Policy Review

Common Core State Standards Initiative for Writing Program Administrators

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This policy review provides an overview of the creation, launch, assessment, and reception of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) in the United States public school system. In terms of context, the review is situated within the broader background of school accountability and testing, with special attention to the connections and implications for postsecondary writing instruction. Put directly, the implementation of the CCSSI and associated assessments constitute a pivotal event in the history of US public education. Efforts culminating in 2009 mark the first time a majority of states adopted common standards for mathematics and English language arts across the entire elementary and secondary system.

Of particular interest to writing program administrators and writing studies scholars is the elevation of writing as its own content area in CCSSI English language arts (ELA). States that adopted the CCSSI for ELA have teachers teaching writing in all grade levels; students practice writing in all grade levels; and writing is emphasized in other content areas—history/social studies, science, and technical subjects—from grade six onward. The fact that the majority of American public school children across a significant number of states and US territories are now engaged in a system of public education that has elevated writing instruction to be one of the core areas is no small feat. Since the future of the CCSSI is unclear given the significant political fallout that has occurred over its brief existence, now is the time to take stock of the benefits and challenges of a national curriculum in a time of uncertainty.

In this review, I will provide context about the CCSSI for those working in the multiple array of writing program administration contexts so that we can continue to participate in these discussions that hold deep implications

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for those of us in postsecondary writing settings. I begin with the origin of the CCSSI and then describe the launch and assessment of the initiative. In concluding with the educational and political reaction to the initiative, I offer three opportunities for WPAs: professional networking with elementary and secondary colleagues; continued research and advocacy on career and college readiness; and assuming the role of public intellectual. As you read this review, keep these expansive opportunities in mind. The following policy review covers an area in which creative tension plays a role for all of us. If a policy review is to examine the origin and present state of a given policy, then the goals and frustrations involved in the CCSSI are best understood by WPAs who are, in turn, in excellent positions to meaningfully contribute to the ongoing discussions and decisions related to the costs and benefits associated with standardization and assessment of writing.

Creation

Many writing studies scholars saw promise in a cohesive set of standards for primary and secondary public education: common curricular objectives for mathematics and English language arts that students, teachers, administrators, and legislators could work toward. Lee Odell optimistically observed, "in 2010, writing assessment took a major step forward with the widespread acceptance of a common set of Common Core State Standards for writing" (271) and Applebee concurred that the CCSSI "[offer] a strong and well-intentioned vision of the knowledge and skills needed by a college- and career-ready high school graduate" (25). Susan McLeod first raised the issue of the CCSS in July 2009 to the listserv affiliated with the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA-L), and the conversations ranged from optimism about the standards to presciently anticipating problems with the perception of curricular standardization and problems with large-scale assessment. Multiple WPA-L participants encouraged WPA members to provide input about the CCSSI for ELA and to participate in any state-level activities soliciting feedback regarding the standards. In July and September 2009 after the draft of the CCSSI was released, there were nearly 25 exchanges on the WPA-L listserv on the topic.

The CCSSI were developed within a context that has deep tensions regarding the purposes of public education. In 2002, Diane Ravitch asserted that

> American education [is] driven by two paradigms: the professional education paradigm, which . . . believes that the profession should be insulated from public pressure for accountability and . . . the poli-

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> cymaker paradigm, which insists that the public school system must be subject to the same incentives and sanctions based on its performance as are other large scale organizations. (21)

In 2012, Linda Adler-Kassner echoed these tensions and the ways they shape postsecondary writing instruction. She detailed two competing visions of education: one which views education as a mechanism to produce better citizenry and the other to produce better workers who can contribute to the national economy. Indeed, Arthur Applebee also observed another layer of tension noting the implications of a common "vision from kindergarten to grade 12 [embodied in the] CCSS documents are a palimpsest, with deeply embedded traces of our ongoing professional and political debates about the nature of effective curriculum and instruction in the English language arts" (25). The CCSSI were borne out of political and professional tensions, and their implementation coincided with the economic downturn of 2008.

According to Arthur Applebee, "the CCSS are shaped in great part by the history of what went before" (25). The federal mandate of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the 21st century version of Lyndon Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, required states to delineate and assess standards and "resulted in 50 different visions of what students should know and be able to do, accompanied by 50 different assessment systems" (26). The CCSSI gained purchase because they provided a common set of standards that satisfied the mandate of the federal government for assessable educational standards. Likewise, the standards were cast in economic terms to prepare students for career and college work in math and English language arts, and this economic framing certainly helped the effort gain public and political traction as the US entered the Great Recession following the economic collapse of 2008.

The CCSSI was led and created through the partnership of the state-level efforts coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and Achieve, Inc. The CCSSI moved forward formally with the 2008 publication of the report, *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring US Students Receive a World-Class Education* co-authored by these organizations. Philanthropic organizations and non-profit agencies with strong legislative support have also played a large role in the evolution and promotion of these common standards, ushering in a new set of players in the accountability context. The positioning of the CCSSI as a state-led effort is key as the responsibility for articulating standards and leading educational reform shifted from the federal government to the states. The federal government became involved with the CCSSI by funding their assessment through

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grants incentivized by the Race to the Top Initiatives in 2009 (White House and US Department of Education; see also Laine et al).

