

From Common Core to Charter: The Economic Remedy to NC Education

Hunter Winstead

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Thomas Metallo, Ph.D.
Chairman of Thesis

Robert Robertson, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Donald Fowler, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Brenda Ayres, Ph.D.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

Although numerous factors contribute to the decline of North Carolina's economic prosperity, one of the most prevalent is the waste that occurs through the ineffective funding of education. In the last century, this system has become progressively centralized and bureaucratized which restricts the presence of diversity and hinders economic choice. The purest evidence of this movement is demonstrated through the state's adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), an initiative designed to serve as a basis for federal entanglement in education. Proponents of CCSS claimed that the system would accomplish a variety of rigorous educational goals; however, none of these goals have been successfully attained. These failed initiatives waste tax dollars and subsequently hinder economic prosperity. Remedying this issue necessitates replacing CCSS with a charter school system. These schools of choice have largely proven to accomplish the very goals promised by the creators of CCSS at only a fraction of the cost. Pursuing a cost-effective charter school system in North Carolina will lead to a more effective educational system and a more prosperous economy.

Keywords: Common Core, waste, charter schools, education, economy

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Introduction

A primary example of civil encroachment in the private lives of American citizens is evident through the public education system. In an effort to improve the education level of the nation and gain a more respectful international position, policymakers are consistently making efforts to further centralize American learning. Proponents of this initiative believe that a nationwide educational system encompasses the key to academic success.

The most recent example of such centralization is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative, an enterprise created to uniformly measure academic progress throughout the states by applying consolidated teaching techniques. In North Carolina, officials adopted and fully implemented CCSS in the 2012 – 2013 school year based on national promises to increase student understandability, raise standardized test scores, advance minority academic achievement, increase graduation rates, and better prepare students for life after graduation. These goals have revealed themselves to be empty promises.

Necessary Action

Due to the tremendous amount of state money allocated for public education, it is apparent that the continued funding of CCSS wastes billions of tax dollars and subsequently hinders North Carolinian economic prosperity. Charter schools in the state have proven to successfully accomplish all of the goals promised by CCSS at only a fraction of the cost; therefore, North Carolinian lawmakers must repeal CCSS and

transform the traditional public school structure into a more effective and less costly charter system in order to advance the state's economic prosperity.

The Birth of Common Core

CCSS surfaced in an effort to place standards on the information that students should learn each year in the subjects of math, English, and writing. These standards specifically establish uniform scholastic expectations from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The methodology for these standards originates from internationally benchmarked work and college level expectations.¹ Furthermore, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) created CCSS with the primary intention of advancing educational success through such centralized learning standards.²

Although this general examination appears to outline a state-led creation for CCSS, a deeper investigation reveals the involvement of the federal government. Bill Adair is a professor of political science at Duke University and is an expert on CCSS in North Carolina. He claims, "Although Common Core is voluntary, the federal government has had a role in encouraging states to adopt the standards."³ Adair also specifies that "[s]tates earned a small number of extra points (40 of a possible 500) in the competition for grants from Race to the Top, Obama's signature program that provided

1. "Understanding the Common Core Standards: What They Are - What They Are Not," *The Education Digest* 79, no. 8 (April 2014): 17, accessed July 3, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1511968055?accountid=12085>.

2. Ibid.

3. Bill Adaire and Tom Kertsher, "Kay Hagan Says Federal Government Didn't Create Common Core," *Politifact*, October 7, 2014, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2014/oct/08/kay-hagan/kay-hagan-says-federal-government-didnt-create-com/>.

added money for education, if they adopted standards to prepare students for college and work.”⁴ In order to receive these grants, the states had to adopt CCSS as a de facto requirement.⁵

North Carolina did not adopt CCSS for the sole reason to enhance education, but for the additional purpose of receiving this federal subsidy. In exchange for entirely adopting CCSS, the federal government granted over \$400 million to North Carolina. The purpose of this grant was to generally enhance the standard of NC education.⁶ By accepting this subsidy, NC lawmakers allowed the federal government the ability to further regulate local education, which diminishes the state’s freedom with regard to education policy and causes the system to be less effective for North Carolinians. This apparent federal involvement is one of the leading roots for CCSS’s failure to achieve its goals in North Carolina.

Understandable Learning

The first goal that NC educators expect through the implementation of CCSS is to create learning techniques that are more understandable for every student. This initiative is explicitly outlined on the CCSS website: “Designed through collaboration among teachers, school chiefs, administrators, and other experts, the standards provide a clear and consistent framework for educators” and present learning techniques to students that

4. Adaire and Kertsher, “Kay Hagan Says Federal Government Didn’t Create Common Core.”

5. Karen Eppley, “Seven Traps of the Common Core State Standards,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 59, no. 2 (2015): 209.

