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# Teacher Perceptions of the Common Core Performance Standards

## **Abstract**

The Common Core State Standards were implemented in the state of Georgia in the 2012/2013 school year replacing NCLB. Previous studies indicated that teachers and administrators viewed NCLB negatively, and the purpose of this study was to gauge teachers' perceptions of the new standards after they had been in effect for one and a half years. Findings revealed that while teachers did see some improvements with CCGPS, such as preparing students for college and/or a job and increasing creative and critical thinking skills, they did not feel that CCGPS would improve student achievement or raise standardized test scores. Teacher morale was also not improved by the new standards, primarily due to the increased workload, and negative opinions of standardized testing remained firmly in place. Teachers indicated that while they did see some advances with CCGPS, they did not feel that it represented a significant improvement over NCLB.

## **Keywords**

Teacher perceptions, Common Core State Standards, Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, No Child Left Behind, policy implications, standardized testing

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## Teacher Perceptions of the Common Core Performance Standards

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**Abstract:** The Common Core State Standards were implemented in the state of Georgia in the 2012/2013 school year replacing NCLB. Previous studies indicated that teachers and administrators viewed NCLB negatively, and the purpose of this study was to gauge teachers' perceptions of the new standards after they had been in effect for one and a half years. Findings revealed that while teachers did see some improvements with CCGPS, such as preparing students for college and/or a job and increasing creative and critical thinking skills, they did not feel that CCGPS would improve student achievement or raise standardized test scores. Teacher morale was also not improved by the new standards, primarily due to the increased workload, and negative opinions of standardized testing remained firmly in place. Teachers indicated that while they did see some advances with CCGPS, they did not feel that it represented a significant improvement over NCLB.

*Keywords:* Teacher perceptions, Common Core State Standards, Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, No Child Left Behind, policy implications, standardized testing

## **Teacher Perceptions of the Common Core Performance Standards**

### **Introduction**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, the purpose of which was to increase funding to low-performing schools (Trolan & Fouts, 2011). It also created the National Department of Education in 1979. It has now been 48 years since its inception and ESEA has been reauthorized and refunded many times under many names including President George H.W. Bush's Goals 2000, Bill Clinton's Improving America's Schools Act, George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind, and most recently, under the Obama Administration, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

In 1983, under the Reagan Administration, the Secretary of Education created the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) to study the state of education in the United States. The resulting report was called, "A Nation at Risk", which led to many reauthorizations and reforms of ESEA, including but not limited to No Child Left Behind and Common Core. The first of these, No Child Left Behind, was signed into law on January 8, 2002 by president George H. Bush (Trolan & Fouts, 2011). It is considered to be one of the broadest and most sweeping pieces of legislation to ever affect education (Smith & Kovacs, 2011). More recently, a new set of national standards was created to replace NCLB called the Common Core State Standards (Rust, 2012). Currently, forty-five states have adopted these new standards and implementation began in the 2011/2012 school year. This research study focuses on the state of Georgia, which implemented the new standards during the 2012/2013 school year.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

This study begins by identifying teachers' perceptions of NCLB across the nation to serve as a benchmark, and then attempts to determine teachers' perceptions of the new Common Core

Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) from two counties in Georgia. CCGPS has been in effect now in Georgia for one and a half years after replacing NCLB, however, the majority of studies available to-date deal solely with No Child Left Behind given that it was in-force from 2002 until 2012, and there has not been enough time for studies to be performed, reviewed, and published for CCGPS. Therefore much of the data in this report concerns teachers' perceptions of NCLB.

In 2011, Smith & Kovacs (2011) and Mertler (2011) surveyed teachers in two separate studies to determine their perceptions of NCLB. These surveys were then adopted and modified by Cheng (2012), whose survey will be adopted and modified by this study to similarly identify teachers' perceptions of the new CCGPS.