It is therefore important to differentiate the roles of state and federal government in the CCSSI: the states were responsible for the development and implementation of the standards, and the federal government incentivized the assessments of the standards. In situating the development of the standards at the state-level, CCSSI developers argued that local school chiefs and governors "recognized the value of consistent, real-world learning goals and launched this effort to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life," and the standards were developed by building upon the existing standards in the states, experience of teachers, content experts, states, and leading thinkers, and feedback from the public emphasizing the collaborative, coalition-building nature of the project (CCSS, "Development Process").

The overlapping timeline of state and federal projects related to the CCSSI is important to note. In 2007, forty-eight states and multiple US territories signed on as interested collaborators in the Common Core State Standards process convened by the NGA Center, CCSSO, and Achieve, Inc. After the 2008 publication of the *Benchmark* report, the development of the CCSSI for math and English language arts was underway. The NGA Center and the CCSSO developed the first iteration of the math and English language arts standards in 2009, and these organizations quickly sought feedback about the CCSSI. The final version was released in 2010. By the time of implementation in 2013–2014, forty-two (of the forty-eight original) states and seven US territories implemented the standards within their state elementary and secondary systems. The implementation of the CCSSI varied based on the timeline under which various states and territories authorized and adopted the standards.

In late July 2009, the Obama administration announced the Race to the Top incentives under which the assessments of the mathematics and English language arts standards were developed. Federal Race to the Top funds supported two consortia, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for the Assessment of the Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC). Later, ACT, Inc., separately developed an assessment for CCSSI purposes seeing that the federally funded assessments were going awry. The assessments of the CCSSI were first administered in 2014–2015. At the end of 2015, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). This legislation affirmed the need for states to have academic standards to receive federal education funds, but forbid the federal government to influence or incentivize a state's standards

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or anything related to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (See Section 8526A—Prohibition Against Federal Mandates, Direction, or Control, ESEA 1965 Amended and Enacted in December 2015, 429; US Department of Education). This policy move put the control of educational standards squarely back into each state's purview and again made the decision of the assessment of the standards up to each state. The legislation explicitly forbids the federal government from dictating any kind of directions for the CCSSI, thus making the future of the CCSSI uncertain.

The context and scope of the curricular expansion of writing through CCSSI is astounding. In addition to the significant shifts in the CCSSI curriculum and assessment, there are also seismic changes in terms of the increasing numbers and diversity of students going through the system. According to Hussar and Bailey, enrollment in US elementary and secondary school equaled 55 million students in 2012, a 4 percent increase from 1999. Between Fall 2012 and Fall 2024, a further increase of 5 percent is expected. The projections indicate continued increases in enrollments in elementary and secondary schools. Likewise, postsecondary enrollments are projected to reach 23 million students by 2024, a 14 percent increase (Hussar and Bailey). Many of these students will pass through postsecondary, first-year writing and our associated programming—through online, dual enrollment, or face-to-face curricula. These students will take placement tests into our courses and will seek out writing centers or other instructional support to help them navigate the postsecondary writing curriculum. First-year writing is a common portal through which many students first encounter postsecondary study. Naturally, curricula and testing at the elementary and secondary levels will have spillover effects for postsecondary settings.

These changes are accompanied by costs of staggering proportions. As it serves millions of students, the US public education system is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. Most of the funding for US education comes from local and state coffers, and a smaller percentage is distributed through the federal government. According to Cornman,

> the 50 states and the District of Columbia collected $623.2 billion in revenues for public elementary and secondary education in [fiscal year] 2014, with 91% of the revenues coming from state and local governments. State and local governments funded $568.7 billion of elementary and secondary education, and the federal government contributed $54.5 billion, or 8.7 percent of all revenues. (2)

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As a result, it made sense to locate the creation and implementation of CCSSI in local and state contexts because these officials have more decision-making power about the standards.

There are also dramatic changes occurring in demographic profiles of students enrolled in publicly funded education in the US adding to the changing landscape. These shifts are felt at the postsecondary level too. According to Hussar and Bailey,

> public school enrollments are projected to be to be higher in 2024 than in 2012 for Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and students of Two or more races; lower for Whites and American Indians and about the same for Blacks. Public school enrollments are projected to be higher the South and West, and about the same in the Northeast and Midwest. (3)

Like the K–12 system, postsecondary student populations are increasingly more racially and ethnically diverse. In addition, the increase of students requires more teachers. Hussar and Bailey projected that there will be a decline in pupil/teacher ratios. More students graduate from high school, and more go on for postsecondary study. The annual number of new teachers hired is projected to be higher in 2024 than in 2012 in both public and private schools (9). There will be smaller class sizes with more inexperienced teachers. The drive to make standards more cohesive is understandable, given this rapidly changing and growing system.

