

## **First in Reform: The Adoption of Common Core State Standards in Kentucky**

Richard Day, Eastern Kentucky University

### **Abstract**

Kentucky first drew national attention when its Supreme Court declared the entire system of schools to be unconstitutional in *Rose v Council for Better Education*, 790 S. W. 2d 186 (1989). The *Rose* case, argued by former Kentucky Governor Bert Combs, launched a third wave of school reform litigation based on both equity and adequacy as expressed in state constitutions (Day 2011, 2-4). On February 11, 2010, in an unprecedented joint meeting, the chairs of the Kentucky Board of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education, and the Education Professional Standards Board signed a resolution directing their respective agencies to implement the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and mathematics. This act formalized Kentucky's commitment to integrate the nascent standards into the state's public education system – the first state to do so. This article will trace the antecedents to Kentucky's adoption of the standards as one expression of the late 20th century/early 21st century "corporate school reform movement" as manifested in the Commonwealth. The state that led America to reconsider how its schools should be funded, now celebrates a newfound spirit of interagency cooperation as it leaps at the opportunity to join with other states in an effort to define what students need to know and be able to do.

**Keywords:** common core, state standards, education reform, Kentucky

### **National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983**

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Education published its catalytic report, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" (ANAR) and the late-20<sup>th</sup> century "corporate school reform movement" was launched. The report decried "a rising tide of mediocrity" in American high schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 9). While the report's statistics were disputed, the nation's attention was galvanized around the idea that American schools were failing. The era of school accountability had arrived. The Commission made findings in four areas: Content, Expectations, Time, and Teaching. In the area of content, the commission recommended an examination of curriculum standards in light of other advanced countries, and higher college admission standards (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

While shocking at the time, the vision of school reform as drawn by ANAR was mild compared to the 21<sup>st</sup> century vision

that would develop around President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind eighteen years later. ANAR was a response to the freewheeling reforms of the 1960s and early 1970s which sought to "free the children," and led to experimentation, challenges to authority, and a focus on social justice issues. ANAR called on states and the nation to craft genuine curriculum standards and strengthen high school graduation standards. "Far from being a revolutionary document, the report was an impassioned plea to make our schools function better in their core mission as academic institutions and to make our education system live up to our nation's ideals." It did not advocate market-based competition, school choice through charter schools and vouchers, privatization, or high-stakes assessment and accountability (Ravitch, 2010, p. 22-26).

At this point in the history of compulsory education in Kentucky, it is fair to say that the Commonwealth never led the nation in financial support for its schools, literacy, availability of highly educated teachers, or any other historical measure of

educational excellence. But that was about to change.

Even before President Reagan's national commission pushed for enhanced curriculum standards, the courts had been looking for a set of judicially manageable standards to determine whether a state had met its obligation to provide equitable schools for its children. In *McInnis v. Shapiro*, 293 F. Supp. 327 (1968), the first fiscal equalization case to make it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, plaintiffs argued that under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment's equal protection clause, funds should be distributed based on educational need. But they were unable to help the court devise "discoverable and manageable standards" by which the court could determine when the Constitution is satisfied, and when it is violated (Day, 2003, 339). What followed were two waves of school finance cases. In the first, based on the equal protection clause, plaintiffs argued for equitable school funding. When the court rejected 14<sup>th</sup> amendment arguments altogether in *San Antonio Independent School District v Rodriguez*, 411 U. S. 1 (1973), a second wave of cases began to appear in state courts and were based on education clauses in state constitutions (Day, 2003).

Kentucky first drew national attention when its Supreme Court declared the entire system of schools to be unconstitutional in *Rose v Council for Better Education*, 790 S. W. 2d 186 (1989). The Rose case, argued by former Kentucky Governor Bert Combs, launched a third wave of school reform litigation based on both *equity* and *adequacy* as expressed in state constitutions (Day, 2011).

The 1990s showed an increase in the number of plaintiffs around the nation who followed Combs' lead. States began shifting away from the use of input measures—such as per-pupil expenditure, how many teachers

held advanced degrees, or how many books were on the library shelves—to measures of output as shown by student test score results. The court's willingness to accept a standards-based approach altered the yardstick used to determine when a school was adequately preparing its students (Day & Ewalt, in press; see also Hurst et al., 2003).