In doing so, this study will attempt to determine the following:

1. Have teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing improved under CCGPS?
2. Do teachers perceive that CCGPS will live up to its stated goal of increasing student college and/or career readiness?
3. Do teachers perceive that CCGPS has had an overall positive or negative effect on their workload?
4. Do teachers perceive that CCGPS has represented a significant improvement over NCLB?
5. Has teacher morale improved under CCGPS?
6. Are there significant relationships between teacher characteristics, such as training or years of teaching experience, and their views on the impact of CCGPS, or between their views on various constructs?

The goal of these questions is to try to determine teachers' perceptions of the impact and efficacy of CCGPS in order to assist policymakers in understanding the overall effect of this change, and to possibly identify problem areas that should be modified, or successes that should be kept in place.

## **Literature Review**

### **No Child Left Behind**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was a standards-based education reform that required states to institute high-stakes, standardized testing each and every year in grades 3 - 8, and then again in grades 10 - 12, in order to gauge the level of student knowledge and achievement (Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Each year each school had to show overall improvement in their test scores in order to achieve Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Those that did were rewarded with an increase in funding, while those that did not could be subject to a decrease. In addition, if a school failed to reach AYP during any given academic year, it was labeled as "needs improvement". If it did not show improvement the second year, parents were given the option of transferring their child to a different school, with the failing school being required to pay for any necessary transportation. By the fourth year of "needs improvement", schools were required to make some tough choices, from replacing staff to completely retooling their organization. They could even lose accreditation.

Under NCLB, AYP targets started low but quickly rose to a level that was seen as unattainable (Hill & Barth, 2004), requiring that 100% of students, including those who were impoverished or disabled, in every state, be "proficient" in each subject by 2014. Many saw this goal as unrealistic, especially when schools that failed to meet AYP had their federal funding reduced, and therefore, had fewer resources available to improve their scores (Winstead, 2011).

In addition to the punitive measures, high-stakes testing set the tone for what should be studied and what should not, and also how subjects should be taught (Winstead, 2011). But students are diverse, with different interests, strengths, and motivations, and this process was seen as taking the fun out of learning as subjects other than math and reading were put on the back burner, including social studies, science, art, foreign language, and music. This process denied students a full curricular experience, and in low performing schools, might possibly have denied them the motivation to stay in school.

Teachers and administrators were also greatly impacted by NCLB's mandates (Mertler, 2011). In the research study by Powell, Higgins, Aram, and Freed, (2009), 51% of the principals stated that their number one priority was to "Meet AYP and raise test scores", and only 23% stated that meeting teachers' needs was a priority when making decisions related to professional development. In the same study, teachers also stated that the stress associated with high-stakes testing caused them to adopt new teaching strategies that took the fun and innovation out of their lessons and that they had narrowed their curriculum substantially to "teach to the test" by focusing primarily on reading, math, and test-taking skills. Some teachers even stated that they wanted to leave the profession altogether and that they would not recommend it to others.

The pressure to perform on standardized testing is so great, and the consequences so dire, that in some schools educators have resorted to unethical behaviors (Trolian & Fouts 2011; Mertler, 2011). "Teaching to the test" has also been criticized because it narrows curriculum to only the content being tested (Snow-Gerono & Franklin, 2006; Mertler, 2011), which has led to a concern over whether or not students are actually mastering the material, or if they are simply learning how to take a test (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003). Teachers also admitted that

their classroom instruction has been modified to the point that they are at times uncomfortable with what and how they are teaching, and that it limits the range of their instruction.

Teachers agreed that testing helps improve test scores, but disagreed on whether or not it really helps students learn as they are primarily being taught memorization skills and how to take a multiple-choice test (Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Following graduation, students can at times have trouble with group work and critical thinking skills, and can feel overwhelmed in a post-secondary education setting or job where they are expected to think independently and problem solve on their own rather than being taught exactly what to learn (Trolian & Fouts, 2011).