Postsecondary institutions will also experience similar growth and change in demographic populations. According to Hussar and Bailey,

> Total enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions is expected to increase 14 percent between fall 2013 and fall 2024. Differential growth is expected by student characteristics such as age, sex, and attendance status (part-time or full-time). Enrollment is expected to increase in both public and private degree-granting postsecondary institutions. (23–24)

There were significant increases to postsecondary enrollments between 1999–2012. The number of students seeking associates degrees increased by 78 percent; the percentage of students awarded bachelor's degrees increased by 49 percent. By 2024, the numbers of students seeking associates and bachelor's degrees will level off and are projected to increase by only 14 percent and 10 percent respectively.

There are four major changes to the CCSSI from the standards-based reform efforts that preceded them. First, a majority of states adopted the standards into their elementary and secondary curricula in 2012–2013. This adoption signals a huge shift in which millions of students and thou-

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sands of teachers are working toward the same goals. Second, the CCSSI ELA shifts away previous focus on reading and interpretation of literary text to reading informational and nonfiction texts. Shanahan observes that

> one of the biggest changes . . . [in] these new writing standards is the closer connection of writing and reading . . . and the focus . . . on opinion, which in the middle and high school grades morphs into formal argument, complete with anticipation of counterarguments and use of multiple sources of evidence. (np)

Third, writing is elevated to a unique and distinct skill worthy of overt instruction and evaluation whereas previous standards-based curricula emphasized reading and/or knowledge of grammar. Fourth, the CCSSI situates Reading and Writing instruction and assessment within disciplines from the 6th grade onward. In 2008 after the publication of the *Benchmark* report, 84 percent of the states agreed to use Anchor Standards for Career and College Readiness for writing. In other words, 84 percent of the US states agreed to promote writing across the entire K–12 curricula as well as situated within social science/history, science, and technical subjects. Eventually, for states that continue with the Common Core, students who matriculate into postsecondary study will have had overt, scaffolded writing instruction since kindergarten, and they will have been exposed to writing instruction as a tool for communication and learning across disciplines since 6th grade.

Consistent with the two competing aims of American education expressed by Ravitch and her followers, the CCSSI embraced the career and college-ready framework. The CCSSI ELA authors define career and college readiness as performance that

> demonstrates independence, builds strong content knowledge, responds to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline, comprehends as well as critique, value evidence, uses technology and digital media strategically and capably; comes to understand other perspectives and cultures. (Headings, *English Language Arts* 7)

Under the Common Core State Standards, students are writing a great deal more; teachers are teaching more writing; and the CCSSI assessment evaluates student written performance.

The CCSSI articulate career and college ready performance targets—Anchor Standards—for each of the four strands of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language toward performance defined as career and college ready. Each grade details specific performance targets for grades K–12 as well as. Likewise, reading and writing specific performance targets are also situated within other disciplinary areas beginning in

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6th grade. These performance targets are identical to those of ELA-specific writing strand. For each grade level, ten standards are identified for each of the strands. Within the CCSSI ELA, the Anchor Standards are translated for each grade level into detailed performance expectations for each of the four stands for individual grades K–8 and combined for grades 9–10 and 11–12. Additionally, performance expectations are delineated for reading and writing for grades 6–12 and are situated across disciplines (history/social studies, science, and technical subjects). Again, performance expectations are specified for individual grade levels 6–8 and then are combined for grades 9–10 and 11–12. Table 1 provides an overview of the anchor standards for English Language Arts and Literacy within other disciplines.

As Table 1 illustrates, the Anchor Standards communicate broad expectations across the four strands and then further detail the "skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate" for various grade levels (*English Language Arts* 51). Each strand contains performance standards for specific sub-strand areas. Again, these terms are articulated for individual grades K–8 and combined for grades 9–10 and 11–12.

Within the CCSSI—again, this cannot be stressed enough—writing has been elevated to a distinct skill necessary for career and college success. Like reading, it has been positioned as a skill that requires deep knowledge and practice within English language arts but also requires application within and across multiple disciplinary areas. The CCSSI ELA developers adopted an integrated model of literacy that "refocuses educators' attention on the importance of writing and the need to teach it effectively at every grade level. It also provides benchmarks for what students need to master at each step along the way" (Graham and Harris). In addition, "although the Standards are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands for conceptual clarity, the processes of communication are closely connected, as reflected throughout" (*English Language Arts* 4).

