

## **COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

*What Effect Could They Have on Adult Education  
And High School Equivalency Programs in the U.S.?*

By

**Jeffrey A. Fantine, MA**  
**Adult Education Consultant**  
**and**

**Mitch Rosin, MA, MS, MS**  
**Director, Adult Learning and Workforce Initiatives**  
**McGraw-Hill Education**

**July 12, 2012**

## **The Coming of the Common Core State Standards for K-12**

It appears the much-heralded and long-awaited Common Core State Standards for K-12 education (CCSS) have become a reality.

Many were skeptical when the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) joined forces three years ago to launch this most recent push to establish Common Core State Educational Standards for K-12 students in the United States.

In the recent past, others, including Presidents George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton, had proposed some version of Common Core Standards; they failed to gain much traction. But, on June 10, 2010, almost one year to the day after the CCSSO/NGA Center standards were proposed, a full set of solid and unambiguous English language arts and math standards – crafted, evaluated and approved by experts – was released to the public.

Now, just two years later, 46 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have all formally adopted the CCSS, and have committed themselves to different schedules for full implementation over the next few years.<sup>1</sup>

Implementation represents the next big challenge for the CCSS to overcome, and it will be “a huge, heavy lift,” according to Chester E. Finn, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which has been tracking the initiative.

But, even if nationwide implementation of the CCSS encounters bumps in the road and setbacks along the way – almost a certainty when attempting comprehensive change on a scale this large – there can be no doubt that this home-grown, state-initiated, and “full-steam-ahead” effort to establish nationwide Common Core State Educational Standards will fundamentally change education in the United States for the foreseeable future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Minnesota has adopted the common core English but not the math standards, claiming the latter are not as rigorous as Minnesota’s own. See <http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2010/08/13/minnesota-rejects-common-core-math-standards>

Inevitably, education in America will be changed, even if the standards do not immediately achieve rousing success. The fact is, the latest standards initiative has changed the debate and made it clear the current system – in which states and districts each have some version of their own individual standards for education attainment – is inadequate for the 21st century.

The new standards as proposed may evolve over the next few years in response to experience on the ground, but they are not likely to go away. As currently constructed, they will demand more from students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

### **Common Core State Standards Are Game-Changers**

The new English Language Arts and Literacy standards will require that students have a better understanding of text. Teachers working with the English standards will grade students on the ability to read critically to grasp essential information and to develop and defend ideas based on what was read. This approach also includes anchor standards for college and career readiness.

The English Language Arts standards also will involve teachers in other disciplines – e.g., history and science – by asking them to focus on the reading and writing skills involved in acquiring and demonstrating knowledge in those subjects.

The new Mathematics standards demand an even bigger shift in approach, moving from a focus on the procedural steps necessary to solve a math problem to a deeper conceptual understanding of the math principles that form the basis of the problem. This creates an entirely new definition of math proficiency in basic education.

The CCSS Math standards are designed to help students expand their understanding of math principles based on the foundations established in the earlier grades. In other words, the standards are built upon a sequential progression of learning that is dependent upon prior learning. This new paradigm, taken to its logical conclusion, could end, or at least wreak havoc with, the controversial practice of “social promotion.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The practice of promoting a student to the next higher grade level, despite poor grades, in order to keep the student with his or her social peer group. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/social+promotion>

Similar new standards for science (released for public comment in May 2012), social studies, and other subjects are still in development with partner organizations.

The Common Core Standards are destined to be game-changers. Even if only a handful of states manage to implement them effectively, that achievement will demonstrate it can be done. Such success will raise the bar for – and put pressure on – states that are not implementing the CCSS. States will have to pay more attention to what their students know and are able to do, and whether their students can compete in today’s world. Undoubtedly, no state will want anything other than an “A” grade when it comes to how effective its educational system is in preparing students for college and career success.

### **Standards are Necessary Because the Rules of the Game Have Changed Globally**

Students and workers in the U.S. today seek employment in a world where their competition could just as likely be in Dublin, Dubai, or Manila as in Detroit, Dallas, or Manhattan. Even service professions and other occupations once considered immune to outsourcing are being conducted in geographically remote locations. Advanced communications technologies and greater bandwidth make it possible to send large packets of data around the globe instantly at little or no cost.

Telephone consumer service operations are already located in places like India and the Philippines, and have been for years. But today’s jobs involving graphic design and English language editing, among many others, also are outsourced internationally. Even medical services, once considered a “personal delivery” service profession safe from overseas competition, are now losing business to lower-cost providers in other countries. A CT scan performed on a patient in a Chicago clinic might be evaluated by doctors or health technicians in Poland or India or any location in the world with computers and high-speed Internet.