It was expected that these student achievement results would be roughly equitable among the various subgroups of students, (male v female; rich v poor; among races), but the standards were not anchored to a more tangible goal, such as college- and career-readiness, that described the expected level of student performance. This, at least in theory, allowed an equitable level of mediocrity to persist.

An equally important contribution to the policy dialogue in Kentucky was the Prichard Committee's publication of *The Path to a Larger Life: Creating Kentucky's Educational Future*, in 1985. The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence had formed in 1983 as an independent citizen's advocacy group for better schools and was named for its first Chairman Edward F. Prichard who believed that, "Education is a seamless web running from the earliest years through the highest levels of educational achievement" (Prichard Committee, 1990, xiii). *Path to a Larger Life* was influential to the Rose court and proposed major changes in seven areas, including curriculum, teacher preparation, assessment of student performance, and education finance (Day & Ewalt, in press).

Prichard's plan outlined a desirable set of knowledge expectations, and anticipated a connection with postsecondary education, such as "early admission of students," but a set of curriculum standards that anchored a high school diploma to entry-level college standards did not yet

exist (Prichard Committee, 1990, p. 34). Prichard pushed for the publication of school goals, the “identification of the competencies expected of all Kentucky high school graduates,” measurement of “the mastery of these competencies,” and assuring that a diploma is only awarded “when the student demonstrates that he or she has mastered the desired competencies...” (Prichard Committee, 1990, p. 32).

### **Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990**

The General Assembly’s response to the Rose decision came in the form of the sweeping Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA), the nation’s most ambitious statewide school reform package ever (Day, 2011; see also Guskey & Oldham, 1997). Uniquely, KERA went beyond restructuring the education bureaucracy and raising educational standards. It also created additional support systems for students, families, and teachers through extended schools services, Family Resource/Youth Services Centers, and enhanced professional development. School-based, decision-making councils brought parents into local school policy-making – although councils were largely constrained by top-down mandates which dictated instructional formats, such as the ungraded, multi-aged Primary Program – and it is unclear whether councils ultimately raised student achievement results (Guskey & Oldham, 1997).

The Rose decision, along with KERA, energized a number of education public interest groups, especially the Council for Better Education and the Prichard Committee, who were largely responsible for creating the demands and supports that made education reform possible. They acted at the state level, but had an additional impact on national

education policy as Kentucky became the state to watch (Day & Ewalt, in press)

Arguably, KERA’s most powerful feature was the advent of a new kind of high-stakes accountability system based on student achievement outcomes. In a departure from traditional norm-referenced testing, which gauged a student’s individual performance against that of his same-age peers, Kentucky’s new KIRIS test was designed to measure how well each school was performing. The old method of reporting only school-wide means concealed the substandard performance of as much as a third or more of the student population. The new data, disaggregated into subgroup performance, revealed those short-comings and changed the way educators talked about student success. The public reporting of student test score data by subgroups, along with the ranking of schools – a contribution of the news media – proved to be a powerful tool for driving change in this new era of “high-stakes” assessment (Day & Ewalt, in press, p. 267):

The promise of equality of educational opportunity that had guided American schools for a century was effectively replaced by a new goal, equity of student achievement outcomes. State governments passed legislation, adopted new procedures and standards, and pursued policies in a number of areas that galvanized the new emphasis on outcomes over inputs. The question of what constitutes an adequate education for all students was expanded to include strong measures of equity in student outcomes, otherwise known as closing achievement gaps while maintaining high standards. As the court ordered, an efficient system of schools must be adequately funded.

Whenever the system is inadequately funded, excellence and equity are forced to compete. (Day & Ewalt, in press, p. 267-268)

In the early 1990s, an effort to create voluntary national standards fell apart when history standards, which included social justice issues, were attacked by conservative groups as “the epitome of left-wing political correctness” during the George H. W. Bush administration.

### **Goals 2000**

President Bill Clinton backed away from national standards and provided funding under his Goals 2000 program for states to write their own standards, pick their own tests, and be accountable for achievement (Ravitch, 2010).

By 1996, a new national movement began when the National Governor’s Association, in concert with corporate leaders, created Achieve, Inc. Achieve is an independent, bipartisan, nonprofit education reform organization based in Washington D.C. that helps states raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability (American Diploma Project 2011, i).