6. “North Carolina Wins \$400 Million in Race to the Top,” MCNC, last modified 2016, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.mcnc.org/news/north-carolina-wins-race-to-the-top-money.html>.

are “clear, understandable, and consistent.”⁷ This statement from the CCSS website indicates that the educational principles of CCSS are designed to make learning more understandable for students.

Although this goal is expressed through the advent of CCSS, students are having difficulty understanding the curricula under the program. *Education Next* is a widely respected journal that conducts statistical research on education. The journal is sponsored by the Hoover Institution, Harvard Kennedy School on Education Policy and Governance, and the Fordham Institute.⁸ *Education Next* conducts an annual poll that examines the quality of learning and the popular support of North Carolinian education. For the most recent 2016 data, the organization polled 2,180 individuals, which consisted primarily of public school teachers and parents of school-aged children throughout North Carolina. This poll concluded with the following results: “In 2016, 50% of all those taking a side say they support the use of the Common Core standards in their state, down from 58% in 2015 and from 83% in 2013.”⁹ These statistics demonstrate that overall support from parents, teachers, and other influencers of CCSS has dropped roughly 33% since North Carolina’s adoption of the standards.

7. “About the Standards,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, last modified 2016, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/>.

8. “Home,” *Education Next*, last modified 2016, accessed October 13, 2016, <http://educationnext.org/>.

9. Paul E. Peterson, Michael B. Henderson, Martin R. West and Samuel Barrows, “Ten-year Trends in Public Opinion from the EdNext Poll,” *Education Next* 17, no. 1 (June 2016), accessed September 20, 2016, <http://educationnext.org/ten-year-trends-in-public-opinion-from-ednext-poll-2016-suy/>.

The study also focused on the responses of teachers by questioning 609 educators. The data concluded that their support for the understandability of CCSS dropped 43% since the adoption in 2012. In 2013, 87% of these teachers supported CCSS, but these numbers fell to 54% in 2014 and 44% in 2015. The support level from 2015 did not substantially change leading into 2016.¹⁰

Both teachers and parents of students admit that the primary reason for this rapid decline in popular support of CCSS is because the learning techniques of the initiative are so difficult to teach and understand. According to Joshua Starr, the CEO of PDK International, “Folks are definitely interested in higher standards, but they don’t necessarily understand the Common Core.”¹¹ Instructors especially feel that they are not sufficiently prepared to teach the complicated methods to students.

In the Fall of 2012, the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) conducted a survey focusing on the perceived success of CCSS within the state. Ninety-four local education agencies (LEAs) responded to the survey and were asked a variety of questions. When asked if they had adequate preparation in the implementation of CCSS, 70% answered that they were not prepared, while only 30% felt that they were prepared.¹² Since the adoption of CCSS in 2012, educational curricula have become more

10. A.P. Dillon, “Common Core Support Has Plummeted 40% Since 2012,” *Stop Common Core NC*, August 25, 2016, accessed September 24, 2016, <http://stopcommoncorenc.org/common-core-support-has-plummeted-40-since-2012/>.

11. Sarah Tully, “National Poll Shows Majority Oppose Common Core Standards,” *EdSource*, August 23, 2015, accessed November 2, 2016, <https://edsources.org/2015/national-poll-shows-most-oppose-common-core-standards/85212>.

difficult for students to understand. Because of the difficulty in understanding the standards, teachers and parents have lost support of CCSS, demonstrating that CCSS is failing at its perceived goal to make learning more understandable for students.

Increasing Standardized Test Scores

The next goal that CCSS is meant to accomplish is to increase the standardized test scores of students in North Carolina. Both the results in the state and the entire nation have not met expectations on the international scale as nations like Finland and Japan have quickly surpassed the United States. The founders of CCSS recognized this issue and understood that educational reform needed to take place. Although they were correct in understanding this issue, the implementation of CCSS has not raised such scores.

One of the most reliable and effective methods when investigating American educational statistics through standardized test scores is the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the NAEP is “the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas.”¹³ In other words, the NAEP is a useful tool when measuring scholastic aptitude throughout the states.

Additionally, the NAEP has the capacity to measure student progress in the fields of mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S.

12. “Common Core State Standards and the School Community,” *North Carolina Association of Educators* (Fall 2013), accessed July 23, 2016, <http://www.ncae.org/wp-content/uploads/Common-Core-State-Standards-and-the-School-Community.pdf>.

13. “National Assessment of Education Progress,” National Center for Education Statistics, last modified 2016, accessed September 16, 2016, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/>.

history, and in Technology and Engineering Literacy (TEL).¹⁴ In a recent study, mathematics scores from students in both fourth and eighth grade between 2013 and 2015 were inspected. The study concluded that only the District of Columbia, Mississippi, and Department of Defense improved in standardized math scores.