In addition to overt writing instruction, the CCSSI ELA also emphasize facility in digital settings as well as reading skills that emphasize both textual and visual analysis, thus preparing them to read multiple formats. Eventually, students may enter our postsecondary courses with a wider array of experience with literacy practices. This fundamentally changes previous English language arts frameworks as the CCSSI combines writing, reading, and speaking into one construct, and this will surely have implications for postsecondary composition classrooms and scholarship. With this integrated framework, the previously narrow constructs of English language arts defined by educational measurement specialists have been made obsolete (see also Elliot in *On a Scale*), and are replaced with more complex constructs of literacy. This integrated sense of construct articulation ties

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Table 1
An overview of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for
English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Reading	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language
Key Ideas and Details 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	**Text Types and Purposes** 1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. 2. Write informative /explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.	**Comprehension and Collaboration** 1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. 2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. 3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.	**Conventions of Standard English** 1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. 2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Adapted from *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.*

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Reading	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language
Craft and Structure 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.	**Production and Distribution of Writing** 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. 5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. 6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.	**Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas** 4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. 5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations. 6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.	**Knowledge of Language** 3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Adapted from *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.*

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Reading	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.	**Research to Build and Present Knowledge** 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. 8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism. 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.		**Vocabulary Acquisition and Use** 4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate. 5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. 6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

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An overview of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Reading	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.	**Range of Writing** 10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.		

Adapted from *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*,

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into work within postsecondary composition that is also moving toward more integration with other content areas. Such language arts approaches are clear gains for education. In educational contexts, however, the road is paved with politicization.

Launch

While the CCSSI have been portrayed as standards created by and for the states, scholars have observed other dynamics driving the process—one in which philanthropic and non-profit agencies with strong legislative support partner with the state-level organizations to bring about specific educational reforms (see *Education Week, Spotlight: Writing Instruction*). Recall that the CCSSI gained traction after the 2008 publication of the *Benchmarking* report which coincided with the economic downturn in the US economy and the start of the Great Recession. Linda Adler-Kassner asserts that the CCSS were "drafted by a relatively small group of educators (largely administrators) and professionals, vetted with minimal input from professional organizations like NCTE or even MLA, the Standards went from draft to final version in about 14 months" (124).

Linda Adler-Kassner cautioned WPAs about emerging narratives and players in the landscape of accountability and the quickly changing terrain of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. She argues that there are two distinct narratives for public education—one that values education for the benefit of an educated citizenry and the other that sees the role of education to prepare workers to help the nation compete in the global economy. In political realms, there has been a great deal of anxiety that the US is losing economic ground, and this loss tends to be attributed to a weak educational system. Like Adler-Kassner, Hesse also claims that professional organizations were not substantively consulted during the development of the CCSS.

On the other hand, the CCSSI was a state-led effort, and it may have been difficult to track the distributed nature of feedback regarding the CCSS as there were multiple ways to give input. Individuals were invited to comment directly; the American Council on Education put together a response group comprised of selective NCTE and MLA members (Asao Inoue lists that panel in a WPA-L message on September 21, 2009) and individual campuses were asked for response depending upon the institution's connection to Achieve., Inc. or other connections to the CCSS—usually beginning with the Provost's Office and then that office searching out the appropriate English faculty member or administrator. CCSSI developers document their wide spread evidence of participation (CCSSI,

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"Development Process"). Kylene Beers, then president of NCTE, published an open letter in 2009 regarding NCTE's actions about the CCSSI, and NCTE subsequently provided three sets of responses to the standards (NCTE, "Resources"). The State of Washington became the fiscal agent of one of the assessment instruments, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and so there were significant numbers of faculty invited from my institution at the time, Washington State University, to provide feedback on the standards—both through state channels and also through national meetings held in Washington DC. The evolution of the CCSS tapped into the economic and literacy crisis narratives that resulted in a reset of roles of teachers and how they are or are not included in determining the content of the curriculum. While evidence points to engagement and review by NCTE, MLA, and other venues, the duration of review and degree to which counsel was accepted both remain contested.

The CCSSI built upon the patchwork of standards and assessments developed under No Child Left Behind and coincidentally came into place at the same time of the economic downturn. The marketplace lost approximately 5.7 million jobs, and the unemployment rate hovered at 9 percent. Hundreds of billions of dollars in investments evaporated, banks failed, and retirement funds declined. The term Great Recession (from December 2007 to June 2009) has come to be synonymous with systematic economic failure. Inception of CCSSI during the recession resulted in a winnowing of the core curricular areas. Lasisi Ajayi argues that the CCSS built upon the standards-based accountability movement of the 1990s when mandatory testing of student achievement was required in almost all states. These state-level achievement test mandates linked to the broader federal accountability initiative of No Child Left Behind. Linking standards-based tests to a common core of knowledge helped narrow what schools needed to teach to ensure that students were ready to participate in a globalized economy. Ajayi asserts

> the standards-based tests were designed to test students' learning of a common core of knowledge that all citizens were expected to acquire . . . The core argument of the accountability movement was that schools should teach students the knowledge and skills to become effective workers in an increasingly globalized economy. (2)

The shift to the CCSSI resulted in a more limited set of constructs to be taught and assessed. These constructs were selected based on their potential contribution to economic indicators. Jory Brass observes that the development of the CCSSI marked an important departure from the standards-based efforts of the 1990s which sought teacher and professional input