To compete in this increasingly global and high-tech jobs market – and for the U.S. to maintain global competitiveness – students today must graduate high school sufficiently prepared to function at the higher levels demanded for college study. Alternatively, to earn a living wage,

they must be adequately prepared to take on rigorous career and technical training for the kinds of high-tech jobs that are becoming more common. For example, the auto mechanics occupation has become high-tech, involving computers and other advanced diagnostic tools.

Consider the following:

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests that 33 percent of all job openings and nearly 50 percent of all new jobs created between 2008 and 2018 will require a credential or postsecondary degree.<sup>3</sup>
- The availability of low-skilled jobs is shrinking in the U.S., both in real numbers and as a proportion of all jobs. Since 1960, the factory share of jobs has fallen by nearly half, from 32 to 17 percent, while real manufacturing output in the U.S. has increased by three percent.<sup>4</sup>
- Output has increased as the number of workers has decreased due to advances in manufacturing technology. New technology requires factory workers who possess the higher level of knowledge and skills necessary to operate sophisticated technology. The number of factory workers with at least some college education has tripled from 12 percent in 1973 to 36 percent today.<sup>5</sup>
- As the need for better-educated, skilled workers continues to rise, the available pool of such workers is decreasing in the U.S. Nearly half the U.S. workforce today, approximately 52 million adults, has only a high school education or less, while 25 million workers aged 18 to 64 lack even a high school diploma or a High School Equivalent (HSE) degree.<sup>6</sup>

Because of these trends, more people have been coming around to the idea that CCSS for K-12 education are necessary and will be implemented in some form over the next few years.

---

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P., Strohl, Jeff and Smith, Nicole, "Help Wanted: Postsecondary Education and Training Required," Chapter 3 of *New Directions for Community Colleges*, no. 146, Summer 2009

<sup>5</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P., et. al., *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Funding Career Pathways and Career Pathway Bridges: A Federal Policy Toolkit for States, The Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success (CLASP), May 2010.

## **The Potential Impact on Adult Education and High School Equivalency?**

Few people outside of the field of adult education in the U.S. – a catch-all term that includes Adult Basic Education (ABE), a portion of Career and Technical Education (CTE) depending on the state, and Adult Secondary Education (High School Equivalency or “HSE” testing and prep) – have given any thought to what impact the CCSS might have on the students and teachers involved in adult education programs and classrooms.

If the standards (for what a high school graduate is expected to know and be able to do to compete effectively in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy) rise to a new level, it stands to reason that the same expectations will apply to students completing a program in adult education.

Over the years, it has become generally accepted (if not always openly admitted) that a high school “equivalency” diploma, typically offered through adult education, is not actually equivalent to the standard K-12 education. The reasons include:

1. Adult education programs normally do not have the capacity to offer comprehensive high school programming that includes core academic subjects and electives;
2. Instructors in adult education programs sometimes do not have the same level of qualifications as those teaching in the K-12 system; and
3. The intensity of services delivered and breadth of the subject content often do not match the amount of “seat time” or rigor characteristic of the K-12 environment.

Consequently, the coming of the CCSS raises many important questions with regard to adult education and HSE:

- How can the adult education community adapt to the CCSS to raise educational achievement and reduce the marginalization and stigmatization that adult education carries?
- How can the instructional guidelines now being established for the CCSS in English Language Arts and Literacy and Mathematics in K-12 be adapted to be relevant (and realistic) for adult education students?

- How can adult learners – especially those who did not finish high school – be supported to meet higher academic standards? How can learners be motivated to pursue an education with enhanced rigor? What services can be implemented to support transition into postsecondary education, advanced job training, and productive lifelong careers?
- What can be done to support instructors and administrators in all areas of adult education to ensure that they are provided with the professional development necessary to ready them to meet the challenges that might result from the implementation of the CCSS?
- In a time of fiscal austerity, will there be sufficient resources to adapt and adequately implement the CCSS? If not, what can be done to implement the CCSS in some meaningful form without a substantial increase in funding?
- Is there a consensus that can be achieved in the adult education field regarding what needs to be done to adapt and implement the CCSS based on the resources that are currently available?

### **Adult Education in the U.S. is Under-Funded**

The fact is, despite a sharply escalating need for higher academic and technical job skills, adult basic and secondary education remains severely under-funded.