Alternatively, sixteen states presented a decline in these test scores between 2013 and 2015. These states were Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, Maryland, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.¹⁵ Out of these states, only one has yet to fully institutionalize CCSS. Moreover, in eighth grade statistics, no state demonstrated improvement on math scores, while Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia all had declining scores.¹⁶ Out of these twenty-two states, only two had not fully implemented CCSS.

The states that adopted CCSS, including North Carolina, saw a significant drop in standardized testing scores. In 2011, NC test scores well exceeded the national average. The NC average for composite scores was 21.9 while the national average was 21.1. These 2011 statistics marked the fourth consecutive year the NC ACT scores surpassed

14. Ibid.

15. "The Nation's Report Card Shows Declines in Student Achievement," NC Public Schools, last updated 2016, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/policyoperations/naep/mediasummary15.pdf>.

16. Ibid.

the national average.¹⁷ This trend did not continue after CCSS became fully implemented in the state. In 2014, the average composite results of NC students dropped well below the national average with the US scores remaining at 21 and the NC scores falling to 19. The greatest drop was in English which significantly plummeted to an average of 17.5.¹⁸ This substantial decrease in NC ACT scores during the implementation of CCSS signifies that the standards are failing by precipitating lower scores in the state.

Enhancing Minority Proficiency

Another stated goal of CCSS is to increase minority proficiency. Kirkland Hamilton, a doctoral scholar at Union University, specializes in educational advancement. He underlines a primary goal of CCSS by remarking, “Proponents claimed the new standards would raise standardized test scores and better prepare students to be successful in college or a career after post-secondary education.”¹⁹ More specifically, the program was designed to increase the education and test scores of minority students who were seemingly struggling in school.

Hamilton conducted an analysis of the effect that CCSS has on the success of minorities in Tennessee schools. Tennessee consists of about 81% white individuals and

17. “NC Act Scores Remain Above the National Average in 2011,” *State Board of Education*, accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/newsroom/news/2011-12/20110817-01>.

18. “Average ACT Scores by State (Most Recent),” *Prep Scholar*, Feb 23, 2015, accessed October 21, 2016, <http://blog.prepscholar.com/act-scores-by-state-averages-highs-and-lows>.

19. Justin Hamilton, “President Obama, U.S. Secretary of Education Duncan Announce National Competition to Advance School Reform,” *Department of Education*, 2009, accessed October 25, <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/president-obama-us-secretary-education-duncan-announce-national-competition-advance-school-reform>.

about 16% African American individuals. Similarly, North Carolina consists of about 70% white and 13% African American.²⁰ Hamilton's study involved 13,742 subjects, and he concluded, "The results of the data further indicated that the interaction of Common Core and race was effective for White . . . students, but not effective for African American students."²¹ This information demonstrates that the ACT scores of minority students in Tennessee decreased, while the scores of white students remained relatively the same with some increase.

In North Carolina, minority ACT scores have also plummeted since the state's adoption of CCSS. In 2010, the average composite ACT score of African Americans in North Carolina was 17.4 and that of Hispanics was 20.3. By 2015, the average African American score dropped to 15.8 and the Hispanic score dropped to 17.2.²² Based on these numbers, the average ACT scores of minorities in North Carolina have steadily decreased since the advent of CCSS. In other words, minority students are currently worse off than they were before the implementation of CCSS.

This failure to increase minority proficiency is also apparent in the current status of the state's school performance. The amount of low-performing schools has greatly

20. "Tennessee Demographics," Tennessee, last modified 2016, accessed July 6, 2016, <http://www.tennessee.com/demographics.html>.

21. Kirkland D. Hamilton, "The Impact of the Common Core State Standards Initiative on Math ACT Scores of West Tennessee High School Students," Union University, 2015, accessed June 18, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1765159719?accountid=12085>.

22. "ACT Profile Report – State," The ACT, 2014, accessed October 28, 2016, <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Natl-Scores-2014-NorthCarolina.pdf>.

increased since the full implementation of CCSS in 2012. According to the NC State Board of Education, low-performing schools are those “who received a letter grade of D or F and meet or did not meet expected growth traditional public school.”²³ Essentially, these low-performing schools are those that consistently perform worse than the average of NC public schools.

Based on the 2015 – 2016 report by the NC State Board of Education, it is clear that the amount of low-performing schools has increased since 2012, especially in predominately minority areas. For example, in Durham County, there are now twenty-one schools that are considered to be low-performing. Each of these schools encompasses mainly minority students and is located in a less-affluent region.

The same is true with Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Schools, which now has forty low-performing schools. Similarly, the schools that were added to the low-performing list consist of those with predominately minority students.²⁴ Based on the diminished performance of minority ACT scores and the increased number of low performing schools, it is clear that CCSS has done little to nothing to place minority students in a better academic standing.