### **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

When President George W. Bush signed the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) into law, a new definition of school reform became nationalized; one characterized by accountability (Ravitch, 2010) This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act built upon a standards-based reform whose roots were found in policy responses to the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report decrying mediocrity in public schools (Kaestle, 2006, xii).

In many ways, the law was consistent with KERA’s emphasis on performance outcomes and since Kentucky had already implemented its own standards-based education system, much of the legislation fit fairly well in current practices in the state (KDE, 2010). NCLB required states receiving federal funding to implement a system of annual assessment of student progress for schools and districts. As initially enacted, the legislation allowed states to set the standards to which they are held accountable and a limited form of parental choice was provided for schools that persistently failed to make adequate progress. But a major accomplishment of the law has been its unapologetic national focus on measuring student outcomes and holding schools and districts accountable for those outcomes – a focus Kentucky began in 1990 (Day & Ewalt, in press).

### **American Diploma Project 2004**

By 2004 the American Diploma Project (ADP) produced its report, “Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts.” The report described “specific content and skills in English and mathematics graduates must master by the time they leave high school if they expect to succeed in postsecondary education or high-performance, high-growth jobs.” The standards were said to be “considerably more rigorous than [the existing] high school standards” (American Diploma Project, 2007, p. 5).

In 2005, the American Diploma Project expanded its partnership with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the Education Trust. ADP boasted network districts in 35 states which included 85% of all public school students. The project set out to align high school standards, assessments and graduation requirements with college and career demands. Kentucky

signed on as one of five partner states that identified English and mathematics knowledge and skills (American Diploma Project, 2007, p. 7). Would ADP be able to avoid the political pitfalls and achieve a set of national standards where federal standards had failed?

At the National Education Summit on high schools that year, governors from 45 states joined with business leaders and education officials to address a critical problem in American education – that too few students were graduating from high school prepared to meet the demands of college and careers in an increasingly competitive global economy. The result was ADP’s creation of a set of benchmarks that were proposed as anchors for other states’ high school standards-based assessments and graduation requirements. ADP identified “an important convergence around the core knowledge and skills that both colleges and employers – within and beyond ADP states – require” (American Diploma Project, 2004, p. 3-4).

The American Diploma Project set five goals and the criteria against which participating states were measured to determine if the goal had been met.

- Common Standards – The criteria are met “if the standards writing process is guided by the expectations of the state’s postsecondary and business communities, if those communities verify that the resulting standards articulate the knowledge and skills required for success in college and the workplace, and if an external organization verifies the standards’ alignment to college- and career-ready expectations” (American Diploma Project, 2011, p. 9).
- Graduation Requirements – “High school graduates... need to complete

a challenging course of study in mathematics that includes the content typically taught through an Algebra II course (or its equivalent) and four years of grade-level English aligned with college- and career-ready standards” (American Diploma Project, 2011, p. 11).

- Assessments – “[S]tates must have a component of their high school assessment system that measures students’ mastery of college- and career-ready content in English and mathematics. The assessment must have credibility with postsecondary institutions and employers” such that a certain score indicates readiness (American Diploma Project, 2011, p. 13).
- P-20 Data Systems – States must have “unique student identifiers to track each student through and beyond the K-12 system” and must have “overcome all barriers to matching” and have “the capacity to match longitudinal student-level records between K-12 and postsecondary, and matches these records at least annually” (American Diploma Project, 2011, p. 16).
- Accountability Systems – States must value and reward the number of students who earn a college- and career-ready diploma, score college-ready on high school assessments, and enter college without the need for remediation. ADP looks at state-wide performance goals, annual school-level public reporting, school-level incentives, the state’s accountability formula, the percentage of students who earn a college- and career-ready diploma, the percentage who score college-ready on high school assessments,

the percentage of students who earn college credit during high school, and the percentage of high school graduates who are placed in college remediation classes. “If a state collects and reports the data in a meaningful way, sets clear targets for schools to improve, and provides clear incentives and consequences that drive schools to improve performance and meet the targets” then ADP considers the state to have a comprehensive approach to accountability (American Diploma Project, 2011, 18–20).

Kentucky’s legislators have remained steadfast in their emphasis on assessment and accountability measures for Kentucky schools. When the state’s CATS test came under attack in the mid-2000s, education leaders capitalized on the state’s participation in ADP and moved to a new era of education policy which looked toward national test instruments, while the state embraced a focus on college- and career-readiness and norm-referenced testing built around a set of national curriculum standards. The establishment of the high school diploma as an indicator of college- and career-readiness was made at last (Day & Ewalt in press).