The proposed 2013 federal budget for Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) programs includes the following:<sup>7</sup>

- **\$1.13 billion to support the reauthorization and reform of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program**, providing level funding for activities under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006. However, the reauthorization of Perkins funding in 2006 made it more difficult to provide CTE services through adult education programs.
- **\$606.3 million to support activities under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998**, also level funding. Some \$594,993,000 is available for Adult Education State Grants.

---

<sup>7</sup> All of the budget data following comes from the DOE's OVAE website:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/news/newsletters/ovaconnection/2012/02162012-special.html>

Other budget proposals that have a potential impact on adult education programs include:

- **\$8 billion in mandatory funding for the Community College to Career Fund** to be co-administered by the Department of Education (DOE) and Department of Labor (DOL) to provide competitive grants to support community college and state partnerships with businesses for developing or expanding training programs designed to meet employers needs for two million skilled workers including the needs of companies seeking to bring back American jobs from overseas.
- **\$1 billion over three years in mandatory funding to expand Career Academies**, which combine a college preparatory and career and technical curriculum with a career theme. A total of \$200 million will be available in 2013.
- **\$20 million provided by the DOL, DOE and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)** to strengthen services provided to disconnected youth.
- **\$12.5 billion from DOL to create a [Pathways Back to Work Fund](#)**, with \$2.5 billion supporting summer and year-round jobs for low-income youth, and \$10 billion to make it easier for workers to remain connected to the workforce and gain new skills for long-term employment.<sup>8</sup>

Of the \$22.45 billion requested above, approximately \$19.73 billion goes to programs and activities that can reasonably be described as “adult education.” This is by far the lowest funded category of education in the U.S., despite its rising importance for both business and workers.

To put this level of funding into perspective, consider that the K-12 system of public and private education in the U.S. spends approximately \$605 billion annually, based on data from the 2008-2009 school year. Approximately \$58.5 billion of this money comes from the federal government. That is nearly three times what the U.S. government spends on adult education.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, U.S. colleges and universities received approximately \$267 billion in revenues for that same 2008-2009 school year, with approximately 16 percent of those funds (\$43 billion) coming from the federal government.<sup>10</sup> That’s more than twice the amount OVAE is requesting for adult education in 2013.

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/news/newsletters/ovaeconnection/2012/02162012-special.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www2.census.gov/govs/school/09f33pub.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> National Center for Education Statistics 2010 Digest,



## **Peril and Opportunity**

The current, uncertain situation regarding the K-12 Common Core Standards and what they could mean for adult education presents some daunting challenges for the adult education community, particularly given the lower level of government funding adult education receives. But it also presents an opportunity to help make adult education more accountable and effective in preparing people for the more intense competition of the global economy.

The fact is, adult education policy makers and state and federal officials have been aware for some time that all areas of adult education need to have both higher standards and greater accountability.

To this end, OVAE has launched several initiatives or partnered with other institutions and organizations lately to:

- Improve ABE/HSE teacher professional development and effectiveness;
- Guide educators on standards implementation in adult education programs through the Standards-in-Action initiative;
- Document and codify the teacher competencies necessary for successful delivery of adult education to varying populations; and
- Support Career Pathways and Bridge programs that attempt to help adult learners acquire the knowledge, skills, and credentials necessary to make the transition from ABE to postsecondary education to career opportunities more efficiently and effectively.

This last initiative is critical to adult education's successful move toward higher standards which would correspond to goals of the CCSS.

It appears that OVAE is studying the CCSS, and will issue new guidance on how its ABE and HSE programs should adjust. However, this guidance is not expected until 2014 at the earliest. That's a long time to wait for concrete information in the worlds of both education and education publishing, spheres in which materials supporting curricula must be designed, tested, and

approved well in advance of a school year or semester. Nevertheless, several states are moving forward with CCSS in adult education as their K-12 systems move forward with them; they are not waiting for federal guidance. Kentucky, Maine, West Virginia, and Texas are just a few of the states already implementing CCSS in adult education.

What should people involved in administering and providing adult education and training be doing in the meantime? Is there any way to prepare for the guidance coming in 2014?

Since it remains unclear what OVAE will ultimately decide regarding the new standards for ABE/HSE in the wake of the CCSS, we spoke with several leaders and experts in the adult education sector to get their take on what could happen and what it might mean for the future. We started our conversation with each expert by asking the basic questions below before letting the conversation evolve as the interviewee saw fit.<sup>11</sup>

- What might happen (or should happen) to adult education in the wake of a successful implementation of the CCSS?
- What might be the potential impact of the CCSS on administrators, teachers, and learners in the adult education community?
- What can be done now to make the transition to higher standards more efficient?
- Who should be responsible for implementing and overseeing these changes in adult education: the federal government, each individual state, or the local community?