Increasing Graduation Rates

Another goal that CCSS is intended to achieve is to increase the overall graduation rates of students within North Carolina. The creators of CCSS “launched this

23. “Accountability and Testing Results,” *Public Schools of North Carolina*, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/>.

24. *Ibid.*

effort to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school.”²⁵

This primary goal of CCSS is to have more students graduating. Like the other initiatives, this is an outstanding goal which has the capacity to be achieved; however, CCSS has failed to accomplish it.

It is too early to measure the true effect that CCSS will have on the dropout percentage. The reason for this issue is that students preparing to graduate in 2017 were not brought up under the education of CCSS. Although many statistics regarding the impact of CCSS on graduation have yet to be determined, multiple scholars and organizations have presented detailed predictions that focus on the impact.

The Carnegie Corporation has done exhaustive research on the effect that CCSS has on graduation. This corporation is a well-respected establishment that primarily focuses on the two main issues of “international peace and the advancement of education and knowledge.”²⁶ The Carnegie Corporation conducted a study in 2013 to project the impact of CCSS. The study concluded that “even coordinated, rapid, and highly effective efforts to improve high school teaching would leave millions of students achieving below the level needed for graduation and college success as defined by the Common Core.”²⁷ In other words, the study predicts that the implementation of CCSS will not have the

25. “Development Process,” Common Core, last updated 2016, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/development-process/>.

26. “Our History,” *Carnegie Corporation of New York*, last updated 2016, accessed August 2, 2016, <https://www.carnegie.org/about/our-history/>.

27. John Thompson, “Common Core Will Double Dropout Rate, Says Carnegie Corporation,” *Scholastic*, 2014, accessed August 2, 2016. http://scholasticadministrator.typepad.com/thisweekineducation/2014/08/thompson.html#.V_K0E5MrLV0.

capacity to properly teach students the rigorous standards and will cause the current dropout rate to double from 15% to about 30%.²⁸

In North Carolina, this theory appears to be true based on the linear regression model of graduation rates from 2005 to 2016. From the 2007 to the 2011 school years, the graduation rate increased from 70.3% to 80.4%. This frequency represents an average increase of 2.02% per year. From the 2012 to the 2016 school years, the graduation rate improved from 80.4% to 85.8%, an annual increase of 1.08%.²⁹ The rate of increase that occurred between 2007 and 2011 was about twice as fast as that which occurred between 2012 and 2016. The frequency of North Carolina's rising graduation rate has substantially slowed since the implementation of CCSS.

Preparing Students for College or Professional Life

The final goal of CCSS presents a culmination of the previous four goals by striving to increase college and workforce readiness among NC students. The CCSS website declares that the most important goal of the initiative is to better prepare students for "college, career, and life."³⁰ According to the Manhattan Institute, "To be 'college ready' students must pass three crucial hurdles: they must graduate from high school, they must have taken certain courses in high school that colleges require for the acquisition of necessary skills, and they must demonstrate basic literacy skills."³¹

28. Ibid.

29. Kelly Hinchcliffe, "NC's Graduation Rate, School Grades Improve," *WRAL*, September 1, 2016, accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.wral.com/nc-s-graduation-rate-school-grades-improve/15978981/>.

30. "Development Process."

A recent study released by ACT examines the readiness of high school students to attend college. Mary Reim is a research associate with a specialization in domestic policy studies at the Heritage Foundation. She examines this report and remarks, “As the report finds, the Common Core math standards do not adequately provide a child with the skills needed to succeed in the classroom, forcing teachers to add on extra material to their limited instruction time.”³² This assertion correlates with the decreased amount of NC students that scored within college readiness ranges from 2010 to 2014. In 2010, 47% of students that took the ACT scored within the range of college readiness; however, this number dropped to just 23% in 2014, a decrease of 24% since the adoption of CCSS.³³

Additionally, Reim asserts that “only 18 percent of college professors surveyed rated their students as prepared to distinguish between opinion, fact, and reasoned judgement—a skill determined to be important for college-level work.”³⁴ These statistics represent that the English standards of CCSS also fail to properly prepare students for college. Based on these evidences, it is clear that CCSS does not accomplish its primary goal of increasing student readiness for life after graduation.

31. Jay Greene and Greg Forster, “Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States,” *Manhattan Institute*, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/public-high-school-graduation-and-college-readiness-rates-united-states-5906.html>.

32. Mary Reim, “Common Core Does Not Prepare Students for College, New Report Finds,” *The Daily Signal*, June 14, 2016, accessed August 5, 2016, <http://dailysignal.com/2016/06/14/common-core-does-not-prepare-students-for-college-new-report-finds/>.

33. “ACT Profile Report – State,” The ACT.

