

Where Have We Heard it Before? Survey of Maricopa County High School  
Teachers' Perceptions of Common Core Policy Rhetoric

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine Maricopa County high school teachers' perspectives on educational policy rhetoric messages. The current time and setting among Arizona high school educators provide a unique opportunity to gain the perspective of those who will be implementing the reform and held accountable for subsequent student performance before the reform takes effect and while the policy talk that precedes reform efforts is at its peak. The questions that this study sought to answer were the following:

1. What are Maricopa County High School teachers' perceptions of policy talk regarding Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSSI) and high stakes accountability measures with respect to student achievement outcomes and implementation?
2. How do these perspectives vary by teacher context (e.g. experience, content taught, district, and site demographics) within the 9-12 educational system?

To determine the answers, a sequential explanatory mixed methods design was selected. The first phase involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase. A survey instrument was developed utilizing CCSSI/PARCC policy rhetoric statements and was administered to high school teachers. Initially, survey data identified overall trends among high school teachers' perceptions of educational reform policy (CCSSI) talk messages. Subsequently, qualitative focus group interviews further informed results.

Results indicated that portions of policy talk messages have resonated; however, these tended to be the oldest and most oft-repeated statements. Newer messages related to

changes in instructional practices and student outcomes were less widely accepted. It would appear from the results that teachers are unsure of what CCSSI really entails due to a lack of clarity in message and presentations for practitioners regarding implementation. A significant complicating factor in this effort is the unique nature of the CCSSI as a nationalized movement. Furthermore in Arizona, the backlash of conservative Republicans against CCSSI has led some teachers to believe that the implementation is up in the air, without discernable direction or support. This has left educators to interpret this latest change through their own lenses, which has defined their level of agreement and acceptance with these policy statements.

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## Chapter 1 -Introduction

### **Where Have We Heard It Before?**

“Let’s adopt the Common Core and stick with it for at least 10 years. How can we see progress if we keep changing our plans?” says an American high school teacher. (Scholastic/Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, p. 19)

As the United States (U.S.) stands on the precipice of implementing a new educational reform embodied as the Common Core State Standard Initiative and PARCC Assessment Consortium, the quote from the teacher above signifies one of the unintended consequences of vacillating policy objectives throughout the last thirty years of K-12 educational reform. Starting with the call to high school curricular and instructional reform in *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), implementing standards and accountability measures under *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, imposing sanctions for insufficient academic achievement under *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, and financially incentivizing educational reforms under *Race to the Top*, each well-intentioned policy measure attempted, utilizing various mechanisms, to realize the promise of well-primed human capital, “first in the world” international achievement, and rigorous academic standards for *all* American children. To date, education policy reforms have fallen short of achieving these admirable goals reiterated throughout numerous white papers, policy agency talking points, and legislative speeches. Moving forward, the impact of the Common Core State Standards Initiative and PARCC assessments remains to be seen; however, as witnessed by prior reforms, it is certain that teachers will be entrusted to bring this policy measure’s vision and intent to fruition. In light of this responsibility, it behooves those interested in effecting change to reflect upon the legacy that past reforms

have exacted upon the teaching community and to consider teachers' perspectives moving forward into this new educational era.

### **Fast Times at Ridgmont High Puts *A Nation at Risk***

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their interests, but also the progress of society itself. (*A Nation at Risk*, National Council on Excellence in Education, 1983)

In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) ended its eighteen month evaluation of the nation's educational system in the form of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. This innocuous eighteen page report advanced the concern that the K-12 American education system was in a state of substantial decline following improvements gained during the 1950s "Sputnik Era." Focusing on high school outcomes, NCEE authors avowed that declining achievement statistics, less-rigorous instructional materials, weak educational programming, and substandard teacher quality were evidence of a system in desperate need of reform. Indeed, the data presented demonstrated substantially dissimilar levels of academic performance from prior generations. From 1963 to 1980, the College Board reported declining scores in SAT reading and mathematics, as well as a drop in the overall number and proportion of students who had "superior" level scores (NCEE, 1983). Business leaders, the U.S. military, and higher education representatives reported a steady increase in the number of new organizational entrants that required remediation for basic literacy and numeracy skills. Researchers reported that U.S. colleges and universities had lower academic entrance requirements than in previous years along with increased remedial



math and English courses offerings perceived to be caused by a lack of “higher order thinking skills” among recent high school graduates (NCEE, 1983).

While serving to bolster the commission’s concerns, the evidence utilized also belied the enormous societal and economic shifts that had impacted K-20 education since the Civil Rights Movement; however, NCEE authors failed to address the issue of equity other than to call for an improved K-12 educational system for all in light of improved human capital needs. As American students had slipped from their first place status among their international peers, warned the commission, so too could the American economy slip from its first place status in the world marketplace. The commission issued a call to action “to turn the tide of mediocrity” and reform high school educational programming, improve teacher quality, revise curricular materials, and overhaul classroom instructional formats so that American youth could rise to meet the demands of the emerging “informational age” economy.

Undoubtedly the report served to shock the general public and became a rallying cry for educational reformers, but it also served to coalesce parallel concerns between state and national policymakers. Prior to the 1983 report, twenty-six states had modified their education statutes to reflect elevated graduation requirements, thereby signaling awareness that local expectations of performance were substandard. Additionally, nineteen states had established skills-based exit exams for high school graduates, thereby ensuring that their students had received “adequate” instruction from their teachers. With the emergence of information technology on the industrial scene, twenty-one legislatures added computer literacy curricular requirements for teachers and students which aligned with a component of the NCEE’s ideal “new basics” program of study for students.

Instructional time requirements were lengthened in seven states with another nine considering modifications their state's school calendars and instructional minutes legislation. Moreover, prior to April 1983, several state legislatures already had begun the process of reviewing teacher evaluation and compensation formulas, the results of which would emerge as revised evaluation practices and new merit-pay systems, such as Career Ladders and Master Teacher Programs (Walton, 1983; Firestone, 1989).

Certainly these state reform efforts coincided in a timely fashion with the release of the *Nation at Risk* report and served to reassure those constituencies that policymakers had a sense of heightened awareness to the urgent nature of K-12 education dilemmas. In the case of one state education superintendent lauded for the decision to implement new graduation standards, the release of *Nation at Risk* obscured the attention and efforts that the state had undertaken for a year prior. When asked by reporters for commentary regarding the responsiveness of his department to the NCEE report, "I was too embarrassed to tell them (the press) that we couldn't have done it that fast if we wanted to" (Walton, 1983). For those state policymakers who had not yet engaged in education reform discussion, the business and public sector reaction demanded the development of education commissions to ascertain each state's level of risk, as enumerated by *Nation at Risk*, and to determine which recommendations were most applicable to current deficits. Following the adjournment of these commissions, many public school teachers found themselves facing multiple state controlled curricular, instructional, and evaluative changes that were once in the purview of their local district or school site leadership (Kimpston & Anderson, 1986).

Interestingly, teachers demonstrated varied opinions to the shift of educational decision making from the local level to the state-led, compliance oriented measures that grew out of the *Nation at Risk* reforms. One of the most notable reform efforts centered on curricular and educational programming alterations designed to increase academic rigor. Across the country, states began to establish requirements for textbooks as well as common expectations for curriculum that significantly changed the roles of teachers in determining instructional content scope and sequence (Buss, Rosenberg & Tosh, 1988; Bridgman, 1984). Throughout this transition, teachers were surveyed regarding their perceptions of curriculum reform with respect to professionalism (e.g. expertise, trust) and implementation (e.g. fidelity of use). When surveyed regarding their perceptions of who should make curricular decisions, teachers self-reported an interest in being included in curriculum development discussions; however, further investigation found that teachers often subscribed to an advisory role and ceded responsibility for the final determination of content to other curricular leadership, such as principals or district level content experts (Kimpston & Anderson, 1982). Overall, teachers were cognizant that their professional freedoms to determine curriculum had diminished as state education agencies began offer more prescriptive boundaries for curricular decisions. Nonetheless, teachers expressed greater concern with maintaining personal freedom to determine the delivery of content versus freedom to determine the content itself (Zahoric, 1975; Young, 1979; Buss, Rosenberg & Tosh, 1988).

While teachers were generally unified regarding maintaining instructional freedom, their level of receptiveness to implementing a prepared curriculum varied depending upon contextual factors, such as the grade level instructed, teacher experience,

gender and school size and location. In their research on Minnesota public school teachers, Kimpston and Anderson (1986) found that junior high teachers had a greater desire for planned curriculum than elementary or high school teachers, which was attributed to the unique milieu of junior high instruction. They reasoned that high school teachers, as content experts, did not believe that it was as necessary to have a prescribed curriculum and elementary teachers relied on textbooks to steer instruction should a specified curriculum not be present. Additionally, K-12 teachers self-reported that they were more likely to attend to curriculum developed at a district level, rather than those developed at the classroom level. Kimpston and Anderson hypothesized that the formality of district level curriculum coordinators elevated the curriculum to a more legitimate status than those curricular guides developed at the classroom level.

The 1980s curricular restructuring illustrates the “top-down, bottom up focus” of state educational reform efforts following *Nation at Risk*. As states took a more substantial role in framing expectations for curriculum, they also considered changes that more directly influenced teacher quality and compensation. Unlike the reforms that influence student outcomes, these discussions were met with a more unified disdain by teachers. In a 1983 Detroit Free Press poll, 61% of Michigan teachers responded unfavorably to the *Nation at Risk* merit pay proposal, which suggested paying teachers differentially based on superior instructional performance relative to their peers (Macnow, 1983). Of those teachers that responded favorably to the merit-pay proposal, 80% felt that peer teachers should decide who received the additional monies. Given that merit pay signified differential outcomes depending upon the context of teacher experience and current compensation levels, this response from Michigan’s teachers was

hardly surprising. For veteran teachers compensated via the conventional, experience-based system, merit pay represented a tangible threat to their current earning status; however, in states such as Arizona, where a greater number of young, inexperienced teachers received lower salaries, merit pay formats (e.g. career ladders) offered states a unique equalizing opportunity to attract and retain better teachers (Firestone, 1989).

Aside from the merit pay proposal, the majority of Michigan teachers responded favorably to NCEE propositions that impacted students directly (Macnow, 1983). Ninety percent favored elevating requirements for student promotion and graduation, including increasing core area credit requirements and including a semester computer science credit. Eighty-four percent of teachers called for minimum competency examinations required for graduation and sixty percent recommended that students be assigned more homework. Teachers demonstrated divergent opinions regarding their own students' readiness for college and career. Suburban Michigan teachers reported substantially higher percentages of students who were well or extremely well prepared for college compared to their urban counterparts (64% to 14%). When considering vocational readiness, suburban and rural teachers evaluated 32% of their students as career ready as opposed to 8% of Detroit area instructors.

Teachers were equally divergent when it came to describing the current and future goals of education. A study of 279 metropolitan Atlanta area teachers found dissimilar responses among K-12 teachers that aligned to current teaching assignment (high school/middle school/elementary) and the teacher's gender and race perspectives (Hoffman, Hudson & Hudson, 1991). Despite this overall diversity, researchers discovered key points of alignment that held implications for *Nation at Risk* reforms. In

evaluating the current and future goals of education, the majority of Atlanta teachers eschewed the idea schools should be to prepare students for career and vocational work. While not entirely unified, the majority of teachers indicated that a primary goal of schools should be to teach basic skills and emphasize the development of critical thinking and reasoning skills in the higher grades. In this circumstance, teachers appeared to reject the NCEE's assertion that schools should take a key role in developing human capital for the "information age" economy.

By no means was this the only rejection of reform philosophies among teachers in the 1980s. Mississippi teachers experienced the realities of ambitious state level reform policies designed to improve educational outcomes for all students following abysmal state achievement data that impacted business sector investments. In attempting to increase the level of instruction, the state implemented a prescriptive reform and established stringent compliance measures that were necessary for public schools to retain their accreditation status (Heard, 1985). While the state invested over \$100 million dollars into their improvement efforts, teachers cited extant factors such as low community and parental support and increased socio-economic stratification that were untouched by reform measures and were at the heart of declining academic achievement issue. Ultimately, teachers believed that educational reform had come to represent "neat prescriptions" whose intent was to restrict their professional practice due to a *Nation at Risk's* indictment of public educators (Heard, 1985).

The degree to which policymakers acknowledged teachers' opinions, like the opinions themselves, was dependent upon the political context in which teachers resided. In their survey and review of six states' policy making mechanism, Catherine Marshall,

Douglas Mitchell, and Frederick Wirt (1986), ascertained differing levels of influence by teacher organizations within state-level policy making arenas. These advocacy groups ranged from exerting significant levels of influence as “Insiders” to residing on the fringes of policy making discussions as “Far Circle” players. In Arizona, the Arizona Education Association (AEA) was categorized as a far circle player in that it offered substantial feedback on policy, but was largely unsuccessful in influencing policy decisions, unlike key legislators, the State Superintendent of Schools, and the State Board of Education who were viewed as the primary architects of educational policy reform. Non -“Right-to-Work” states that housed stronger teacher unions, such as Illinois and Wisconsin, were found to have teacher organizations that exerted influence at the level of insiders. Researchers found that the distance of teachers from the development of policy measures did hold repercussions for reform efforts. In reform initiatives observed in Arizona and Wisconsin, the level of teacher inclusivity during initiative development influenced not only the policy itself, but subsequently its implementation and level of effectiveness (Marshall, Mitchell & Wirt, 1986; Marshall, 1988; Placier, 1993).

### **Stand and Deliver on Goals 2000: Educate America Act**

By the year 2000: All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy. (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, H.R. 1804. January 25, 1994)

As the 1980s came to a close, the stakeholders and policymakers noted that the *Nation at Risk* reforms were not widely successful in moving the needle on increased

academic achievement. Convinced that further efforts were needed to develop the essential skills necessary the modern economy, President George H.W. Bush's convened the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) which included six state governors, three White House officials, and the Secretary of Education. The panel's preliminary recommendations appeared in President Bush's 1991 State of the Union Address and became the framework for "Goals 2000," which set ambitious objectives for improving K-12 education through the alignment of state, district, and community attention to student achievement outcomes (Walker, 1990; Rothman, 1991). Following the President's address, the nation's governors pledged to strive for the following goals:

- All students will be ready to learn; the high-school-graduation rate will increase to 90%;
- Students will demonstrate competencies in challenging subject matter;
- The U.S. will achieve first in the world status in math and science performance;
- Every American adult will be literate and every school will be free of drugs and violence. (Goals 2000, 1994; Rothman, 1991)

To facilitate this process, the NEGP released recommendations regarding assessment and student level data that should be collected and tracked in to better ascertain progress and determine what additional reforms should be implemented. The panel recommended establishing a national assessment system, utilizing the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and literacy achievement data, developing standardized measures for benchmarking student readiness for school as well as instituting student identification systems that would track students across districts and



states (NEGP, 1991). The panels' recommendations eventually merged with measures that established clear and rigorous academic standards, performance level objectives, valid and reliable assessment requirements, and accountability systems to become the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* passed in January 1994. Later that fall, President Clinton buttressed requirements for state and local area agency (LEA) compliance to the *Goals 2000* reforms during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) whereby Title I funding eligibility was linked to implementing to *Goals 2000* improvement plans (Wixson, Dutro & Athan, 2003; Rothman, 2011).

### **Current State of Reform Implementation**

As of fall 2012, Arizona high schools are in very early implementation stages of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Per the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Race to the Top Implementation Plan, English Language Arts (ELA) teachers of ninth graders are the only grade level expected to fully transition to the AZ CCSS in the 2012-13 school year (ADE, 2012a). All other subject areas (Mathematics and ELA) and grade levels are expected to target implementation which is defined as “targeted instructional shifts related to specific content emphasis by strand (or domain and fluency expectations)” (ADE, 2012a, p. 3-4). High school grade levels that are targeting implementation in the 2012-13 SY are expected to fully implement the CCSS in SY 2013-14 with the summative PARCC assessment becoming active in SY 2014-15.

As a part of preparing districts for transition to CCSS, the ADE Timeline for Implementation lists continuing professional development and technical assistance for school districts through SY 2012-13. Regarding accountability and assessment, the ADE timeline lists winter 2012 as a target date for discussions related to increasing rigor in the

AIMS examination. It is anticipated that SY 2012-13 testing cycle will also provide field testing opportunities for PARCC items that will be utilized in the final 2015 examination cycle (ADE, 2012b). Beyond the timeline for implementation, no accountability measures are in place to assure that teachers have transitioned, or are in the process of transitioning to the CCSS.

Further accountability measures beyond curricular and assessment transition have also begun to take shape through the Arizona Ready Partnership. This program, an extension of the Arizona Education Reform Plan and coordinated through Governor Jan Brewer's Office of Education and Innovation, aligns with expectations established by the Race to the Top competition. Thus far, Arizona Ready has released information related to student achievement in literacy, mathematics, college attainment rates, NAEP achievement, and high school graduation statistics. This information is aligned to the achievement goals specified in Arizona's Race to the Top application. It is expected that the goals related to literacy, college attainment, and academic performance will be achieved by SY 2020 (AZ Office of Education and Innovation, 2012).

### **Research Problem**

The current time and setting among Arizona high school educators provides a unique opportunity to gain the perspective of those who will be implementing the reform and held accountable for subsequent student performance before the reform takes effect and while the policy talk that precedes reform efforts is at its peak. As the framework of prior reforms and current high stakes accountability measures continue to echo across the educational landscape, the perspectives of educators in relation to policy messages have significance as the Common Core State Standards Initiative and PARCC Assessments

move from transitional to active status. As studied previously, educators' individual capacities with respect to knowledge and personal beliefs, coupled with organizational context, influence implementation of reforms at the classroom level (Spillane, 2004). The degree to which perceptions vary among high school teachers based on contextual factors and between policymakers can serve to foreshadow realized outcomes.

**Question 1**

What are Maricopa County High School teachers' perceptions of policy talk regarding Common Core Standards Initiative and high stakes accountability measures with respect to student achievement outcomes and implementation?

**Question 2**

How do these perspectives vary by teacher context (e.g. experience, content taught, district and site demographics) within the 9-12 educational system? (Variation of Perceptions among Implementers)

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Can schools be changed? Depending upon the data, the answer to this question leads to two distinctly different conclusions. An examination of historic and contemporary policy talk messages indicates that schools have not progressed as recurring themes and reform initiatives resurface within decades of one another. On the other hand, long term educational trends point to institutional change and improvements that have accrued throughout reform cycles, thereby attesting to the progress that education has achieved. While these conclusions contradict one another, David Tyack and Larry Cuban argue that both are correct as historic evidence reveals two systems (one political, one organizational) that work independently of each other, yet interact and influence the other over time (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

### **Policy Talk**

Policy talk serves as advocacy for change in education. At the outset of any reform effort, issues are identified and new solutions promoted in an effort to solve them. Tyack and Cuban define these actions as “policy talk.” In education reform, policy talk precedes policy action where reforms are formally adopted by governing agencies. Reform implementation follows by educational institutions at a later date and slower pace, often after policy makers have moved on to other projects.

Policy talk is reflective of public concerns and opinions regarding the current state and direction of American society. Americans have long regarded education as a viable means to fix the future through better educating their youth today. Yet America is a very diverse country with differing ideals, values, concerns, and purposes for education. The

interaction between these conflicting values and interests, coupled with the decentralized nature of public school governance, results in the constant cycling of policy talk and advocacy for educational reform. As Tyack and Cuban state, “Americans have deep faith in educational remedies for societal ills but often disagree about what is wrong and how to fix it” (1995, p. 553). Incongruent philosophies initiate and sustain policy talk over time, thereby leading to the conclusion that education reforms have never fulfilled their promises.

### **Policy Elites**

Public education lies in the purview of state and local governments; therefore it follows that when concerns arise, communities will work to resolve them through local policy talk and policy advocacy. American education is neither supervised at a national level, nor unilaterally accountable to the federal government. Nevertheless, there are moments in history where national leaders take the lead in spearheading and advocating for national education reforms. While it would seem that states and localities should reject this intrusion as an overreach of national authority, interestingly they do not. Tyack and Cuban (1995) attribute this phenomenon to widespread public concern that education has not adequately insulated American society against perceived threats (internal or external). In these situations, the public is content to let national leaders, termed “policy elites,” take the lead in diagnosing and developing extensive solutions to improve education.

Policy elites seek to persuade the American public that they possess definitive solutions to reforming schools. Unlike the local communities, policy elites have access to extensive intellectual and social capital, in the form of educational experts, policy

makers, and media sources. These attributes serve to forward their policy talk and buoy widespread support for proposed reforms. While the efforts of policy elites are substantive, it should be noted that they are rarely inclusive. Policy elites control the process of issue identification and policy advocacy, which often excludes involvement of those most affected by the reform, namely teachers. The resultant outcome leads to policy talk and advocacy measures that do not account for all variables often leading to results that are far from what the policy elites originally intended (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

### **The Etymology of Policy Talk**

As an artifact of school reform, policy talk contains a vast amount of information regarding the political context during the time it occurred. Terminology used in policy talk vacillates between liberal and conservative viewpoints, as influenced by the dominant political party. During conservative administrations, policy elites forwarded appeals for talent development, competition, and quality. Policy elites that led reform efforts during liberal administrations promoted equality and access for all students.

Although policy talk reflects differing political viewpoints, policy elites have sought to shape educational policy that achieves consensus; therefore, educational reform policies between political parties are not significantly disparate. As education is widely accepted as providing for the common good, it is thought that citizens should be able to agree on the outcomes that it achieves. Yet as mentioned earlier, America is a nation of diverse ideals and concerns. What some stakeholders view as a desirable outcome in meeting universal equity and achievement for all, others view as loss in opportunity and ability to achieve self-actualization. In working toward broad agreement, policy elites have merged these differing goals into outcomes whose underlying principles are in

tension with each other. Thus policy talk reflects the variability in American philosophies for education, split between dual commitments to competition and equality, and places educators in an untenable situation where the achievement of one ideal leads to failure in the other.

### **Tinkering With the Schoolhouse**

While the consistent cycling of policy talk and reform measures could lead to the conclusion that education remains unchanged, nothing is further from the truth. Long term institutional trends indicate that education has changed in response to reforms. It is important to note, however, that institutions implement change on a different time frame – and sense of urgency- than policy elites and policy makers demand. While political regimes and public concerns shift over the course of a decade, schools are still working to implement the changes required of previous policy iterations. While the reasons for unequal implementation are as varied as the schools themselves, it is important to recognize that schools do alter their practices in response to reform. When new policy talk appears, even with recurrent themes, it interacts with schools that are operating in new organizational contexts as influenced by prior reform efforts.

Although change happens, rarely do institutional reality and reform ideology completely align. Education reform efforts evolve, or devolve, in ways that policy elites may never have intended. Recriminations from both reformers and practitioners serve as unempirical conclusions for why some reforms achieved results while others “flickered out like fireflies.” In studying implementation and sustainability, Tyack and Cuban (1995) found key criteria among reform measures that differentiated outcomes. Generally, reforms that were non-controversial, received influential support, were

required by law and easily monitored, and were able to generate support from laymen (e.g. administrators, teachers) were likely to last. Those reforms that departed from conventional views of school functions, demanded fundamental change in the behavior of teachers (i.e. instruction), or were promoted solely by individuals outside of the educational establishment were more likely to fail. In general, the closer the reform gets to the entering the classroom, the harder it is to implement and sustain.

### **Nationalizing Education Reforms in the New Millennium**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) represents the latest iteration of standards based accountability reform. A set of literacy and numeracy standards anchored in career and college readiness thresholds, CCSSI offers ambitious change on a nationwide scale. At the outset, it overlays thirty years of prior reform that include standardized testing, subgroup achievement accountability, and high stakes exit exams. Beyond the standards themselves, CCSSI is a part the Obama Administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative that involves substantive shifts to teacher evaluation practices, expanded data collection (PK-20), greater adoption of market-based choice policies, and calls for innovation to include STEM (Science, Math, Engineering and Technology).

Initially CCSSI differentiates itself from previous standards reforms through widespread adoption by 45 states and three territories as a common curricular and instructional framework. In adopting CCSSI, states agree to have academic proficiencies measured by a common exam (i.e. PARCC or SMARTER-Balance) with national, standardized achievement thresholds. Inherent in achieving the standards is an ambitious plan to reform teaching practices, curriculum materials, and lesson design within the



classroom. As opposed to prior standards reforms that simply declared “what” teachers should teach, CCSSI policy documents recommend changes regarding “how” teachers should teach through direct advisement on curriculum materials, calls for “soft skill” development (e.g. independence, collaboration) as well as interdisciplinary study via reading and writing in the content areas. It is implied that student mastery of some of these select skills would be measured through common assessments, in addition to content area knowledge. Thus, the Common Core State Standards signal a substantial shift from state level guidance on curriculum, instruction, and accountability to a nationalized model.

