean for implementation and state support? And what happens in states that call for a review or even rescind the standards? Will much really change?
                      - Michael Brickman, Thomas B. Fordham Institute
                      - Carol Burris, South Side High School (Rockville Center, N.Y.)
                      - Carmel Martin, Center on American Progress
                      - Michael McShane, American Enterprise Institute
                      - Moderator: Andrew Ujifusa, Education Week

9:40 – 10:30 a.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 Voles Ferguson, Center on Education Policy
                      - Diane Stark Rentner, Center on Education Policy
                      - Erik Robelen, Education Writers Association

10:30 – 10:45 a.m.       BREAK

10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  Common Core in Action
Educators share their experiences on the ground with the Common Core standards, and a researcher provides insights from a study of how the new math standards are changing teaching and learning in the classroom.
                      - Linda Hanson, Arlington (Mass.) school district; Arlington Education Association
                      - Brian Pick, District of Columbia Public Schools
                      - William Schmidt, Michigan State University
                      - Jonathan Wray, Howard County (Md.) Public Schools
                      - Moderator: Emily Hanford, American RadioWorks

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12:00 – 1:00 p.m. LUNCH

1:00 – 2:00 p.m. How They Did It: Journalists Share Their Stories
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 and testing to life, from covering debates over textbooks to the challenge of better preparing teachers and figuring out what makes a good Common Core math problem.
- Sarah Garland, The Hechinger Report
- Cory Turner, NPR Education
- Moderator: Kavitha Cardoza, WAMU

2:00 – 2:45 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, Education Writers Association

2:45 – 3:00 p.m. BREAK

3:00 – 4:00 p.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 the 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?
- Catherine Gewertz, Education Week
- Scott Norton, Council of Chief State School Officers
- Moderator: Greg Toppo, USA Today

4:00 – 5:00 p.m. Your Turn: Brainstorming Story Ideas
A veteran national education journalist 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.
- Steve Drummond, NPR Education

Speaker Biographies

Michael Brickman is the national policy director at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, where he is a commentator on education-reform issues and is a regular contributor to the Flypaper blog and other publications. Brickman served in communications roles on state and national political campaigns before being tapped by Gov. Scott Walker to lead his education-reform efforts in Wisconsin. While in the governor’s office, he worked to support collective-bargaining reforms, increase standards and accountability, expand school choice, and keep college affordable through innovative reforms. Brickman
graduated from the University of Delaware with an honors bachelor's degree in political science. He currently lives in Washington, D.C. Contact him at mbrickman@edexcellence.net.

**Carol C. Burris** has been the principal of South Side High School in Rockville Centre, N.Y., since 2000. She was named the N.Y. School Administrators Association Outstanding Educator in 2010 and the NASSP New York High School Principal of the Year in 2013. She has co-authored two books on equity and instruction. Her most recent book, "On the Same Track: How Schools Can Join the 21st Century Fight Against Re-Segregation," was published this year by Beacon Press. Burris frequently guest blogs on the Washington Post’s Answer Sheet. Contact her at burriscarol@gmail.com.

**Steve Drummond** heads up NPR’s new education reporting project, NPR Ed. Drummond brings more than 20 years’ experience covering education issues, and more than a decade at NPR in a variety of roles. Prior to this assignment, he was the network’s senior national editor. In that role, from 2007 through 2013, he oversaw domestic news coverage and a team of more than 60 reporters, producers and editors in Washington, D.C., and 18 bureaus around the country. Drummond has also spent some time in the classroom. In the early 1990s, he left journalism temporarily, for a graduate degree in education and a brief career as a middle and high school teacher. His journalism and education interests merged in 1993, when he joined Education Week, where he spent six years as a senior editor and writer. Contact him at sdrummond@npr.org.

**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. Her background and experience cover almost every area of communications. Contact her at mferguson@email.gwu.edu.


**Catherine Gewertz** created the Common-Core beat for Education Week nearly five years ago, and is the paper’s lead reporter on that topic. She also covers testing and co-authors Education Week’s “Curriculum
Matters" blog. Before moving to the standards-and-assessment beat, she spent a decade covering urban education and secondary schools. Prior to joining Education Week, Gewertz wrote for The Los Angeles Times and United Press International. Contact her at cgewertz@epe.org.