In some ways, raising standards and making substantive changes in how education is delivered and assessed might be easier in adult education than in the K-12 system, for two main reasons:

- Adult education is already more associated with and largely run by the federal government, making it easier to establish national standards; and
- Adult and Career and Technical Education already “contextualizes” much of its learning materials and instructional services, often making them more relevant in preparing students for real-world careers; this is something the CCSS will encourage in K-12’s implementation of the CCSS.

---

<sup>11</sup> Some respondents provided their comments – or additional comments – in writing.

## **Opinions from the Field**

**Robin Asbury, CWDP, Ed.D.**

**DDI Facilitator**

**Authorized WorkKeys Job Profiler**

**Director**

**WV Workplace Education Program at RASE/WVDOE**

“Our teachers are going to have to dramatically change the way they do what they do, and I’m sure that initially there will be a lot of weeping and gnashing of teeth. But I think in the long run the K-12 Common Core Standards will be very good for our field. It will give us a higher profile and a little more legitimacy.

“Currently, a high school equivalency diploma is often not respected as a real credential. But once our standards are in some way adjusted to the Common Core Standards, I think our programs will be viewed as being a little more legitimate.

“The big challenge is going to be for our teachers. They are going to be challenged with conveying a level and a depth of knowledge that will be completely new to them. That’s going to require a lot of professional development, to get them through the transition to higher standards, and to help them understand why we’re doing this and what depth of knowledge means.

“Currently the model is that our adult students are ‘self-directed’ learners. That means they come to class, we give them a book to study, and we say ‘we’re here to answer any of your questions.’ This is a very passive approach.

“In order to reach the depth of knowledge our students will need to have an adequate education and function successfully in the workforce, our instructors are going to have to actually teach and give learners an opportunity to practice their skills and do project-based learning.

“So all that is going to be a huge change for our field. But it’s going to be worth it, because it’s a ‘wake-up’ call. If we don’t change and adjust to the higher educational standards demanded for work today, we run the risk of becoming irrelevant as a field. Because you can get any knowledge you want on the Internet today, what would compel someone to come to adult education classes if all they’re going to do is come and sit and look at a book?”

**Dr. Jann Coles, Superintendent**  
**NYC Department of Education**  
**Office of Adult and Continuing Education**

“The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have the potential to significantly transform teaching and learning in Adult Basic and Adult Secondary Education (ABE/ASE), as well as to integrate the adult education system with the larger K-12 and higher education systems. By articulating the foundation of what every person – regardless of age – needs to know and be able to do to transition successfully into postsecondary education and/or the 21st century workforce, the CCSS provides clear, much-needed guidance for ABE/ASE instruction. Moreover, to the extent that the CCSS are adopted nationally by both the K-12 and adult education systems, the CCSS will provide all educators with a common language to identify and discuss the English Language Arts (ELA), literacy, and math skills their students need; it will potentially provide rich opportunities for educators across systems to share resources, strategies, and techniques to help all students build these skills.

“As adult educators, we owe it to our students to help them develop the high-level skills they need for college and careers. At the same time, incorporating the CCSS into adult education will pose several challenges. To begin with, the CCSS were written for K-12 educators in a grade-by-grade sequence, and assume a linear developmental trajectory more typical of children than of adults returning to ABE/ASE classes. Thus, while K-12 teachers will be expected to familiarize themselves with and target the specific skills identified for their particular grade level, ABE/ASE teachers will potentially need to familiarize themselves with and teach a much wider range of the Common Core, regardless of what NRS level their students and classes have been designated. Of course, we want our teachers to be able to identify and address the full scope of their students’ needs, but, currently, most adult educators in the U.S. do not have the training or breadth of expertise required to effectively teach all of the content and skills identified in the CCSS.

“Even in a program like ours, where all of the teachers hold a New York State teaching certification and over half are full-time, many still need to cultivate the expertise in reading, writing, and/or upper-level math instruction called for in the CCSS. That said, much of the internal professional development work we have engaged in over the last four years has positioned our teachers to more seamlessly incorporate – and more successfully address – the CCSS in their curriculum and instruction. For example:

- We have adopted Equipped for the Future (EFF), a highly contextualized, standards-based approach to instructional design that emphasizes applied learning and an integrated process of content and skill development. The EFF Standards for Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking correspond with the Common Core’s “Anchor Standards.” We believe that the level of specificity delineated in the CCSS will help our teachers better identify the particular skills they wish to target, and lead to even more rigorous teaching and learning.
- We’ve adopted an adult education math curriculum for all of our ABE/ASE classes that is rooted in the same research and aligns completely with the Common Core “Standards for Mathematical Practice.” We are currently working with the curriculum’s developers (through a generous grant from the MetLife Foundation) to have them design additional lessons that target a specific subset of the math skills called for in the CCSS.
- Over the last year, all of our ABE 3 and ABE 4 teachers have participated in intensive professional development with the New York City Writing Project, and have substantially increased their repertoire of strategies for teaching the types of writing and specific skills called for in the CCSS, including techniques to have students use writing to demonstrate their understanding and respond to informational texts.