As the CCSSI transitions from policy advocacy to implementation, what has been said about education (policy talk), who has said it (policy elites), and what it is intended to achieve (etymology) can serve to illuminate contemporary opinions and ambitions that the public holds for society. To date, prior policy talk examinations have taken place posthumously in conjunction with examinations of school reform implementation efforts. Reviewing policy talk “as it happens” provides the opportunity to center the rhetoric of this reform beyond mere criticisms of schools into the current socio-political context of public education. Furthermore, examining contemporary policy talk against teacher perspectives also serves to illuminate how feasible these goals are as they filter into the classroom. Tyack and Cuban’s analyses center on the institutional trends among schools; however, as discussed earlier, CCSSI requires changes to content and instruction. As teachers are charged with affecting these changes, juxtaposing policy talk concerns and ambitions against practitioner knowledge and experience provides insight regarding the

viability of this reform. Ultimately, this discussion serves as an informal benchmark of how far we come, how far we have yet to go, and if we are on the right road to get there.

### **The Road to the Common Core: Policy Talk in Practice**

“America’s prosperity has always rested on how well we educate our children – but never more so than today.” (Obama, 2010, para. 2)

### **Persistent Problem: The Issue of Education and the Economy**

Over the past thirty years, sustained concern regarding the United States’ ability to maintain economic advantage relative to other economies has justified numerous K-12 education reform efforts. To support each reform, American politicians and policymakers submit that the key to improving economic outcomes lies in ensuring a strong human capital pipeline. A strong human capital pipeline is operationally defined as one where all entering individuals (primarily high school and/or college graduates) have the prerequisite knowledge and skills necessary to effectively participate in the workforce. The current definition includes a codicil that most current and future jobs will require training beyond high school; therefore, a strong human capital pipeline requires students to be well suited to enter a two-year or four-year post-secondary institution following high school graduation. It is argued that developing such a workforce will reduce business and industry training costs and in turn serve to facilitate domestic economic growth and foreign capital investment.

As the public education system functions as a nationwide conduit for students to gain necessary knowledge and skills, it follows that K-12 student academic performance measures can serve as periodic evaluations regarding progress toward developing a strong human capital pipeline. Since the 1980s, state K-12 student achievement data has been examined at national levels, with additional assessment data added from national

(NAEP -National Assessment of Educational Progress) and international examinations (PISA - Program for International Student Assessment, TIMSS- Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, PIRLS- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) as these tests were subsequently developed. Recently, select post-secondary measures and statistics have been added to this comprehensive assessment data review. To date each evaluation has resulted in a call for the K-12 education system to improve academic performance relative to their international peers, most significantly in the areas of mathematics and science.

### **Prior Solutions and Subtle Changes: Standards 1.0, 2.0, 3.0**

State educational systems are cooking their books and lying to kids and parents. Specifically, they are rigging educational standards, setting the bar for "proficiency" far too low and creating a dishonestly rosy picture of American schools. By doing so, states are torpedoing the future of America's students and American business. (Barrett, 2011b, para. 3)

The lack of achievement dominance by U.S. students has fueled a steady stream of content standard development, testing, and accountability measures over the last thirty years. The 1980s and 90s witnessed the creation of statewide academic standards and testing intended to improve nationwide achievement in literacy and numeracy skills. Initially, content standards were presented in grade spans (e.g. K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) providing local schools and districts the opportunity to define what standards would be taught at which grade levels. To measure and compare student achievement results, state governments purchased assessments, typically national, norm referenced exams such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, to be administered at key grade levels. Starting in the mid-1990s, state specific exams were created to align with state content standards and a national examination (i.e. NAEP) added recapture comparison data between states on

student academic performance. Nationwide, state departments of education collected aggregate achievement data on literacy and numeracy performance and primarily reported this information to the public through media outlets.

Content standards and assessments implementation was facilitated by federal legislation and funding requirements. In spite of these federal requirements, school districts and schools were nominally accountable for teaching state content standards and their resultant student achievement performance. In 2001, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (a.k.a. “The No Child Left Behind Act”) instituted comprehensive accountability measures for student academic performance disaggregated by content, grade level, and sub-group identification. Introduced as “The Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that *no child is left behind*” (NCLB, 2001), this measure established minimal levels of proficiency for all students and financially sanctioned school districts and schools that failed to achieve specified performance thresholds. Although well intentioned, the high stakes nature of this reform led to increased organizational pressures and unforeseen consequences. Among these, the exclusion of low stakes or non-tested content in elementary instruction (i.e. science, social studies, fine arts), regrouping of students to improve school-wide academic performance (i.e. retention of Special Education/ ELL students), and the lowering of statewide performance levels to improve achievement data (i.e. altered cut scores, development of high school augmentation formulas).

## **Revisiting Educational Reform: Shifting Focus From K-12 to K-20 Continuum**

Thirteen years ago we failed the children of Arizona and we have vowed to never let it happen again. As part of No Child Left Behind, we implemented a high stakes graduation exam at the end of sophomore year called AIMS, the Arizona Instrument for Measuring Standards. It could not be compared to anybody else, either inside or outside of the United States. So every year when we congratulated ourselves for doing better than the year before, we didn't realize that we were doing better on an inferior exam and everybody else was blowing us away. If you want a recipe for K-12 disaster, implement your high school graduation exam for sophomore year and make it easy enough that almost everybody in the state passes. (Crandall, 2011)

Shortly after educators began adjusting to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reform measures, new concerns surfaced regarding college readiness in light of NCLB's focus on minimum proficiency standards. Nationally, educational interest groups began examining the alignment of state standards and exit assessments in relation to post-secondary outcomes. An examination of six state high school exit test revealed "modest" proficiency requirements for less rigorous content when compared to international performance levels and career and college readiness standards (Achieve, 2004c). Similar to results found by Achieve, researchers examining K-12 curricular and assessment alignment and post-secondary entrance requirements found moderate to uneven curricular alignment and differing levels of cognitive complexity on the exit and entrance examinations reviewed (Shelton & Brown, 2010; Conley et al., 2010; Cimetta, D'Agostino, & Levin, 2010; Brown & Conley, 2007). This research illuminated a "loosely coupled system" where high school exit proficiencies are vastly different than the entry level content knowledge and skills needed for success in the post-secondary education.

At the state level, governors and state boards of education began independent examinations regarding the alignment of state exit exams with respect to college and career readiness goals. In 2009, the Arizona AIMS Task Force reported that the high school AIMS test was an essential measure of 10th grade basic standards that held schools accountable for performance. Yet it also functioned as a high stakes threshold that students needed to pass in order to graduate. Given these parameters, most importantly the requirement of multiple testing windows for students in need of remediation, the AIMS was deemed a “limited” exam. In their report, the task force stated, “...we believe that AIMS measures some skills that are transferrable to college and career settings. But we need a credible, robust test of college and career readiness” (p. 6). The task force advised the supplementation of college and career readiness exams at specified intervals to inform high school students of their progress toward college readiness in conjunction with existing college and career planning policies (i.e. Education and Career Action Plan-ECAP, AZ AIMS Task Force, 2009). Further state and national reviews revealed that while K-12 education had engaged in vertical standard setting and assessment development for at least twenty years, nationwide the process stopped short of including post-secondary education readiness as a goal.

### **Policy Talk: Build a Globally Competitive Workforce**

For too long, we've been lying to kids. We tell them they're doing fine, give them good grades, and tell them they're proficient on state tests that aren't challenging. Today, our standards are too low and the results on international tests show it. Worse yet, we see the signals in the international economy as more and more engineers, doctors, and science and math Ph.D.s come from abroad. You must resist the temptation to make these standards too easy. Our children deserve to graduate from high school prepared for College and the jobs of the future. (Duncan, 2009, para. 78)

The issue of building a competitive workforce began to rise on the national agenda as industries increasingly outsourced low-skilled labor to cheaper international labor markets. In the wake of trade agreements such as NAFTA that enabled manufacturers to shift work outside of the U.S., policy experts began cautioning the public of a grim economic future if the United States did not improve the education of its labor force. Couched in economic terms, policy analysts contended that an international market for low-skill labor had been created and businesses could (and would) purchase the lowest labor prices possible. In 1990, the report *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* by the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce argued,

If the United States wants to continue to compete (with low-skill labor), they can look forward to a continued decline in wages and very long working hours. Alternatively, we could abandon low-skill work and concentrate on competing in the worldwide market for high-value-added products and services. To do that, we would have to adopt internationally benchmarked standards for educating our students and our workers, because only countries with highly skilled workforces can successfully compete. (NCEE, 1990, p. 3).

Following manufacturing outsourcing, the 2000s witnessed a rapid expansion of technology, international communication infrastructure and digital information sharing formats that further expanded opportunities for industry to capitalize on international labor markets (Friedman, 2005). Unlike their predecessors bound by geography, corporations and service industries could economically access and utilize a vast market of semi-skilled employees worldwide without having to physically move infrastructure. In this new model, individuals could work within virtual office space as easily as operating within a physical facility. As with the 1990s manufacturing labor projections, policy analysts again cautioned that the accessible and abundant supply of international semi-skilled workers imperiled the current standard of living for semi-skilled American

workers. Adding to these concerns were public and private sector reports projecting high employment demands for individuals with postsecondary education, especially in the area of mathematics, science, and engineering.

The 2007 National Academies of Sciences report, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*, drew specific connections between economic dominance and a highly educated science and technological workforce (COSEP). This Congressionally commissioned report offered ten public policy recommendations targeted toward ensuring continued U.S. leadership among the world's economies. Among their recommendations, the panel recommended changes to K-12 education that were anticipated to positively impact academic achievement for students in mathematics and science. In identifying areas of concern, the authors cited mediocre mathematics, science, and literacy academic performance as measured by the PISA exam. Relative to their international peers, U.S. students consistently achieved at average levels when compared to other OECD nations. The report attributed this middling academic performance of U.S. 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders to low teacher quality and content knowledge, the lack of national content standards, and the decentralized nature of public education. The panel detailed rates of degree attainment between US and international undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students in engineering, science, and mathematics. The panel cited the following:

- “About one-third of US students intending to major in engineering switch majors before graduating.
- In South Korea, 38% of all undergraduates receive their degrees in natural science or engineering. In France, the figure is 47%, in



China 50%, and in Singapore, 67%. In the United States, the corresponding figure is 15%.

- Some 34% of doctoral degrees in natural sciences and 56% of engineering PhDs in the United States are awarded to foreign-born students” (COSEP, 2007, p. 16)

The authors implied that the low numbers of science and engineering graduates was directly linked to a lack of preparedness in earlier academic studies. They challenged policy makers to implement reforms to improve the quality of K-12 mathematics and science education for the express purpose of producing well-prepared high school graduates who could enter post-secondary studies without remediation. They reasoned that these students would likely persist in advanced math and science studies, obtain science and technology degrees, and thereby increase U.S. innovation and economic competitiveness (COSEP, 2007).

PISA examination data substantiated national concerns that American math and science instruction produced inferior results. Administered to high school aged students (aged 15 years and 3 months to 16 years 2 months) from 75 countries, the PISA exam focuses on the application of skills across content areas (i.e. literacy, math, and science). In this manner, students are effectively measured on cognitive skills as well as general content knowledge. Similar to format and structure of the NAEP exam, the two-hour examination blends short answer and multiple choice questions and does not require students to take all components of the exam. The main focus of the 2009 PISA exam was reading with a lesser portion of the exam focusing on math and science (OECD, 2010a). During this administration, the performance of American students on the exam is

statistically equivalent to the OECD mean in the areas of reading and science, and under the OECD mean in mathematics (OECD, 2010a). Overall, thirteen industrialized countries demonstrated educational achievement that outpaced the average U.S. student performance. Disaggregating student performance by region revealed great variability among academic performance within the United States education system. Students the Northeast region of the United States perform at a level comparable with the Netherlands while students in the Southern region of the United States reflect academic abilities similar to those of students in Greece (OECD, 2010b). This data reflects a large gap between academic achievement of American students at the highest level (college bound track) and the lowest level (basic/core track). These unequal achievement levels are notably divided among racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines and are interpreted as a lack of educational equity within the American educational system.

### **Policy Talk: College and Career Readiness for All**

Whether you see improving graduation rates and reducing dropout rates as a fight for social justice, as an economic imperative, or as integral to national security, it is a battle we must win. By most measures, our system of higher education remains the best in the world, but only 40% of the current generation of 25 to 34-year-olds have degrees... too many incoming College freshmen are unprepared. Nearly 40% need remedial education and many eventually drop out...And most high school graduates are simply deficient for even entry-level jobs. (Duncan, 2009, para. 19)

In tangent with these reports, post-secondary and high school completion statistics collected under the George W. Bush administration education reform requirements delivered both encouraging and discouraging news. Since 1963, student enrollment in post-secondary education (2-year and 4-year institutions) increased 272 percent with the largest percentage increase found among public community colleges enrollment at 741%

(NCES, 2011b). Community colleges reported that their incoming populations were more diverse, economically, ethnically, and academically than populations found at traditional four-year university campuses. Enrollment data collected by U.S. Department of Education corroborates this claim. As shown in Figure 1, enrollment patterns differ significantly among post-secondary institutions.

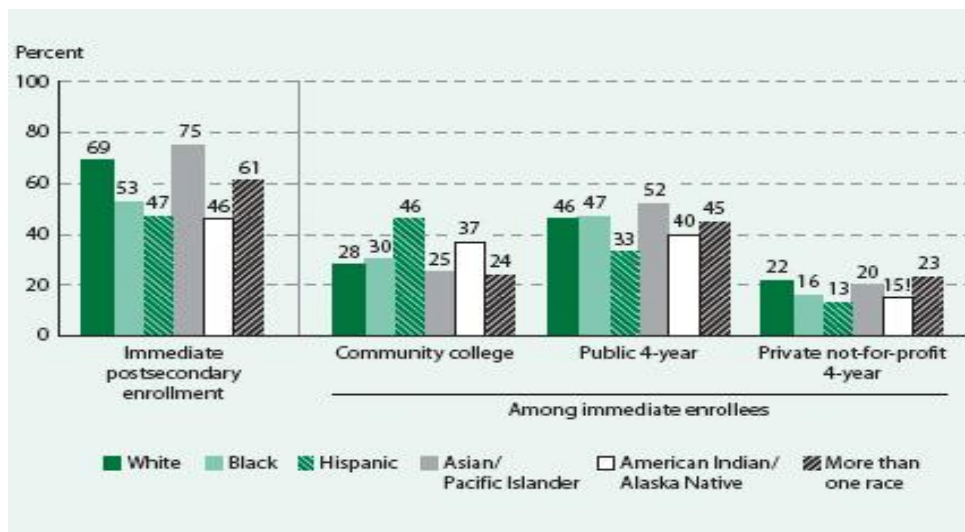


Figure 1. Percentage of 2004 seniors who enrolled immediately in a postsecondary institution after high school and percentage distribution of these immediate enrollees, by control and type of institution and race/ethnicity: 2004. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2006.

While enrollment among high school graduates into some level of post-secondary education appears to have equalized within racial and ethnic subgroups, degree attainment appears to differ significantly between white and minority students. As evidenced by Figure 2, White students continue to obtain 2-year and 4-year degrees at substantially higher rates as compared to other demographic subgroups.

Year	Post Secondary Enrollment Rates										Percentage distribution of Associates degrees conferred						Percentage distribution of Bachelors degrees conferred					
	Total, all students	Level of institution		Race/ethnicity			Race/ethnicity			Total	Race/ethnicity		Total	Race/ethnicity		Total	Race/ethnicity					
		2-year	4-year	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic		White	Black		Hispanic	White		Black	Hispanic				
1996	43.4 (0.54)	11.5 (0.35)	31.9 (0.50)	45.1 (0.64)	35.9 (1.51)	34.5 (1.83)	76.7	9.4	6.9	100.0	76.7	9.4	6.9	100.0	77.8	7.9	5.0					
1997	45.2 (0.54)	12.1 (0.35)	33.1 (0.51)	46.6 (0.64)	39.5 (1.54)	36.0 (1.77)	75.2	9.9	7.6	100.0	75.2	9.9	7.6	100.0	76.8	8.0	5.3					
1998	45.2 (0.53)	12.6 (0.36)	32.6 (0.50)	46.9 (0.64)	40.0 (1.54)	33.9 (1.68)	74.0	9.9	8.2	100.0	74.0	9.9	8.2	100.0	76.1	8.3	5.6					
1999	43.7 (0.52)	11.2 (0.33)	32.5 (0.49)	45.3 (0.63)	39.2 (1.50)	31.6 (1.68)	73.1	10.3	8.6	100.0	73.1	10.3	8.6	100.0	75.7	8.5	5.8					
2000	43.2 (0.52)	11.5 (0.33)	31.8 (0.48)	44.1 (0.62)	39.3 (1.46)	36.2 (1.69)	72.4	10.7	9.1	100.0	72.4	10.7	9.1	100.0	75.1	8.7	6.1					
2001	44.3 (0.51)	11.9 (0.33)	32.4 (0.48)	45.4 (0.62)	40.2 (1.45)	34.8 (1.61)	71.0	11.0	9.9	100.0	71.0	11.0	9.9	100.0	74.5	8.9	6.2					
2002	44.7 (0.48)	11.8 (0.31)	32.9 (0.46)	46.7 (0.59)	40.2 (1.39)	31.6 (1.38)	70.2	11.3	10.1	100.0	70.2	11.3	10.1	100.0	74.2	9.0	6.4					
2003	45.7 (0.48)	12.3 (0.32)	33.4 (0.46)	47.2 (0.59)	41.4 (1.43)	35.8 (1.42)	69.1	11.9	10.5	100.0	69.1	11.9	10.5	100.0	73.7	9.2	6.6					
2004	45.8 (0.48)	11.3 (0.30)	34.5 (0.46)	47.4 (0.59)	40.8 (1.41)	37.3 (1.40)	68.5	12.2	10.9	100.0	68.5	12.2	10.9	100.0	73.3	9.4	6.8					
2005	46.8 (0.48)	11.6 (0.31)	35.2 (0.46)	48.6 (0.59)	41.4 (1.39)	37.4 (1.41)	68.3	12.4	11.3	100.0	68.3	12.4	11.3	100.0	72.9	9.5	7.0					
2006	45.0 (0.47)	11.5 (0.30)	33.5 (0.45)	46.5 (0.58)	42.0 (1.38)	35.5 (1.37)	68.1	12.6	11.3	100.0	68.1	12.6	11.3	100.0	72.4	9.6	7.2					
2007	46.1 (0.47)	13.0 (0.32)	33.1 (0.44)	47.8 (0.58)	40.1 (1.32)	39.2 (1.37)	67.5	12.6	11.7	100.0	67.5	12.6	11.7	100.0	72.2	9.6	7.5					
2008	46.6 (0.46)	13.9 (0.32)	32.7 (0.44)	49.2 (0.58)	40.0 (1.33)	36.7 (1.32)	66.8	12.8	12.2	100.0	66.8	12.8	12.2	100.0	71.8	9.8	7.9					
2009	48.8 (0.46)	13.9 (0.32)	35.0 (0.44)	50.3 (0.58)	46.7 (1.34)	38.7 (1.31)	66.4	12.9	12.4	100.0	66.4	12.9	12.4	100.0	71.5	9.8	8.1					
2010	48.2 (0.62)	15.2 (0.41)	33.1 (0.60)	48.5 (0.83)	46.3 (1.73)	43.7 (1.46)	65.1	13.4	13.2	100.0	65.1	13.4	13.2	100.0	70.8	10.0	8.5					

NOTE: Enrollment Data are based on sample surveys of the civilian noninstitutional population. Percentages based on 18- to 24-year-old high school completers for 1992, and later years use a slightly different definition of completion and may not be precisely comparable with figures for other years. Totals include other racial/ethnic groups not separately shown. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity except where otherwise noted. Standard errors appear in parentheses.

Figure 2. U.S. post secondary enrollment rates and associate's/bachelor's degree attainment 1996 – 2010. Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2010b.

While there are various external factors that impact post-secondary degree attainment, public policy attention has focused on remedial course assignments as the variable that most impedes college completion. As enrollment rates have risen, so too have remedial course assignments among college freshman. National statistics obtained regarding first-year course enrollments demonstrate that remedial course assignments appear most often among students in two-year public universities. Among 2007-08 college freshman, approximately 41.9% of 2-year enrollees reported taking one or more remedial course, as compared to 24.2% of 4-year university enrollees. Among this population, Native American students reported the highest participation in remedial coursework at 46.8%, followed by Pacific Islanders (40.0%), Blacks (45.1%), and Hispanics (43.3%) respectively. White students reported the lowest rates of remediation studies at 31.3% (NCES, 2010a). Bearing in mind that remedial education is rarely applicable to student majors and is not considered credit bearing, enrollment in these courses constitutes a loss of time and investment on behalf of the student. Furthermore, multiple studies reveal that students who are placed in remedial education often fail to complete or reach the gatekeeper math and/or English course necessary for entrance into a given area of study (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010).

Similar to post-secondary data, high school completion data presented both positive and negative feedback for the public. Since 1960, the percentage of high school dropouts had fallen from 27.2% in 1960 to 7.4% in 2010. Yet as witnessed with achievement data collected under NCLB requirements, not all ethnic and racial subgroups were performing equally. Comparing dropout rates among Whites, Hispanics, and Black students revealed significantly different rates of high school persistence. Most notably,

Hispanic students consistently left high school at a rate three to four times greater than their White peers (5.1% vs. 15.1% in 2010). Unlike the gap between White and Black students which narrowed from 1967's 15.4% to the 28.6% rate in the 2010's, 5.1% vs. 8.0%, Hispanic students' school persistence continues to lag behind their peers at a constant interval. Furthermore, Hispanic males consistently demonstrate the highest dropout rates among all student subgroups measured, most recently 17.3% in 2010 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

These unfavorable achievement statistics generated further concern in light of workforce and demographic projections. Following the 2000 U.S. Census, demographers projected the 2039 working-age population to be comprised of greater than 50% historically marginalized groups (Hispanic, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Asians) increasing to 55% by 2050. Within this group, demographers noted the Hispanic population posted the largest gains, increasing to 50% of the minority population in 2032 and 55% in 2050. The report added that by 2050, the composition of the nation's children was anticipated to be 62% historically marginalized groups with only 38% single-race, non-Hispanic White. In light of persistent achievement and school completion gaps among minority students, it increasingly appeared that the majority of the population growth would occur among those that were the least educated (Muro, Valdecanas, & Kinnear, 2001; Kelly, 2005).

### **Policy Elites: Creators and Advocators of Common Core**

Human capital will determine power in the current century, and the failure to produce that capital will undermine America's security. Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to physically defend itself, protect its secure information, conduct diplomacy, and grow its economy. (Council of Foreign Relation, 2012, p. 4)

### **Policy Elite: Obama Administration**

Career and College Readiness/Globally Competitive Workforce Policy Talk intersected with The Great Recession of 2008 to generate an opportune moment for education reformers. Faced with contracting state budgets and looming needs, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 offered federal stimulus funds to states for the purposes of investing infrastructure supports that would provide for “long term economic benefits” as well as “stabilizing state and local governments budgets in order to minimize and avoid reductions in essential services and counterproductive states and local tax increases” (ARRA 2009). As a part of the ARRA, \$4.35 billion dollars were set aside for the Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grant program. Keeping with philosophical tenets of President Obama’s educational platform, RTTT scored grant applications based on a state educational policy and program alignment with specific areas, among them strengthening standards and assessments to reflect internationally benchmarked, career and college readiness competencies, improved data systems that tracked student academic information K-16, enhanced teacher and leader quality through reformed accountability measures, and turning around low performing schools (Rothman, 2011). After three rounds of grant competition, \$4.1 billion dollars has been distributed to eighteen states and the District of Columbia, out of the 46 states who complied with the educational reforms required for RTTT eligibility (Office of Press Secretary, 2009).

### **Policy Elite: Achieve**

While the circumstances that led to adoption of Common Core State Standards Initiative appeared suddenly, the work developing what would later develop into the CCSS and PARCC assessment consortia had begun several years earlier. Throughout the

early 2000s, several education reform groups began tinkering with state standards in light of persistently dissimilar nationwide achievement results and workforce preparedness concerns. Most visible in this effort was Achieve. An outgrowth of the 1996 National Education Summit, Achieve was formed as an independent, bi-partisan, non-profit organization to support and lead standards-based education reform nationwide. Achieve represents both public and private sector interests as evidenced by their founders and Board of Directors, which includes Dr. Craig Barrett, Former Intel CEO/Chairman of the Board, Chair of Achieve, and Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam, Board Member (Achieve, 2012).