### **Senate Bill 1**

The Republican-sponsored Senate Bill 1 (SB1, codified as KRS 158.6451, 2009) completely dismantled the Kentucky-based CATS testing system and phased in new standards designed to be shorter, clearer, and better focused on students being ready for college, work, and global competition.

SB1 called for the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE)

- to revise the statewide assessment program; criterion-referenced test;

end-of-course examination; formative assessment; interim assessments; and national norm-referenced test.

- mandated revisions to the annual statewide assessment program; removing writing portfolios, arts & humanities, and practical living/career studies from being scored as part of the student assessment.
- called for a longitudinal student data system in compliance with NCLB, for use by teachers and for school accountability.
- and importantly, required that KDE, in collaboration with the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), utilize input from teachers and postsecondary faculty to plan and implement a comprehensive process for revising the academic content standards in all areas. SB1 also specified that national standards (where available) must be considered. The new standards had to be aligned with entry-level college course requirements and be included in teacher preparation programs, so that teachers will know how to use them.

### **Common Core State Standards**

As it turned out, national standards were becoming available. A few months before the passage of SB1, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative was launched. Thirty years after *A Nation at Risk* called for the establishment of a clear set of Academic standards in core subjects that describe what students must know and be able to do, a voluntary interstate effort to write them began.

The CCSS initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National

Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. During the early years of implementation, the states using the Common Core Standards were expected to develop new, shared methods for testing and reporting student progress to parents, teachers, officials, and the general public (Day & Ewalt, 2013, in press). The standards-development process was completed in approximately one year by Achieve, Inc. (Mathis, 2010). These standards were finalized on June 2, 2010 (Porter et al., 2010). By September 2009, 48 states (not Texas or Alaska) Washington D.C., the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico were counted as participating in this effort (NGA, 2009).

### **Race to the Top” (RTTT) Grants**

But on July 24, 2009, President Barack Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced \$4.35 billion in competitive “Race to the Top” (RTTT) grants. To be eligible, states had to adopt “internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the work place” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). But the support of the Obama administration for this hitherto voluntary national effort would create confusion as to whether CCSS was a *national* effort or a *federal* effort. When viewed as a federal effort, CCSS became ripe for politicization.

Arguments in support of common core standards, as advanced by ADP and others, focused heavily on connecting a high school diploma with college- and career-readiness. Supporters of common core said that American high schools had changed little since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and graduates were leaving high school unprepared to meet the demands of college and careers. They pointed to disappointing high school graduation rates and high

college remediation rates. This was contrasted with an increased skill demand from business and industry and a sharp decrease in well-paying jobs for which a high school diploma is sufficient. In their report “Ready or Not,” Achieve noted that almost ninety percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders expected to participate in some form of postsecondary education and nearly two-thirds of parents consider college a necessity. But the American high school system sends a confusing set of signals about how to reach the goal. High school grades could not be compared from school to school. Grades were based on effort as much as mastery. State mandated tests may count toward graduation, or they may not. National admissions tests were not aligned with the high school curriculum and neither were college placement tests, which varied from campus to campus, even within the same state system. Most high school graduates needed remedial help in college, and most college students never attain a degree (American Diploma Project, 2004, p. 2-6).

Graduates seeking careers were no better off. Employers rarely asked about high school achievement or standardized test scores. States offered no easy access to information about graduates’ academic records. Most employers say high school graduates lack basic skills and most workers question the preparation their high schools provided (America Diploma Project, 2004, p. 2-6).

The solution CCSS supporters said was to anchor high school graduation requirements and assessments to real world standards – the knowledge and skills colleges and employers actually expect if young people are to succeed in their institutions America Diploma Project, 2004, p. 2-6)

In ACT’s 2006 report, “Reading between the lines,” the authors argue that

there are high costs (\$16 billion per year in lost productivity and remediation) associated with students not being ready for college level reading and suggest that students are actually “losing momentum” during high school, that poor readers struggle and are frequently blocked from advanced work, that low literacy levels prevent mastery of other subjects and is commonly cited as a reason for dropping out (“Reading between the lines,” 2006, p. 2-6). NAEP reading results from 1971-2004 showed average reading scores for 9-year-olds were the highest on record but scores for 13-year-olds had risen only slightly since 1975. But reading scores for 17-year-olds had actually dropped 5 points between 1992-2004 (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005).