### **Teacher Attrition**

Teacher attrition is a serious problem for schools across the nation (Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). When teachers leave, schools must replace them, and the cost of doing so is high, reducing the amount of funds left over for students. The cost of replacing one teacher alone has been estimated between \$4,300 and \$20,000, depending on the school system, and the annual cost of replacing teachers across the U.S. has been estimated as high as \$7 billion. In many parts of the country, this had led to a critical teacher shortage, and students are the ones paying the price (Jalongo & Heider, 2006).

In addition to the monetary amounts, there are many intangible costs associated with teacher attrition, including the lowering of school morale and unity within the organization and a reduction in the quality of instruction (Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). To try and remedy this situation, we must first understand its causes. For each individual, the reasons are different, but some of the more common ones include a lack of support from administration, problems with student behavior, low school funding, low pay, high stress, and a lack of respect for the profession in general (Darling-Hammond, 2003).



The number one reason for teacher attrition, however, cited in the study by Tye and O'Brien (2002) is the increased accountability that comes with high-stakes testing. The study by Sass, Flores, Claeys, & Perez (2012) also supports this finding. In addition, teachers reported that the pressures associated with high-stakes testing have led them to teach in ways that go against their better judgment and that they are modifying what and how they teach solely to improve test scores (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003). Their classroom instruction tends to "mirror" these tests, including the preponderance of multiple-choice questions, and they have narrowed their curriculum to focus primarily on only those topics. Teachers also reported increased stress and a loss of morale, and indicated that the profession is losing its best and brightest due to these policies.

As the pressure to improve students' scores increase, teacher job satisfaction also decreases (Snow-Gerono & Franklin, 2006). Snow-Gerono and Franklin found statistically significant relationships between job satisfaction and teacher autonomy. What seems to matter most to educators is that they feel a sense of control in their classrooms, that they feel appreciated and supported by the administration, that they feel like they "fit in" at their school, and that they are making a difference (Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012).

### **Highly Qualified Teachers**

Another requirement of NCLB (Karelitz, Fields, Levy, Martinez-Gudapakkam, & Jablonski, 2011) was that by the end of the 2005/2006 school year, all classes in core academic subjects (English, reading, language arts, math, science, foreign languages, civics, government, economics, arts, history, and geography) would be taught by "highly qualified" teachers, which are identified as having a bachelor's degree, a teaching certificate, and having passed a state level competency exam for each subject they planned to teach. These requirements sound reasonable,

but the problem is that being able to pass a different competency exam for each subject typically requires a significant amount of time, both in the preparation for, and the taking of, each exam. It can also be costly in terms of acquiring study materials and/or taking classes, as well as paying the fee required to take each exam. In return for this effort, there is typically no additional compensation offered to teachers. And when teachers were interviewed about why they didn't take more of these exams in order to be able to teach a broader array of subjects, they responded that if they did, they would most likely be required to teach subjects that they weren't interested in instead of the ones that they really wanted to teach. The majority of teachers acknowledged the importance of having the required content knowledge, but they criticized this requirement of NCLB, stating that it places more emphasis on content knowledge over pedagogical skills, which are seen as just as, if not more, important (Karelitz et al., 2011). Teachers also argued that there are those who may understand their particular subject extremely well; however, they have little grasp of how to communicate the material to students, or how to control a classroom with effective classroom management skills.

### **Common Core State Standards**

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were created by an independent, bipartisan group called Achieve in 2009 (Rust, 2012) and were developed jointly among educators, administrators, and other educational experts. The CCSS is not a curriculum, but a set of expectations for what students must learn in order to be able to handle the entry-level work of either a post-secondary education or workforce-training program (Rothman, 2012). The panel removed from the previous standards any politically appealing subject matter, and instead focused solely on those skills that create college and/or workplace readiness. Teachers still have the ability to plan their own lessons and decide how they want to teach, and states still have the

ability to modify the standards by adding up to 15% more to the curriculum. The main focus now is to move students beyond the high-stakes testing skills to which they have become accustomed and to teach higher order critical thinking and problem solving skills, which they will be required to have at a college, university, or job.