In 2001, the American Diploma Project (ADP) presented a comprehensive model for college and career readiness as high school graduation outcome. Primarily coordinated by Achieve, the American Diploma Project sought to improve high school instruction through the alignment of state standards and assessments with college and career readiness criteria. As outlined in *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts* (Achieve, 2004a), Achieve presented research on the dismal state of workforce preparedness and action steps that interested states could take in order to improve the quality of their educational system. Achieve advocated for the following criteria:

- Graduation requirements that require all high school students to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum so that earning a diploma assures a student is prepared for post-secondary education.
- Statewide high school assessments anchored in college- and career-ready expectations.



- Comprehensive accountability and reporting systems that promote college and career readiness for all students. (Achieve, 2004b)

Additionally, Achieve assisted in the development and administration of common subject area assessments through the ADP Assessment Consortium. This initiative created common Algebra II end-of-course exams across participating states. Tied to a mathematics college readiness threshold, it offered an external assessment of the content and level of rigor for schools, districts, and states. Beyond the American Diploma Project, Achieve offered member states opportunities to evaluate their academic standards and assessments in light of college and career readiness needs. Similar to ACT's *College Readiness Standards* (ACT, 2011) and the College Board's *Standards for College Success in English Language Arts* and *Standards for College Success in Mathematics and Statistics* (College Board, 2006a; College Board, 2006b), Achieve developed model K-12 English Language Arts and Mathematics academic standards that were aligned to credit bearing, entry-level English (English 101) and mathematics (College Algebra) courses. These standards would later be utilized in the development of CCSSI English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards. Currently, Achieve serves variety of roles at the state and national level ranging from advocacy and communication, to professional development repository, and to a research/evaluation resource for the Common Core State Standards and PARCC Initiative.

### **Policy Elite: National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers**

Unlike previous state content standards, the Common Core State Standards list only two authors, the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices

and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The Center for Best Practices conducts public policy advocacy, research and implementation efforts on behalf of the NGA. A public policy organization founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) represents the joint interests of the nation's governors. Membership in the National Governors Association encompasses the nation's state, territory, and commonwealth governors as well as their senior staff members. The issue of K-12 education has been of interest to the NGA well before the March 2010 adoption of the CCSS.

In 2007, the National Governors Association commissioned a task force in partnership with Achieve and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to ascertain what action steps were needed to develop a competitive, world class education system. The task force, co-chaired by Governor Janet Napolitano (D-AZ), Governor Sonny Perdue (R-GA), and Dr. Craig Barrett, Intel CEO/Chairman of the Board, generated recommendations designed to improve U.S. student performance relative to their international peers. The report entitled *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring that U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*, recommended five action steps in order to achieve first in the world academic achievement status (NGA, 2008). Several recommendations later appeared in the development of Common Core Standards Setting Criteria and rationale for nationwide adoption of the standards. These recommendations included the following:

Upgrade state standards by adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards in math and language arts for grades K-12 to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive. Standards should include *focus* – smaller number of topics to promote greater depth of understanding; *rigor* – content should be challenging

and at a level that is comparable with international peers; *coherence* – topics should be organized in a logical fashion that build upon each other from year to year.

Leverage states' collective influence to ensure that textbooks, digital media, curricula, and assessments are aligned to internationally benchmarked standards and draw on lessons from high performing nations and states.

Measure state-level education performance globally by examining student achievement and attainment in an international context to ensure that, over time, students are receiving the education they need to compete in the 21st century economy. (NGA, 2008, p. 24-34)

Additionally, the report requested that the federal government finance the cost of national standards and assessment development as the individual burden to states was substantial. While the federal government did not step forward to sponsor these efforts in 2008, ARRA dollars were utilized to finance assessment consortia (PARCC/SMARTER-Balance) that developed next-generation assessments under Common Core Standards Adoption.

### **Common Core for the Common Good: The Goals of Common Core Reform**

The Common Core State Standards have been developed to be: 1.) Fewer, clearer, and higher, to best drive effective policy and practice; 2.) Aligned with college and work expectations, so that all students are prepared for success upon graduating from high school; 3.) Inclusive of rigorous content and applications of knowledge through higher-order skills, so that all students are prepared for the 21st century; 4.) Internationally benchmarked, so that all students are prepared for succeeding in our global economy and society; and 5.) Research and evidence-based. (NGABP, 2010a, preamble)

Reflective of the concerns that preceded their development, the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics attempt to improve upon prior standards based reform efforts and definitively solve the human capital issue. While state and national policy elites appear unified on problem identification, they are less so concerning the political interests and values that are served by undertaking this reform.

Within CCSSI policy talk messages there lies nuanced differences between the levels of emphasis on improvement for collective versus individual interest. As an illustration, consider the advocacy statements supporting CCSSI initiatives (see Figure 3).

Advocacy Statement	Author
<p>“A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world. America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game. That's why we're working together to put an outstanding education within reach for every child”</p>	<p>President Barack Obama (White House, 2011)</p>
<p>“The private sector has a vested interest in the quality of education in the U.S. After all, the private sector is the primary employer, and the deficiencies of the education process become the liability of the employer.”</p>	<p>Dr. Craig Barrett Retired CEO/Board Chairman of Intel, Board Chair of Change the Equation, Co-Chair of Achieve, Chair of Arizona READY (Barrett, 2011a)</p>
<p>“An educated workforce is crucial to the future economic success of Arizona. This Arizona Ready Education Report Card — in addition to our other ongoing efforts to improve Arizona schools — will help align our education system with the needs of employers. I am proud of the progress we have made, and excited to see how these reforms will shape our educational and economic future.”</p>	<p>Governor Jan Brewer (R- AZ, State of Arizona, 2012)</p>
<p>“The economy is a national economy. States compete for businesses. Our students move around a lot. Our students go to Colleges all over the country. Not all students are being well-served by having a lower standard in some states.”</p>	<p>Stanley Rabinowitz, WestEd/Arizona READY member (Kossan, 2011)</p>
<p>“This is an equity agenda. This is about making sure that all children have the same opportunity, whether they decide to or not, to go to college.”</p>	<p>Dane Linn, Director, Education Division National Governors Association (The Lumina Foundation, 2012)</p>
<p>“As companies and business organizations, we believe that it is imperative that ALL American students have access to an education that will prepare them for the opportunities and challenges they will face after high school. In a competitive world economy where education and/or training after high school is increasingly the norm for access to good jobs, to prepare students for anything less is, by definition, to deny opportunity.”</p>	<p>Greater Phoenix Leadership (n.d.)</p>

Figure 3. Advocacy statements supporting CCSSI initiatives.

While the connection between education and the economy is overt, the goals for pursuing education reforms are dissimilar. Independent of the human capital argument, advocacy messages offer differing CCSSI reform goals ranging from calls for equity in educational quality, to preserving social mobility opportunities via education, to equity in

educational outcomes. The degree of these emphases is connected to stakeholder group that various policy elites represent. It follows then that these messages should resonate differently within local communities depending upon their context (e.g. urban vs. suburban, Title I vs. affluent) and thus their expectations for what CCSSI should achieve will vary accordingly. As these goals are in tension with each other, as in the case of social mobility (individual attainment) vs. equity in educational outcomes (common good), their equal realization in practice may become less assured as gain in one area may confer loss in the other.

## Chapter 3 - Methods

### **Restatement of the Problem**

This study surveyed high school teachers' perceptions to the policy talk messages surrounding the Common Core State Standards Initiative and PARCC assessment messages. As of the 2013-14 SY, Arizona high schools have not fully transitioned to CCSSI standards, curriculum and accountability measures. The current time and setting among Arizona high school educators provides a unique opportunity to gain the perspective of those who will be implementing the reform and held accountable for subsequent student performance before the reform takes effect and while the policy talk that precedes reform efforts is at its peak. As the framework of prior reforms and current high stakes accountability measures continue to echo across the educational landscape, the perspectives of educators in relation to policy messages have significance as the Common Core State Standards Initiative and PARCC Assessments move from transitional to active status.

As studied previously, educators' individual capacities with respect to knowledge and personal beliefs, coupled with organizational context, influence implementation of reforms at the classroom level (Spillane, 2004). The degree to which perceptions vary among high school teachers based on contextual factors and between policymakers can serve to foreshadow realized outcomes. Additionally, what has been said about education (policy talk), who has said it (policy elites), and what it is intended to achieve (etymology) can serve to illuminate contemporary opinions and ambitions that the public holds for society. To date, prior policy talk examinations have taken place posthumously in conjunction with examinations of school reform implementation efforts. Reviewing

policy talk “as it happens” provides the opportunity to center the rhetoric of this reform beyond mere criticisms of schools into the current socio-political context of public education. This can serve to inform policy makers and educators as they work to affect educational improvement.

### **Question 1**

What are Maricopa County High School teachers’ perceptions of policy talk regarding Common Core Standards Initiative and high stakes accountability measures with respect to student achievement outcomes and implementation?

### **Question 2**

How do these perspectives vary by teacher context (e.g. experience, content taught, district and site demographics) within the 9-12 educational system? (Variation of Perceptions among Implementers)

## **Research Design**

To answer the above research questions, a mixed methods approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) has been selected wherein the researcher collects, analyzes and mixes (through connection, integration or, embedding) qualitative and quantitative data at one or more stages of the research process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). When used jointly, the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods offers the opportunity to capture broad trends and contextual details through a richly diverse data set; a data set that either method alone would not be able to replicate (Creswell, 2009). In utilizing a mixed method approach, research can yield a more nuanced understanding of complex research problems, such as teachers’ perceptions of educational reform policy efforts (CCSSI) as viewed through a policy talk/policy action theoretical lens.



A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was selected for this study, which occurred in two phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The first phase involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase. The purpose behind this design was to utilize qualitative data to inform the findings from the initial quantitative results. Initially, survey data identified overall trends among high school teachers' perceptions of educational reform policy (CCSSI) talk messages. In addition to general trend identification, these results were examined against school-level and teacher-level variables to identify potential correlations. Subsequent to this analysis, qualitative focus group interviews further informed survey results as they provided potential contextualization and rationale. Participants in the qualitative study were individuals reflective of the initial stratified sample population; however, they did not participate in the initial survey. In pursuing this format, the quantitative data and analysis provided a general overview of *what* select high school teachers were thinking with respect to policy reform messages, while the focus group interviews provide the context and rationale of *why* they may have thought that way.

Priority (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003) in this study lies with the quantitative method as it centers on identifying and describing overall trends of urban teacher perceptions of CCSSI policy talk at the early stages of policy action. Extensive data collection during the survey development, refinement, and administration phase provided for an abundant data set regarding teacher perceptions. These results served as the basis for interpretation by focus groups during the second phase of the study and the overall findings were informed by explanatory qualitative data collected via focus groups.

The quantitative and qualitative phases were connected through the informing process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Thus the results of quantitative and qualitative phases built on each other, as the quantitative results were interpreted by the qualitative phase, and were integrated in discussion of study outcomes (Creswell et al., 2003). The linearity of this model, coupled with the robustness of the data set achieved through its use, made it an ideal method for this research study. While the length of time involved in data collection is often cited as a drawback, it was believed that the data set available through this methodology substantially outweighed this concern (see Figure 4 for a diagram of sequential explanatory design and stages specific to this research study).

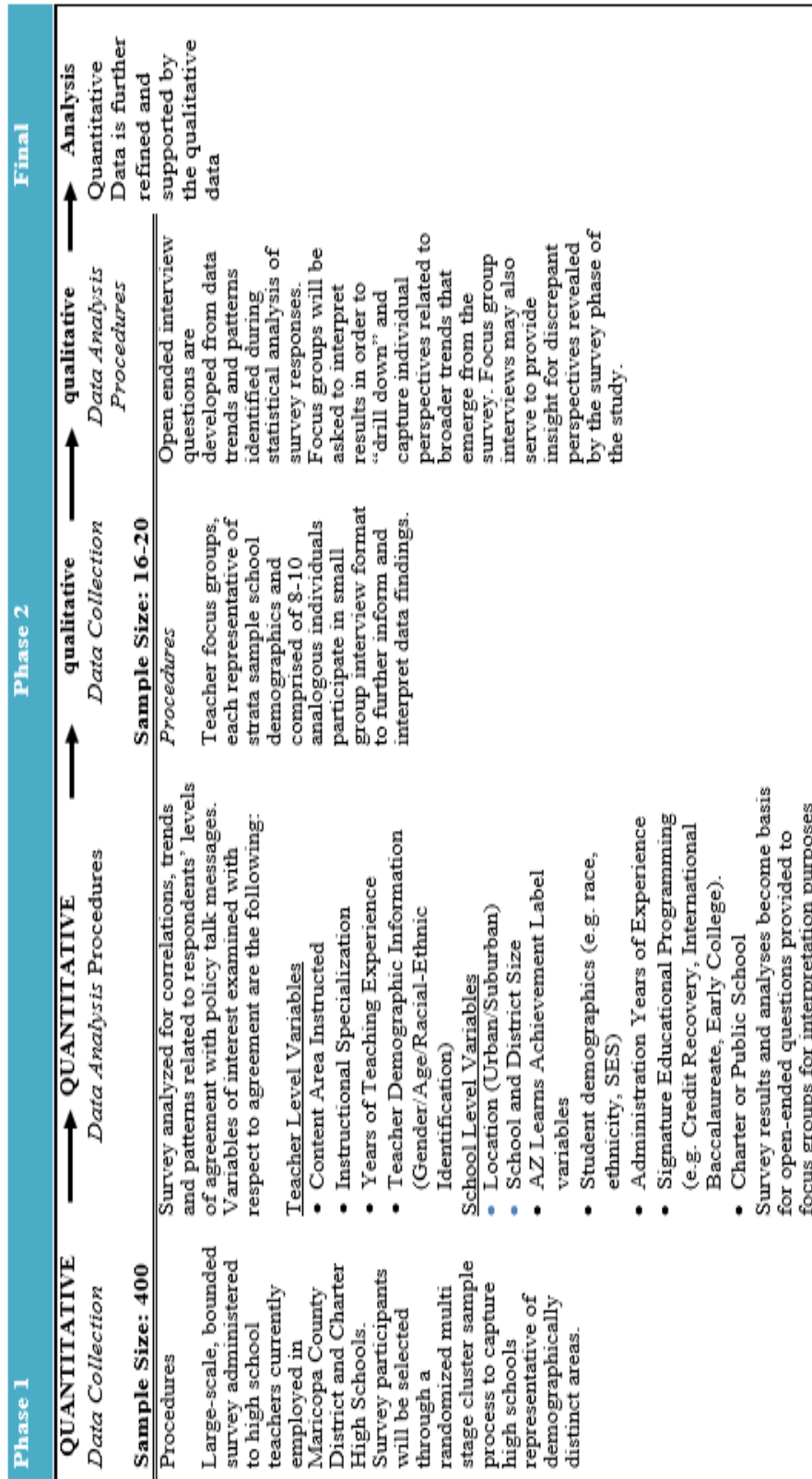


Figure 4. Sequential explanatory research design.

## **Research Methodology**

Approximately 400 Maricopa County high school teachers were surveyed utilizing a survey instrument reflective of current CCSSI policy talk statements. Policy talk statements were adapted from quotes and advocacy messages presented by CCSSI policy elites in press. Following the administration and data analysis of the large scale survey instrument, focus group interviews were utilized to support and interpret study findings.

## **Population and Sample**

**Informants: High school teachers.** District and charter high school teachers in Maricopa County were surveyed regarding their level of agreement with CCSSI and PARCC policy talk messages. High school teachers were selected as the unit of analysis as CCSSI reforms are targeted specifically to influence high school student's achievement and outcomes, as defined by achieving career and college readiness. It follows that high school teachers are the most appropriate and knowledgeable informants to understand how CCSSI reforms will impact Arizona high school students. The inclusion of both district and charter high school teachers reflect the universality of CCSSI reforms as they are to be implemented in all public school settings, regardless of signature educational programming (e.g. credit recovery, acceleration, magnet high schools).

Beyond this perspective, CCSSI reform efforts are particularly salient to teachers as they join accountability measures directly tied to individual evaluations. Under measures developed by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE, 2011) to meet the legal requirements of ARS 15-2-3(A)(38), yearly evaluations of teachers must now

include 33-50% quantitative data reflecting student academic progress. The student achievement data used must be aligned with Arizona State Standards and related assessments (currently transitioning to Common Core State Standards and PARCC). Priority is placed on utilizing state level achievement data whenever feasible, as in the case of teachers instructing English and mathematics. In cases where state level achievement data is limited or non-existent for a subject, it is expected that teacher evaluations include student achievement data aligned with respective subject area (ADE, 2011). As CCSSI standards seek by design to integrate subject matter beyond discrete skills and directly influence instructional practice, this accountability framework may lead to unintended consequences and influences for reform efforts and messages.

**Setting: Maricopa County**

Approximately 1,071,690 K-12 Arizona students are served by 51,142 teachers in both public district and charter schools (NCESb, 2011; ADE, 2013). Of these students, approximately 29.8% are enrolled in grades 9-12 statewide (NCES, 2011b). Maricopa County currently houses 31,158 public school teachers instructing 596,947 students enrolled in district K-12 schools. Of these 31,158 teachers, 7,775 (approximately 25%) instruct in district high schools. Maricopa County charter schools serve 85,859 K-12 students taught by an estimated 3,435 charter school teachers.

The Maricopa County population represents 67.6% of Arizona's teaching staff and 64% of K-12 public school enrollment. Schools within Maricopa County range from urban, suburban to rural fringe as coded by the National Center for Education Statistics. This variation, coupled with the size and scale of high schools servicing Maricopa County students represents made it an ideal population to survey. The findings of this

study will be generalizable to other major urban areas similar to the Phoenix metropolitan area.

### **Sampling Methods**

The sampling frame is a list of all traditional public and charter high schools in Maricopa County. The sampling frame constituted the target population of Maricopa County high schools. The sampling method involved a multi-stage, stratified cluster sample using high schools as the primary sampling unit. All high schools in the sampling frame were coded by location based on the data from NCEC Common Core of Data to establish the relevant stratus. The Common Core of Data is a program of the National Center for Education Statistics that annually collects fiscal and non-fiscal data about all United States public schools, public school districts, and state education agencies. The data included in the CCD database includes descriptive/demographic information regarding student and staff population as well as nominal data (e.g. school names, addresses, phone numbers). Within the database, the CCD utilizes specific locale descriptors (e.g. urban/suburban/rural; city: large/suburb: midsize/town; small) generated in conjunction with US Census data; however, for the purposes of this study the CCD data were recoded to reflect “urban” or “suburban.” Student enrollment was selected as an additional variable to ensure that the sample population surveyed included both Group A (English/Math) and Group B (Social Studies/Science/Electives) teachers -as defined by Arizona Framework for Measuring Educator Effectiveness (ADE, 2011). It is expected that school enrollments of 1000 students or fewer are less likely to include a diverse sample Group A/Group B faculty due to limited resources. These two variables were utilized to determine strati and inclusion of high schools in the sampling frame list.

For each strati, individual schools were chosen proportionate to the percentage of high schools represented by the strati in the target population. For the Phoenix metropolitan area, NCES CCD catalogued 193 high schools serving 184,757 ninth through twelfth grade students for SY 2010-11. Of these 193 schools, 57.5% are located in suburban areas with the remaining 42.5% located in urban Phoenix. Suburban schools instruct 68.7% of all high school students in Maricopa County. Reflective of differential student enrollments, the number of teachers employed by suburban schools is greater with faculties ranging from 13.2 to 160 members versus the urban high schools 9 to 144 range. Eligible sample suburban schools (more than 1,000 students) have faculties ranging from 46 to 160 teachers versus like urban school with faculties of 60.8 to 144 teachers. Within these eligible sample schools, the average urban high school faculty is 100 teachers per school versus 94 teachers per school in suburban high schools (NCES, 2011b).

Utilizing the most recent CCD data file, the sampled high schools were chosen at random within designated location and student population strati. In total, 7 individual high schools, four suburban and three urban, were chosen to derive a representative sample of the target population. While this study's survey administration blends face-to-face with a self-administration component, it was assumed that response rates for surveys will not reach 100% participation; therefore, additional schools were included to ensure sufficient survey response data was obtained. In the event that a selected high school refused to participate, a replacement high school was chosen. All high school teachers in the selected schools were invited to participate in the survey. The targeted number of survey responders was 450 teachers working in suburban high schools and 450 teachers

working urban high schools for a total of 900 Maricopa high school teachers. Figure 5 represents a broad overview of this study’s sampling process.

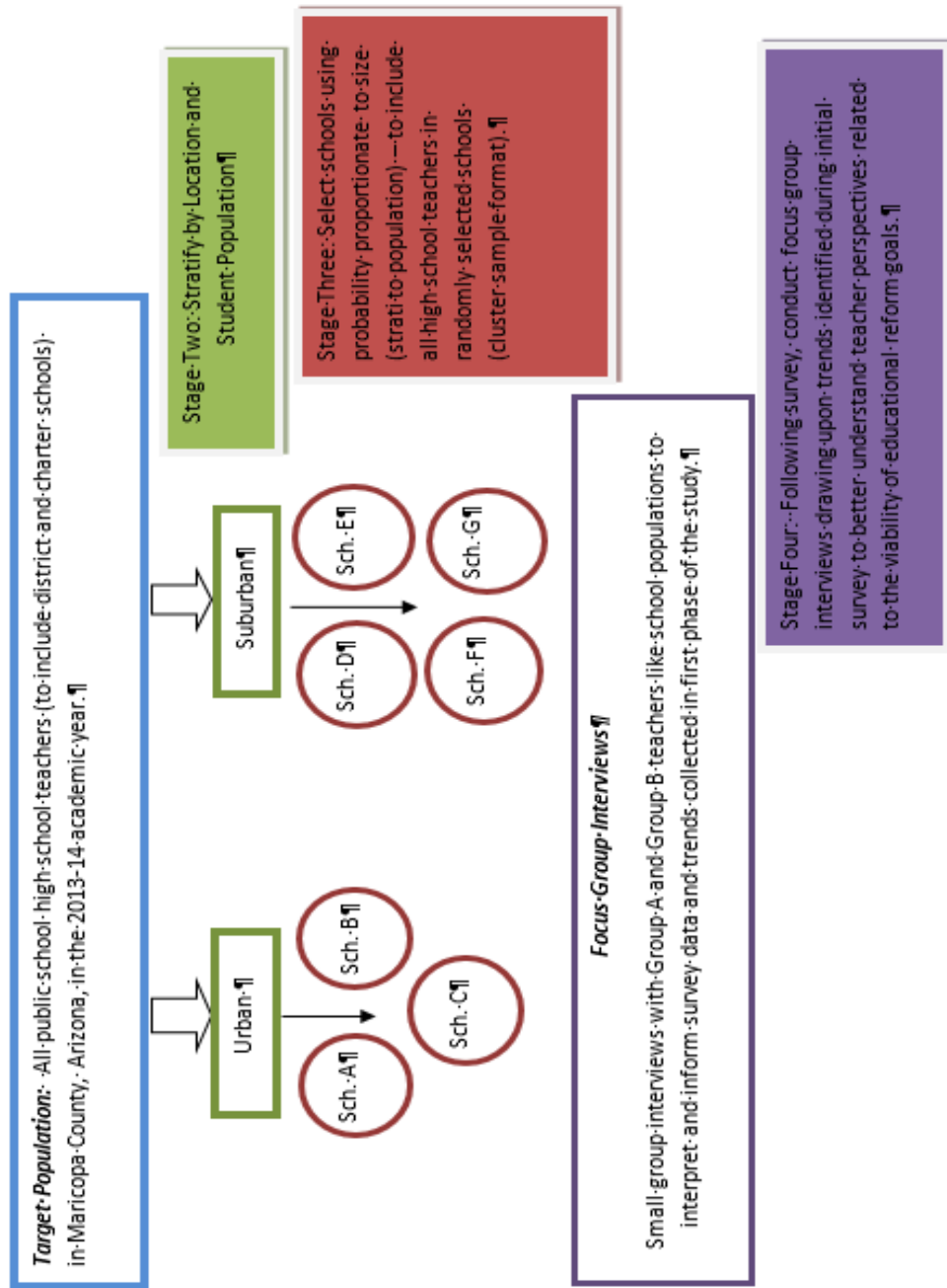


Figure 5. Overview of sampling procedures



## **Survey Construction**

Presently, survey instruments related to CCSSI are centered on assessing teacher awareness of new standards versus teacher perceptions of current educational reforms. Given this gap, it requires that a survey instrument be developed. To this end, policy talk quotes made in press by leading education reformers were researched and collected. These quotes comprise the framework for the policy talk survey. Quotes utilized were aligned with stated rationales of CCSSI reform, that is Career and College Readiness for All, International Competitiveness, and the Connection of Educational Achievement to U.S. Economic Improvement (Human Capital/Vocationalism). See Figure 6 for rationale and policy talk sample items. Survey participants indicated their level of agreement to these policy talk quotes on a 1 to 5 Likert scale.