“The Office of Adult and Continuing Education is part of the NYC Department of Education’s Division of Equity and Access, and we take ‘equity’ and ‘access’ to be the fundamental principles that guide all of our work.

“The CCSS provide an unprecedented opportunity to raise the quality of adult education and open the door for students to pursue their dreams beyond their high school equivalency (HSE) diploma. With proper resources and support, we will be able to rise to the challenge of the CCSS, and provide all of our students with educational equity and greater access to college and careers.”

**Cristine Smith, Associate Professor**  
**Center for International Education**  
**University of Massachusetts**

“I have to confess that I really don't know that much specifically about the Common Core Standards, but I will say that the more stringent high school standards and high-stakes testing gets, the more likely it is that ‘underperforming’ high school students will be ‘pushed out’ – either overtly or covertly – of their high school in order to make the high school stats look better.

“The impact that has on adult education is that the number of students needing to avail themselves of high school equivalency preparation and adult secondary education programs increases, because kids have no other alternative to get a high school diploma or equivalent than to go to adult education. However, the per-student funding for adult education is dramatically lower than it is for high school students.

“Adult education funding can range from \$100 to \$1,000 per year per student, whereas most high schools, even the less wealthy ones, spend \$5,000 and up per student each year. So if kids are being pushed out of high school so that the high school can maintain its good statistics, these kids end up in overcrowded adult education programs (or on the waiting list for them), and get much different services because of the fewer resources available.

“I have no idea if the Common Core Standards will have this effect; I’m just surmising. But it’s possible.

“Also, there is the perennial problem in adult education with undertrained teachers and tutors, because we operate on soft money and teachers are generally part-time, low salaried, with no benefits, and with no stability from year to year. Thus, if the CCSS are going to inform what happens in the adult education classrooms, then teachers will need to be better trained, further stressing an already underfunded professional development system.”

**Art Ellison, Administrator,  
Bureau of Adult Education,  
New Hampshire Department of Education**

“Yes, the Common Core Standards will have an impact on ABE/HSE in New Hampshire. Due to the change in the major high school equivalency test in January, 2014, we will be in a position to have to respond to the Common Core ‘requirements’ even before our state’s K-12 system does. In effect, K-12 will have a three- to four-year cycle to do what we will have to do in the next 18 months.

“We are one of the states that will find an alternative to the GEDTS Pearson VUE test, but whatever we choose will also be tied to the Common Core so the issues remain relatively the same regardless of the composition of the new test.

“I think that it will be positive in the long-run, however, we may well be facing a situation where 50 percent of the people who are able to pass the current HSE test will not be able to pass the new test without very intensive work in the classroom. This issue is best framed by looking at the great number of newly unemployed older workers who do not have a high school credential. Getting them through a new HSE test tied to the Common Core will set up a very difficult situation, one in which they may not be able to succeed.

“We will raise our standards in New Hampshire along with the K-12 system but we hope to do so in a way that is appropriate for our adult students.

“The challenge for the adult education field will fall into at least two major areas: professional development for our staff, so that they will be able to offer quality instruction to all of our students; and the vastly extended time that students will need to be in programs in order to succeed on the new test. In order to meet the needs in both of these areas we will need a huge influx of funding, something that does not appear to be readily available.”

**Jeffrey Fantine**  
**Adult Education Consultant**  
**Formerly: Senior Project Director –**  
**Adult Career Pathways Initiative at**  
**Kratos Learning Solutions**  
**Director of Adult Education and**  
**Family Literacy, State of Maine**

“OVAE has contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) under a national activities initiative to adapt the CCSS to adult education. A primary purpose of the Common Core State Standards is to increase the rigor of the education being provided, which is an effort OVAE has supported in adult education for many years. Regardless of how the CCSS shake out, the goal of educational leaders is to increase the rigor and quality of education so that students acquire the knowledge, skills, and credentials necessary to effectively transition into college and career.

“A majority of adult education programs across the country need to improve the quality and rigor of their services. However, it’s difficult to demand that with the current capacity of the adult education system: limited funding, part-time staff, and inconsistent professional standards and certification requirements.