## **Method**

### **Contextual Factors**

This study was conducted with two counties in northern Georgia. The two school districts were chosen because of geographic accessibility and to cover a wider demographic range- one county was suburban with an upper middle class population, while the other was more rural with a population that fell into the middle class to lower middle class range.

The first was a high-income county where the median home price was \$265,900 and the median household income was \$87,585 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). The portion of residents that held a bachelor's degree or higher was at 43.3% with 91% graduated from high school. Approximately 13.3% of the population was foreign born with 17.8% speaking a language other than English at home. This school district contained 34,208 students and 2168 teachers (K-12 School Rankings and Statistics, 2014). All math and language arts teachers were included from each of the 34 schools including 6 high schools, 9 middle schools, and 19 elementary schools. The student/teacher ratio for this district was 15.78, and 14.6% of students were eligible for a free lunch while 3.7% received a reduced price. The demographic breakdown was as follows: 76.77% white, 11.85% Hispanic, 5.99% Asian, 2.34% African American.

The second school district was in a more rural county farther north from the metropolitan Atlanta area. Its median home price was \$191,200 and the median household income was \$53,289 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). The high school graduation rate was at 86.3%

and 23.5% held a bachelor's degree or higher. The percentage of the population that was foreign born was at 3.7%, with 5.3% speaking a language other than English at home. This school district contained 3502 students and 256 teachers (K-12 School Rankings and Statistics, 2014). All math and language arts teachers were included from each of the 6 schools including 1 high school, 2 middle schools, and 3 elementary schools. The student/teacher ration for this district was 13.67, with 33.9% of students eligible for a free lunch and 8.9% received a reduced price. The demographic breakdown was as follows: 92.98% white, 5.37% Hispanic, .51% Asian, .14% African American.

### **Participants**

A link to the survey was distributed to the principals within the participating school districts. Only math and language arts teachers were included as these are the only areas currently affected by CCGPS. Principals agreed to send the survey link to their math and language arts teachers along with an email explaining the purpose of the survey. It is impossible to know if principals actually distributed the survey link or to how many teachers it was distributed. However, the result was that seventy-five responses were received in total.

Five of the responses, or 6.7%, were incomplete and had to be removed, leaving 70 complete responses. The vast majority of these, 94.29%, were from female educators, while 5.71% were from males. For teaching level, elementary school teachers represented the largest response at 75.71%, middle school educators were at 18.57%, and 5.71% were from secondary schools. The education levels of the respondents were as follows: 18.57% held a bachelor's degree, 42.86% a master's, 37.14% a specialist's degree, and 1.43% held a PhD.

The number of years of teaching experience for the participants varied greatly with 11.43% being new to the field with five or less years of experience. Sixteen teachers, or 22.86%

had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 21.43% had 11-15 years, 18.57% had 16-20, 12.86% had 21-25 years, 8.75% had 26-30, and 4.29% had over 30 years of teaching experience.

The majority of the teachers ( $n = 40$ ) 62.86% taught at schools with a school rating of “excellent”, while 25.71% taught at an “effective” school, 8.57% were at a school labeled as under “continuous improvement”, 2.86% were on “academic watch”, and none were at schools labeled as “academic emergency”.

All demographic information is detailed in Appendix A.

### **Materials / Measures**

The survey contained 26 items and was adopted from the one used by Cheng (2012), who based his questions on those used by Mertler (2011) and Smith and Kovacs (2011) in their studies of teacher perceptions of NCLB. The survey was modified from the one used by Cheng (2012) only slightly to change future tense references to past. This was necessary because the Common Core Standards had yet to be implemented when Cheng performed his survey; however, since these standards were implemented in Georgia at the beginning of the 2012/2013 school year, they had been in effect for approximately a year and a half at the time of the survey. In addition, questions were also added to determine if teachers felt that CCGPS was an overall improvement in comparison to NCLB, or if it was simply viewed as more of the same.

