



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday



August 29, 2014

Standards on trial in the court of public opinion

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Public opinion in this country is everything." And whether you subscribe to that notion or not, the recent release of two national polls on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) would seem, at least on the surface, to be a blow to standards supporters.

The first results came from the [Education Next \(EdNext\) poll](#) that has been given annually for about 14 years. When asked the question about support for the Common Core State Standards the following groups responded.

EDUCATION NEXT POLL
Support for CCSS

	2013	2014
Public	65%	53%
Republicans	57%	43%
Democrats	64%	63%
Teachers	76%	46%

In another poll released last week, we saw similar results. The [PDK/Gallup poll](#), which has been around for more than 50 years and is one of the most respected of the polls, indicated 60 percent of respondents oppose using CCSS in their local schools to guide what teachers teach; 18 percent of respondents said the standards were too challenging; 40 percent said the standards were not challenging enough; and 36 percent said the standards were just right.

Both polls showed an erosion in support for the CCSS from the previous year. In 2012, hardly anyone in the general public had even heard of the CCSS. Why such a steep drop in such a short time and why do we see such a steep drop in teacher support?

In a pre-release media call for the PDK/Gallup poll last week, I made the following points.

1) There has been a significant increase in media reporting about CCSS. Depending on your media source, the public has been confronted with a barrage of information, some factual, some not, that has led to a polarization of opinions with regard to the Common Core State Standards.

2) With the rush to implement No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver requirements for standards, assessments and teacher evaluations, the general public and especially teachers have connected CCSS with federal overreach.

3) With the rush to implement NCLB waiver requirements in some states, teachers feel they have not been provided adequate support in training or resources to implement the standards. With the rush to assess the standards and utilize the results from testing in waiver-required teacher evaluation systems,

again, teachers feel they are being held accountable for implementing standards, assessments, and teacher evaluation systems without adequate support and time.

When we dig deep and go back to the PDK poll in the late 1980's, we find tremendous support for the concept of more rigorous standards that all states would adhere to in order for more students to reach college- and career-readiness. Even in the current polling, when the term Common Core was removed, there was a majority of support for more rigorous state standards across all states.

Several positive things happened last week as the polls were being released. Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced that the United States Department of Education (USED) would relax the timeline for states that need more time to implement teacher evaluation systems that use test scores as part of the evaluation. Also, Sec. Duncan announced his concerns about "too much testing" in our schools. The PDK/Gallup poll indicated that the general public would support Sec. Duncan's concerns about too much testing. More than 50 percent of those polled said standardized tests are not helpful; however, in excess of 80 percent support college placement tests, grade placement tests, and exit exams. It appears the public supports testing as long as the purpose of testing is clear.

A few other items of note from the recent polls:

- Charter Schools – the PDK poll shows 70 percent support, EdNext shows 54 percent support
- Vouchers – the PDK poll shows 63 percent oppose with EdNext showing 51 percent support

While the department's own anonymous survey of nearly 7,000 Kentucky teachers earlier this year showed stronger support for the standards than is evidenced nationwide, Kentucky is being proactive with regard to CCSS. This week, I announced the [Kentucky Core Academic Standards Challenge](#), which will inform our regular review of the standards taught in our classrooms. I urge all readers, regardless of your opinion on the standards, to take the challenge. It will be open until April 30, 2015.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.
Education Commissioner