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about the curricular content and assessment constructs. In the iteration of the CCSSI, the reform efforts were driven

> by overlapping networks of policy entrepreneurs (e.g., Student Achievement Partners), venture philanthropy (e.g., Gates Foundation, Pearson Foundation, GE Foundation), neoconservative think tanks (Fordham Foundation), corporate executives (e.g., Business Roundtable), and non-governmental trade organisations (sic) (Achieve, Inc., National Governors Association) in "partnership" or "consortia" with education publishers (e.g., Pearson Corporation, McGraw-Hill) and standardized testing companies (Education Testing Service, ACT, College Board). (126)

This shift in who decides what is taught in school, begun during a period of massive economic decline, made an explicit departure from traditional state and local control of public education and from educators taking central roles in determining the parameters of their profession. Instead, according to Brass, the advent of the CCSSI created a market developed and fostered by the private sector that can reform public education with

> tests, services, and products aligned with the standards. In this "state-led" reform, the free market has been positioned to reshape curriculum, teaching and assessment at the state and local levels through the provision of CCSS-based tests (PARCC and Smarter Balanced), prepackaged materials developed by educational publishers, and educational technologies and games. Conversely, states, school districts, and teachers have been positioned here as "customers" of these tests, technologies, and services. (127)

Whether or not states adopt or subsequently drop the CCSSI is really now a moot point. Textbooks, professional development materials, tests and other educationally supportive materials have been revised to align with these standards since they have been so widely adopted.

These shifts in elementary and secondary education have implications for postsecondary settings. Joanne Addison argues "the Common Core State Standards are being positioned as the most well-funded and pervasive effort to date at ensuring accountability through standardization not just in our K–12 classrooms but increasingly in our college classrooms as well." The evolution of career and college readiness standards links directly to perceptions about what is (or isn't) taught in postsecondary settings.

In anticipation of the launch of the CCSSI, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project collaborated to author the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (see O'Neill et al.). This document

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> describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success. Based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy, the *Framework* was written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide and is endorsed by the [major professional organizations].

The *Frameworks* couches college readiness in terms of eight habits of mind: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition.

The implementation of the CCSSI has narrowed the curriculum with its common focus on specific outcomes for career and college readiness. The adoption of these standards has also narrowed the development of textbook and instructional materials, and standardization of curricular materials decreases the needed amount of expertise in the instructional ranks. As Jacobson observes, the "implementation process privileges the goals and needs of accountability [mandates] rather than the teachers and students enacting the standards." Jacobson fears that "the central focus on testing and accountability related to the adoption of these standards creates the need for an ecosystem of texts that bring the standards into practice." These genres of implementation, including textbooks and assessment instruments, are institutional texts that work together to organize the activity of teachers and students. Jacobson wisely observes that the "standards supply a theory of writing and the kinds of writing to be evaluated, and the implementation materials focus on these valued forms, simplifying the standards to the most easily accessible components."

As is too often the case with constraint accompanying standardization, the launch of the CCSSI has narrowed what should be taught and what will subsequently be assessed. This shift will have significant implications at the postsecondary level as pathways are identified through curricula. The need for broader disciplinary knowledge has been significantly reduced in the CCSSI. I will return to the implications of this narrowing in the section on reception.

Assessment

Before the CCSSI assessments were developed, testing developers were optimistic (Sweeney et al.). In 2010, Lazer and his colleagues observed

> the unprecedented opportunity [brought about by] improvements in methods and technology, possible agreement on a common set of standards, combined with a generous commitment of federal resources should allow [ETS, Pearson, and the College Board] to build assess-

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> ment systems that provide accountability data and instructionally actionable information . . . the opportunities will surely be wasted if we do not carefully consider the trade-offs inherent in any large-scale assessment design. (18)

The largest backlash to the CCSSI has come under the assessments. Common Core replaced the No Child Left Behind tests enacted under President George W. Bush which elevated high stakes testing and school accountability in ways not previously seen. NCLB "required states to test, disaggregate and report data on student performance, but allowed states to continue deciding on their own which standards and tests to use" (Bidwell). The NCLB efforts were problematic because so many schools did not meet adequate levels for performance in these high stakes assessments and faced serious financial consequences. Beach et al. assert that no research exists to demonstrate that "adopting standards will necessarily improve student achievement" (10).

The federal government funded the development of the assessments for the CCSSI. Two testing groups, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and Partnership for the Assessment of the Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), won federal Race to the Top grants to develop the assessments of the Common Core State Standards replacing the multitude of assessments developed for NCLB. The assessment of the CCSSI first occurred in 2014–2015. Each testing consortium received hundreds of millions of dollars to develop and implement the assessments of the CCSSI. PARCC received $185,862,832 from September 2010 to September 2015, and SBAC received $175,849,539 to develop the assessments for math and English language arts.