CCSS I Goal	CCSSI Standard Setting Criteria	Policy Talk Quote
Career and College Readiness for all	<p>“The Common Core State Standards define the rigorous skills and knowledge in English Language Arts and Mathematics for students to be ready to succeed academically in credit-bearing, college-entry courses and in workforce training programs...</p> <p>The standards created will not lower the bar but raise it for all students; as such we cannot narrow the college-ready focus of the standards to just preparation of students for college algebra and English composition and therefore will seek to ensure all students are prepared for all entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses in English, mathematics, the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities.</p> <p>The objective is for all students to enter these classes ready for success (defined for these purposes as a C or better).” (NGABP, 2010b)</p>	<p>“Whether you see improving graduation rates and reducing dropout rates as a fight for social justice, as an economic imperative, or as integral to national security, it is a battle we must win.</p> <p>By most measures, our system of higher education remains the best in the world, but only 40% of the current generation of 25 to 34-year-olds have degrees. The President's goal is 60% by the end of the next decade, but we won't get there unless we add more rigor and help more people succeed.</p> <p>Your report cites the fact that too many incoming College freshmen are unprepared. Nearly 40% need remedial education and many eventually drop out.</p> <p>And according to a 2008 report on workforce readiness by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, many College graduates are not ready to work. And most high school graduates are simply deficient for even entry-level jobs.” (Duncan, 2009, November 9)</p>
International Competitiveness	<p>“The standards will be informed by the content, rigor, and organization of standards of high performing countries so that all students are prepared for succeeding in our global economy and society.” (NGABP, 2010a)</p>	<p>“The workplace is far different today than it was even ten years ago. Unlike past generations, teachers today must prepare students for a world of possibilities that may not currently exist. The workforce of tomorrow must be flexible, motivated, and be able to draw from a deep and vast skill set.</p> <p>The ability to effectively communicate, collaborate, and adapt to situations will be critical to ensuring competition in a global market. By setting high expectations with a commitment to succeed with all students, we are positioning our future workforce to be internationally competitive.” (Huppenthal, 2012)</p>
Human Capital/ Vocationalism	<p>“The standards developed will set the stage for US education not just beyond next year, but for the next decade, and they must ensure <i>all</i> American students are prepared for the global economic workplace” (NGABP, 2010a)</p>	<p>“Strong schools are the surest path to our nation’s long-term economic success. America’s students are now competing with children around the globe for jobs and opportunities after graduation. We need to maintain a national focus to ensure our kids are ready to compete and ready to win.” (Markell, 2010)</p>

Figure 6. Educational reform policy goals and policy talk.

While policy talk quotes provided the framework for the survey, narrowing of the scope of policy talk quotes was necessary as many policy talk quotes encompass multiple rationales as evidenced above. Additional survey items were developed that singularly reflected these themes. Survey construction ensured a sufficient number of survey questions to triangulate teacher perceptions of CCSSI policy talk. Multiple questions reflected singular education reform goals to ensure that an accurate evaluation of teacher perception is achieved.

Furthermore, survey items were structured to capture the level of agreement to broad reform themes. For example, college readiness can be achieved on a variety of thresholds ranging from technical colleges to community colleges to state and private universities. Capturing respondents' agreements along this continuum provided a more robust data set from which to evaluate teacher perceptions. See Figure 7 for CCSSI Survey Blueprint.

**Teacher Perception of CCSS Policy Talk Survey Blueprint**

CCSSI Policy Goal Career and College Readiness	Number of Items
<b>Question Set Prompt</b>	
The Common Core State Standards define the rigorous skills and knowledge in English and Mathematics that need to be effectively taught and learned for students to be ready to succeed academically in credit-bearing, college-entry courses and workforce training programs. In light of this criteria, many statements have been made regarding career and college readiness for all. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	
<b>Policy Talk Quotes</b>	
Equity: CCSS will ensure that all students will be able to enter first year (college/university/workforce training) courses upon high school graduation without remediation.	3
Equity: CCSS will ensure that all students will be academically successful in (college/university/workforce training).	3
Equity: CCSS will ensure that all students can successfully attain (college/university/workforce training) degrees/certificates.	3
Excellence: CCSS will ensure that students will enter first year (college/university/workforce training) courses upon high school graduation without remediation.	3
Excellence: CCSS will ensure that students are academically successful in (college/university/workforce training).	3
Excellence: CCSS will ensure that students successfully attain (college/university/workforce training) degrees/certificates.	3
Subtotal	<b>18</b>
<b>International Benchmarks</b>	
<b>Question Set Prompt</b>	
The Common Core State Standards have been designed to include rigorous content and application of skills so that all students are prepared for the 21st century and to succeed in the global economy and society. In light of this criteria, many statements have been made regarding the new standards. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	
<b>Policy Talk Quotes</b>	
Comparison: CCSS has higher student expectations than previous iterations (accountability)	3
Comparison: CCSS has clearer expectations for performance (structure of standards)	3
Comparison: CCSS better mirrors the examples of other nations (international benchmarking)	3
Outcomes: CCSS will produce higher student achievement (national/international metrics)	3
Outcomes: CCSS will produce instructional shifts (curriculum/instruction)	3
Outcomes: CCSS will produce greater alignment (school/district & state/nation)	3
Subtotal	<b>18</b>
<b>Human Capital</b>	
<b>Question Set Prompt</b>	
The Common Core State Standards are designed to ensure that all students are prepared for success in the global, economic workplace following high school graduation. In light of this criteria, many statements have been made regarding the relationship of education to the economy. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	
<b>Policy Talk Quotes</b>	
Connection: Education's influence on growth of US Economy	3
Connection: Education's relationship with business and industry	3
Connection: Education's role in national security	3
Connection: Education's role in ensuring social mobility opportunities for all American Youth	3
Subtotal	<b>12</b>
<b>Total Number of Survey Items</b>	<b>48</b>

Figure 7. Survey blueprint.

**Survey validation.** The development and refinement of the survey instrument occurred in cognitive interview sessions and focus groups with individuals representative of those in the target population (i.e. Phoenix metropolitan high school teachers). These participants were involved in survey instrument development; therefore, the high schools that they represented were excluded from the possible sample population. Specific content area representation was present in the survey development groups as CCSSI reforms impact high school curriculum and instruction at differing levels. Cognitive interview participants and focus groups included at minimum 2 (9-10/11-12) English, 2 (9-10/11-12) mathematics, 1 social studies, 1 science and 1 elective teacher representation. The rationale for this selection was reflective of Group A and Group B staff composition at traditional comprehensive high schools with enrollment of more than 1,000 students.

Utilizing cognitive interview methodology when developing the survey instrument served to determine teacher comprehension of survey questions, assessed teachers' ability to retrieve from memory relevant information, illuminated teachers' judgment processes, and mapped respondents' internally generated responses with the selections available (Tourangeau, 1984). Cognitive interviewing occurred in a one on one format with the interviewer asking respondents to explain their thought process as questions were read to them (e.g. Think-Aloud Process). Additionally, verbal probing questions were asked in order to assess participant comprehension of terminology, understanding of survey items and related concepts, as well as how the respondent arrived at a given conclusion (validity). Utilizing cognitive interviews in pretesting served to guard against threats to survey validity that stem from poor or misleading

questions, the participant's incomplete understanding of survey items, survey structure that failed to capture the complexity of the ideas and concepts measured, and the possibility of respondents providing socially acceptable rather than authentic responses (Biemer, Groves, Lyberg, Mathiowetz & Sudman, 1991; Desimone & Le Floch, 2004; Czaja & Blair, 2005; Ryan, Gannon-Slater & Culbertson, 2012).

Focus groups were utilized to test the draft questionnaire following survey item development. This process occurred in two stages with the first involving individual survey completion followed by a whole group debriefing. In a similar approach akin to the verbal probing format, the debriefing process included identifying items that caused respondent problems or confusion, denoting which items were unable to be answered, clarifying terminology specific to the survey (i.e. "College and Career Readiness"/ "International Competitiveness"/ "Vocationalism") and soliciting responses regarding what other ideas should be included. The focus group process helped to ensure the reliability of the instrument as it provides a source of repeated trials prior to large scale survey usage. Refinements to the instrument occurred following each focus group in order to fine tune the instrument and ensure its validity and reliability (Willis, 1999; Czaja & Blair, 2005).

### **Survey Administration Procedures**

Upon securing agreement for participation, an online survey link will be distributed to all high school staff via email. A nominal compensation (less than \$5.00 each) was offered in exchange for participant's time and effort.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

Survey data was encoded and analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. Descriptive statistics were tabulated and presented to provide a macro level view of teacher perceptions relative to policy talk messages. The validity of these statistical findings were further informed by qualitative data collection. Using an etic coding analysis approach, transcribed focus group interviews data were analyzed relative to the trends and findings of the initial survey data. The inclusion of the qualitative data assists in ascertaining the “why” of what high school teachers after quantitative data has determined “what” their initial perceptions are to date.

Surveys were administered to selected high schools starting in July throughout October 2014. Focus group interviews for data analysis purposes occurred in late October through mid-November 2014. Focus groups were conducted using a prepared script of questions, developed from survey data collection and analysis, along with the data from the survey itself. These questions were anticipated to be open ended in design to provide for elaboration and interpretation of survey results.

## Chapter 4 – Findings and Results

### **Introduction**

This chapter includes findings and survey results regarding Maricopa County high school teachers' perceptions of the policy talk surrounding the Common Core State Standards Initiative and PARCC assessment. The sample population, respondent demographics, and survey characteristics will be described prior to detailing the survey findings and results. Results are further informed by focus group interviews whose insight will be detailed in the final section of this chapter. The research questions that this survey is designed to answer are as follows:

Question 1: What are Maricopa County high school teachers' perceptions of policy talk regarding Common Core Standards Initiative and high stakes accountability measures with respect to student achievement outcomes and implementation?

Question 2: How do these perspectives vary by teacher context (e.g. experience, content taught, district, and site demographics) within the 9-12 educational system?  
(Variation of Perceptions among Implementers)

### **Sample Population**

Initially, twenty eight Maricopa County high schools were selected for participation in the research study. Utilizing stratified and probability proportional to size selection methods, this representative sample of urban and suburban high schools contained a total of 2,345 potential respondents: 1,218 teachers in Maricopa County urban schools and 1,127 teachers in Maricopa County suburban schools. The 28 high schools reflected ten school districts (union and unified) and three distinct charter school organizations. Following identification, district administration and site administration



were contacted regarding participation in early June 2013. Four of the ten school districts and one charter school organization consented to allowing the targeted high schools to participate in the survey. The remaining six districts and charter organizations representing 1,711 (73%) of the 2,345 potential respondents declined participation.

Of those schools consenting to participation, response rates by participating teachers were significantly low throughout the three month response collection phase (July to September 2013), totaling only 137 responses from teachers in either urban or suburban schools (21% of available respondents). Based on this emerging limitation, the research design shifted from the stratified sampling and comparison design to a convenience sampling format. The survey link was emailed and posted to social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) to invite participation. Respondents were asked to share the link with fellow high school teachers in Maricopa County. By early October 2013, 453 total responses had been collected via the online survey. The results below are representative of responses collected using this method added to those responses collected during the original sampling format.

### **Respondent Demographics**

The survey respondents' demographic characteristics (gender, race, age, length of teaching experience, subject area classification) are presented in Figures 1 to 5.

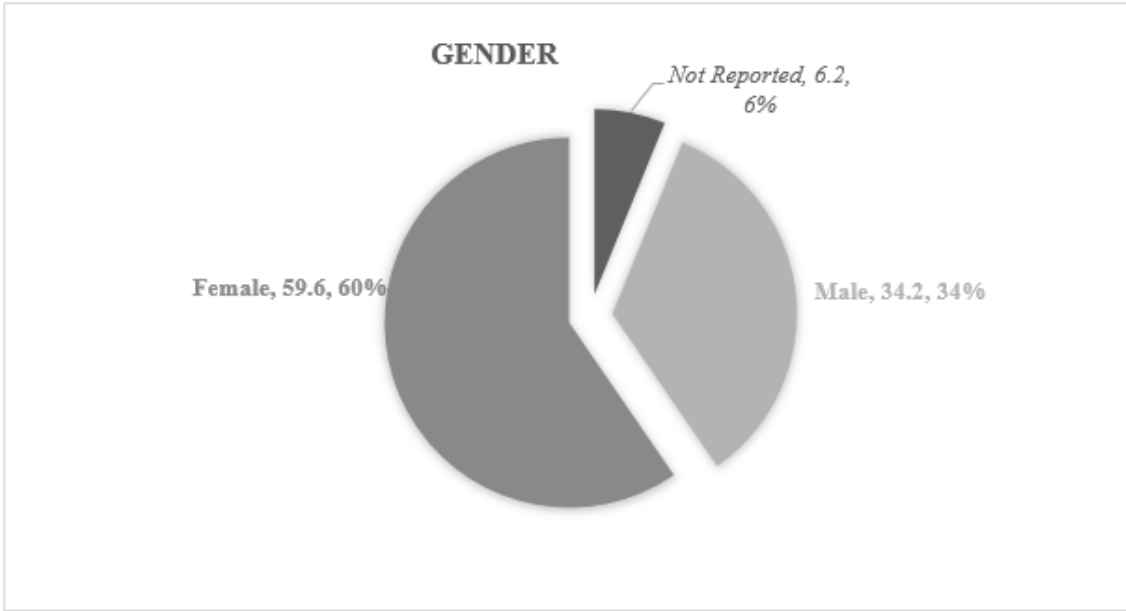


Figure 8. Survey sample population by gender. Note: N=453.

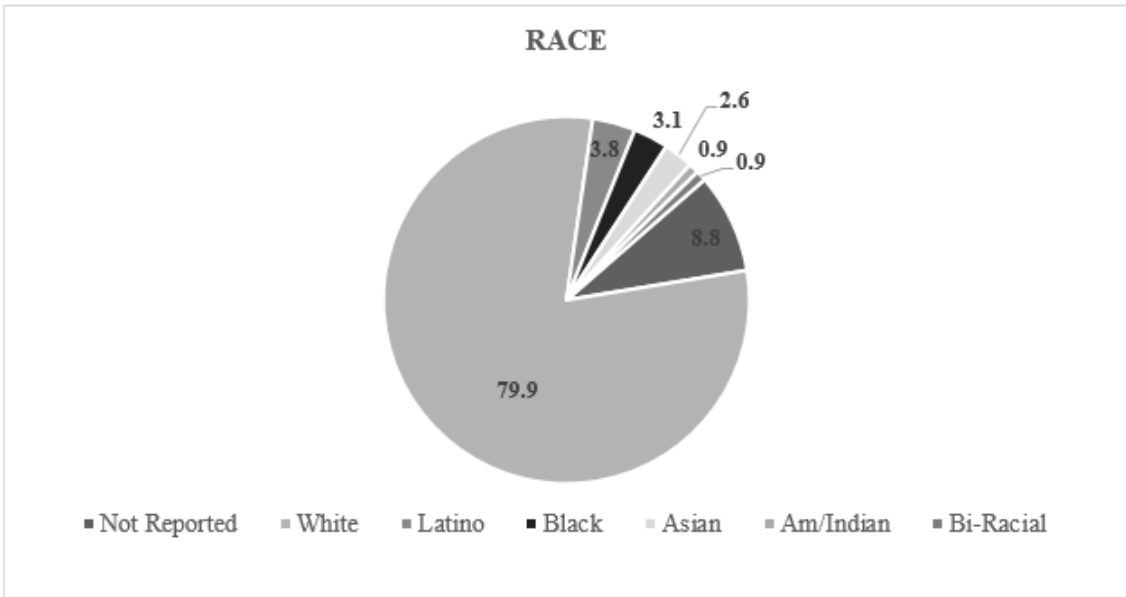


Figure 9. Survey sample population by race. Note: N=453.

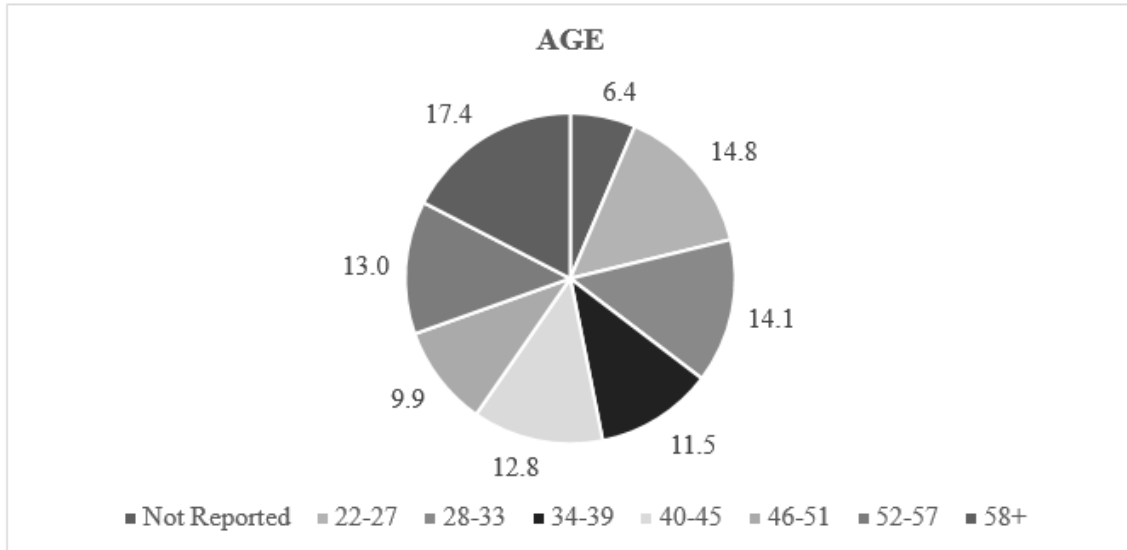


Figure 10. Survey sample population by age. Note: N=453.

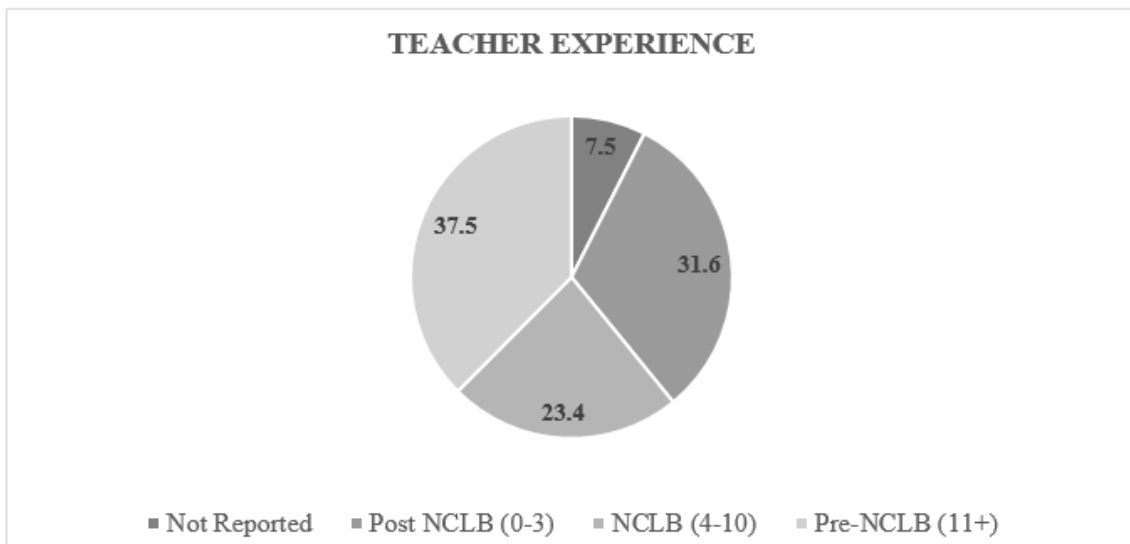


Figure 11. Length of survey respondents' teaching experience. Note: N=453

Respondents' teaching experience was categorized into one of three classifications in order to identify their experiences with previous education reforms: Pre-NCLB (11+ years of experience), NCLB (4-10 years of experience), or Post NCLB (0-3

years of experience). This classification system is based on the assumption that teachers' level of experience with previous reforms may have implications for how they respond to policy messages for current reforms. In the respondent population, the largest percentage fell into the Pre-NCLB category indicating that they have experienced the transition to two educational reform cycles, NCLB and now CSSCI. The second largest group was the "new to the teaching profession" with three or less years of experience. This group of teachers has limited to no experience with educational reform cycles because they are in the midst of experiencing their first reform cycle. The smallest percentage respondents are those teachers who began practicing during NCLB implementation (4-10 years' experience) and are experiencing their first education reform transition.

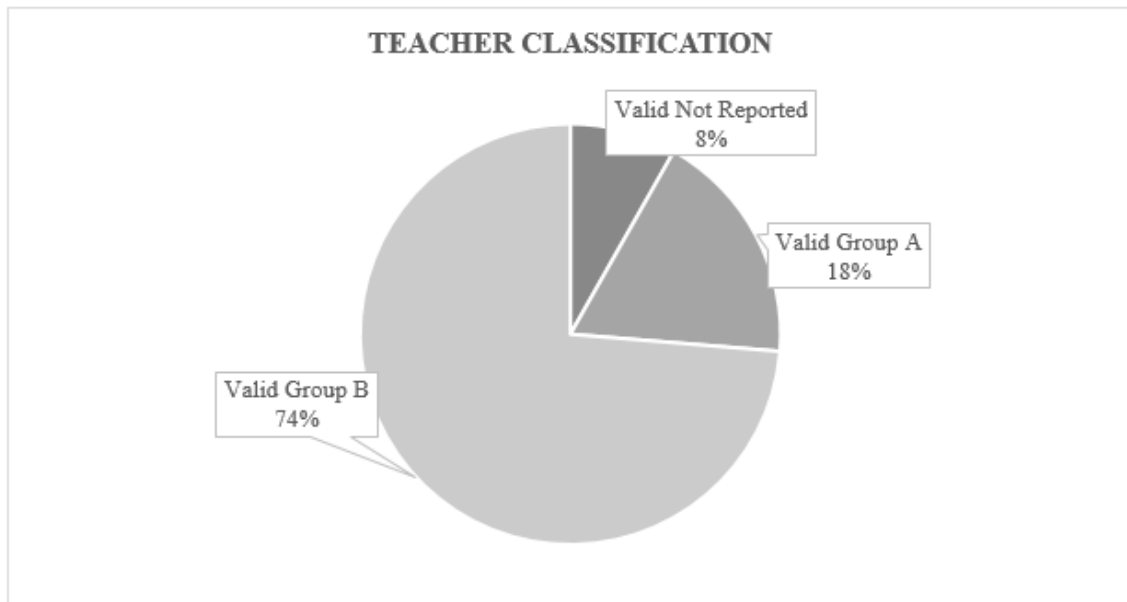


Figure 12. Survey respondents' classification by subject area. Note: N=453.

Respondents are classified as either Group A or Group B based on what they self-reported teaching the majority of their school day. Respondents classified as Group A are those teachers who teach AIMS tested subjects (9th-10th Grade English, 9th-10th Grade Math); all other subject areas and specializations were classified as Group B teachers .

The relevance of teacher specialization lies with current accountability measures in Arizona, as well as elsewhere in the nation. As indicated in Chapter 3, CCSSI reform efforts are particularly salient to teachers because accountability measures are directly tied to individual evaluations. Under policies developed by the Arizona Department of Education to meet the legal requirements of ARS 15-2-3(A) (38), yearly evaluations of teachers must now include 33-50% quantitative data reflecting student academic progress. The student achievement data used must be aligned with Arizona State Standards and related assessments (currently transitioning to Common Core State Standards and PARCC). Priority is placed on utilizing state level achievement data whenever feasible, as in the case of teachers instructing English and Mathematics. These teachers are classified as “Group A” teachers. In cases where state level achievement data is limited or non-existent for a subject, it is expected that teacher evaluations include student achievement data aligned with respective subject area (ADE, 2011). These teachers are classified as “Group B” teachers. As CCSSI standards seek by design to integrate subject matter beyond discrete skills and directly influence instructional practice, this accountability framework may lead to unintended consequences and influences for reform efforts and messages. Using this lens of potential “differential” accountability, Group A and Group B teachers may hold different opinions on this reform effort.