In “Ready or Not,” Achieve argued that the knowledge and skills required for college are also required in the workforce. Poor reading skills persist in limiting opportunity and are frequently cited by employers as a principal limiting factor as 80% report shortages of qualified workers. Improving college and workforce readiness is critical for a diverse talented workforce needed to ensure economic global competitiveness (America Diploma Project, 2004, p. 2-6).

Kentucky’s early adoption of the not-yet-written CCSS standards, in February 2010, was met with great fanfare. SB1 had created the first time in history that the three governing boards affecting P-20 education in the state had met – and for the first time, considered how to build the seamless educational system of Ed Prichard’s dreams. SB1 called on state education agencies to revise Kentucky’s academic standards to:

- focus on critical knowledge, skills and capacities needed for success in the global economy

- result in fewer, but more in-depth standards to facilitate mastery learning
- communicate expectations more clearly and concisely to teachers, parents, students and citizens
- be rooted in evidence-based research
- consider international benchmarks to ensure that the standards are aligned from elementary to high school to postsecondary education so that students can be successful at each education level.

The joint effort of the Kentucky Board of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education, and the Education Professional Standards Board in adopting CCSS was hailed as an “historic moment” and the most important education reform initiative since KERA. Governor Steven L. Beshear said, “These standards will move us closer to our ultimate goal, a K-12 system that positions our children for success” (Day, 2010).

“Kentucky is once again at the forefront in education reform,” said CPE Chair Paul Patton. “I am very pleased with the level of cooperation and commitment by Kentucky’s policy and education leaders in the development of these draft content standards. Consistent academic standards, aligned to college and work expectations, will help our students reach higher levels of success” (Council on Postsecondary Education, 2010).

Kentucky Board of Education Chair Joe Brothers said, “With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, teachers and administrators will have a blueprint to move the state forward in P-12 education. This is just the beginning of Kentucky’s next chapter of education reform, and it reflects the mandates of the state’s legislature – specifically, Senate Bill 1 – and our application for federal Race to

the Top funding” (Council on Postsecondary Education, 2010).

EPSB Chair Lorraine Williams said, “To truly make a difference in Kentucky’s students’ ability to demonstrate what they know and are able to do and to make them more competitive in the marketplace, it is a refreshing move to narrow the number of standards taught at each level. ESPB is excited to be part of this cutting edge initiative and looks forward to working with our university partners to ensure that our undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs embrace the Common Core Standards and prepare a stronger workforce capable of teaching the curriculum to a deeper, more rigorous level” (Council on Postsecondary Education, 2010).

Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday told the assembly, “if you want to know where the state is going, read our Race to the Top grant” (Day, 2010).

Perhaps thinking about the challenges of implementing common academic standards in a large education system, Prichard Committee Executive Director Bob Sexton said, “*Now it is critically important that we provide our schools and teachers with the support and resources they need to make sure these standards do what they are designed to do - ensure the success of students in every part of Kentucky*” (Day, 2010).

### **Task Force on Transforming Education in Kentucky 2009**

Kentucky did not wait to get started. Governor Beshear created the Task Force on Transforming Education in Kentucky by October 2009. The group was tasked with envisioning a statewide system of schools that would meet the emerging and complex demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century life in a global economy. The Task force created a state

policy blueprint that called for improved pre-school programs and accessibility, raising the compulsory school age from 16 to 18, and funding to expand the state’s ability to recruit high-quality teachers. KDE, CPE and EPSB had already begun developing a unified strategy to reduce college remediation rates and provide accelerated learning opportunities for secondary students (Kentucky, 2011).

Using the educational reforms of Senate Bill 1 (hereafter known as Unbridled Learning to distinguish it from later SB1s which occur in every legislative session) and its status as the first state in the nation to adopt the Common Core Standards as the foundation of its application, Kentucky took part in the RTTT grant competition as a means of funding its recently enacted, but under-resourced reforms. Through RTTT, the federal government sought to encourage education reforms in four areas: new standards and assessments linking primary and secondary education to success in college and the workplace; improved data systems to measure student performance and contribute to formative assessment; enhancing the recruitment and retention of effective school personnel, particularly in poor performing districts; and reducing the performance gap for the lowest-achieving schools. Although Kentucky would be recognized twice as a finalist, the state was unsuccessful in securing first- or second-round funding from RTTT.