Participants responded to each item based on the following five-point Likert scale: *strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree*. The on-line survey program, Survey Monkey, was used to create and distribute the survey during the 2013/2014 school year. Five demographic items were also included as follows: gender, teaching level, education level, years of teaching experience, and school rating.

In the interest of keeping the time required to complete the survey to a minimum, no open-ended or qualitative items were included. By keeping the questions to a minimum, it was felt that other principals would be more inclined to participate. The amount of time required to complete the survey was estimated at 10 minutes. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix B.

## **Procedures**

Before beginning the study, IRB approval was sought and acquired. Afterwards, the superintendents of the targeted school districts were contacted to explain the purpose of the study and to provide them with a copy of the questions. Both school districts granted approval for the study. In addition, principals and teachers were assured that their responses would be kept completely confidential and that no personal information would be required. A letter was provided to each school that could be forwarded to teachers to explain the purpose of the study. The survey was then sent via email to all participants, who only needed to click on a link in order to begin.

## **Results**

### **Data Analysis/Reporting**

The 26 survey questions were organized into the following constructs: (1) Teacher training/preparedness, (2) Impact on education, (3) Teacher workload, (4) Teacher morale, and (5) Standardized Testing. The survey showed strong internal consistency when tested for reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89. The means and standard deviations by construct are identified below:

Table 1

*Survey Constructs*

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Teacher Training	3.08	0.79	70
Impact on Education	2.94	0.64	70
Teacher Workload	2.13	0.67	70
Teacher Morale	2.47	0.69	70
Standardized Testing	3.93	0.94	70

**Teacher Training.** The majority of responses for the construct of teacher training hovered around the middle with a mean of 3.08. The portion of respondents that indicated that they felt sufficiently prepared to teach the new standards through professional development was at 66% ( $n = 46$ ), while 53% ( $n = 37$ ) also indicated that they could use additional information.

**Impact on Education.** As to the overall impact that CCGPS has had on education, the average response was neutral with a mean of 2.94, indicating that teachers do not feel that the new standards represent a significant change over No Child Left Behind. The strongest response was when teachers were asked if, in hindsight, No Child Left Behind was a more positive step for education. A majority ( $n = 37$ , 53%) disagreed, indicating that No Child Left Behind is still viewed negatively.

When asked if some of the main stated goals of CCGPS were being met, the responses were slightly weighted in agreement. For example, when asked if the new standards would be

better at preparing students for college and/or a career, 45% agreed ( $n = 31$ ), 31% remained neutral, and 24% disagreed. When asked if students' higher-level critical and creative thinking skills would be improved by CCGPS, 43% agreed, 26% remained neutral, and 31% disagreed. And finally, when asked if CCGPS would be a better choice to help students keep pace academically with other students across the nation, 49% agreed, 30% remained neutral, and 21% disagreed.

**Teacher Workload.** The construct of teacher workload had a mean response of 2.13, indicating that teachers have felt the impact of transitioning to the new standards. 78% ( $n = 54$ ) indicated that they were spending more effort to comply with mandates under the new standards instead of teaching students to the best of their ability, and a large majority ( $n = 60$ , 86%) also agreed that transitioning to the new standards has required new or substantial revisions to materials and lesson plans.

**Teacher Morale.** For the construct of teacher morale, the mean response was 2.46, indicating that teachers do not feel that CCGPS has improved morale. When asked if the new standards made teachers feel more professional, a large majority disagreed ( $n = 48$ , 69%), and in one of the few survey questions to receive a zero response in any category, no respondents selected '*strongly agree*'. Similarly, a majority ( $n = 40$ , 57%) also indicated that the new standards have restricted and/or limited their creativity and the types of instructional strategies they are allowed to use.