For comparison purposes, demographic data between both the initial stratified sample population and the convenience sample population were reviewed. The comparisons between these two groups can be seen in Tables 1 through 4.

Table 1

*Comparison of Gender Data Between Stratified and Convenience Samples vs State and National Averages*

	Stratified Sample	Convenience Sample	Aggregate	State*	National*
Male	33.7%	34.6%	34.2%	N/A	41.9%
Female	60.8%	58.9%	59.6%	N/A	58.1%

\*Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Teacher Data File”, 2011-12

Table 2

*Comparison of Age Data Between Stratified and Convenience Sample vs State and National Averages*

Age Range	Stratified Sample	Convenience Sample	Aggregate	State*	National*
21-27	8.1%	18.4%	14.8%		
28-33	12.9%	14.9%	14.1%	19.5%	15.4%
34-39	14.2%	10.3%	11.5%		28.1%
40-45	15.4%	11.8%	12.8%	49.1%	
46-51	12.4%	8.9%	9.9%	11.3%	25.0%
52-57	13.2%	14.5%	13%		22.8%
58+	12.8%	20.2%	17.4%	20.1%	8.8%

\*Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Teacher Data File”, 2011-12

Table 3

*Comparison of Race/Ethnicity Data Between Stratified and Convenience Samples vs State and National Averages*

Race/ Ethnicity	Stratified Sample	Convenience Sample	Aggregate	State*	National*
White	84.4%	78.8%	79.9%	80.1%	83.0%
Latino or Hispanic	5.7%	2.9%	3.8%	13.1%	6.8%
Black or African American	2.7%	3.4%	3.1%	2.8%	6.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.8%	3.1%	2.6 %	1.7%	N/A
Am. Indian or Native American	0.7%	1.1%	0.9 %	1.3%	0.6%
Bi-racial	1.2%	0.7%	0.9 %	0.9%	1.2%

\*Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Teacher Data File”, 2011-12

Table 4

*Comparison of Teacher Experience Data Between Stratified and Convenience Sample vs State and National Averages*

	Stratified Sample	Convenience Sample	Aggregate	State*	National*
0-3 Years	29.1%	33.4%	31.6%	17.8%	9.9%
4-10 Years	28.3%	21.3%	23.4%	32.8%	32.7%
11+ Years	41.3%	36.3%	37.5%	49.5%	57.7%

\*Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Teacher Data File”, 2011-12

**Survey Characteristics**

The survey instrument was developed using policy talk quotes made in press by leading education reformers. These quotes were classified and aligned with the policy talk supported CCSSI reform – *Career and College Readiness for All, International Competitiveness*, and the *Connection of Educational Achievement to U.S. Economic Improvement* (Human Capital/Vocationalism) Quotes under these large ideas were subdivided further into supporting ideas or sub-claims. Sub-claims were identified within these stated rationales and questions were coded accordingly. A list of sub-claims can be referenced in Appendix B. In order to ascertain the internal reliability of survey items, Cronbach’s alpha was utilized. Survey sub-claims, items associated with each sub-claim and the corresponding results of Cronbach’s alpha, are listed in Tables 5 to 34 below.



Table 5

*CCSSI survey - International Benchmark Claim 1: CCSSI has higher student expectations than previous iterations (accountability).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I2.1	Unfortunately, today, too few high school students graduate and, among those who do, too few graduate well-prepared for life after high school.
I2.2	In order to prepare today's students for the challenging world they will encounter, it is critical that we set the right expectations....for this reason, we believe states need to have K-12 standards that will prepare all students by the end of high school for success in College and Careers.
I2.3	For too long, we've been lying to kids. We tell them they're doing fine, give them good grades, and tell them they're proficient on state tests that aren't challenging.
I2.4	Today our standards are too low and the results on international tests show it.
I2.5	We see the signals in the international economy (that the U.S. K-12 education system is not competitive) as more and more engineers, doctors and science and math Ph.D.s come from abroad.
I2.6	The common core standards finally make real the promise of American public education to expect the best of all our school children, regardless of which state they come from.

Table 6

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for IB Claim 1  
CCSSI has higher student expectations than previous iterations (accountability).*

Correlation Matrix						
	I2.1	I2.2	I2.3	I2.4	I2.5	I2.6
I2.1	1.0000					
I2.2	0.1688	1.0000				
I2.3	0.3150	0.1576	1.0000			
I2.4	0.2989	0.2340	0.6301	1.0000		
I2.5	0.3332	0.1913	0.5065	0.6289	1.0000	
I2.6	0.0589	0.3417	0.1515	0.2394	0.1524	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 420. Reliability coefficients: 6 items. Alpha = 0.7202.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.7141.

Table 7

*CCSSI Survey - International Benchmark Claim 2:  
CCSSI has clearer expectations for performance (structure of standards).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I2.7	The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents have a roadmap for what they need to do to help them.
I2.8	The K-12 Common Core State Standards represent a major advance in standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts.
I2.9	The Common Core State Standards are unique in that they are based on decades of sound empirical data on what students must know and be able to do to succeed after high school.

Table 8

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for IB Claim 2  
CCSSI has clearer expectations for performance (structure of standards).*

Correlation Matrix			
	I2.7	I2.8	I2.9
I2.7	1.0000		
I2.8	0.6153	1.0000	
I2.9	0.5687	0.6387	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 441. Reliability coefficients: 3 items. Alpha = 0.8227.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8229

Table 9

*CCSSI Survey - International Benchmark Claim 3:  
CCSSI better mirrors the examples of other nations (international benchmarking).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I2.10	The advantage (of CCSS) is that they're internationally benchmarked standards so that students who have mastered these standards can compete internationally.
I2.11	The Common Core State Standards are - built on the finest state and international standards.
I2.12	The Common Core State Standards are - grounded in evidence about what it takes for high school graduates to be ready for college and careers.
I3.1	CCSS work recognizes that students in the United States are now competing in an international environment and will need to meet international benchmarks to remain relevant in today's workplace.

Table 10

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for IB Claim 3:  
CCSSI better mirrors the examples of other nations (international benchmarking).*

Correlation Matrix				
	I2.10	I2.11	I2.12	I3.1
I2.10	1.0000			
I2.11	0.6450	1.0000		
I2.12	0.6478	0.7728	1.0000	
I3.1	0.6113	0.5752	0.5487	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 415. Reliability coefficients: 4 items. Alpha = 0.8734.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8736.

Table 11

*CCSSI Survey - International Benchmark Claim 4:  
CCSSI will produce higher student achievement (national/international metrics).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I3.2	The (CCSS) initiative is a critical first step in our nation's effort to provide every student with a comprehensive, content-rich and complete education.
I3.3A	Education leaders agree that moving to the Common Core Learning Standards will raise the quality of what is being taught in Arizona public schools.
I3.3B	The Common Core State Standards ensure that every child across the country is getting the best possible education, no matter where a child lives or what their background is.

Table 12

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for IB Claim 4  
CCSSI will produce higher student achievement (national/international metrics).*

Correlation Matrix			
	I3.2	I3.3A	I3.3B
I3.2	1.0000		
I3.3A	0.7196	1.0000	
I3.3B	0.6310	0.7153	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 416. Reliability coefficients: 3 items. Alpha = 0.8663.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8690.

Table 13

*CCSSI Survey - International Benchmark Claim 5:  
CCSSI will produce instructional shifts (curriculum and instruction).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I3.3C	With the states' release of a set of clear and consistent academic standards, our nation is one step closer to... - to supporting effective teaching in every classroom.
I3.4A	With the states' release of a set of clear and consistent academic standards, our nation is one step closer to... - charting a path to College and careers for all students.
I3.4B	With the states' release of a set of clear and consistent academic standards, our nation is one step closer to... - developing the tools to help all children stay motivated and engaged in their own education.
I3.5	The Common Core State Standards demand deeper and more focused instruction.
I3.6	[Under CCSS] Rather than trying to get through as much content as possible, teachers will focus on creating greater understanding in key areas.
I3.7	Under CCSS, both reading and math coursework will emphasize knowledge and understanding of relevant information in science, social studies and other content areas.
I3.8	[Due to the structure of CCSS] Teachers across all content areas will use their subject-area expertise to help students learn to read, write and communicate effectively.

Table 14

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for IB Claim 5  
CCSSI will produce instructional shifts (curriculum and instruction).*

Correlation Matrix							
	I3.3C	I3.4A	I3.4B	I3.5	I3.6	I3.7	I3.8
I3.3C	1.0000						
I3.4A	0.6200	1.0000					
I3.4B	0.7255	0.6775	1.0000				
I3.5	0.5219	0.5247	0.4988	1.0000			
I3.6	0.5367	0.5591	0.5634	0.5640	1.0000		
I3.7	0.5404	0.5452	0.5847	0.5550	0.5886	1.0000	
I3.8	0.5577	0.5794	0.5527	0.6025	0.5826	0.6868	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 408. Reliability coefficients: 7 items. Alpha = 0.9055. Standardized item alpha = 0.9060.

Table 15

*CCSSI Survey - International Benchmark Claim 6:  
CCSSI will produce greater alignment (school/district & state/nation).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I3.9	As the Common Core is implemented across 40+ states, Arizona will have more curriculum options than ever before.
I3.10A	The Common Core State Standards - provide appropriate benchmarks for all students-regardless of where they live.
I3.10B	The Common Core State Standards - allow states to more effectively help all students succeed.
I3.11	With common standards and assessments, students, parents, and teachers will have a clear, consistent understanding of the skills necessary for students to succeed after high school and compete with peers across state lines and across the ocean.

Table 16

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for IB Claim 6:  
CCSSI will produce greater alignment (school/district & state/nation).*

Correlation Matrix				
	I3.9	I3.10A	I3.10B	I3.11
I3.9	1.0000			
I3.10A	0.5590	1.0000		
I3.10B	0.5690	0.7660	1.0000	
I3.11	0.5574	0.6666	0.7078	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 414. Reliability coefficients: 4 items. Alpha = 0.8757.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8756.

Table 17

*CCSSI Survey - Career and College Readiness Claim 1: Equity –  
CCSSI will ensure that all students will be able to enter first year  
(college/university/workforce) courses upon graduation without remediation.*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I4.1A	Arizona's Common Core Standards provide a foundation and path for all students to be well prepared for post-secondary educational options - specifically - Universities.
I4.1B	Arizona's Common Core Standards provide a foundation and path for all students to be well prepared for post-secondary educational options - specifically - Community Colleges.
I4.1C	Arizona's Common Core Standards provide a foundation and path for all students to be well prepared for post-secondary educational options - specifically - Vocational Training/Apprenticeships.

Table 18

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for CC Claim 1  
Equity – CCSSI will ensure that all students will be able to enter first year  
(college/university/workforce) courses upon graduation without remediation.*

Correlation Matrix			
	I4.1A	I4.1B	I4.1C
I4.1A	1.0000		
I4.1B	0.8359	1.0000	
I4.1C	0.5222	0.6662	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 420. Reliability coefficients: 3 items. Alpha = 0.8587.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8616.

Table 19

*CCSSI Survey - Career and College Readiness Claim 2: Equity –  
CCSSI will ensure that all students will be academically successful in  
(college/university/workforce training).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I4.2	For years we have struggled to articulate expectations and standards to help all students achieve their full potential.
I4.3	In particular, we have struggled to align student learning at the end of high school with the demands of College-level work, beginning with core areas such as mathematics and language arts.
I4.4	We have many students who think they are doing well and then they take the ACT or the SAT as a junior or senior, and their scores are devastatingly low, and they're shocked.
I4.5	For the first time, millions of schoolchildren, parents and teachers will know if all students are on-track for College -- and if they are ready to enter College without the need for remedial instruction.

Table 20

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for CC Claim 2:  
CCSSI will ensure that all students will be academically successful in  
(college/university/workforce training).*

Correlation Matrix				
	I4.2	I4.3	I4.4	I4.5
I4.2	1.0000			
I4.3	0.6222	1.0000		
I4.4	0.3617	0.4774	1.0000	
I4.5	0.3308	0.3769	0.3704	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 416. Reliability coefficients: 4 items. Alpha = 0.7459.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.7459.



Table 21

*CCSSI Survey - Career and College Readiness Claim 3: Equity –  
CCSSI will ensure that all students can successfully attain  
(college/university/workforce training) degrees/certificates.*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I4.6	We are lying to children --- telling them they are ready for College -- when they aren't.
I4.7	(The disconnect between HS graduation requirements and college readiness) is why so many of our young people need remedial education when they get to College.
I4.8	We recognize the enormous promise the Common Core State Standards released today hold to help all students graduate from high school ready to succeed in postsecondary education.
I4.9	We need to prepare all of our children to succeed in meaningful careers; however, children are taught at higher or lower levels based upon their zip code.

Table 22

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for CC Claim 3: Equity  
CCSSI will ensure that all students can successfully attain  
(college/university/workforce training) degrees/certificates.*

Correlation Matrix				
	I4.6	I4.7	I4.8	I4.9
I4.6	1.0000			
I4.7	0.5372	1.0000		
I4.8	0.2268	0.4324	1.0000	
I4.9	0.2558	0.2469	0.2704	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 407. Reliability coefficients: 4 items. Alpha = 0.6575.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.6616.

Table 23

*CCSSI Survey - Career and College Readiness Claim 4: Excellence –  
CCSSI will ensure that students will be able to enter first year  
(college/university/workforce training) courses upon high school graduation  
without remediation.*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I5.1	Many educators have lamented for years the persistent disconnect between what high schools expect from their students and the skills that universities expect from incoming freshman.
I5.2A	The Common Core State Standards establishes a baseline set of skills and knowledge that define college readiness.
I5.2B	The Common Core State Standards establishes a baseline set of skills and knowledge that define career readiness.

Table 24

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for CC Claim 4: Excellence  
CCSSI will ensure that students will be able to enter first year  
(college/university/workforce training) courses upon high school graduation  
without remediation.*

Correlation Matrix			
	I5.1	I5.2A	I5.2B
I5.1	1.0000		
I5.2A	0.2890	1.0000	
I5.2B	0.3379	0.7131	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 410. Reliability coefficients: 3 items. Alpha = 0.7064.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.7077.

Table 25

*CCSSI Survey - Career and College Readiness Claim 5: Excellence –  
CCSSI will ensure that students will be academically successful in  
(college/university/workforce training).*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I5.2C	We view (the CCSSI) as foundational in the effort to address the full range of - employability and technical skills that students need to be successful.
I5.3	We view (the CCSSI) as foundational in the effort to address the full range of - academic skills that students need to be successful.
I5.4	If states adopt the standards and align their curriculum, assessments and professional development to the new standards, many more of their students will graduate with the skills they need to succeed in the university.

Table 26

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for CC Claim 5: Excellence  
CCSSI will ensure that students will be academically successful in  
(college/university/workforce training).*

Correlation Matrix			
	I5.2C	I5.3	I5.4
I5.2C	1.0000		
I5.3	0.6562	1.0000	
I5.4	0.5212	0.6874	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 407. Reliability coefficients: 3 items. Alpha = 0.8304.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8313.

Table 27

*CCSSI Survey - Career and College Readiness Claim 6: Excellence –  
CCSSI will ensure that students can successfully attain  
(college/university/workforce training) degrees/certification.*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I5.5A	Because the Common Core State Standards have been developed differently (than previous state standards), - college completion rates will increase.
I5.5B	Because the Common Core State Standards have been developed differently (than previous state standards), - university completion rates will increase.
I5.6	Because the Common Core State Standards have been developed differently (than previous state standards), - workforce training program completion rates will increase.
I5.7	Prior English and math state standards have so far mostly been set without empirical evidence or attention as to whether students were learning what they needed for college.

Table 28

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for CC Claim 6: Excellence  
CCSSI will ensure that students can successfully attain  
(college/university/workforce training) degrees/certification.*

Correlation Matrix				
	I5.5A	I5.5B	I5.6	I5.7
I5.5A	1.0000			
I5.5B	0.9338	1.0000		
I5.6	0.7429	0.7358	1.0000	
I5.7	0.3802	0.3682	0.3293	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 402. Reliability coefficients: 4 items. Alpha = 0.8423.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8476.

Table 29

*CCSSI Survey - Human Capital Claim 1:  
Education's influence on the growth of the US Economy*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I6.1	Strong schools are the surest path to our nation's long-term economic success.
I6.2	America's students are now competing with children around the globe for jobs and opportunities after graduation.
I6.3	We need to maintain a national focus (on education) to ensure our kids are ready to compete and ready to win.
I6.4	An educated workforce is crucial to the future economic success of Arizona.
I6.5	American competitiveness relies on an education system that can adequately prepare our youth for College and the workforce.
I6.6	When American students have the skills and knowledge needed in today's jobs, our communities will be positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

Table 30

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for HC Claim 1  
Education's influence on the growth of the US Economy.*

Correlation Matrix						
	I6.1	I6.2	I6.3	I6.4	I6.5	I6.6
I6.1	1.0000					
I6.2	0.3373	1.0000				
I6.3	0.5382	0.3702	1.0000			
I6.4	0.6494	0.4118	0.5545	1.0000		
I6.5	0.4610	0.3507	0.4368	0.4522	1.0000	
I6.6	0.4575	0.3482	0.4797	0.4840	0.6695	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 407. Reliability coefficients: 6 items. Alpha = 0.8341.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8400.

Table 31

*CCSSI Survey - Human Capital Claim 2:  
Education's relationship with business and industry*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I6.7	State by State adoption of these standards is an important step towards maintaining our country's competitive edge.
I6.8	With a skilled and prepared workforce, the business community will be better prepared to face the challenges of the international marketplace.
I6.9	The private sector has a vested interest in the quality of education in the U.S.--After all, the private sector is the primary employer, and the deficiencies of the education process become the liability of the employer.
I6.10A	A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world.
I6.10B	America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game.

Table 32

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for HC Claim 2  
Education's relationship with business and industry.*

Correlation Matrix					
	I6.7	I6.8	I6.9	I6.10A	I6.10B
I6.7	1.0000				
I6.8	0.4044	1.0000			
I6.9	0.2967	0.4792	1.0000		
I6.10A	0.4173	0.5918	0.4802	1.0000	
I6.10B	0.2488	0.2191	0.2137	0.1712	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 413. Reliability coefficients: 5 items. Alpha = 0.7066.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.7311.

Table 33

*CCSSI Survey - Human Capital Claim 3:  
Education's role in national security*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I6.10C	Educational failure puts the United States' - future economic prosperity at risk.
I7.1	Educational failure puts the United States' - global position at risk
I7.2	Educational failure puts the United States' - physical safety at risk.
I7.3	Human capital will determine power in the current century, and the failure to produce that capital will undermine America's security.
I7.4	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - physically defend itself.
I7.5A	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - protect its secure information.
I7.5B	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - conduct diplomacy.
I7.5C	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - grow its economy.

Table 34

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for HC Claim 3  
Education's role in national security.*

Correlation Matrix								
	I6.10C	I7.1	I7.2	I7.3	I7.4	I7.5A	I7.5B	I7.5C
I6.10C	1.0000							
I7.1	0.7563	1.0000						
I7.2	0.5188	0.5637	1.0000					
I7.3	0.4962	0.5208	0.4929	1.0000				
I7.4	0.3957	0.4394	0.6271	0.5197	1.0000			
I7.5A	0.3949	0.4290	0.4970	0.4651	0.7197	1.0000		
I7.5B	0.4375	0.5087	0.4959	0.4799	0.6330	0.7630	1.0000	
I7.5C	0.6126	0.5291	0.4229	0.5030	0.5456	0.5981	0.5922	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 406. Reliability coefficients: 8 items. Alpha = 0.8987. Standardized item alpha = 0.9017.

Table 35

*CCSSI Survey - Human Capital Claim 4:  
Education's role in ensuring social mobility opportunities for all American youth*

Item Code	Survey Item Statement
I7.5D	Our competitive 21st century world requires innovative educational strategies that will enable students to succeed in a global economy (as achieved via CCSS).
I7.6	Now, perhaps more than ever before, high quality education serves as a vital pathway out of poverty, both in the U.S. and abroad.
I7.7	If our country is not just to compete, but also win in that global environment, we must continue to shake off the educational status quo and reinvigorate our schools and students with innovative ways of thinking, learning and doing (as achieved via CCSS).
I7.8	As companies and business organizations, we believe that it is imperative that ALL American students have access to an education that will prepare them for the opportunities and challenges they will face after high school.
I7.9	In a competitive world economy where education and/or training after high school is increasingly the norm for access to good jobs, to prepare students for anything less is, by definition, to deny opportunity.

Table 36

*Reliability Computations: Cronbach's Alpha for HC Claim 4  
Education's role in ensuring social mobility opportunities for all American youth.*

Correlation Matrix					
	I7.5D	I7.6	I7.7	I7.8	I7.9
I7.5D	1.0000				
I7.6	0.3834	1.0000			
I7.7	0.7593	0.3960	1.0000		
I7.8	0.3162	0.3415	0.3433	1.0000	
I7.9	0.4874	0.3932	0.4958	0.5428	1.0000

Note: N of cases = 400. Reliability coefficients: 5 items. Alpha = 0.8035.  
Standardized item alpha = 0.8009.



## **Survey Analysis Interpretation**

The Cronbach's alpha results illustrated for each claim (survey item collection/scale) are all generally in the *good to excellent* range (0.7 to 0.9), thereby indicating the consistency and reliability of the survey items. While it is acknowledged that claims were not assessed by an equal number of items, scales ranged from a minimum of three questions to a maximum of eight, where the higher item counts may inflate the Cronbach's alpha statistics. Additionally, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis was completed to determine the correlation between sub-claim items within the survey (see Appendix B). The Cronbach's alpha analyses and Pearson Correlations support the reliability of the instrument as an assessment of Maricopa County high school teachers' perceptions of policy talk statements.

## **Findings and Results**

### **Question 1**

What are Maricopa County high school teachers' perceptions of policy talk regarding Common Core Standards Initiative and high stakes accountability measures with respect to student achievement outcomes and implementation?

Starting in July 2013, identified Maricopa County high school teachers were sent a link to an on-line survey accessible through the Survey Monkey website. The self-administered 48 question survey included current policy rhetoric statements about Arizona Common Core State Standards, PARCC Assessment, and what these new reforms are designed to achieve. The survey asked for respondents' level of agreement with these statements utilizing a Likert Scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). Participants were advised that the survey

required approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. Additionally, participants were informed that all data obtained in the study was strictly confidential and that results of the survey would be reported in aggregate form only.

Survey responses for all questions were analyzed for descriptive statistics (n, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum range). Appendix E contains this information for each survey item. Survey items have been grouped by claims for comparison purposes. The highest and lowest mean response have been highlighted in each claim group. Highest mean response per claim group are bolded, while lowest mean response is underlined.

Of the 72 discrete items, the range of survey means consisted of a low of 2.84 to a high of 4.61 on the 1 to 5 Likert Scale. The level of agreement with each item was analyzed using the following scale. Neutral responses was operationally defined as responses within the 3.0 to 3.49 range. Neutrally positive responses were operationally defined within the range of 3.50 to 3.99. Positive responses were defined within the scale of 4.0 to 4.49 range. Highly positive responses were defined within the 4.50 to 5.0 range. Mean values were calculated to the hundredths position to identify overall levels of agreement along the continuum with more specificity. Ninety-six percent of mean responses for survey items tended to be neutral to positive.

For all survey items, the highest mean item response was 4.60 which was connected to the statement “An educated workforce is crucial to the future economic success of Arizona.” Other policy statements within this claim (Human Capital Claim 1: Education’s influence on the growth of the US economy) reflected similarly highly positive mean item responses at the 4.0 or greater level. The mean for this claim was the

highest among all claim groups at 4.34, reflecting a strong agreement by respondents with these CCSSI policy statements. Policy statements reflective of the Human Capital rationale proved to generate the higher levels of agreement among all claims (see Table 37).