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Table 2
Federal Funding for Development of CCSSI Assessments

Item	SBAC $	PARCC $
Governance	14,480,127	5,323,922
Fiscal agent		2,038,345
Support for governing states		3,405,419
Assessment, design, development	108,030,080	100,055,192
Research and evaluation	7,131,179	5,857,424
Professional capacity and outreach	16,227,600	2,552,599
Technology	27,234,211	29,349,034
Higher education engagement	1,376,570	900,308
Project management		18,582,187
Institutes		429,526
Technical issues ~ policy work groups		231,075
Educator leadership cadres		5,137,801
Formative assessment tools for K–12		2,000,000
Diagnostic assessments		10,000,000
Indirect costs + system design	1,369,772	
Total	175,849,539	185,862,832

From the Race to the Top assessment awards:
www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/awards.html

In addition to these RTT awards, each testing group received an additional $15.9 million from the remaining unallocated funds from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. While these figures represent a fraction of the federal US Department of Education budget, the funds to develop the tests are no small drop in the bucket.

Both SBAC and PARCC employ automated essay scoring. For English language arts, there are several types of questions: constructed response tasks which are open ended or short answer questions; selected response (multiple choice, true and false, matching); technology-enhanced, and performance tasks that are more complicated and are delivered over a period of time. According to SBAC's definition of technology-enhanced and performance-based questions, they "measure a student's ability to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills . . . [they require] students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to complex real-world problems" ("Home" and "Setting Criteria"). The questions are scenario- or theme-based, and they include interactions and responses beyond traditional selected response or constructed response. The test items are predominantly computer scored. The SBAC exams were created by American Institutes for Research (AIR). PARCC's tests were developed by Pearson and ETS. Additionally, ACT developed a CCSSI based test called ASPIRE

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as a lower cost alternative to SBAC or PARCC (see "About PARRC Inc.," and "Independent Studies").

The assessment of complex performance-based or technology-enhanced tasks has been challenging. Strauss (2016) reports that SBAC and PARCC items are computer-scored with Pearson and AIR contracted to do the scoring. According to these contracts, PARCC/Pearson intends to cross check only 10 percent of student exams by hand. AIR/SBAC intends to cross check 25 percent of the exams. States can pay extra to have their exams read by humans. SBAC and PARCC report psychometric information in terms of the ways in which the computer models match human raters. Both tests have lower reliability ratings for both human- and computer-scored topics. In the SBAC report on ELA items, there is low agreement with humans on computer-scored items (40 percent).

Not surprisingly, questions have been raised about the validity of scoring these exams by machine. Leonie Haimson asserts that there are too many unanswered questions about machine scoring of the common core exams, referencing Les Perelman's numerous critiques of automated essay scoring, and calls into question that computers can read student work. Quoting Perelman, Haimson argues

> the [studies conducted by PARCC and SBAC are] so flawed, in the nature of the essays analyzed and, particularly, the narrow range of scores, that it cannot be used to support any conclusion that Automated Essay Scoring is as reliable as human graders.

In their reporting, PARCC scores were very low—mostly 0s or 1s on a five-point scale: "Someone could obtain to close the same reliability simply by giving a 0 to the very short essays and flipping a coin for the rest." Quoting Perelman, Haimson argues "As for the AIR study, it makes no particular claims as to the reliability of the computer scoring method, and omits the analysis necessary to assess this question." Again, the developers PARCC and SBAC solicited a wide array of input from state-level assessment experts and content experts to set standards. Ultimately, while the framework of the CCSSI included a new, expansive framework of English language arts, the assessments had to be narrowly defined to achieve the technical specifications within standards set by the educational measurement community. In the areas of tension between the validity of construct representation and the reliability of raters, technical specifications of reliability won—and teachers and students lost.

The capabilities of automated scoring do not yet support a robust assessment of complex writing tasks. AIR and Pearson's research primarily focuses on comparison of rating behaviors of machines and humans. They

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have not yet attended to the newly iterated standards governing educational and psychological testing articulated through APA, AERA, and NCME's *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* most recently revised in 2014. In the previous revision in 1999, the *Standards* asserted that validity defined as "the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretation of test scores entailed by the proposed uses of tests" (9) was paramount. The latest edition of the *Standards* elevates the consideration of fairness as a core principle:

> use of test score interpretations for intended use(s) for individuals for all relevant subgroups. A test that is fair minimizes the construct-irrelevant variance associated with individual characteristics and testing contexts that otherwise would compromise the validity of scores for some individuals. (219)

Neither human-scored nor computer-scored SBAC or PARCC tests have moved to address the standards set forth by these professional organizations. Although Norbert Elliot, Andre A. Rupp, and David Williamson's "Conceptual, Interpretative, and Integrative Frameworks: Assessment of English Language Arts-Writing in the Common Core State Standards Initiatives" provides excellent perspective on interpreting these scores within local contexts, such exposition is something that the test publishers have a very difficult time doing.