“It is unlikely in the current economic climate that adult education will receive an appreciable increase in funding, so tough decisions will have to be made if the field wants to meet the demands the CCSS will require. The thought process must be more about “how will we allocate our current resources differently” versus “where will we get more funding to do this?” This will be a matter of providing high-quality services over an emphasis on the number of students served, which, unfortunately, still drives the federal funding formula. I believe it is OVAE’s intent to push for legislation that will support performance-based funding, which will be the incentive for the field to strive even harder to achieve better student outcomes. (Workforce Investment Act does currently offer an opportunity for states to receive additional funding based on performance, provided both Title I and Title II programs meet their federally approved goals. However, how those additional funds are used is up to the individual state, and may or may not benefit adult education.)

“There is a big push in the field of adult education around college and career readiness, which calls for adult education programs to develop postsecondary transition programs, career pathways, and provide contextualized services. The goal of adult education must become more



than helping students get a HSE, but rather making sure they have the knowledge, skills, and credentials necessary to advance successfully to college and a career. This will not only require higher-quality instructional services, but also comprehensive career planning and support services.

“In order for the CCSS, and education in general, to be more successful, stakeholders in education must stop ‘working in silos,’ and work collaboratively to create a seamless and aligned educational system. This includes all of the following stakeholders: K-12; CTE; adult education; workforce development; higher education; correctional education; and business and industry.

“In adult education, all students should choose a career path, and then receive the appropriate services that will aide them along that chosen career path. Programs will need to assess their current services to determine what enhancements need to be made to their delivery system to ensure college and career success.

“The same forces and global trends that have served as an impetus for the CCSS in the K-12 system should also motivate adult education. It’s not about getting that piece of paper (i.e., a diploma or GED certificate), but about what our students know and are able to do as they transition to that next step in the education and career pipeline without any need for remediation once they get there.

“The CCSS should be welcomed with open arms into the field of adult education, as these standards support the fundamental principles of adult learning, i.e., building on prior knowledge and past experience, learning in relevant context, and transferability of learning to work and life. More importantly, though, just as it will do for the K-12 system, the CCSS will provide a consistent teaching and learning framework for the field of adult education that can be utilized and benchmarked across the country.”

**Myrna Manly**  
**Mathematics Professor and Author**  
**Past President, Adult Numeracy Network**

“First, I do not see any really ‘new’ recommendations being made by the Common Core Math standards. They reiterate what National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the National Research Council have said for many years in their publications meant for K-12. Additionally, we in the Adult Numeracy Network (ANN) have made similar recommendations for adult education.

“For adult education, the grade-by-grade standards are less impactful than they are for K-12. That said, the learning trajectory that is recommended for K-12 does have one feature – early introduction of algebraic thinking – that is not commonly practiced in adult education. When you analyze the summaries, you see that algebraic ideas are introduced from the earliest learning at the kindergarten level and then throughout the grades.

“The eight mathematical practices in the Common Core elaborate on the kinds of understanding and reasoning that are important to math instruction. Again, these are not new and there are numerous ‘pockets’ of practice in adult education that already follow these recommendations. The professional development activities that have been delivered by the ANN members have espoused these ideas, and a few adult education textbooks are available that can be used for this kind of instruction that use a problem-solving and reasoning approach.

“However, it goes without saying that the wider population of adult educators has not embraced this approach to teaching mathematics to adults. The instructional focus in most programs continues to be on the manipulation of symbols to get an answer to a computation problem that is explicitly stated, a process that is a small part of what mathematical proficiency (or numeracy) is all about. Why? What will it take to make real change happen? A new list of standards?

“What drives instruction at the adult level? ‘The HSE test’ is the answer most would give. Teachers are under the gun, because students come in and say ‘I want my GED!’ The new

version of the test does promise to use the CCSS as its basis. For me, however, the new test alone will not be sufficient to alter instruction. When you compare the published specifications for the 2002 version of the math test to the descriptions offered in the new guidelines, you won't see much difference. The GED math test has always featured applications and concepts in addition to procedures. Yet, most programs do not emphasize understanding and reasoning in their instruction.

“To make a more substantial impact, I think that fundamental systemic changes need to be made. For example, program and teacher evaluations are usually made on the basis of student improvement on written tests. In some cases, the early levels of these tests consist of naked computation problems. Why would a teacher spend time on understanding and problem solving if those abilities will not be considered in an evaluation of her effectiveness? Look at the descriptions of the various NRS levels in mathematics; problem solving is not even mentioned until the later levels.