Strong opinions were also delivered in this construct for the issue of having more decision-making power over the curriculum. A large majority ( $n = 54$ , 77%) indicated that they would like to have more power over what they teach than what CCGPS provides for, with only 4% disagreeing and 0% strongly disagreeing. Teachers also indicated by a majority ( $n = 48$ ,



69%) that they don't feel that they have a voice in creating and responding to new policy legislation that relates to education. Of particular note in this category, when respondents were asked if they would encourage others to enter the teaching profession at this time, 52% ( $n = 36$ ) disagreed.

**Standardized Testing.** The survey questions regarding standardized testing yielded results at the farthest ends of the possible survey responses. This construct had a mean of 3.93, indicating that the majority of teachers in this sample still look unfavorably upon high-stakes testing. When asked if they felt less pressure under CCGPS to perform on standardized testing than they did with NCLB, the majority ( $n = 55, 79%$ ) indicated that they do not. A large majority ( $n = 54, 77%$ ) also indicated that they were spending too much time preparing students for standardized testing under CCGPS, and an even larger percentage ( $n = 58, 83%$ ) indicated that they look unfavorably upon the amount of time students spend taking these tests. The percentage of teachers who disagreed that they spent more time "teaching to the test" under No Child Left Behind than under the new standards was also high at 53% ( $n = 37$ ).

**Correlational data.** Pearson Correlations were performed to compare responses for teaching level, education level, school rating, and years of experience to a teacher's opinion of the overall impact that CCGPS has had on education. The various constructs were also compared against each other. Only the aggregates were reported. The analysis was meant to determine if there was an overall positive, negative, or neutral opinion of CCGPS now that teachers have been working within its guidelines for one year and a half years.

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to test for a relationship between teachers' school ratings and their overall opinion of CCGPS's impact on education. The results showed a statistically significant, negative correlation,  $p = .05$ ,  $r = -.24$ , indicating that the lower a school's

rating, the higher teachers' opinions were about CCGPS at that school, and conversely, the higher the rating for a school, the lower the teachers' opinions were about the new standards' impact on education. For example, if a school was on Academic Watch, their teachers tended to rate CCGPS more positively than did teachers from better performing schools. The assumption is that schools that have been performing at a higher rate are less eager to change what has been working, while teachers at schools that are struggling are more accepting of new standards, which they hope might improve their scores (see table 2).

Table 2

*School Rating and CCGPS's Overall Impact on Education.*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
School Rating	1.51	0.78	70
Impact	2.94	0.64	70

Also of interest was whether there was a relationship between a teacher's level of training and preparedness for CCGPS and their overall opinion of CCGPS's impact on education. A Pearson Correlation was conducted to test this relationship and showed a statistically significant, positive correlation,  $p = .015$ ,  $r = .29$ . This indicates that the more prepared, trained, and informed teachers felt about the new standards, the higher they rated them. The less informed and prepared, the lower the rating (see table 3).

Table 3

*Teacher Training and CCGPS's Overall Impact on Education.*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Teacher Training	3.08	0.79	70
Impact	2.94	0.64	70

A Pearson Correlation was then conducted to test for a relationship between teacher training and teacher morale. The results showed a statistically significant, positive correlation,  $p = .039$ ,  $r = .248$ , indicating that the lower a teacher rated their level of training and preparedness to implement CCGPS, the lower they also rated their morale. Similarly, the more confident and prepared a teacher felt to work within the new guidelines, the higher the morale (see table 4).

Table 4

*Teacher Training and Teacher Morale.*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Teacher Training	3.08	0.79	70
Morale	2.47	0.69	70

Teacher morale and teachers' overall opinions about the impact that CCGPS has had on education were also analyzed using Pearson Correlations. The results identified that there is a statistically significant, positive correlation,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .79$ , indicating that when a teacher's morale was high, they tended to have a higher overall opinion about the impact of CCGPS on education, and when morale was low, they tended to have a lower overall opinion about the new standards (see table 5).