34. Reim, “Common Core Does Not Prepare Students for College, New Report Finds.”

CCSS has failed to adequately accomplish any of its respective goals. Since the application of the program, students have been less able to understand techniques, standardized test scores have fallen, minorities have performed significantly worse, increased graduation rates have diminished, and college readiness has declined. Regardless of these failures, the NC government continues to support its adoption of CCSS by funding its implementation.

Economic Analysis

CCSS has proven to be an ineffective system in North Carolina through its failure to accomplish these goals; therefore, the federal subsidization of the initiative wastes tax money which hinders economic prosperity. In addition to understanding these evident failures of CCSS in North Carolina, it is paramount to comprehend the considerable amount of money that the initiative wastes.

According to the US Census Bureau, the total amount of funds used for NC public education is around \$12.73 billion. This figure consists primarily of state, local, and federal taxes. The federal government's funding of NC education is relatively small and consists of just twelve percent of the total revenue. Local funding is greater than federal and includes about \$3.3 billion per year. Moreover, the largest contribution to NC public education is by far through state taxes which supplied schools with \$7.9 billion in 2013. This state tax figure is quite excessive and greatly exceeds the amount spent by neighboring states. For example, in the same year, South Carolina spent \$3.8 billion, Tennessee spent \$4.1 billion, and Virginia spent \$5.8 billion.³⁵ These numbers indicate

35. "Public Education Finances: 2013, Economic Reimbursement Surveys Division Reports," *Educational Finance Branch* (June 2015): 11, accessed October 15,

that North Carolina spends notably more money on public education than nearby states. Unfortunately, this large sum of NC revenue is being wasted through the implementation of the ineffective CCSS.

This accumulating waste is evident through the state's increased cost-per-pupil since the creation of CCSS. In the 2003 – 2004 school year, the per pupil expenditure in average daily membership was just \$6,741. 74.4% came strictly from state funding. This compares to 7.6% coming from the federal government and 18% from local municipalities.³⁶ As CCSS entered the state, the expenses rose. In the 2015 – 2016 school year, the per pupil expenditure enlarged to \$8,296. This figure breaks down to 67.9% from state taxes, 7.7% from the federal government, and 24.4% from localities.³⁷ This period encompasses the creation and adoption of CCSS into North Carolina, representing an increased cost of \$1,555 per student.

As these expenses increased, North Carolina's per capita income rates suffered. In 2008, the state was in the ninety second percentile based on the per capita income as a percent of the United States. That year produced a real median household income of \$51,243.³⁸ In 2015, North Carolina dropped below the eighty fifth percentile for per

2016, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/econ/g13-aspef.pdf>.

36. "2003-04 Facts & Figures," North Carolina Public Schools, accessed October 20, 2016, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/fbs/resources/data/factsfigures/2003-04figures.pdf>.

37. "Facts and Figures 2015-16," North Carolina Public Schools, accessed October 20, 2016, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/fbs/resources/data/factsfigures/2015-16figures.pdf>.

38. "North Carolina Household Income," Department of Numbers, accessed October 20, 2016, <http://www.deptofnumbers.com/income/north-carolina/>.

capita income and displayed a real median household income of \$47,830.³⁹ As expenses for education increased because of the implementation of CCSS, the median household income decreased by \$7,413, thus demonstrating that the use of state tax money to fund the ineffective CCSS hinders economic prosperity.

The Replacement

Since the current method of funding education in North Carolina includes the implementation of CCSS, lawmakers and citizens must strive to generate educational reform. It is imperative to develop an educational system that successfully accomplishes the same goals that CCSS proposed to accomplish, but does so without placing so much money in the hands of the government. Fortunately, the sample for such an innovational system already exists through the manifestation of a charter school.

Before investigating the cost and funding possibilities of charter schools, it is necessary to understand that they have the ability to successfully accomplish the same goals that were outlined by CCSS proponents. Although the creators of CCSS did strive to achieve very crucial goals, the program's implementation rendered lower performance; therefore, it is necessary to pursue a plan that is already demonstrating considerable success. Current charter schools throughout the United States and in North Carolina are successfully producing understandable curricula for students, raising standardized test scores, enhancing minority proficiency, producing elevated graduation rates, and preparing students for life after graduation.

Increasing Understandability

39. "North Carolina," Bureau of Economic Analysis, September 28, 2016, accessed October 20, 2016, <https://www.bea.gov/regional/bearfacts/pdf.cfm?fips=37000&areatype=STATE&geotype=3>.

The very nature of charter schools explains why they are able to increase understandability for students. A charter school is “a publicly funded independent school established by teachers, parents, or community groups under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority.”⁴⁰ In other words, a charter school is created on the basis and terms of a charter and has the ability to avoid a wide array of government regulations that are cast upon other public schools.⁴¹ The most important aspect of this structure is that the school is then free to educate its students how it sees fit.