“A specific example is Mathematical Practice #4. The new GED guidelines say that they will emphasize mathematical modeling in the new test. (Modeling is the process of recognizing and documenting mathematical relationships in situations, often from the real world. Students can use words, diagrams, tables, graphs, symbolic expressions, and equations to “model” the situation. We often say that they ‘mathematize’ the situation.)

“Another issue is that the teacher corps in adult education have usually been elementary teachers, so they don't know that they have to teach. They follow a book that doesn't do anything but the procedures. So no insight or reasoning is ever imparted – none of the things that make math useable. All they teach is what a calculator can do. We want people to understand more than just a procedure.

“So, will the introduction of the Common Core State Standards impact math instruction in adult education? If the system adjusts with it, there is a possibility for real change. Assessments, expectations for teacher and program performance, and classroom activities all must be aligned.”

**Chris Miller**  
**Adult Education Director**  
**Calhoun Community College**  
**Decatur, AL 35609**

“There is a lot of speculation right now among adult educators. It comes from not yet knowing how the implementation of the K-12 Common Core State Standards will affect adult education.

“Nationally, the adult education community is quite concerned about the 2014 high school equivalency test that will incorporate the Common Core State Standards. The challenge for us, at the state and local level, is to make sure we are prepared to give our students the best quality education we can, regardless of how the standards are implemented for adult learners. One key to success is providing the training and professional development the instructors will need to teach to the new standards.

“We know that the academic basics will always be the basics. As long as we don’t deviate from the basics, but rather add to them and enhance what we’re already prepared to provide our students, we’ll be in a good position to shift to the Common Core. However, in Adult Basic Education, we have to incorporate many facets of education other than the academics. This often includes job readiness, financial literacy, computer literacy, and employability skills. This adds to the strain already placed on under-funded programs.

“From a National Reporting System (NRS) standpoint, we have to meet the benchmarks and goals for academic achievement set by OVAE. So essentially we have to prepare students for two assessments: one that meets the federal requirements of showing academic gain, and one that meets state guidelines for a high school equivalency diploma. On top of these, we need to prepare our students for the workforce and/or an experience in a post-secondary institution. Both of these are important as we develop academic and career pathways for our learners.

“Adult Education has already addressed the question of college or career readiness in some states by implementing bridge programs, such as the I-BEST, that meet both academic and career

goals. But we also have to combat the concept of “passing the test” that prevails among adult learners. Many adult learners enter programs with the goal of passing a high school equivalency test. They’re focused only on “the test.” This will be one challenge of implementing the Common Core as we will have to incorporate much deeper and broader curriculum, and therefore keep students in adult education classes for a longer period of time. Many will become discouraged, and leave programs prior to completion. We already see that now in our classrooms. If we can target the instructional levels of individual students, and by doing so give them a targeted, individualized curriculum to meet their goals, we have a solid chance of retention.

“What I’d like to know from OVAE is: How many of the Common Core Standards and career readiness standards will mesh together. What we have to do is incorporate academic frameworks and build them into a timeframe that is going to be workable for our adult population that is already struggling to manage work and family in addition to their educational goals.

“Any time we move to change a system, people inherently don’t like it. Change moves people out of their comfort zone. Instructors have become used to teaching the same content and using the same materials in the same way, often for a long time. Now we’re moving toward a more rigorous level of instruction where all of us – not just the instructors, but the local directors, the state leaders – need to come together and be unified, presenting a strong front in making this change happen in the least painful way we can.

“Teachers are apprehensive. They are eager to know what they are going to have to change. What teaching style will be required? How will curriculum changes unfold during the next couple of years? What pedagogical changes will be needed to instruct to the new rigors and expectations? How will the workforce needs of employers be infused into adult education programs?

“We are a very resilient group of people in adult education. Change is our middle name; we have changed over the years to meet the needs of the people we serve. High school equivalency tests have morphed, and are going to morph again. This will ideally produce a cadre of learners who are better prepared to find family sustaining employment.

“Ultimately, the CCSS are going to be positive for ABE/HSE. As we adjust, first and foremost, we have to stay focused on the people that we serve, their goals, ambitions, and the effort they put into gaining a higher level of academic achievement.”

**Steven Paine**  
**Chief Academic Officer at Engrade**  
**Formerly State Superintendent of Schools**  
**For West Virginia and Past President,**  
**Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)**

“We should be looking at standards internationally benchmarked to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test.

“The original idea behind the Common Core Standards was that it would allow states to benchmark their efforts against other countries, not just other states, as they are doing now. The CCSS should contain a level of rigor and the kinds of skills our kids need to be globally competitive.