### **Race To The Top Grant 2011**

In December 2011, Kentucky was awarded \$17 million, much less than the \$175 million it requested, to implement reforms designed in part to prepare students for more rigorous science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) course work (Day & Ewalt, in press).

But the application process solidified the state as an early adopter of most RTTT reform ideas, particularly Common Core State Standards, and that drew the attention of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In February 2011, KDE announced that it had received a two-year, \$1-million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support implementation of the new Common Core Academic Standards. Focused on improved classroom instruction and alignment with Common Core Standards as required under Unbridled Learning, KDE partnered with the Prichard Committee to expand existing work being done through the Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative. The grant was part of a nationwide effort by the Gates Foundation to develop and test prototype classroom assessments and instructional tools (“KDE Receives Grant,” 2011).

According to KDE’s Director of Program Standards Karen Kidwell, the Gates money allowed the state “to scale up work” with eight different regional leadership networks. The leadership networks were multi-agency teams of K-12 and higher education professionals whose purpose was to provide the necessary instructional support for successful implementation of CCSS, and the assessments based on the new standards (K. Kidwell, telephone interview, August 5, 2013). Kentucky’s approach was strongly influenced by “Professional Learning in the Learning Profession,” a report of the National Staff Development Council which argued for a “professional learning system” that was responsive at the individual teacher/grade and content-area level, and sought to build capacity in every teacher to refine “new learning into more powerful lessons and assessments, [and] [reflect] on the impact on student learning.” The system

also called for “state and federal policies that encourage regular teacher collaboration” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 3). In what KDE officials considered high praise, one participant in the 2012 Instructional Support Leadership Network evaluated the experience, writing,

I feel like this is the right work. It wasn’t just, “here’s the standards.” It was here’s how you assess. Here’s how you instruct. There was a lot of informational support that came to leadership that could go to teachers. It was structured. It was organized. It was given to us in a way we could make it manageable. Did it require a lot of change for myself as an administrator, and for teachers? Absolutely. But here’s how: through an emphasis on highly effective teaching and learning.

What distinguishes the professional learning networks from similar ideas, such as professional learning communities, is its focus on outputs and “shared accountability.” Just as the reform movement shifted from an input-driven idea to one based on outcomes, the professional learning network must be aligned with state and local goals for student achievement and “decisions about professional learning are made collaboratively by educators, among educators, their colleagues, and their supervisors, and based on student, educator, and system data” (K. Kidwell, telephone interview, August 5, 2013; see also KDE, 2012)

Nationally, with bipartisan support for a conservative proposal, and much evidence-based rationale, CCSS seemed to be on track for a relatively easy adoption among the 45 adherents that remained by 2013. The thornier issue appeared to be whether a set of national exams based on the CCSS could be agreed to, and would be

affordable. But backlash against CCSS was surfacing in state legislatures in Alabama, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Pennsylvania Missouri, Georgia, South Dakota, and Kansas (“Exit Strategy,” 2013).

In April, the Republican National Committee surprised many educators when it passed a resolution bashing the standards. The resolution says that the Republican National Committee recognizes the CCSS for what it is — an inappropriate overreach to standardize and control the education of our children so they will conform to a preconceived “normal...” Claiming that the Obama administration’s RTTT incentives had clouded the picture, states’ rights issues were resurrected among conservatives (“Common Core Standards Attacked,” 2013).

Sen. Charles Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, followed the RNC’s denouncement by starting a bid to eliminate federal Education Department funding for the CCSS effort. Education Secretary Arne Duncan had supported the standards, and awarded \$360 million to two multi-state consortia to develop standardized tests: The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Grassley called CCSS an “inappropriate overreach to standardize and control the education of our children” and saying that the RNC “rejects this CCSS plan” (“Common Core Standards Attacked,” 2013).

In a letter to colleagues on the appropriations subcommittee that handles education funding, Grassley asked that they cut off all future funds for CCSS and its assessments, and “restore state decision-making and accountability with respect to state academic content standards.” The letter says in part:

While the Common Core State Standards Initiative was initially billed as a voluntary effort between states, federal incentives have clouded the picture. Current federal law makes clear that the U.S. Department of Education may not be involved in setting specific content standards or determining the content of state assessments. Nevertheless, the selection criteria designed by the U.S. Department of Education for the Race to the Top Program provided that for a state to have any chance to compete for funding, it must commit to adopting a “common set of K-12 standards” matching the description of the Common Core. The U.S. Department of Education also made adoption of “college- and career-ready standards” meeting the description of the Common Core a condition to receive a state waiver under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Race to the Top funds were also used to fund two consortiums to develop assessments aligned to the Common Core and the Department is now in the process of evaluating these assessments (Grassley, 2013).