According to a study on the correlation between understandability and curricular freedom, “If not approached correctly, a classroom can be set up in a way that stifles creativity or does not promote a positive learning environment.”⁴² Essentially, the environment and amount of freedom that a teacher has in a classroom directly impacts the learning ability of the students. It is also important to notice that teachers are usually more motivated when they have the freedom to teach while using their own personal contributions.

The study also claims, “if a teacher is motivated and positive they will likely have a beneficial impact on their students as well, allowing them to better understand the material.”⁴³ Since teachers are more likely to be positive when they have more freedom,

40. “Charter School,” English Oxford Living Dictionaries, last modified 2016, accessed October 19, 2016, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/charter_school.

41. “Just the FAQs – Charter Schools,” The Center for Education Reform, last modified 2016, accessed October 3, 2016, <https://www.edreform.com/2012/03/just-the-faqs-charter-schools/>.

42. Ryan Hannah, “The Effect of Classroom Environment on Student Learning,” (Western Michigan University, 2013), 1.

43. Ibid.

and their attitudes directly impact the learning of the students, the correlation between curricular freedom and student understandability is apparent. These principles explain the success that NC charter schools have with regard to student understandability. Based on this information, it is clear that the ability of charter schools to allow for less regulation increases the ability of students to understand the curricula.

Improved Standardized Test Scores

Charter schools throughout North Carolina and other states are producing substantially higher test scores than those of their neighboring traditional schools. On a national scale, students in charter schools perform better than those in traditional public schools. Jim Hull, the Senior Policy Analyst from the Center for Public Education, maintains, “On average, nationally, students in 17 percent of charter schools performed significantly better than if they had attended their neighborhood traditional public school.”⁴⁴ This data demonstrates that a noteworthy number of students demonstrate superior performance on standardized tests when they are being educated through charter schools.

The same data is evident in North Carolina with students in charter schools outperforming their counterparts in traditional public schools. The most popular method for measuring student achievement in North Carolina is through SAT scores. According to the State Board of Education, 57,997 seniors across the state took the SAT in 2014,

44. Jim Hull, “How Do Charter Schools Compare to Traditional Public Schools in Student Performance?” *Center for Public Education*, accessed October 12, 2016, <http://www.data-first.org/questions/how-do-charter-schools-compare-to-regular-public-schools-in-student-performance/>.

signifying a participation rate of 64%. The average combined score of Critical Reading, Math, and Writing among all NC seniors was 1483, and the national average was 1497.⁴⁵

Partitioning this statewide figure into school type expresses the increased performance of students in charter schools. The average combined score of students from North Carolina's district and country schools was 1394. This data displays that these traditional public school students scored an average of eighty-nine points less than all NC schools combined. On the other hand, students from charter schools scored an average combined score of 1558.⁴⁶ This figure is not only 164 points higher than the traditional public school average, but is also seventy-five points higher than the statewide average. NC charter schools produce significantly higher standardized test scores than neighboring public schools.

Advancement of Minority Proficiency

Another goal of CCSS that charter schools have proven to achieve is to enhance the educational proficiency of minorities. This advancement is investigated by the research organization known as In Perspective. This organization states that “[a] number of studies that focus on charter schools in large urban districts (for instance, New York City, Boston and Los Angeles) found positive impacts of charters on students’

45. “NC SAT Scores Show Improvement in 2014; More Students Participate and Succeed in AP Courses,” State Board of Education, October 7, 2014, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2014-15/20141007-01>.

46. “2014 NC Local SAT Data,” State Board of Education, October 7, 2014, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2014-15/20141007-01>.

standardized test score achievement.”⁴⁷ In other words, Charter schools specifically assist underprivileged minority students that live in less affluent areas.

A CREDO study of the effect that charter schools have on low-income minorities demonstrates evidence for this enhancement. The study reports “math gains equivalent to 36 extra days of learning for African-American students living in poverty, compared with African-American students living in poverty and attending traditional public schools.”⁴⁸ Essentially, charter schools provide minority students from low-income families with a better education than they would receive from a traditional public school.

The Raleigh, Charlotte, and Greensboro areas are primary examples of regions where low-income minority students struggle in traditional schools but thrive in charter schools. This notion can be analyzed by comparing the performance of minority students in charter schools with those in other district schools. According to a recent report by K12 Inc., charter schools are successfully closing the minority achievement gap in such low-income, urban areas. In reading, minority students that qualified for free lunch demonstrated a proficiency increase of 20%, and those eligible for reduced-price lunch increased by 18%, while those not eligible increased by 15%.⁴⁹ Based on these findings,

47. “Student Achievement,” In Perspective, accessed September 23, 2016, <http://www.in-perspective.org/pages/student-achievement#sub2>.