While the majority of the statements (61.1%) received neutrally positive mean

Table 37  
*Descriptive Statistics for CCSSI Claims*

Claim	<i>N</i>	MIN	MAX	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
IB1MEAN	453	1.33	5.00	3.53	0.70
IB2MEAN	453	1.00	5.00	3.14	0.86
IB3MEAN	453	1.00	5.00	3.31	0.79
IB4MEAN	453	1.00	5.00	3.09	0.95
IB5MEAN	428	1.00	5.00	3.34	0.81
IB6MEAN	453	1.00	5.00	3.11	0.88
CC1MEAN	427	1.00	5.00	3.57	0.88
CC2MEAN	428	1.00	5.00	3.49	0.77
CC3MEAN	428	1.00	5.00	3.35	0.77
CC4MEAN	428	1.00	5.00	3.41	0.75
CC5MEAN	416	1.00	5.00	3.36	0.82
CC6MEAN	417	1.00	5.00	3.13	0.78
HC1MEAN	432	1.00	5.00	4.34	0.58
HC2MEAN	432	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.71
HC3MEAN	432	1.00	5.00	3.91	0.74
HC4MEAN	416	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.71

Note: Valid *N* = 392

scores (3.50 level or higher), three mean item responses were below the 3.0 (neutral) threshold. Two of these mean responses related to policy rhetoric regarding the standards

themselves. The lowest mean response, at 2.84, was connected to the statement, “The (CCSS) initiative is a critical first step in our nation’s effort to provide every student with a comprehensive, content-rich and complete education.” The second lowest mean at 2.88 reflected respondents’ overall level of agreement to the statement, “As the Common Core is implemented across 40+ states, Arizona will have more curriculum options than ever before.” The third lowest mean response, at 2.91, was connected to college and career readiness for all as evidenced in the statement, “For the first time, millions of schoolchildren, parents and teachers will know if all students are on-track for College – and if they are ready to enter College without the need for remedial instruction.” The statements associated with the claim that CCSSI will produce higher student achievement results generated the lowest overall agreement by respondents as evidenced by 3.09 mean score (see Table 37).

Table 38

*Claim Reference List*

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Code	Associated Common Core State Standards Initiative Policy Talk Claim
IB1	International Benchmark Claim 1: CCSSI has higher student expectations than previous iterations (accountability)
IB2	International Benchmark Claim 2: CCSSI has clearer expectations for performance (structure of standards)
IB3	International Benchmark Claim 3: CCSSI better mirrors the examples of other nations (international benchmarking)
IB4	International Benchmark Claim 4: CCSSI will produce higher student achievement (national/international metrics)
IB5	International Benchmark Claim 5: CCSSI will produce instructional shifts (curriculum and instruction)
IB6	International Benchmark Claim 6: CCSSI will produce greater alignment (school/district & state/nation)
CC1	Career and College Readiness Claim 1: Equity - CCSSI will ensure that all students will be able to enter first year (college/university/workforce) courses upon graduation without remediation
CC2	Career and College Readiness Claim 2: Equity - CCSSI will ensure that all students will be academically successful in (college/university/workforce training)
CC3	Career and College Readiness Claim 3: Equity - CCSSI will ensure that all students can successfully attain (college/university/workforce training) degrees/certificates.
CC4	Career and College Readiness Claim 4: Excellence - CCSSI will ensure that students will be able to enter first year (college/university/workforce training) courses upon high school graduation without remediation
CC5	Career and College Readiness Claim 5: Excellence - CCSSI will ensure that students will be academically successful in (college/university/workforce training)
CC6	Career and College Readiness Claim 6: Excellence - CCSSI will ensure that students can successfully attain (college/university/workforce training) degrees/certification.
HC1	Human Capital Claim 1: Education's influence on the growth of the US Economy
HC2	Human Capital Claim 2: Education's relationship with business and industry
HC3	Human Capital Claim 3: Education's role in national security
HC4	Human Capital Claim 4: Education's role in ensuring social mobility opportunities for all American Youth

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Similar to the individual mean item responses, claims fell into a neutral to positive range with the lowest mean response at 3.09 reflective of the claim that CCSSI will produce higher student achievement (national/international metrics). The highest level of agreement at 4.34 lies with the claim that education has an influence on the growth of the US Economy. It is also of note that the standard deviation measured for Human Capital Claim 1 is significantly lower than the other claim sets, indicating that participants' responses tended to be less variable than in other opinion areas. Overall, six of the sixteen claims (37.5%) reflected neutrally positive opinions. All claims tied to the human capital/vocationalism rationale produced higher levels of agreement as evidence by the neutrally positive (3.50 or higher) mean scores for each claim subset.

## **Question 2**

How do these perspectives vary by teacher context (e.g. experience, content taught, district and site demographics) within the 9-12 educational system? (Variation of Perceptions among Implementers)

As studied previously, educators' individual capacities with respect to knowledge and personal beliefs, coupled with organizational context, influence implementation of reforms at the classroom level (Spillane, 2004). The degree to which perceptions vary among high school teachers based on contextual factors and between policymakers can serve to foreshadow realized outcomes. In the case of the policy statements, comparing some of the previously identified demographic characteristics was negated as the sampling process was forced to change from the stratified sample to convenience sampling. However, there were elements of demographic comparison that were maintained and yielded significant results.

Within the population, the comparisons of teacher experience and teacher classification with regard to claim survey response means were analyzed. The descriptive statistics for these reviews are illustrated in Figure 6 and 7. Highest values per claim and classification group are bolded and emphasized in green, while lowest values per group are underlined and emphasized in yellow. Given that the survey sample is based on convenience and do not include a statistically significant number of responses, the comparisons below are suggestive of how this group may feel and not confirmatory. This provides a possible overview on current Maricopa County high school teachers' perspectives given specific characteristics and should be considered as exploratory at best.

		TEACHER CLASSIFICATION															
		IB1	IB2	IB3	IB4	IB5	IB6	CC1	CC2	CC3	CC4	CC5	CC6	HC1	HC2	HC3	HC4
GROUP A	Mean	3.42	3.07	3.34	3.14	3.30	3.06	3.55	3.53	3.33	3.40	3.31	3.11	4.41	3.95	4.01	4.06
	Std. Deviation	0.68	0.92	0.82	1.08	0.91	0.92	0.84	0.80	0.82	0.78	0.82	0.84	0.65	0.73	0.73	0.70
	N	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	82
GROUP B	Mean	3.56	3.17	3.31	3.08	3.35	3.12	3.58	3.49	3.36	3.42	3.37	3.13	4.33	3.84	3.88	4.04
	Std. Deviation	0.70	0.85	0.79	0.92	0.79	0.87	0.90	0.77	0.76	0.75	0.82	0.77	0.56	0.71	0.75	0.71
	N	368	368	368	368	343	368	342	343	343	343	333	334	347	347	347	334
Total	Mean	3.54	3.15	3.31	3.09	3.34	3.11	3.57	3.50	3.35	3.41	3.36	3.13	4.34	3.86	3.91	4.05
	Std. Deviation	0.70	0.86	0.79	0.95	0.81	0.88	0.88	0.77	0.77	0.75	0.82	0.78	0.58	0.71	0.74	0.71
	N	453	453	453	453	428	453	427	428	428	428	416	417	432	432	432	416

Figure 6. Comparison of Group A to Group B teacher mean responses (per CCSSI claim).



		TEACHER EXPERIENCE															
		IB1	IB2	IB3	IB4	IB5	IB6	CC1	CC2	CC3	CC4	CC5	CC6	HC1	HC2	HC3	HC4
Post NCLB	Mean	3.78	3.19	3.41	3.22	3.48	3.26	3.61	3.53	3.34	3.40	3.34	3.14	4.37	3.86	3.96	4.05
(0-3 yrs)	Std. Deviation	0.64	0.76	0.65	0.82	0.71	0.77	0.89	0.75	0.76	0.76	0.80	0.72	0.54	0.66	0.68	0.72
	N	143	143	143	143	138	143	138	138	138	138	135	135	143	143	143	138
NCLB	Mean	3.50	3.07	3.20	3.06	3.23	2.99	3.65	3.57	3.43	3.46	3.45	3.16	4.30	3.83	3.88	3.95
(4-10 yrs)	Std. Deviation	0.66	0.91	0.90	1.04	0.88	0.89	0.88	0.80	0.79	0.73	0.84	0.87	0.68	0.79	0.80	0.80
	N	106	106	106	106	104	106	105	105	105	104	105	106	106	106	106	104
Pre-NCLB	Mean	3.36	3.15	3.28	3.03	3.33	3.06	3.50	3.45	3.35	3.42	3.33	3.12	4.36	3.89	3.89	4.10
(11+ yrs)	Std. Deviation	0.73	0.91	0.83	0.99	0.85	0.92	0.87	0.77	0.76	0.74	0.80	0.78	0.55	0.69	0.74	0.62
	N	170	170	170	170	163	170	168	168	168	168	162	162	170	170	170	166
Total	Mean	3.54	3.14	3.30	3.11	3.34	3.11	3.58	3.51	3.37	3.43	3.36	3.14	4.35	3.87	3.91	4.04
	Std. Deviation	0.70	0.86	0.79	0.95	0.81	0.87	0.88	0.77	0.77	0.74	0.81	0.78	0.58	0.71	0.74	0.71
	N	419	419	419	419	405	419	411	411	411	411	401	402	419	419	419	408

Figure 7. Comparison of teacher experience (Post NCLB/NCLB/Pre-NCLB) mean reponses (per CCSSI claim).

When comparing teachers' classification (Group A/Group B) mean responses, both groups produced similar levels of agreement to CCSSI claims. Both classification groups had six of sixteen neutrally positive mean responses. Additionally, both groups reflected high agreement with the Human Capital/Vocationalism claims as those four associated claims received the highest mean scores among all claim categories. Both groups reflected a neutrally positive opinion on statements that CCSSI will ensure that all students will be able to enter first year (college/university/workforce) courses upon graduation without remediation; however, the final neutrally positive response differed between the two groups as Group A teachers responded more favorably to the idea that CCSSI will ensure that all students will be academically successful in college/university/workforce training than Group B teachers. Group B teachers favored the idea that CCSSI has higher student expectations than previous iterations more so than Group A teachers. While these trends do show differences in responses, when comparing group means via ANOVA test, there was no statistical significance found between the groups.

Teacher experience groups demonstrated different response patterns similar to teacher classification groups. As evidenced figure 7, there is wide agreement among all three experience levels that education is connected to the economy. As with the previous comparisons, the human capital/vocationalism rationale is most favorably embraced by all survey respondents. Teachers with less than three years of experience (Post-NCLB) produced claim mean scores that were the most positive toward CCSSI policy talk statements. Among the three experience groups compared, 44.8% (7/16) of the Post-NCLB claim mean responses were neutrally positive. Similar to the Group B teachers

responses, younger teachers were more positive that this new policy change will result in higher student expectations than previous iterations (IB1).

Teachers with the highest levels of experience (11+ years), were mostly neutral with only four claims (25%) reaching neutrally positive agreement status. All four of these claims related to the Human Capital/Vocationalism rationale. NCLB Teachers (those who have practiced for four to ten years) had mean claim responses more closely aligned with new teachers: 37.5% at the neutrally positive level or above. NCLB teachers were not as positive as new teachers toward the idea that this policy shift will result in higher student expectations: 3.50 mean score as compared to 3.78 mean score among Post-NCLB teachers.

Further statistical analyses revealed a significant difference based on teacher experience level for International Benchmark Claim 1: CCSSI has higher student expectations than previous iterations (accountability) and International Benchmark Claim 6: CCSSI will produce greater alignment (school/district & state/nation). In response to statements in the first claim, Post NCLB teachers had the highest level of agreement (3.78), with the level of agreement decreasing with teacher experience level: 3.50 (NCLB) and 3.36 (Pre-NCLB) respectively. Regarding the idea of greater alignment among schools, state, and the nation due to CCSSI reforms, NCLB teachers (4-10 years) were in least agreement with this claim, followed by Pre-NCLB teachers (11+ years of experience). (See Appendix C for ANOVA results).

### **Interpretation**

In order to provide context and interpret trends identified during initial survey analysis, focus groups were conducted following initial analysis. In pursuing this format,

the quantitative data and analysis provide a general overview of what select high school teachers are thinking with respect to policy reform messages, while the focus group interviews provide the context and rationale of why they may think that way. As the format of sampling changed, focus group participants were not selected utilizing the same stratified sampling procedure; however, they are reflective of the demography among current Maricopa County high school teachers. In addition to the tables presented in the first section, the focus group were presented further statistical representations. This information indicated the percentage of respondents selecting their respective indicator (0 = no response, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) for each survey item. Focus groups were asked to weigh in regarding their opinions as to why teachers responded as they did when providing neutral responses, why some respondents chose to opt out on selected questions, and what this may mean for interpreting teacher perceptions. The additional statistical results presented to these focus groups can be found in Appendix D.

### **International Benchmarking Analysis**

The initial section of the survey, international benchmarking questions, included a review of policy talk rhetoric that explored the expectations and the design of the common core standards themselves. Specifically, the policy talk rhetoric asserts that the Common Core State Standards would produce a student that was better prepared for life beyond high school. Focus group respondents felt that these messages were “familiar” and that teachers, parents, and students agree that students are not ready for the demands that follow in college. “...There is a pretty big fear that India and China are going to take our jobs from our students – we need to prepare them better if we are going to remain

competitive” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “Students are not prepared for the rigor and expectations of college along with the responsibilities associated with this...anything we can do to bring them closer [like the Common Core] would be a step in the right direction” (Respondent 11, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “I think the Standards are good, but it is really going to come down to what is done with them in the classroom” (Respondent 4, personal communication, October 26, 2013).

While these initial assertions support the need for change, the focus group pointed out that the agreement among teachers regarding the impetus of that change was less unified. “These questions kind of indicate that the education system is broken as it currently is – we aren’t really giving everyone a comprehensive, content-rich and complete education, - that’s why we need this new set of standards and next reform...but no one wants to agree with that” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “I don’t know where we should start with raising the quality – what I think should be done and what my neighbor next door thinks are really different – it’s not just a quick fix – I don’t think you can get to it by changing the standards...or even asking your survey questions” (Respondent 11, personal communication, December 17, 2013). It was noted that the policy talk rhetoric implies parental and student involvement in education as well. “The responsibility of these questions doesn’t lie with teachers though – this is about making sure that parents and students start to understand what they need to do.” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “We [parents, students and teachers] all need to have a better understanding of the word Rigor” (Respondent 1, personal communication, October 18, 2013). “Parents need to understand that their

children are going to have to work harder and not all of them are going to get an A”  
(Respondent 6, Personal Communication, October 26, 2013).

Focus group participants reasoned that neutrality among responses reflected that their peers are less certain that the standards are able to produce all of their intended outcomes. When examining the idea that the standards are “fewer, clearer, and higher” and will produce an internationally competitive student, focus group respondents expressed doubt. “Phrases like ‘clear understanding, roadmap, major advance in the standards’ make it seem like we have arrived. Not sure that I buy it...and I want to know why they are so sure about it – ‘decades of sound empirical data’ were used to build the standards? What is this data, who financed it and where did it come from? I want to know...” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “That sounds familiar too – when we were doing NCLB, everyone said that we would have arrived after that – it was even in the name ‘No Child Left Behind’ - now it feels like education reform is the gift that keeps coming back around – like the fruitcake that no one wants” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

With respect to international alignment claims, focus group participants argued that international standards/testing is irrelevant in the day-to-day practice. “Teachers don’t really pay attention to international standards anyway – unless we are getting beaten up over the data from them – I don’t know what these would look like, where they come from, who made them– so how could I agree?” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 18, 2013). “Most teachers don’t believe these were created to be in line with international standards – this was a national movement – led by the Obama administration. International standards aren’t really talked about all that often. I

think this is a lack of knowledge” (Respondent 15, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

Despite the admitted lack of knowledge on international education, teachers did note the impetus to create an internationally competitive student as a uniting concern among their peers – albeit with some disagreement that this is an outcome that can be readily attained. “The last question got a lot of responses because we all know our students have to do better against other international job markets – that is why you got a lot of 4s there. Teachers know we have to make our kids competitive – if we all want to have a good future” (Respondent 11, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “This question talks about the ‘best possible education, no matter where a child lives or what their background is.’ That’s just not going to happen. Poverty can’t be that easily overcome. No piece of paper, or standard, will guarantee a kid’s success. It’s a variety of kid’s experiences and opportunities – and teachers don’t want to tell you that – it’s kind of like admitting defeat” (Respondent 14, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

In addition to reflecting on these discrete areas, the focus group identified other extant factors that would impact the measured effectiveness of the standards and may result in less favorable responses by teachers (especially veteran teachers). “Do people know what makes students motivated? There is a hope that these standards will fix everything – but we just don’t know that this is the case. There is a lot to motivation and engagement – too much – it’s not defined well – kind of like the Common Core – no one is really sure where to start or how we are going to do it.” (Respondent 14, personal communication, December 18, 2013). “This seems like a lot of hype to me – I don’t think teachers really know what the terms mean ‘effective teaching,’ ‘motivated and engaged,’

‘deeper instruction’...it is all empty – but no one wants to take a stand on it – so they just mark neutral” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “If we don’t have the money to purchase the things we need, it won’t make any difference how great the standards are...” (Respondent 9, personal communication, October 26, 2013).

Throughout the review of the international benchmarking section, three recurrent discussions emerged interrelated with Common Core State Standards and the transition that is currently underway. First, focus group participants feel that their peers are largely unaware of “what” the standards entail. “I think they marked neutral because they don’t know much about it. You can’t agree or disagree with something if you don’t know what it means” (Respondent 1, personal communication, October 18, 2013). “We haven’t really done much with them [Common Core Standards] in terms of how they work in practice- I wouldn’t be sure that this is really going to be a game changer – I am hopeful – but I really don’t know. I think that is why you have these neutral responses” (Respondent 15, personal communication, December 18, 2013). “I think ... teachers aren’t really clear on what these are, but they don’t necessarily agree that they are better” (Respondent 15, personal communication, December 18, 2013). Overall, focus group respondents felt that the neutrality on survey responses when asked directly about the standards was indicative of a lack of exposure as well as an emphasis on the teacher as being the locus of control for implementation of these standards. In light of this, it was hypothesized by some that teachers didn’t want to respond affirmatively or negatively regarding the outcomes, as they were the ones ultimately responsible for their success or failure.



Second, the lack of direction and communication regarding the Common Core State standards across schools, districts, and the state was mentioned as a barrier for teachers truly understanding the standards. “The webinars that come from New York don’t really apply to us – I don’t think people see them as relevant to Arizona’s standards – plus New York has more money than us...” (Respondent 7, personal communication, October 26, 2013). This is also reflected in the discussions as to who is in charge of education reform in the state. “This last question – who are the education leaders in Arizona? I really don’t know – I don’t think it is [my principal or the district superintendency] – but it isn’t clear who is in charge of Common Core in Arizona? Oh wait – I mean Arizona College and Career Ready State Standards” (Respondent 11, personal communication, December 17, 2013). Respondents described different methods of current implementation at their own school sites and districts, seeming to corroborate the idea that there is uncertainty regarding what the common core state standards will actually entail and little unification in that presentation.

Focus group respondents displayed a hopeful attitude toward obtaining new curriculum and the wealth that collective sharing offers, an oft-cited advantage of the Common Core State Standards. Yet these hopeful aspirations were countered by the realization of a severely contracted operational budget and the realities of their communities. “It would be nice to know what we could get for our classroom from other places – like New York or other states – but given that there is no money – and some of the stuff online is so different than what we are doing here – it isn’t really all that helpful” (Respondent 11, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “I wonder what the other states are doing – I am hopeful – but it doesn’t seem like any one has money to buy new

materials” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 17, 2013). Other teachers argued that the idea of curriculum is extremely localized and that the observed survey responses are a polite unwillingness to conform. “Define curriculum? It is too varied to be a singular definition. It is not only the materials, but also the assessments and the instruction. And besides – who has time to go online and look up all that stuff? This isn’t providing options for us – most of the time textbooks are set [aligned to state standards] by CA, TX, and FL anyway. Now that we are nationalized – how will this be any different?” (Respondent 16, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

The third discussion emerged as a “wait and see approach” to the standards themselves. With the continued use of the AIMS exam as a primary accountability measure for students and teachers, the shift to embracing the Common Core State Standards is low. “People don’t know what the Common Core is about – most of the teachers I know are waiting to see what the impact will be and what the PARCC test will look like” (Respondent 1, personal communication, October 18, 2013). “The teachers I work with think this is going to fall apart before it gets started – I mean we have already changed the name from Common Core to Arizona Career and College Readiness Standards...most people aren’t paying attention to it” (Respondent 2, personal communication, October 18, 2013). This was also cited by other teachers when discussing and explaining low response rates for identified questions, “This is the only question in the series that has “Common Core” in it...the Tea Party has changed the title and one district [Gilbert Unified] just signed a letter saying they want no part of it. I think this might be a real-life reflection that teachers are getting mixed messages about the

Common Core – nobody really knows what it is about – and are we going to keep doing it?” (Respondent 14, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

This “wait and see” approach also emerged when presented with claim mean differences among teacher experience levels. The focus group offered that experienced teachers have “been there, done that” when it comes to reform. They were unsurprised by the lack of support for the claim statements. Similar to the “wait and see” approach of teachers to the standards themselves, experienced teachers comment that this too shall pass when a new presidential regime is elected. With respect to the lack of differences between Group A and Group B responses, focus group participants cited that many districts have placed all teachers (regardless of content) in the Group B category and that the accountability system itself is not clear. “It’s hard to know how this will affect you when the district and state hasn’t even figured it out yet...it keeps changing” (Respondent 3, personal communication, October 18, 2013). “Older teachers have lived through these changes – some know it won’t make any difference – others are just waiting to retire. I think that is why you see these differences” (Respondent 8, personal communication, October 26, 2013).

### **College and Career Readiness Analysis**

The second section of the survey, College and Career Readiness questions, explored the extensively cited outcome of the Common Core State Standards, that every child will be career and college ready. Policy talk items reflecting the dual goals of equity and excellence in this pursuit became the survey items for this section. Focus group participants cited that teachers are highly familiar with both of these ideas; however, the agreement that they are attainable – or should be – was less certain. “I think that we

already know which kids are college ready – and we have for a while. I think that is why you got so many 3s. Kinda like it really isn't the big problem right now... a better question should be should we really be making that our goal? Society has failed to acknowledge that not everyone will be college and career ready. Not all of our kids are going to make it [like our profoundly Autistic or ED kids]. Those kids – it's just enough that they don't hit, kick, or spit on a daily basis. We expect education to fix the issues that are beyond it. Maybe the better goal is that, for some kids, they are going to read/talk/balance a checkbook – and be able to go out in public alone” (Respondent 14, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

Focus group respondents noted that the questions in this section, like other policy talk statements, placed the responsibility for outcomes squarely on the teachers (through the execution of the standards both past, present, and future). “This says we have been lying to students, but we haven't – if you are using the wrong test to tell them – then maybe, but that wasn't my choice. It depends on who you mean by ‘we’ and I am not sure that everyone really knows what it takes to be ready for college or even what happens to us when they leave us [e.g. first year college placement data]” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “The onus is off of the students here - it is not my job to make the kid a success by myself– at some point they have to own their own shit you know?” (Respondent 15, personal communication, December 18, 2013). The level of disconnect with this message was offered as an explanation for majority of 3 responses for the question, “We recognize the enormous promise the Common Core State Standards released today hold to help all students graduate from high school ready to

succeed in postsecondary education” as well as the overall neutral responses in other areas.

In considering results for the policy talk rhetoric that CCSSI will ensure that every student will be able to enter first year (college/university/workforce training) courses upon high school graduation without remediation, focus group participants discussed the isolated nature of education (organization of grade level, subjects, and tracks) as a contributing factor that keeps teachers from understanding students’ larger progression toward goals beyond high school along with a continued lack of clarity on what the standards can actually achieve. “The accountability for your students’ progress is very personal – you don’t really care about the whole child at that point. So of course there are going to be disconnects between what you do and what they need to do beyond your classroom. I don’t think anyone really knows what their kids may need to be able to do – kids haven’t even decided yet. And it is really hard when you are evaluated on just one component at a time” (Respondent 14, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

“You are talking about using the Common Core Standards as setting a baseline for what kids need to know and do for career readiness – but if you really want to help kids get there – you have to be a mentor. Ask them about their dreams and aspirations and teach them the things that will get them there – hard work, perseverance, grit. Those aren’t things that you teach in class as a lesson or are measured on a test” (Respondent 16, personal communication, December 18, 2013). “I still don’t know what these baseline set of skills and knowledge in the standards are and I have been to quite a few Common

Core trainings – there is no clarity here” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

When considering the neutral agreement to statements related to the idea that CCSSI will ensure that students find success in college/university/workforce training, the lack of transparency regarding key terms used in the questions, along with other variables that could affect these outcomes were mentioned by the focus group. “I am not really sure what ‘employability and technical skills’ really means? Do they want to know if they are on time? How are the common core standards supposed to teach that?” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “How exactly do you link education to some of these things that are really about work ethic and personality? I don’t think teachers are really clear on it – they just don’t know” (Respondent 15, personal communication, December 18, 2013).