“But the cognitive demand, the level of difficulty necessary to meet those standards, is embedded within the Common Core for English Language Arts and the Math standards right now.

“There’s a lot more to it than just putting standards on paper and expecting students to learn from them at that higher level. There’s no question that, if the CCSS are taught well and ultimately mastered by K-12 students, the standards for all students – even adult education and high school equivalency students – will have to increase.

“I’ve heard concern they might become so rigorous some students will have difficulty mastering the standards. That’s a valid concern. And the districts should, as part of their implementation strategy, build ‘safety nets’ for students who have not previously mastered the information necessary.

“The way that this should work is, you start teaching kids at the elementary level these rigorous standards, and, as each class graduates and moves on to the next level, you continue to introduce the higher-level standards. But that’s not the way it’s going to work upon implementation, unfortunately. Standards are all going to be adopted at once. Since those kids will be moving into a higher level of expectation in the upper grades, there will have to be, on the front end, a very

careful analysis of: where kids are performing; the skills they have already mastered; those they have not mastered; and the interventions needed to prepare kids in Career and Technical and adult education programs for learning under the new standards. But that won't be just for HSE and ABE students; that will be for all students.

“Teacher training and professional development will be critical, but the ABE/CTE teachers already really know how to integrate these academic skills with the performance-based approach.

“Everyone will have a learning curve here. But ABE and CTE teaches students performance-based tasks better than anyone else in the educational arena. They really have nailed down 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, where students need to learn, not only academic skills, but those skills within the context of real-life situations, simulating what they'll need to know to perform later on in life.

“Common Core is about teaching kids the practical applications of knowledge. Adult and Career and Technical education do that better than anything else.”

**Anne M. Serino**

**State Director, ABE**

**Massachusetts Department of Education**

“Yes, I believe CCSS will definitely have an impact on adult education, and I think it will be positive, but it will take a while, and it will be difficult and challenging for adult education. It definitely raises the bar. If we're talking about ABE, HSE, or any alternative, we're talking about a higher bar.

“Every time the GED changed it was difficult, but this time, in particular, we get the feeling it's going to be changing standards significantly.

“I understand people are considering two levels of credentialing: one at the high school graduate level and one at the college and career readiness level. So, for Massachusetts, one positive, in our favor, is that we do have content standards, and we have had them for a long time. People are used to the concept that you have standards, and you align your curriculum to those standards. Additionally, we have an assessment test aligned with our standards. And we have tools to help teachers address strengths and weaknesses.

“Having said all that, are our programs ready? No. And so what we’re doing is focusing on the data we have around high school equivalency test scores. We know that math is the Achilles’ heel; it’s where folks score the lowest.

“A lot of programs teach math at the end, and their only goal is to get their students a passing score on the HSE test. But that’s not really serving the student’s best interests. We need to introduce math early. We need to help people think differently about math, and they need a different set of skills when they leave us. Whether they’re going to a workplace or a post-secondary education environment, they’re going to need more math and the ability to think in math, which they don’t do now.

“We need to give people the skills that will allow them to continue to learn.”

## **Conclusion**

The experts do not all agree, but a consensus appears to have formed:

- The Common Core State Standards are here;
- They will have an impact on adult basic and secondary education programs;
- Opinions on the impact of the CCSS differ widely;
- A new means of assessing secondary completion will need to be implemented as a tool for measuring academic achievement for adult learners;
- Whatever the impact is, it will raise the bar for teaching and administering adult education and high school equivalency by increasing the rigor and quality of services, and, therefore, pose a challenge to everyone involved;
- There will be pain at the beginning as the field adjusts to the CCSS. The lack of funding for better instructor professional development will be a significant issue. If adult education professionals want to implement CCSS effectively, a fundamental change in how they perform in the classroom will be required;
- But, in the long run, the higher standards and greater rigor that will result from the CCSS will benefit adult basic and secondary education, giving it a higher profile, highlighting its need for more funding, and giving the entire field the higher level of respect and cachet that comes from meeting higher standards.



The fact is that the trends and factors compelling higher quality and an increase of rigor in educational accountability and standards affect adult education as much as they do K-12. Higher standards are long overdue in all educational systems in the U.S.

Implementation and experience on the ground will be the real test. People can plan and prepare as much as they like, but no one will know for sure what's working until the CCSS and other standard schemes have been tried and evaluated where they count most – in the classroom.

One thing is crystal clear. Higher standards and accountability in education are necessary. They are being demanded and driven from the ground up by educators, employers, parents, students, and all others who care about the nation's future.