48. Ibid.

49. “New K12 Inc. Report Shows Online Charter Schools Closing the Achievement Gap Among Low-Income Students,” NC Public Charter Schools Association, 2016, accessed October 20, 2016, <https://ncpubliccharters.org/new-k12-inc-report-shows-online-charter-schools-closing-the-achievement-gap-among-low-income-students/>.

it is clear that the increased implementation of charter schools in North Carolina increases minority proficiency.

Increased Graduation Rates

The presence of charter schools throughout the nation has produced higher graduation rates than traditional public schools. A great example of such enhancement is evident in the impact that charter schools are currently having in the border state of Georgia. According to the Center for Education Reform, “In Thomas County, Georgia, where in an effort to raise its graduation rate from below 70 percent, the district opened up the Bishop Hall Charter School. . . By the end of the school’s first year, the county’s overall graduation rate increased to 80 percent, and rose to 90 percent in the second year.”⁵⁰ This analysis explains the ability of charter schools to increase graduation rates.

NC charter schools are also surpassing traditional public schools in terms of graduation rates. Institutions like Raleigh Charter and Gray Stone Day School are generating performance levels and graduation rates superior to any district schools. According to the NC Board of Education, Gray Stone Day School is the highest performing school in North Carolina and places at 203 out the 494 schools listed for America’s best schools. In 2014, the school recorded a college-bound graduation rate of 93%.⁵¹ Other NC charters reflect similar statistics with the average 2015 graduation rate being about 89%.⁵²

50. “Choice and Charter Schools,” Center for Education Reform.
<https://www.edreform.com/issues/choice-charter-schools/achievement/>.

51. “Report to the North Carolina General Assembly,” State Board of Education, January, 1, 2015, accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/DRAFT-2015-Annual-Charter-Schools-Report.pdf>.

On the other hand, the average graduation rate for all other NC public schools in 2015 was 85.4%.⁵³ These statistics indicate that charter schools in North Carolina have produced considerably higher graduation rates than neighboring district schools. Based on these evidences, it is apparent that charter schools accomplish the CCSS goal of precipitating higher graduation rates.

Preparing Students for Life after Graduation

The final CCSS goal that charter schools accomplish is preparing students for life after graduation. One of the main initiatives of charter schools throughout North Carolina is to give students a lasting education that goes beyond successful standardized test scores and grants them with skills that will assist them throughout life's journeys. These skills incorporate both educational initiatives for college readiness and practical skills for the professional world.

Raquel Farmer-Hinton conducted a study analyzing the readiness of charter students by examining Glenn Hills College Prep (GHCP). She states, "In an attempt to develop college-bound students, GHCP students are immersed in a network of teachers, counselors and other staff members who emit the college preparatory culture of the school through high expectations and consistent dialogue on the importance of college access."⁵⁴ In other words, many charter schools focus on material that strategically

52. "North Carolina 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate Report," State Board of Education, December 1, 2015, accessed July 2, 2016, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/graduate/statistics/2015cohort-report.pdf>.

53. "High School Graduation Rate Highest in State History; More Than 70 Percent of Public Schools Receive Grades of C or Higher," State Board of Education, September 2, 2015, accessed October 13, 2015, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/newsroom/news/2015-16/20150902-01>.

prepares students for higher education. The information observed from GHCP provides an adequate example for why charter school college readiness levels outpace those of traditional public schools

In North Carolina, college and career preparedness is measured by students' scores on end of grade exams (EOG). During the 2014 – 2015 school year, 1,897,612 traditional school students took EOG exams. Out of these students, 1,064,519 passed at their grade level, and 881,007 passed at a college or career ready level. In the same year, 94,588 charter school students took the same tests with 63,066 passing at their grade level, and 53,335 passing at the college readiness level. According to these statistics, 46.4% of traditional students were ready for career or college, while 56.4% of charter students proved to be college-ready.⁵⁵ These results indicate that charter students score about 10% higher than neighboring public school students on EOG exams. Based on these numbers, it is evident that charter schools successfully accomplish the CCSS goal of precipitating higher degrees of college readiness.

The Economic Solution

In addition to understanding that charter schools successfully accomplish the very goals that CCSS could not, it is essential to recognize that charter schools embody a cost-effective replacement for CCSS by conducting a more efficient educational system.

54. Raquel Farmer-Hinton, "Creating Opportunities for College Access: Examining a school model designed to prepare students of color for college," *Multicultural Perspectives* 10, no. 2 (2008): 73-81.

55. "State EOG Averages: Public Charter Students Outperform Traditional Public Students," NC Alliance for Public Charter Schools, January 27, 2016, accessed October 14, 2016, <https://www.nccivitas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Charter-PublicSchoolComparison.pdf>.