Linda Hanson began her teaching career in 1987 as a classroom teacher in the urban district of Somerville, Mass. From there, she took a job in Arlington, Mass., where she still works today. In Arlington, she began her work as a reading teacher, and then went on to oversee the literacy curriculum and professional development initiatives in the seven K-5 elementary schools in the district. In the past few years, Hanson has also become active in local and state education associations. She is in her third year as the president of the Arlington Education Association. She just finished a year as a participant in the Teacher Leadership Initiative, a joint endeavor of the National Education Association, the Center for Teacher Quality, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Hanson is also a fellow in the Education Policy Fellowship Program through the Rennie Center in Massachusetts. Contact her at lhanson@rcn.com.

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.

Carmel Martin is the executive vice president for policy at the Center for American Progress. She manages policy across issue areas and is a key member of CAP’s executive team. Before joining CAP, Martin was the assistant secretary for planning, evaluation and policy development at the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to that, Martin served as the general counsel and deputy staff director for the late Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who was the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. She also previously worked as the chief counsel and senior policy adviser to former Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) and special counsel to former Sen. Tom Daschle (D-S.D.). Early in Martin's career, she worked as a trial attorney for the Civil Rights Division of the Educational Opportunities Section at the Department of Justice. She graduated with a J.D. from the University of Texas School of Law and a master’s degree in public affairs from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs. Martin has appeared on PBS, NBC, CNN and NPR. Contact her through wragland@americanprogress.org.

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” (AEI Press 2014), editor of the forthcoming volume “New and Better Schools” (Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), and co-editor of “Teacher Quality 2.0” (Harvard Education Press 2014) and “Common Core Meets Education Reform” (Teachers College Press 2013). 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.

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 through melissa.mcgrath@ccsso.org.

Brian Pick is the chief of teaching and learning for the District of Columbia Public Schools. He is on the chancellor’s management team and leads the district’s academic work. Pick and his team ensure all students have access to a high-quality curriculum, engaging instruction, and aligned formative assessments. Over the past seven years, Pick led the development and rollout of the DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework; served as the chairman of the standards, assessments, data and accountability working group for D.C.’s successful Race to the Top application; and led the development and implementation of the district’s academic strategy. He was the 2012 recipient of the national Curriculum Leadership Award from the Council of the Great City Schools. Prior to joining DCPS, Pick worked as a teacher, consultant, and education policy analyst. He is an alumnus of both Teach For America and Education Pioneers. Pick graduated from Princeton University with a degree in public and international affairs, completed his teacher credentialing work at San Jose State University, and holds a master’s degree in education policy from the University of California, Berkeley. Contact him at brian.pick@dc.gov.

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 @EWAErich.

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 fifteen 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.
**Diane Stark Rentner** has been with the Center on Education Policy since its founding in January 1995 and serves as its deputy director. From 1988 to 1994, she served as a legislative associate for the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor, where she worked on the reauthorization of several major education laws, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Higher Education Act, the National School Lunch Act, the Child Nutrition Act, and the authorization of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Rentner also worked for the National PTA and the Council of Chief State School Officers in their government relations offices. She holds a B.S. from the University of Utah. Contact her at diane.rentner@cep-dc.org.

**William H. Schmidt** is a university distinguished professor at Michigan State University and director of the Center for the Study of Curriculum. He serves as co-director of the Education Policy Center and holds faculty appointments in statistics and education. Previously, he served as the national research coordinator and executive director of the U.S. National Center, which oversaw participation of the United States in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). He has published in numerous journals and has co-authored eight books, including “Why Schools Matter,” “Teacher Education Matters,” and “Inequality for All.” His current writing and research concerns issues of academic content in K-12 schooling, assessment theory and the effects of curriculum on academic achievement. Schmidt received the 1998 Willard Jacobson Lectureship from The New York Academy of Sciences and is a member of the National Academy of Education. He received his bachelor's in mathematics from Concordia College in River Forest, Ill. and his doctorate from the University of Chicago in psychometrics and applied statistics. Contact him through jsodeman@msu.edu.

**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.

**Jonathan Wray** is a mathematics instructional facilitator for the Howard County (Md.) Public School System and is serving a three-year term as a member of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Board of Directors. Wray is the president of the Association of Maryland Mathematics Teacher Educators and a past president of the Maryland Council of Teachers of Mathematics. He serves as the manager of the Elementary Mathematics Specialists & Teacher Leaders Project. He is a co-author of “Common Core Mathematics in a PLC at Work™, Grades K-2 and Grades 3-5” (Solution Tree & NCTM, 2012). An author, consultant and speaker, Wray’s interests include instructional leadership, teacher collaboration and professional learning, effective and engaging teaching and learning strategies, strategic uses of technology, and issues related to access and equity in mathematics education. Contact him at jonowray@gmail.com.