Curriculum

A summary of the scientific literature on curriculum and learning in schools.



How This Impacts Children's Development

Changes in curriculum can have substantial educational impacts for children. Common Core State Standards set higher rigorous standards for learning across adopting states, leading to improvements in educational

performance. Though not having the profound effects it hoped for, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) had gains in student achievement, the achievement gap, and school accountability.

READ THE BRIEF: The common core state standards: Effects on educational practice, 2014

READ THE BRIEF: Research on No Child Left Behind can inform reauthorization process, 2007

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) emerged in 2010 from a bipartisan effort by states to improve educational performance. This initiative was adopted by 43 states. It emphasizes student ownership of learning and encourages deeper cognitive processing of content.
- Content-area experts, state education department staff, teachers, school administrators, community group members, and parents scrutinized the CCSS before it was offered as an alternative to current standards.
- A 2010 study concluded that the CCSS are clearer and more rigorous than most existing state standards. Later studies found that states with standards more like the Common Core math standards had average higher National Assessment of Educational Progress math scores.
- The NCLB Act is a $13.3 billion federal effort to raise students' academic achievement, but public opinion is evenly divided over the effects of this legislation. A 2007 report stated that more states boosted achievement since 2002 than showed declines, with the greatest gains at elementary levels and in math.
- A recent report highlights that more states have observed a narrowing rather than a widening of the proficiency gap between Black and White students, Hispanic and White students, and children from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

1. A revised assessment process is needed to capture the types of learning and outcomes promoted by the Common Core State Standards, including developing formative assessments and other measures that track student progress more frequently to guide instruction.
2. It will be important for institutions of higher education (IHE) to use the new Standards-based assessment information on student readiness for college.

3. Educators should collaborate more systematically to support students' cognitive development year after year, with professional development focusing on student interests, learning styles, and college/career readiness.
4. There should be a universal proficiency standard to better prevent variation and differences in achievement across states. This includes further consideration of national content and performance standards, definitions of highly qualified teachers, and achievement tests.
5. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets must be revised, including adding a “value added” component for schools to focus on all students, not just those at the brink of proficiency.

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