Furthermore, scores from SBAC and PARCC tests are used for multiple purposes beyond attainment of career and college readiness. Some states use the scores for placement out of remedial postsecondary courses, as graduation requirements, and as indictors of teacher performance. Many states have made agreements regarding placement into postsecondary writing courses based on the 11th grade ELA scores. Such arrangements allow students to bypass remedial coursework if they score at a certain level on the ELA test and guarantee that students can enter real college writing courses.

The SBAC scores are also used as a way to identify students who need targeted instruction. These students intend to pursue postsecondary study but haven't demonstrated adequate levels of performance on the 11th grade ELA or math tests. For example, the State of Washington's Bridge to College program mainstreams students into postsecondary study. This program places remedial coursework in high school so that students can enter regular courses in college upon their graduation from high school.

Some states required performance at a certain level on the CCSSI assessment as a graduation requirement, but as the rollout of the CCSSI and its assessments occurred, these requirements were waived or performance on SAT or ACT tests became suitable alternatives. Teacher evaluations became

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tied to the results of SBAC and PARCC tests. Given the complications with automated scoring of student essays, there has been a great deal of controversy here too. Haertel, in a study supported by ETS, reported that using student test scores as measure of teacher performance is very problematic, and he concludes "teacher [value added model] scores should emphatically *not* be included as a substantial factor with a fixed weight in consequential teacher personnel decisions. The information they provide is simply not good enough to use in that way" (emphasis in original, 23). Much of the problem with using student scores as an indicator for teacher performance is that there is a significant amount of bias "*for* some teachers and *against* others . . . [stemming] from the way our school system is organized" (24; emphasis original).

As noted above, economic constraint accompanied assessment every step of the way. SBAC and PARCC assessments presented financial challenges to states. The costs of the exams, for many, is higher than the tests previously administered for federal accountability purposes. In 2013, the SBAC test cost between $22.50 and $27.30, depending on which test was being used: the basic model or a complete testing system which included formative and interim performance tests. PARCC costs $29.50. According to Gewertz, this cost is "higher than what one-third of its 24 member states [previously paid for their state developed assessment]." The requirement to conduct the assessment of educational standards places a financial burden on public schools. The law mandates that the assessments must be done, taking away resources from instruction and professional development for teachers.

While there were political issues during the development and launch of the CCSSI, the problems literally exploded with the implementation of the assessments. The development of the standards had been rushed, and the purposes of the assessments had not been clearly agreed upon. While there was good consensus about the value of common standards for English language arts, there was less agreement about the ways in which to evaluate student work. The CCSSI assessments still remained high stakes tests to satisfy federal accountability mandates, and the fact that automated essay scoring was the primary vehicle to evaluate student work led to strong backlash. In April 2013, NCTE issued a position statement against using machine scoring to evaluate student written work, and a petition of professionals against machine scoring of student essays in high stakes environments currently has more than 4,300 signatures ("Professionals"). These documents cited research arguing serious limitations in automated essays scoring. Finally, the SBAC and PARCC ELA assessments have neglected to foster the possibilities within the integrated literacy framework of the

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CCSSI. The constructs assessed are more narrowly defined because of the high-stakes nature of these tests and the employment of automatic essay scoring. Both require very concisely delineated constructs which do not support the expansive possibilities in the CCSSI. The changing demographics in US public elementary and secondary schools as well as the changing conceptions of standards for educational testing require tests to be considered through the lens of validity, reliability, and now fairness. Haertel's preliminary research on the relationship between student test scores and teacher performance documented bias resulting from improper use of test scores in school systems. The same types of inquiries need to be done for student performance as well as similar dynamics are most likely at play for students based on race, gender, and social economic status. Given the recent rollout of the assessments, these areas have yet to be adequately investigated.

Reception

After the first implementation of the SBAC and PARCC assessments, there was significant political backlash against the CCSSI in many states (Ujifusa, Bannerjee, and Tomko; Ujifusa, Gwertz, and Decker). By 2015, the number of participating states dropped to forty-three using the ELA standards and forty-two using the Math standards. Gewertz traces the eroding support for the CCSSI. Currently, it's not clear the extent to which CCSSI-based curricula were implemented and simply renamed or were implemented and entirely revised. Some people misread the CCSSI as a federal takeover of public education, and others fear that the CCSSI puts public education in the hands of private non-profits, testing companies, and textbook publishers. In 2015, many states rebranded their state level assessments, but most likely, they are simply renamed Smarter Balanced Assessments or PARCC. This is the case in my home state of Idaho in which the Smarter Balanced Assessment has been renamed from the Idaho Core Standards to the Idaho Standards Achievement Test. Additionally, the US Congress reauthorized the ESSA in late 2015 forbidding the federal government to do anything related to the Common Core (see Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet"). Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 which allowed states to design their own accountability systems and opened up the assessments to more than just math and reading. There is a general backing away from anything labeled Common Core.