Additional disagreement centered on whether standards alone will fix current educational issues, as measured by degree and certification attainment. “Correlation does not equal causation – we just taught that in Algebra I this semester – and it’s true. Better standards don’t mean that everyone is going to make it through. Great (K-12) standards in Massachusetts is not why they have higher college completion rates...they spend more on education than most places for a start, but there are a lot of reasons why people don’t graduate from college and most of them have nothing to do with their high school teachers or what they taught them” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “People aren’t buying this one – but they know they have to do it anyway. I think this is your polite disagreement option– we don’t want to tell you what we really

think [about this idea]...” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

### **Human Capital Claims**

In most sections of the survey, there were clear areas where the individual nature of education and educators was evident, with the exception of the Human Capital claim portion. For the most part, in this last section of the survey, educators responding were in strong agreement with the statements that were presented about education’s link to the economy, so much so, that very few anomalous outcomes arose for discussion.

Overwhelmingly, focus group participants were very familiar with the messages that were present in this section. “Most of this sounds like the propaganda we hear every time there is a change. These are the most often repeated statements by the governor,

Huppenthal and even Obama” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 17, 2013). There was a sense of comfort in many of the messages and what they represent for

educator’s role in society “This is why we do the job. We want to believe that we can help people better their lot in life through education. It is the foundation of our nation”

(Respondent 11, personal communication, December 17, 2013). “I came into the job to

make a difference – these ideas represent that I can” (Respondent 13, personal

communication, December 17, 2013). There was discussion that the standards,

functionally being adopted nationwide, represented socialism. The standards were not

only national, but had been developed, advanced, and controlled by individual interests

outside of the immediate locality. “The number of people who have not agreed outright

makes me think that some teachers are sitting on the fence about this. States and

communities have always been able to determine what they teach and how. This is scary

socialism – and we are hearing about it now by some of these right wing Republicans and ultra conservatives. It would make sense that some teachers agree with their views” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013). The sole highly neutral response was a question related to uneducated individuals impacting the ability of the nation to defend itself. Some focus group respondents felt that it was not accurate, as the majority of military combatants may not have attended college prior to enlistment, but that they were unsure if their peers had the same knowledge. Others thought that respondents may have been confused by the question. Notwithstanding this question, focus group respondents indicated that while they liked the ideas, there were many statements that represented discrepancies in real life, such as the idea that education is an absolute need for producing wealth. “The guy that is behind these [CCSSI], Bill Gates, never graduated from college. So why do we all have to go now? He shouldn’t be telling everyone to do something he didn’t” (Respondent 13, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

In reviewing the sub-claim agreement levels, the focus groups identified the human capital (HC) argument as a way for education to “be taken seriously.” In subscribing to statements, it reinforces the purpose of education for many teachers which is to build strong, productive citizens that can continue to move America forward. The repetition of the human capital message was also cited as a possible explanation for high agreement, “Businesses are all over Common Core and education, it is the most common argument that we hear – after a while, you believe it to be true” (Respondent 1, personal communication, October 18, 2013). Some focus group members commented that this argument had been consistent throughout the roll-out of the Common Core State



Standards and those teachers with experience cited the argument's existence well before this most current policy shift.

### **Summary**

This chapter has summarized the findings and results regarding Maricopa County high school teachers' perceptions to the policy talk messages surrounding the Common Core State Standards Initiative and PARCC assessment messages. Based on the results found, there are portions of policy talk messages that have resonated; however, it should be noted that these tend to be the oldest and most oft-repeated statements, many stretching back to "A Nation at Risk" rhetoric. Newer messages related to changes in practices and student outcomes tend to be less widely accepted on the whole by the survey population. It would appear from the survey data and focus group interpretation that teachers are unsure of what the Common Core really entails due to a lack of clarity in message and presentations for practitioners regarding implementation. Little concrete information has come forward regarding what this reform truly involves, how it will be executed, and how it will overlay prior reform efforts that have preceded its implementation. A significant complicating factor in this effort is the unique nature of the Common Core State Standards as a nationalized movement with policy elites well outside of the communities wherein this reform will eventually take hold. Furthermore in Arizona, the backlash of conservative Republicans against the Common Core State Standards has led some teachers to believe that the implementation of the new standards is up in the air, without discernable direction or support from the state, and at times even district, level. This has left educators to interpret this latest change through their own lenses of educational understanding, which in turn, has defined their level of agreement

and acceptance with these policy statements. As implementers of this newest educational change, their perceptions, attitudes, and understandings will ultimately determine the viability of this latest policy iteration. Chapter 5 will present the summary, conclusions, recommendations, and implications of this study as it can be applied to inform policy makers and educators as they work to affect educational improvement.

## Chapter 5 - Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

### **Introduction**

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study including a reflective narrative, a summary of findings and conclusions, recommendations as well as suggestions for future research. The summary of the study is presented as a brief review of the initial three chapters. The remainder of the chapter addresses research questions one and two.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to survey Maricopa County high school teachers' perceptions to the policy talk messages surrounding the Common Core State Standards Initiative and PARCC assessment. To determine these educator perspectives, a survey was created based on CCSSI and PARCC policy talk statements in press. The survey was developed and given to 400 high school educators in Maricopa County. Initially, surveys were to be distributed to 28 high schools, both urban and suburban, to yield 400 survey responses from each demographic setting. Difficulties in securing participation by districts and charter school administration shifted the research design from a stratified sample to a convenience sampling format. This shift also led to an overall contraction among the number of participants (800 vs. 400 total respondents).

The research was designed to measure practitioner perspectives as this new reform moves from transitional to active status and was incorporated into existing accountability measures. This school year marked the first wherein Arizona high school teachers would come in contact with new standards on a functional level and would be expected to shift their instruction accordingly. Prior to this year, the transitional status of Common Core meant that high school teachers were aware shifts were coming, but the

actual realization of what this may look like to instruction, what shifts would be required in curriculum and course sequencing, and what would be the resultant impact to student achievement were still relatively nebulous. Most K-12 districts focused on implementation at the lower levels (K-2) with transient attention given to high school subject area teachers and instructors. One teacher, reminiscing about a training given by his East Valley suburban school district remarked, “They had us sit in a training for three days (for English 12 teachers) on Common Core, but didn’t tell us much about what it was. They used materials from the 90s and videos from New York to try to explain what this was going to look like in the classroom. I kind of got the feeling that they didn’t really know themselves.” (Respondent 12, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

Overall, it appears that for the past three years K-12 and union high school districts primarily focused on making high school content teachers aware that there were new standards and little beyond this fact. This approach was hardly surprising as the AIMS test did not directly measure these new standards in their projected “PARCC-like” format and the focus, for high school students, continues to remain on achieving student achievement outcomes relative to the AIMS assessment. Indeed, at this writing, it is still uncertain what the revised AIMS assessment will look like, what high-stakes accountability measures will remain intact for high school graduates, and whether the PARCC test will be adopted by the State of Arizona at all. Furthermore, strong opposition from conservative Republican groups (e.g. Tea Party), parents and community groups concerned about a nationalized curriculum, and grassroots organizations (e.g. AZB.A.T.S.) vocalizing their beliefs that Common Core is a product of commercialized education facilitated by private interests and industry have all served to stall forward

movement on Common Core State Standards implementation. It is against this backdrop that this study focused on the high school teachers' perceptions of common policy talk messages associated with the Common Core State Standards movement. Results of the survey were contrasted based on practitioners level of teaching experience and content area instructed.

As presented in chapter one, the idea of educational reform as a vehicle to improve America's emerging social and economic concerns is not a novel concept. An accounting of educational reforms since the 1980s reveal that reforms have cycled roughly on a 10 year basis often while previous reforms are still being implemented. The perceived failures of previous reforms (Nation at Risk, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind) serve as the impetus to develop the next iteration, often with similar rhetoric and themes. As presented in the literature review, David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995) explain the treadmill of chasing educational change as an outcome of the diversity among America's population, the decentralized nature of public school governance, and pre-existing conflicting values and interests among stakeholders. The lack of consensus on what education should do and how it should go about doing it has led to the conclusion that educational reforms have not met their intended consequences; thus there is a constant need to reform the schoolhouse.

Tyack and Cuban argue that practitioners are often left out of the discussion as most of the ideas for reform and the subsequent rhetoric to buoy support for it, is generated by policy elites as they have the political and intellectual capital to move the reform forward. In doing so, there is a gap between what is occurring on the ground level versus the intended outcome of the current reform. Practitioners carry the living history

of prior reform movements along with the day to day perspectives of implementing the newest reform. Measuring the perspectives of practitioners regarding policy talk's intended results can serve to foreshadow realized outcomes in this latest policy iteration. This research can serve to inform both policy makers and educators as they work to affect educational improvement. In the course of this research, it was discovered that engaging teachers in these discussions was actively discouraged by many of the organizations themselves for reasons that were not entirely clear to the researcher.

The methodology for the research consisted of a sequential explanatory mixed-method design that occurred in two phases. The first phase involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase. The purpose behind this design was<sup>2</sup> to utilize qualitative data to inform the findings from the initial quantitative results. In pursuing this format, the quantitative data and analysis provided a general overview of *what* select high school teachers are thinking with respect to policy reform messages, while the focus group interviews provided the context and rationale of *why* they may think that way.

Although the study was fairly innocuous and provided substantial data regarding the current perspectives of Maricopa County High School teachers, there were significant moments where the “politicization” of education reform was evident and deserved to be mentioned. The impact of this politicization created situations whereby the research could not be conducted as it had originally been intended. It also serves to underscore many of the arguments surrounding educational reform as presented in the literature review.

At the outset of this study, the intention was to assess teachers' perspectives on the policy talk surrounding this emerging reform and to determine if there was any

variation among these perspectives based on teacher context. This was a perspective which had not been previously measured during educational reforms and given that the AZCCSSI was rolled out to all grade levels this year across the state, the timing of the survey provided a unique opportunity as many of the policy talk statements were at their peak. As mentioned previously, it is of note that prior to this year, the Common Core Standards were implemented in K-2 classrooms only. In anticipation of the widespread change that would be occurring with 3-12 grade implementation, AZ Ready held various forums regarding the increasing rigor and demand that would occur with the new standards, but nothing was in effect until fall 2013. During the course of these forums, Craig Barrett, Chair of the Arizona Ready Council, outlined the rationale for implementing the Common Core State Standards as well as how they tied into the Arizona Ready Goals. The AZ Ready Goals are a list of educational reform goals that were developed in accordance with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act/Race to the Top parameters, as was the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Barrett was joined by other members of the AZ Ready Council, such as Rebecca Gau (Director of the Governor's Office of Educational Innovation) and Pearl Esau Chang (Expect More Arizona), to detail the current state of Arizona K-20 education and the dire need for change. Most of these forums were attended by those affected directly by the looming educational reform shifts, primarily superintendents, school boards and district office staff. Discussions at these forums centered on an agreement regarding the need for improvement, but there were concerns as to how to achieve this improvement without the resources necessary to provide training and instructional support. Barrett and his AZ Ready team brushed these concerns aside citing the ability to put more "tension in the

system” and “leverage existing resources” (C. Barrett, personal communication at AZ Ready Forum, Chandler, AZ, September 2012).

Administrators and school board members noted that there was little to no parent participation in these forums early on. Regarding the paltry response by the public, one unidentified superintendent asked Rebecca Gau, “If you only have 2,000 likes on your Arizona Ready Facebook Page, and you have over a million K-12 students across the state, that doesn’t seem like a whole bunch of people are signing up to find out about this...” Gau’s response was that she was hopeful there would be changes as the “message got out there” (R. Gau, personal communication at AZ Ready Forum, Chandler, AZ, September 2012). To date, the AZ Ready Facebook page has 18,411 likes with 728 people “talking” about it – roughly 0.9% of the eligible parental population represented (AZ Ready, 2013).

As the new standards were implemented K-12 along with the prospect of a revised high stakes testing requirement for graduation, conservative political groups became more vocal regarding the “nationalization” of Arizona’s K-12 education system. Claims from these political groups ranged from a CCSSI connection to United Nations Article 21, to assault on local control, to loss of student privacy through longitudinal data collection methods (Arizonans Against the Common Core, 2013). Thus far, pressure from these conservative groups have yielded a name change, from the Arizona Common Core State Standards to Arizona’s College and Career Ready Standards, as well generating numerous forums involving State Superintendent John Huppenthal in defense of the standards (Fischer, 2013). At the school site level, parents have presented administrators with opt out forms requesting to be excused from Common Core curriculum along with



any longitudinal data system collection and tracking. These requests have resulted in oftentimes contentious discussions regarding the nature and reality of current standards adoption and this most recent reform (Arizonans Against Common Core, 2013, see Appendix F).

In seeking district and charter school participation amid these arguments, several school districts declined participation citing concerns related to the bias and slanted nature of the survey questions. “Our teachers do not need any other negative messages in their heads right now as we are rolling out our K-12 curriculum aligned to ACCS. We are trying to help everyone ‘stay on message’ here,” wrote one district administrator in an email regarding the decision to decline participation. “Statements in your survey such as ‘We have been lying to students – telling them they are ready for college when they aren’t’ take away from our mission that every child can learn.” wrote one Assistant Superintendent for Research and Assessment in their letter declining participation. “It’s not that we don’t think the subject is good. We just want to keep our teachers above all the politics that is going on with this right now – we just need them to teach the standards and not question them,” responded another district administrator.

Other districts did not directly decline; rather requests for research were “lost” multiple times in the bureaucracy of the organization. When questioned directly regarding this circumstance, one district office administrator said that they were very uncomfortable putting the survey and research before a board member, for fear of what it may do to derail their district’s implementation efforts. It was suggested by one assistant superintendent that finding teachers who were more politically motivated, e.g. Arizona Education Association, might prove more fruitful in getting responses with less resistance

as it was expected that these teachers would be more “accessible” and not tied to any one district. Ultimately, the emerging political controversies regarding the policy talk around the standards appeared to preclude the opportunity for teachers to enter the same dialogue within their work settings for fear of what these discussions may do to support for implementation efforts.

## **Summary of Findings and Conclusions**

### **Question 1**

What are Maricopa County High School teachers’ perceptions of policy talk regarding Common Core Standards Initiative and high stakes accountability measures with respect to student achievement outcomes and implementation?

Of the respondent pool, the majority of the policy talk statements received neutrally positive mean scores (3.5 level or higher). There were only three mean item responses that were below the 3.0 (neutral) threshold. Two of these mean responses related to policy rhetoric regarding the standards themselves. The lowest mean response at 2.8 was connected to the statement, “The (CCSS) initiative is a critical first step in our nation’s effort to provide every student with a comprehensive, content-rich and complete education.” The second lowest mean at 2.9 reflected respondents’ overall level of agreement to the statement, “As the Common Core is implemented across 40+ states, Arizona will have more curriculum options than ever before.” The third lowest mean response at 2.9 was connected to college and career readiness for all as evidenced in the statement, “For the first time, millions of schoolchildren, parents and teachers will know if all students are on-track for College – and if they are ready to enter College without the need for remedial instruction.” The statements associated with the claim that CCSSI will

produce higher student achievement results generated the lowest overall agreement by respondents as evidenced by 3.1 mean score.

Of the 72 discrete items, the range of survey means consisted of a low of 2.8 to a high of 4.6 on the 1 to 5 Likert scale. Ninety-six percent of mean responses for survey items tended to be neutral to positive, at the 3.0 or higher level. For all survey items, the highest mean item response was 4.6 which was connected to the statement, “An educated workforce is crucial to the future economic success of Arizona.” Other policy statements within this claim group (Human Capital Claim 1: Education’s Influence on the Growth of the US Economy) reflected similarly high positive mean item responses at the 4.0 or greater level. The mean for this claim group was the highest among all claim groups at 4.3, reflecting a strong agreement by respondents with these CCSSI policy statements. Policy statements reflective of the Human Capital rationale proved to generate the higher levels of agreement among all claim groups.

When considering claim group responses, a similar pattern emerged to the discrete items, where mean responses for claims fell into a neutral to positive range with the lowest mean response at 3.1 reflective of the claim that CCSSI will produce higher student achievement (national/international metrics). The highest level of agreement at 4.3 lies with the claim that education has an influence on the growth of the US economy. Overall, six of the sixteen claims (37.5%) reflected neutrally positive opinions. All claims tied to the human capital/vocationalism rationale produced higher levels of agreement as evidence by the neutrally positive (3.5 or higher) mean scores for each claim sub set.

## Question 2

How do these perspectives vary by teacher context (e.g. experience, content taught, district, and site demographics) within the 9-12 educational system?

(Variation of Perceptions among Implementers)

When comparing teachers' classification (Group A/Group B) mean responses, both groups produced similar levels of agreement to CCSSI claims. Both classification groups had six of sixteen neutrally positive mean responses. Additionally, both groups reflected high agreement with the Human Capital/Vocationalism claims as those four associated claims received the highest mean scores among all claim categories. Both groups reflected a neutrally positive opinion on statements that CCSSI will ensure that all students will be able to enter first year (college/university/workforce) courses upon graduation without remediation; however, the final neutrally positive response differed between the two groups as Group A teachers responded more favorably to the idea that CCSSI will ensure that all students will be academically successful in college/university/workforce training than Group B teachers. Group B teachers favored the idea that CCSSI has higher student expectations than previous iterations more so than Group A teachers. While these trends do show differences in responses, when comparing group means via ANOVA test, there was no statistical significance found between the groups.

Teacher experience groups demonstrated different response patterns similar to teacher classification groups. As with the previous comparisons, the human Capital/Vocationalism rationale is most favorably embraced by all survey respondents. Teachers with less than three years of experience (Post-NCLB) produced claim mean

scores that were the most positive toward CCSSI policy talk statements. Among the three experience groups compared, 44.8% (7 of 16) of the Post-NCLB claim mean responses were neutrally positive. Similar to the Group B teachers' responses, younger teachers were more positive that this new policy change will result in higher student expectations than previous iterations (IB1).

Teachers with the highest levels of experience (11+ years) were mostly neutral with only four claims (25%) reaching neutrally positive agreement status. All four of these claims related to the Human Capital/Vocationalism rationale. NCLB Teachers (those who have practiced for four to ten years) had mean claim responses more closely aligned with new teachers with 37.5% at the neutrally positive level or above. NCLB teachers were not as positive as new teachers toward the idea that this policy shift will result in higher student expectations with a 3.5 mean score as compared to 3.7 mean score among Post-NCLB teachers

Further statistical analyses revealed a significant difference, based on teacher experience level, for International Benchmark Claim 1: CCSSI has higher student expectations than previous iterations (accountability) and International Benchmark Claim 6: CCSSI will produce greater alignment (school/district & state/nation). In response to statements in the first claim, Post NCLB teachers had the highest level of agreement (3.7829) with the level of agreement decreasing with teacher experience level: 3.4972 (NCLB) and 3.3616 (Pre-NCLB) respectively. Regarding the idea of greater alignment among schools, state, and the nation due to CCSSI reforms, NCLB teachers (4-10 years) were in least agreement with this claim, followed by Pre-NCLB teachers (11+ years of experience).

Overall, survey focus groups denoted that Maricopa County High School teachers do not share a monolithic view of the changes that await them under the Common Core State Standards. The results point to varied perceptions related to these messages, dependent upon factors such as message content, teacher experience, teacher background, and other respondent demographic characteristics. Based on the results found, there are portions of policy talk messages that have resonated; however, it should be noted that these tend to be the oldest and most oft-repeated statements, many stretching back to “A Nation at Risk” rhetoric. Newer messages related to changes in practices and student outcomes tend to be less widely accepted on the whole by the survey population. It would appear from the survey data and focus group interpretation that teachers are unsure of what the Common Core really entails due to a lack of clarity in message and presentations for practitioners regarding implementation. Little concrete information has come forward regarding what this reform truly involves, how it will be executed, and how it will overlay prior reform efforts that have preceded its implementation.

A significant complicating factor in this effort is the unique nature of the Common Core State Standards as a nationalized movement with policy elites well outside of the communities wherein this reform will eventually take hold. Furthermore in Arizona, the backlash of conservative Republicans along with other groups against the Common Core State Standards has led some teachers to believe that the implementation of the new standards is up in the air, without discernable direction or support from the state, and at times even district, level. This has left educators to interpret this latest change through their own lenses of educational understanding, which in turn, has defined their level of agreement and acceptance with these policy statements. As implementers of

this newest educational change, their perceptions, attitudes, and understandings will ultimately determine the viability of this latest policy iteration.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research serves to illuminate what Maricopa County high school teachers perceive regarding policy talk messages related to the Common Core State Standards. The overall neutrality toward this most recent policy iteration serves to inform policy makers, as well as practitioners, of the current mood of educators as they move forward with accountability and implementation measures. At the outset, it would appear that Maricopa County teachers are somewhat reticent to embrace the promises of this newest change for a varied host of reasons. In addition to the policy discussions that are occurring at the state level, it may behoove district and site level administrators to engage in the discussion surrounding policy talk to reach consensus regarding what the reform is and if and why we should engage in it. While it would ideal to leave politics at the schoolhouse door, the events that transpired during the course of this study indicate that education is far from apolitical. In order to achieve true change, teachers must be able to understand why these reforms continue to occur, what is being asked of them in each iteration, and to weigh in on the feasibility of these changes *before* policies are adopted. Concurrently, policy makers should invite and listen to the realities of implementing reforms with limited resources, differential needs and outcomes, and the day to day realities of those providing instruction. Without engaging in these discussions and deeply exploring these topics, the likelihood of achieving the outcomes promised by any reform is limited at best.

In revisiting further areas of research, it would be of interest to conduct the study as originally intended to determine what effect, if any, was exerted by where and whom the teachers instructed. The differential responses among teachers of varying work experience suggest that context does influence perception of educational reform. It would be of interest to determine whether or not this extends to other demographic characteristics. Further extensions of this study might include the following:

1. Surveying and tracking teacher perceptions longitudinally as the reform implementation begins in earnest. As these reforms begin to take shape and become a part of the institutional fabric, perceptions related to policy statements may shift either positively or negatively depending upon experiential factors. These perceptions may hold implications for the realized effectiveness of this most current reform effort.
2. Surveying different institutional stakeholder perceptions of common core policy talk messages (site administrators, district office administrators, board members) prior to implementation. Similar to the high school teachers' perspectives, these individuals draw upon their immediate context to make interpretations regarding what policy talk messages hold for educational change. These perceptions can be juxtaposed against realized outcomes as a measure of each stakeholders' influence and importance within the reform cycle.
3. Surveying parents and students regarding their perceptions of common core policy talk messages. As end users of this reform, both groups' perceptions related to the need for and the validity of CCSSI are critical as they are



expected to participate and endorse the changes that are being made for their educational benefit. As with the stakeholder perspectives, parent and student perceptions can be juxtaposed against realized outcomes to determine level of influence within the reform implementation process.

### **Implications**

The significance of this particular study lies in the current time and state of educational reform in Arizona. As the CCSSI transitions from policy advocacy to implementation, what has been said about education (policy talk), who has said it (policy elites), and what it is intended to achieve (etymology) can serve to illuminate contemporary opinions and ambitions that the public holds for society. As with prior reforms efforts, the policy elite continue to hold that we have yet to reach the full promise of American education. The teachers surveyed in this research appear to be less certain of this argument and that the direction proposed by the Common Core State Standards will eventually fulfill this promise. Furthermore, the politics that continue to surround the Common Core State Standards movement appear to preclude an authentic discussion among all stakeholders (implementers, policy elites, and the American populace) regarding what should occur to improve our educational outcomes.

The reticence of educational institutions to encourage and enter the discussion only serves to further widen the gulf between what is idealized and what is possible; however, this result is not surprising. In Arizona, as well as nationally, the de-professionalization of teaching has only served to remove educators at all levels from the table. Teachers, administrators, and educational organizations that may go against this current reform run the risk of being cast out of an ever-contracting circle of influence.