Gronberg, Jansen, and Taylor conducted an exhaustive study of the cost efficiency and performance of American charter schools. They state, “Our main findings suggest that charter schools are able to produce educational outcomes at a lower cost than traditional public schools.”⁵⁶ This statement urges that charter schools are cheaper than traditional public schools and produce superior results for students.

The primary difference in funding between charter schools and other publics is that charter schools “do not have a tax base from which to draw funds and are therefore solely dependent on state and federal transfers, charitable donations, and other non-tax revenues such as food service activity.”⁵⁷ Charter schools operate solely on non-tax sources, thus diminishing the amount of government funding. Additionally, “OE charter schools have neither a CEI nor an enrichment tax rate and are not eligible for the district size adjustments or the facilities aid programs.”⁵⁸ They are then less susceptible to government regulation since they do not accept a variety of aid programs. Charter schools are less dependent on government aid and have the ability to operate more freely and independently.

Gronberg et al. also maintain that a large sum of funding for charter schools derives from private charitable donations.⁵⁹ As opposed to traditional schools, this charitable funding indicates the more privatized nature of charter schools. Since the

56. Timothy J. Gronberg, Dennis W. Jansen, and Lori L. Taylor, “The Relative Efficiency of Charter Schools: A Cost Frontier Approach,” *Economics of Education Review* 31, no. 2 (2012): 302-17.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

funding comes partially from private donors instead of government entities, the schools are under less regulation and thus have the ability to operate more efficiently. This privatized element contributes to why charter schools can operate at a lower cost. In North Carolina, these schools operate based on the rules of a free market, forcing them to consistently compete with other schools and increase performance in order to remain open: “Because charter schools are subject to the laws of the market, when they do not satisfy parents and do a good job educating students, they close due to lack of enrollment.”⁶⁰ This market aspect forces competing charter schools to operate at higher efficiency.

Additionally, the advantage for students “is often greater because bad charter schools tend to close over time, leaving a growing number of excellent charter schools that continue to satisfy their students and parents.”⁶¹ Based on this system, the waste of money on ineffective schools will be essentially eliminated because the least performing charter schools will not reach their enrollment requirements and will close. On the other hand, the current NC government funding of CCSS continues to waste money on schools that fail to accomplish educational success.

The difference in per pupil expenditure between NC district schools and charter schools provides deeper evidence for the more cost effective element of charter schools. A study of NC education conducted by Ball State University specifically investigated the difference in cost between charter and traditional public schools. The data utilized for the

60. “Choice and Charter Schools,” Center for Educational Reform, last updated 2016, accessed September 13, 2016, <https://www.edreform.com/issues/choice-charter-schools/>.

61. Ibid.

study came from the 2006 – 2007 school year. The data concluded that the per pupil expenditure for traditional public schools was \$8,995. Alternatively, the per pupil expenditure for charter schools was \$8,065.⁶² Based on these numbers, the average per pupil cost for NC charter schools is \$930 less than that of traditional public schools. If every NC district school operated with same per pupil expenditure as charter schools, the cost of education would be cut by a total of \$1.3 billion. With the total cost of NC education being \$12.73 billion, this action would significantly assist the economy through a cost deduction of 10.2%.

The funding of charter schools embodies wiser financing than the government funding of traditional public schools by responding directly to the demands and trends of the people. This conscientious method of charter appropriation uncovers the tremendous waste that takes place through the inefficient funding of traditional district schools. Not only do current district schools require more money to operate, they produce less successful academic results than their neighboring charter schools. Since charter schools precipitate higher scholastic achievement at a much lower cost, it is clearly evident that statewide legislation to move away from traditional district schooling and shift toward a charter system will significantly cut the cost of public education through waste elimination and increase the prosperity of the NC economy.

Conclusion

In order to remedy the economic strife that has been caused by the ineffective and inefficient government funding of CCSS, the people of North Carolina must reduce the

62. Meagan Batdorff, “Charter School Funding: Inequity Persists: North Carolina,” *Ball State University*, May 17, 2010, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://cms.bsu.edu/-/media/www/departmentalcontent/teachers/pdfs/northcarolina.pdf?la=en>.

role of the federal government in education by repealing CCSS and subsequently shift public education from the current system to charter schooling. Although the creators of CCSS successfully identified necessary educational goals, their system is incapable of accomplishing these goals and needs to be replaced. This replacement will eventually eliminate the massive waste that takes place through the funding of public education in NC by allowing the more economic charter school system to prevail.

Such a system solves the current economic problem of education by accomplishing all of the goals intended for CCSS at a much cheaper price. The implementation of this system will enhance economic prosperity by diminishing monetary waste with regard to education and placing more money in the hands of the people. Not only does this system effectively allow for schools and students to thrive, it provides a cost-effective approach that will enhance the performance of the economy; therefore, NC lawmakers should seriously consider implementing a charter school system.

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