The educational landscape continues to change. *Education Week* tracked the results of the CCSSI assessments in 2014–2015 and found that many states had lower proficiency rates than their previous federal accountability tests. Again, the tests used in 2013–2014 varied from state to state,

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but those used by PARCC or SBAC trended lower performance wise. As scores were released this fall and were lower than anticipated, states revised the plans they had for score usage. In Idaho, the State Board of Education approved a waiver that rescinds the requirement that students earn a certain score to qualify for graduation (Stone). In Ohio, just more than a third of students met the standards on the PARCC exams (O'Donnell), and in New Jersey, most students performed below grade level in English and math (Clark). Overall, the performance has been mixed (see Hegarty; Oshrin; Rey; Singer). Gewertz reports that many states continue to drift away from the use of SBAC or PARCC assessments and, in an *Education Week* survey of PARCC or SBAC, states "only 21 states still plan to use shared tests designed for the common core." More states are opting to use SAT or ACT college entrance exams to meet the changing landscape of assessment. According to Gewertz, "six states and the District of Columbia will administer PARCC in 2015–2016; 14 will use Smarter Balanced." Given the December 2015 ESSA authorization, states are within their purview to make this choice

The future of the Common Core State Standards and their assessments is not clear, but the initiative will have lasting effects on writing instruction. Even if many participating states change their membership status as Common Core adopters, the curricula implemented by the common core has not been replaced by something new. Writing has a new place in American education, and the changes in K–12 contexts will spillover to postsecondary settings. The segementing, streamlining, narrowing based on particular career and college ready points capitalizes on the fractured nature of educational systems. The more things are compartmentalized and fragmented, the more they can be put in service of pushing students through or redefining what it is students need to be able to do in college.

That trajectory continues to place the disciplines of Composition/Rhetoric and English Studies in the sights of conversations to contract or constrict what needs to be known or taught. Most likely for faculty and instructors at research institutions, this dynamic will be felt less by them since research and disciplinary innovation are part of their mandate, but colleagues at two-year or four-year regional institutions will begin to feel the pressure of what can and should be taught. Colleagues of mine at two-year colleges in Idaho are already expressing concern that their doctoral work in literary studies is perceived to have decreased value over their ability to teach multiple sections of composition. The guided pathway includes composition courses and not literary study or creative inquiry.

Writing program administrators need to actively participate in these unfolding conversations. WPAs and composition/writing studies schol-

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ars have multiple opportunities to continue the work set in motion by the CCSSI. These opportunities fall in three areas: professional networking with elementary and primary colleagues; continued research and advocacy on career and college readiness for writing; and assuming the role of public intellectual on these issues. The development of the CCSSI shifted the central role of professional organizations as the primary group to determine curricular content and definitions; now, businesses, non-profits, the public, and legislative entities are much more interested and have taken more active roles in participating in the definitions of our disciplinary areas. The professional organizations are key in terms of the national conversations about our disciplines but equally important are collaborations within states. For example, my WPA counterparts and I in Idaho have created Idaho ENACT (Educators Networking about College–Composition Transitions), a project that brings together high school English teachers and first-year writing faculty from two- and four-year public, postsecondary institutions to develop instructional materials based on emerging research related to the role of prior learning and transfer theories and their implementation in both settings. This group has created an active network model established to sustain the collaborative work of the ENACT participants and to mitigate the challenges presented by our state's rugged geographic terrain as well as its depressed economy. Sustained professional conversations are vital.

Our scholarship needs to continue to investigate how well common standards work for students and teachers and to document the issues that arise when we teach and assess them. We need to flex our scholarly expertise in these areas to help define what works and what doesn't, and there are multiple contexts this could be explored given the meta-disciplinary status of writing. Much needs to be done within our own postsecondary writing program administrator fields to look at the ways documents like the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* or the WPA Outcomes Statement work and define the constructs we work with. These scholarly projects can inform the work of common standards at elementary and secondary levels and vice versa. There are many journals related to the teaching of English situated in elementary, secondary, and international contexts, and there are scholarly inquiries related to fields like reading which overlap with writing studies and offer important directions for us. We need to be reading and publishing in those journals.

Finally, we need to heed Duane Roen's directive to take up the mantle of the public intellectual around issues related to writing. Writing exists in the public and political sphere, and as writers and as writing faculty or administrators, we should be actively shaping these perceptions. There may be ways that you can provide expertise to local school districts about teacher prepa-

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ration in assigning writing within the disciplines (take a cohort of your colleagues to make such a partnership); weigh in on state-level decisions seeking public input about how to assess educational standards; or write up and distribute a document about key points to consider in the CCSSI decision making. Write letters to the editors. Get together informally with high school and college teachers of writing to talk about professional issues. WPAs need to be more proactive about seeking out these conversations in ways that align with their work.

The main constant in the US's educational landscape will be change. More than ever, we need to work intentionally to be part of a coalition that ensures that writing is taught and assessed and teachers are prepared with the most complex and robust frameworks. Given our expertise, we need to actively shape the future of writing for students and teachers.

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