Additionally other emergent concerns, adequate funding for K-12 education among them, demand that the remaining political capital be spent judiciously, even if individuals do not necessarily agree with the current reform. Given that so much hinges on the success of K-12 education, the consistent tinkering with the schoolhouse should give way to empowerment of those within it to discuss openly what is needed to achieve the very best for all children.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

**To:** David Garcia  
ED

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 05/30/2013

**Committee Action:** **Exemption Granted**

**IRB Action Date:** 05/30/2013

**IRB Protocol #:** 1304009126

**Study Title:** Identifying Maricopa County High School Teacher's Perceptions of Education Reform Rhe

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX B

PEARSON CORRELATION CO-EFFICIENT ANALYSIS:

CLAIM MEANS

Pearson Correlation Co-efficient																
	IB1MEAN	IB2MEAN	IB3MEAN	IB4MEAN	IB5MEAN	IB6MEAN	CC1MEAN	CC2MEAN	CC3MEAN	CC4MEAN	CC5MEAN	CC6MEAN	HC1MEAN	HC2MEAN	HC3MEAN	HC4MEAN
IB1MEAN	1.000	.413**	.483**	.452**	.480**	.460**	.237**	.270**	.258**	.270**	.276**	.252**	.088	.062	.117*	.050
IB2MEAN	.413**	1.000	.748**	.768**	.773**	.763**	.231**	.171**	.160**	.232**	.215**	.228**	.119*	.179**	.122*	.094
IB3MEAN	.483**	.748**	1.000	.727**	.809**	.749**	.217**	.156**	.177**	.228**	.223**	.218**	.138**	.184**	.149**	.137**
IB4MEAN	.452**	.768**	.727**	1.000	.832**	.829**	.249**	.193**	.186**	.236**	.248**	.269**	.152**	.180**	.149**	.116*
IB5MEAN	.480**	.773**	.809**	.832**	1.000	.847**	.278**	.189**	.188**	.250**	.268**	.253**	.097**	.137**	.096*	.067
IB6MEAN	.460**	.763**	.749**	.829**	.847**	1.000	.257**	.199**	.210**	.227**	.241**	.270**	.112*	.173**	.118*	.117*
CC1MEAN	.237**	.231**	.217**	.249**	.278**	.257**	1.000	.422**	.409**	.660**	.687**	.570**	.054	.116*	.104*	.091
CC2MEAN	.270**	.171**	.156**	.193**	.189**	.199**	.422**	1.000	.653**	.632**	.571**	.581**	.085	.115*	.114*	.081
CC3MEAN	.258**	.160**	.177**	.186**	.188**	.188**	.653**	.632**	1.000	.648**	.584**	.598**	.087	.154**	.140**	.095
CC4MEAN	.270**	.232**	.228**	.236**	.250**	.227**	.660**	.632**	.648**	1.000	.824**	.707**	.166**	.213**	.174**	.138**
CC5MEAN	.276**	.215**	.223**	.248**	.268**	.241**	.687**	.571**	.584**	.824**	1.000	.711**	.147**	.219**	.187**	.168**
CC6MEAN	.252**	.228**	.218**	.269**	.253**	.270**	.570**	.581**	.598**	.707**	.711**	1.000	.097*	.143**	.119*	.103*
HC1MEAN	.088	.119*	.138**	.152**	.097**	.112*	.054	.085	.087	.166**	.147**	.097*	1.000	.722**	.683**	.667**
HC2MEAN	.062	.179**	.184**	.180**	.137**	.173**	.116*	.115*	.154**	.213**	.219**	.143**	.722**	1.000	.663**	.700**
HC3MEAN	.117*	.122*	.149**	.149**	.096*	.118*	.104*	.114*	.140**	.174**	.187**	.119*	.683**	.663**	1.000	.641**
HC4MEAN	.050	.094	.137**	.116*	.067	.117*	.091	.081	.095	.138**	.168**	.103*	.667**	.700**	.641**	1.000
**	Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)															
*	Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)															

APPENDIX C

*ANOVA* TEACHER EXPERIENCE

<b>TEACHER EXPERIENCE</b>						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
IB1MEAN	Between Groups	14.042	2	7.021	15.103	.000
	Within Groups	193.382	416	.465		
	Total	207.424	418			
IB2MEAN	Between Groups	.881	2	.441	0.592	.554
	Within Groups	309.598	416	.744		
	Total	310.479	418			
IB3MEAN	Between Groups	2.853	2	1.427	2.273	.104
	Within Groups	261.176	416	.628		
	Total	264.029	418			
IB4MEAN	Between Groups	3.142	2	1.571	1.752	.175
	Within Groups	373.000	416	.897		
	Total	376.143	418			
IB5MEAN	Between Groups	2.419	2	1.210	1.836	.161
	Within Groups	264.892	402	.659		
	Total	267.311	404			
IB6MEAN	Between Groups	5.231	2	2.615	3.505	.031
	Within Groups	310.383	416	.746		
	Total	315.614	418			
CC1MEAN	Between Groups	1.854	2	.927	1.199	.303
	Within Groups	315.593	408	.774		
	Total	317.447	410			
CC2MEAN	Between Groups	1.076	2	.538	.900	.407
	Within Groups	243.802	408	.598		
	Total	244.877	410			
CC3MEAN	Between Groups	0.550	2	.275	.465	.628
	Within Groups	241.410	408	.592		
	Total	241.961	410			
CC4MEAN	Between Groups	.199	2	1.0E-01	.180	.835
	Within Groups	225.833	408	.554		
	Total	226.032	410			
CC5MEAN	Between Groups	1.046	2	.523	.798	.451
	Within Groups	260.943	398	.656		
	Total	261.989	400			
CC6MEAN	Between Groups	9.1 E-02	2	4.5E-02	.074	.929
	Within Groups	245.451	399	.615		
	Total	245.542	401			
HC1MEAN	Between Groups	.352	2	.176	.526	.591
	Within Groups	139.343	416	.335		
	Total	139.695	418			
HC2MEAN	Between Groups	.260	2	.130	.261	.771
	Within Groups	207.575	416	.499		
	Total	207.836	418			
HC3MEAN	Between Groups	.523	2	.262	.482	.618
	Within Groups	225.675	416	.542		
	Total	226.199	418			
HC4MEAN	Between Groups	1.437	2	.718	1.437	.239
	Within Groups	202.425	405	.500		
	Total	203.862	407			



APPENDIX D  
RESPONSES FOR INDIVIDUAL SURVEY ITEMS  
(BY RAW SCORE/PERCENTAGE/NON-RESPONSE RATE/MEAN/STANDARD  
DEVIATION)





Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	7	1.5	1.5
1	32	7.1	8.6
2	83	18.3	26.9
3	197	43.5	70.4
4	108	23.8	94.2
5	26	5.7	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate			3.8
Mean Score			3.03
Std. Dev			0.97

IB2

The Common Core State Standards are unique in that they are based on decades of sound empirical data on what students must know and be able to do to succeed after high school

Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	28	6.2	6.2
1	20	4.4	10.6
2	56	12.4	23.0
3	170	37.5	60.5
4	153	33.8	94.3
5	26	5.7	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate			5.8
Mean Score			3.26
Std. Dev			0.93

IB3

The advantage (of CCSS) is that they're internationally benchmarked standards so that students who have mastered these standards can compete internationally.

Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	29	6.4	6.4
1	25	5.5	11.9
2	60	13.2	25.2
3	204	45.0	70.2
4	119	26.3	96.5
5	16	3.5	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate			3.8
Mean Score			3.10
Std. Dev			0.90

IB3

The Common Core State Standards are - built on the finest state and international standards

Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	30	6.6	6.6
1	24	5.3	11.9
2	60	13.2	25.1
3	162	35.8	60.9
4	149	32.9	93.8
5	28	6.2	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate			3.8
Mean Score			3.23
Std. Dev			0.97

IB3

The Common Core State Standards are - grounded in evidence about what it takes for high school graduates to be ready for college and careers















Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	25	5.5	5.5
1	22	4.9	10.4
2	75	16.6	26.9
3	83	18.3	45.2
4	191	42.2	87.4
5	57	12.6	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate			7.1
Mean Score			3.43
Std. Dev			1.08

CC3  
 (The disconnect between HS graduation requirements and college readiness) is why so many of our young people need remedial education when they get to College.

Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	29	6.4	6.4
1	30	6.6	13.0
2	70	15.5	28.5
3	145	32.0	60.5
4	149	32.9	93.4
5	30	6.6	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate			7.1
Mean Score			3.19
Std. Dev			1.02

CC3  
 We recognize the enormous promise the Common Core State Standards released today hold to help all students graduate from high school ready to succeed in postsecondary education.

Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	41	9.1	9.1
1	27	6.0	15.1
2	77	17.0	32.1
3	70	15.5	47.5
4	151	33.3	80.8
5	87	19.2	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate			7.1
Mean Score			3.47
Std. Dev			1.20

CC3  
 We need to prepare all of our children to succeed in meaningful careers; however, children are taught at higher or lower levels based upon their zip code.









Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	38	8.4	8.4
1	7	1.5	9.9
2	9	2.0	11.9
3	28	6.2	18.1
4	223	49.2	67.3
5	148	32.7	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 4.20			
Std. Dev 0.79			
HC1			
When American students have the skills and knowledge needed in today's jobs, our communities will be positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.			
Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	38	8.4	8.4
1	5	1.1	9.5
2	8	1.8	11.3
3	33	7.3	18.6
4	219	48.3	66.9
5	150	33.1	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 4.21			
Std. Dev 0.76			
HC2			
State by State adoption of these standards is an important step towards maintaining our country's competitive edge.			
Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	26	5.7	5.7
1	27	6.0	11.7
2	56	12.4	24.0
3	86	19.0	43.0
4	151	33.3	76.3
5	107	23.6	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 3.60			
Std. Dev 1.18			
HC2			
With a skilled and prepared workforce, the business community will be better prepared to face the challenges of the international marketplace.			
Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	21	4.6	4.6
1	4	0.9	5.5
2	8	1.8	7.2
3	36	7.9	15.2
4	170	37.5	52.7
5	214	47.2	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 4.35			
Std. Dev 0.79			



Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	25	5.5	5.5
1	11	2.4	7.9
2	32	7.1	15.0
3	61	13.5	28.5
4	155	34.2	62.7
5	169	37.3	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 4.03			
Std. Dev 1.03			
HC2			
The private sector has a vested interest in the quality of education in the U.S.--After all, the private sector is the primary employer, and the deficiencies of the education process become the liability of the employer.			
Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	24	5.3	5.3
1	8	1.8	7.1
2	27	6.0	13.0
3	68	15.0	28.0
4	165	36.4	64.5
5	161	35.5	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 4.04			
Std. Dev 0.98			
HC2			
A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world.			
Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	28	6.2	6.2
1	29	6.4	12.6
2	106	23.4	36.0
3	76	16.8	52.8
4	138	30.5	83.2
5	76	16.8	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 3.30			
Std. Dev 1.22			
HC3			
America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game.			
Score	Count	Percentage	Cumulative
0	21	4.6	4.6
1	4	0.9	5.5
2	6	1.3	6.8
3	31	6.8	13.7
4	205	45.3	58.9
5	186	41.1	100.0
Survey Non Response Rate 7.8			
Mean Score 4.30			
Std. Dev 0.74			
HC3			
Educational failure puts the United States' - future economic prosperity at risk			







APPENDIX E

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ALL SURVEY ITEMS

Descriptive Statistics: All Survey Items							
Claim	Item	Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	I2.1	Unfortunately, today, too few high school students graduate and, among those who do, too few graduate well-prepared for life after high school.	452	1.00	5.00	3.56	1.12
	I2.2	In order to prepare today's students for the challenging world they will encounter, it is critical that we set the right expectations...for this reason, we believe states need to have K-12 standards that will prepare all students by the end of high school for success in College and Careers.	452	1.00	5.00	4.09	0.90
<b>I</b>	I2.3	For too long, we've been lying to kids. We tell them they're doing fine, give them good grades, and tell them they're proficient on state tests that aren't challenging.	452	1.00	5.00	3.34	1.22
<b>B</b>	I2.4	Today our standards are too low and the results on international tests show it.	452	1.00	5.00	3.46	1.15
<b>I</b>	I2.5	We see the signals in the international economy (that the U.S. K-12 education system is not competitive) as more and more engineers, doctors and science and math Ph.D.s come from abroad.	451	1.00	5.00	3.64	1.05
	I2.6	The common core standards finally make real the promise of American public education to expect the best of all our school children, regardless of which state they come from.	425	1.00	5.00	3.08	1.05
<b>I</b>	I2.7	The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents have a roadmap for what they need to do to help them.	449	1.00	5.00	3.25	1.01
<b>B</b>	I2.8	The K-12 Common Core State Standards represent a major advance in standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts.	451	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.00
<b>2</b>	I2.9	The Common Core State Standards are unique in that they are based on decades of sound empirical data on what students must know and be able to do to succeed after high school.	446	1.00	5.00	3.03	0.97
	I2.10	The advantage of CCSS is that they're internationally benchmarked standards so that students who have mastered these standards can compete internationally.	425	1.00	5.00	3.26	0.93
<b>I</b>	I2.11	The Common Core State Standards are - built on the finest state and international standards.	424	1.00	5.00	3.10	0.90
<b>B</b>	I2.12	The Common Core State Standards are - grounded in evidence about what it takes for high school graduates to be ready for college and careers.	423	1.00	5.00	3.23	0.97
<b>3</b>	I3.1	CCSS work recognizes that students in the United States are now competing in an international environment and will need to meet international benchmarks to remain relevant in today's workplace.	450	1.00	5.00	3.57	0.91
<b>I</b>	I3.2	The (CCSS) initiative is a critical first step in our nation's effort to provide every student with a comprehensive, content-rich and complete education.	449	1.00	5.00	2.84	1.16
<b>B</b>	I3.3A	Education leaders agree that moving to the Common Core Learning Standards will raise the quality of what is being taught in Arizona public schools.	448	1.00	5.00	3.24	1.03
<b>4</b>	I3.3B	The Common Core State Standards ensure that every child across the country is getting the best possible education, no matter where a child lives or what their background is.	423	1.00	5.00	3.22	1.01
<b>I</b>	I3.3C	With the states' release of a set of clear and consistent academic standards, our nation is one step closer to... - supporting effective teaching in every classroom.	425	1.00	5.00	3.17	1.08
	I3.4A	With the states' release of a set of clear and consistent academic standards, our nation is one step closer to... - charting a path to College and careers for all students.	424	1.00	5.00	3.35	1.04
<b>I</b>	I3.4B	With the states' release of a set of clear and consistent academic standards, our nation is one step closer to... - developing the tools to help all children stay motivated and engaged in their own education.	423	1.00	5.00	3.02	1.12
<b>B</b>	I3.5	The Common Core State Standards demand deeper and more focused instruction.	426	1.00	5.00	3.51	0.98
<b>5</b>	I3.6	[Under CCSS] Rather than trying to get through as much content as possible, teachers will focus on creating greater understanding in key areas.	422	1.00	5.00	3.40	1.03
	I3.7	Under CCSS, both reading and math coursework will emphasize knowledge and understanding of relevant information in science, social studies and other content areas.	425	1.00	5.00	3.45	0.92
<b>I</b>	I3.8	[Due to the structure of CCSS] Teachers across all content areas will use their subject-area expertise to help students learn to read, write and communicate effectively.	425	1.00	5.00	3.46	0.97
<b>I3.9</b>	I3.9	As the Common Core is implemented across 40+ states, Arizona will have more curriculum options than ever before.	448	1.00	5.00	2.88	1.02
<b>I</b>	I3.10A	The Common Core State Standards - provide appropriate benchmarks for all students-regardless of where they live.	426	1.00	5.00	3.25	1.04
<b>B</b>	I3.10B	The Common Core State Standards - allow states to more effectively help all students succeed.	422	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.05
<b>6</b>	I3.11	With common standards and assessments, students, parents, and teachers will have a clear, consistent understanding of the skills necessary for students to succeed after high school and compete with peers across state lines and across the ocean.	427	1.00	5.00	3.22	0.99

<b>Descriptive Statistics: All Survey Items</b>							
Claim	Item	Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation
C	I4.1A	Arizona's Common Core Standards provide a foundation and path for all students to be well prepared for post-secondary educational options - specifically - Universities	427	1.00	5.00	3.67	1.04
C	I4.1B	Arizona's Common Core Standards provide a foundation and path for all students to be well prepared for post-secondary educational options - specifically - Community Colleges	421	1.00	5.00	<b>3.72</b>	0.93
<b>1</b>	I4.1C	Arizona's Common Core Standards provide a foundation and path for all students to be well prepared for post-secondary educational options - specifically - Vocational Training/Apprenticeships	421	1.00	5.00	<u>3.35</u>	1.00
	I4.2	For years we have struggled to articulate expectations and standards to help all students achieve their full potential.	426	1.00	5.00	3.71	1.04
C	I4.3	In particular, we have struggled to align student learning at the end of high school with the demands of College-level work, beginning with core areas such as mathematics and language arts.	426	1.00	5.00	<b>3.81</b>	1.00
C	I4.4	We have many students who think they are doing well and then they take the ACT or the SAT as a junior or senior, and their scores are devastatingly low, and they're shocked.	423	1.00	5.00	3.54	1.02
<b>2</b>	I4.5	For the first time, millions of schoolchildren, parents and teachers will know if all students are on-track for College -- and if they are ready to enter College without the need for remedial instruction.	422	1.00	5.00	<u>2.92</u>	1.00
	I4.6	We are lying to children --- telling them they are ready for College -- when they aren't.	426	1.00	5.00	3.30	1.08
C	I4.7	(The disconnect between HS graduation requirements and college readiness) is why so many of our young people need remedial education when they get to College.	428	1.00	5.00	3.43	1.08
C	I4.8	We recognize the enormous promise the Common Core State Standards released today hold to help all students graduate from high school ready to succeed in postsecondary education.	424	1.00	5.00	<u>3.19</u>	1.02
	I4.9	We need to prepare all of our children to succeed in meaningful careers; however, children are taught at higher or lower levels based upon their zip code.	412	1.00	5.00	<b>3.47</b>	1.20
C	I5.1	Many educators have lamented for years the persistent disconnect between what high schools expect from their students and the skills that universities expect from incoming freshman.	426	1.00	5.00	<b>3.61</b>	0.96
C	I5.2A	The Common Core State Standards establishes a baseline set of skills and knowledge that define college readiness.	413	1.00	5.00	3.39	0.93
<b>4</b>	I5.2B	The Common Core State Standards establishes a baseline set of skills and knowledge that define career readiness.	416	1.00	5.00	<u>3.25</u>	0.95
C	I5.2C	We view (the CCSS) as foundational in the effort to address the full range of - employability and technical skills that students need to be successful	414	1.00	5.00	<u>3.24</u>	0.95
C	I5.3	We view (the CCSS) as foundational in the effort to address the full range of - academic skills that students need to be successful	412	1.00	5.00	<b>3.55</b>	0.92
<b>5</b>	I5.4	If states adopt the standards and align their curriculum, assessments and professional development to the new standards, many more of their students will graduate with the skills they need to succeed in the university.	412	1.00	5.00	3.28	0.96
	I5.5A	Because the Common Core State Standards have been developed differently (than previous state standards), - college completion rates will increase	415	1.00	5.00	3.07	0.92
C	I5.5B	Because the Common Core State Standards have been developed differently (than previous state standards), - university completion rates will increase	413	1.00	5.00	3.08	0.95
C	I5.6	Because the Common Core State Standards have been developed differently (than previous state standards), - workforce training program completion rates will increase	412	1.00	5.00	3.10	0.93
	I5.7	Prior English and math state standards have so far mostly been set without empirical evidence or attention as to whether students were learning what they needed for college.	411	1.00	5.00	<b>3.26</b>	1.01

Descriptive Statistics: All Survey Items							
Claim	Item	Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
H	I6.1	Strong schools are the surest path to our nation's long-term economic success.	429	1.00	5.00	4.37	0.79
	I6.2	America's students are now competing with children around the globe for jobs and opportunities after graduation.	429	1.00	5.00	4.33	0.86
	I6.3	We need to maintain a national focus (on education) to ensure our kids are ready to compete and ready to win.	430	1.00	5.00	4.36	0.85
C	I6.4	An educated workforce is crucial to the future economic success of Arizona.	429	1.00	5.00	4.60	0.62
	I6.5	American competitiveness relies on an education system that can adequately prepare our youth for College and the workforce.	415	1.00	5.00	4.20	0.79
	I6.6	When American students have the skills and knowledge needed in today's jobs, our communities will be positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.	415	1.00	5.00	4.21	0.76
H	I6.7	State by State adoption of these standards is an important step towards maintaining our country's competitive edge.	427	1.00	5.00	3.60	1.18
	I6.8	With a skilled and prepared workforce, the business community will be better prepared to face the challenges of the international marketplace.	432	1.00	5.00	4.35	0.79
C	I6.9	The private sector has a vested interest in the quality of education in the U.S. --After all, the private sector is the primary employer, and the deficiencies of the education process become the liability of the employer.	428	1.00	5.00	4.03	1.03
	I6.10A	A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the world.	429	1.00	5.00	4.04	0.98
2	I6.10B	America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game.	425	1.00	5.00	3.30	1.22
	I6.10C	Educational failure puts the United States' - future economic prosperity at risk	432	1.00	5.00	4.30	0.74
H	I7.1	Educational failure puts the United States' - global position at risk	430	1.00	5.00	4.23	0.80
	I7.2	Educational failure puts the United States' - physical safety at risk.	428	1.00	5.00	3.66	1.10
C	I7.3	Human capital will determine power in the current century, and the failure to produce that capital will undermine America's security.	413	1.00	5.00	3.89	0.89
	I7.4	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - physically defend itself	416	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.11
3	I7.5A	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - protect its secure information	415	1.00	5.00	3.80	1.04
	I7.5B	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - conduct diplomacy	414	1.00	5.00	3.88	1.07
	I7.5C	Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to... - grow its economy	414	1.00	5.00	4.19	0.88
H	I7.5D	Our competitive 21st century world requires innovative educational strategies that will enable students to succeed in a global economy (as achieved via CCSS).	413	1.00	5.00	3.84	1.05
	I7.6	Now, perhaps more than ever before, high quality education serves as a vital pathway out of poverty, both in the U.S. and abroad.	413	1.00	5.00	4.21	0.82
C	I7.7	If our country is not just to compete, but also win in that global environment, we must continue to shake off the educational status quo and reinvent our schools and students with innovative ways of thinking, learning and doing (as achieved via CCSS).	411	1.00	5.00	3.82	1.08
	I7.8	As companies and business organizations, we believe that it is imperative that ALL American students have access to an education that will prepare them for the opportunities and challenges they will face after high school.	412	1.00	5.00	4.26	0.83
4	I7.9	In a competitive world economy where education and/or training after high school is increasingly the norm for access to good jobs, to prepare students for anything less is, by definition, to deny opportunity.	412	1.00	5.00	4.12	0.89



APPENDIX F  
COMMON CORE OPT OUT FORM

**Instructions and Information About Using  
the  
Common Core State Standards Opt Out Form**

**What to Do**

- ❖ Make copies and share the form with other parents.
- ❖ Fill the form out. Check the boxes to indicate your specific requests.
- ❖ Take the completed form to the school office or have your child take it to school and give to the teacher.
- ❖ Make your request by submitting a form each year in the spring and again at the beginning of each school year. Schools begin to make up class lists in the spring for the following school year.

**What to Expect**

- If you send the form to school with your child, the teacher should send the form to the office.
- If your requests are in the hands of the school, your requests may be considered when the school determines the class placement of your child.
- The school may not be able to honor your request for having your child placed in a class that will not be using the Common Core State Standards. Your request, however, may result in your child being placed in a class with a teacher who exercises more professional judgment in providing instruction. This could result in a class placement where explicit example based instruction is the predominant mode.
- Information about explicit instruction versus reform instruction (constructivism, inquiry-based, and other minimal guidance approaches to instruction) can be found on the following webpage:
- <http://wheresthemath.com/curriculum-reviews/explicit-instruction-or-reform/>
- The additional bulleted requests are provided more as a statement on your part than something you can expect your child's teacher or school to act on. Many school personnel, teachers and administrators included, may not be aware of some of these issues and the concerns people have about them. Hopefully, these bulleted items will be passed on to administrators, school board members, legislators, public officials, and others involved in making decisions about education.



### Common Core State Standards Opt Out

As the parent, or legal guardian, of \_\_\_\_\_ (child's full name), I realize I have the fundamental and legal right to direct the upbringing and education of my child and I respectfully and formally request my child:

\_\_\_ be placed in a classroom that will not be using the Common Core State Standards.

\_\_\_ be placed in a classroom that provides explicit example based instruction, guided practice, and independent practice to reinforce the learning.

\_\_\_ not be administered any formative or summative assessment related to the Common Core State Standards or used to assess student learning of the Common Core State Standards.

\_\_\_ not to be administered any computerized assessment and is prohibited from using any computer or handheld mobile device for any assessment purpose.

Please honor my request. Keep this request on file in my child's cumulative folder.

I also request:

- the restoration of powers to the people and the state to determine the educational content to be taught in local schools as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States of America.
- local districts and the state provide a true and honest accounting of any and all direct and indirect costs related to the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards and their related assessments.
- no further public monies (tax dollars) be spent on anything related to or supporting the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards including related assessments, professional development for teachers and administrators, and CCSS aligned text books and curriculum materials.
- local districts and the state fully disclose information about the state longitudinal data system to parents and the general public as well as what student, parent, and teacher information is collected and how and to whom such data is shared both within and outside the state (including the federal government and any federal agency).

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

School Name \_\_\_\_\_

School District \_\_\_\_\_ School Year \_\_\_\_\_



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