Once a public policy issue becomes politicized, it is difficult to accurately predict its future. But a new report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) finds that while concern over funding for CCSS implementation is high, state education leaders say that the effort will go forward. In their report, “Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: State Education Agencies Views on the Federal Role,” CEP found that the majority of the 40 states responding to the survey, taken during the winter and spring of 2013, said that it is unlikely that their state will reverse, limit, or

change its decision to adopt CCSS this year or next. Few state education leaders said that overcoming resistance to CCSS was a major challenge in their state (Renter, 2013).

In Kentucky, Education Commissioner Terry Holliday has not felt any pressure to change the state's position on CCSS adoption:

Kentucky did not experience any push back on its adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which occurred in 2010. The new standards, known as the Kentucky Core Academic Standards, have been taught in schools for two years, and students have been tested on the new standards twice, in spring 2012 and 2013. The new standards went through the Kentucky Board of Education's regular review and approval process and were also vetted through a public hearing and several legislative committees. (T. Holliday, e-mail communication, August 5, 2013)

Kentucky's early adoption and vigorous pursuit of a new assessment system based on the standards seems to have positioned the state comfortably in front of the national political kerfuffle set off by the RNC. But that does not mean all is rosy in the Bluegrass:

In spite of the numerous budgets cuts and dwindling resources, Kentucky educators are leading the nation in the focus on improving student college- and career-ready rates. The eyes of the nation are on Kentucky as it implements more rigorous and internationally benchmarked standards. However, without additional funding our educators in Kentucky will soon burn out and student learning will suffer. As we

get ready for the 2014 General Assembly, my number one priority is to share this concern with legislators. At the minimum, I will be pushing for restoration of funding to 2008 levels. Our children and educators deserve this investment. (Holliday, 2013)

The history of education in Kentucky is littered with examples of legislative action followed by prolonged periods of disregard for the schools. In 1990, when the General Assembly passed KERA, the public perceived education as the top priority in the Commonwealth and the state met the challenge with its largest one-time infusion of education funding. But since that time, Kentucky has shown significant progress in national rankings and concern has eased in relation to other pressing problems (Day & Ewalt, in press).

### **Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky Survey 2012**

A 2012 survey of Kentuckian's views on key issues conducted by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky during the presidential race identified the economy (65%) and healthcare costs (42%) as far outpacing public concerns over education (8%) (Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, 2012). Given the underfunded pension programs and existing structural imbalances in the state budget along with an antiquated tax structure, it remains to be seen whether the state legislature will provide adequate financial support for its Unbridled Learning mandates. Hanging in the balance will be the dream of a seamless education system, where every teacher knows how to use the more rigorous, internationally-benchmarked academic standards, and every student who earns a high school diploma is truly ready for career and/or college success.

### Common Core Development Milestones

- November 2007 - CCSSO policy forum discussed the need for one set of shared academic standards
- December 2008 - NGA and ADP report urges states to create internationally benchmarked standards
- April 2009 - NGA & CCSSO Summit in Chicago called for states to support shared standards
- June 2009 - 46 states publicly proclaimed support
- July 2009 - Writing panels were announced
- July 24, 2009 - Race to the Top competitive grants announced. To be eligible, states had to adopt “internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the work place.”
- February 11, 2010 – Kentucky adopts CCSS
- March 2010 - First draft officially released
- June 2010 - Final draft released (English Language Arts and Math)
- July 2010 - Kentucky launches Leadership Networks for teacher, school, and district leaders around the implementation of the Common Core State Standards within the context of highly effective teaching, learning, and assessment practices
- October 2011 - Kentucky selected as model Demonstration State for *Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core by Learning Forward*/Council of Chief State School Officers
- Spring 2012 - Kentucky assesses CCSS in new accountability system
- April 2013 - Common Core opposed by Republican National Committee

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Richard Day is Associate Professor, Foundations of Education, Eastern Kentucky University.