Table 5

*Teacher Morale and CCGPS's Overall Impact on Education.*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	N
Teacher Morale	2.47	0.69	70
Impact	2.94	0.64	70

A Pearson Correlation was then performed to test for a relationship between teacher workload and teachers' perceptions about the overall impact that CCGPS has had on education. The results showed a statistically significant, positive correlation,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .49$ , indicating that when teachers' perceive their workload to be manageable and not unduly affected, they have a higher overall opinion of CCGPS's impact on education, and when they feel that their workloads are being overly taxed, they score CCGPS poorly, or lower on the Likert scale survey (see table 6).

Table 6

*Teacher Workload and CCGPS's Overall Impact on Education.*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Teacher Workload	2.13	0.67	70
Impact	2.94	0.64	70

The last significant relationship to be identified was between teacher workload and teacher morale. A Pearson Correlation was conducted to test for a relationship between these two variables and found that there is a statistically significant, positive correlation,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .64$ , indicating that when teachers had a negative opinion of their workload, they tended to also

rate their morale low, and conversely, when they viewed their workload positively, they rated their morale higher (see table 7).

Table 7

*Teacher Workload and Teacher Morale.*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
Teacher Workload	2.13	0.67	70
Teacher Morale	2.47	0.69	70

Three constructs, teacher training, workload, and morale, were all identified as having significant, positive relationships with how a teacher rates the overall impact that CCGPS has had on education, and teacher training and workload also showed a positive correlation with teacher morale. These results indicate that when teachers feel they are sufficiently trained and prepared to implement the new standards and that their workload has not been unduly affected, they tend to have a higher morale, and in turn, a higher opinion about the overall impact that CCGPS has had on education. Conversely, when they feel ill prepared to implement the new standards or are overwhelmed by their new workload, they tend to have lower morale and a lower opinion of CCGPS.

### **Discussion**

The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) were implemented with the purpose of improving education and being more successful at preparing students for college and/or career readiness. The main focus was to move students beyond the high-stakes testing skills to which they have become accustomed, and to teach higher order critical thinking and problem solving skills, which will be required by a college, university, or job. As we discuss the

results of this survey, which was performed after CCGPS had been in effect for approximately one and a half years, the results indicate that CCGPS is viewed as a moderate improvement over No Child Left Behind in some areas, and less so in others.

As previously discussed, the main negative attribute associated with No Child Left Behind was high-stakes standardized testing and the pressures it placed on teachers and students. Other negatives included a narrowing of the curriculum or "teaching to the test", a lack of critical thinking skills as students were primarily taught rote memorization and multiple-choice test taking, and low morale/high teacher turnover, which was primarily caused by high-stakes testing (Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

High-stakes testing, the main negative attribute associated with No Child Left Behind, still remains in place under CCGPS, and teachers' negative opinions about it are largely unchanged. This is even though No Child Left Behind's requirement that all students have 100% proficiency for all subjects by 2014 was opted out of by the state of Georgia in 2013 (Washington, 2013). It should be noted, however, that teachers' negative opinions on this subject could largely be a holdover from NCLB, and could also quite possibly change over time as it typically takes years for opinions to form completely concerning testing after a curriculum change, while attitudes about standards tend to be more current and timely.

In addition to high stakes testing, the opinions of teachers in this study on CCGPS's overall impact on education were mostly neutral, indicating that teachers did not see it as a significant change over No Child Left Behind. On the positive side, teachers did feel that the new standards would be better at preparing students for college and/or a career, and that they would also help to improve students' higher-level critical and creative thinking skills. They also agreed that CCGPS would be a better choice to help students keep pace academically with other

students across the nation, indicating that some of the main goals of CCGPS, at least according to teachers in this sample, were being met. However, on the negative side, teachers did not feel that CCGPS has helped to raise student achievement, nor that it will help to raise test scores. They also did not think it has been more of a positive than negative step in education reform, nor that it would help them to become a more effective teacher. These contrasting opinions led to an overall neutral review of CCGPS's overall impact on education, indicating that while teachers did see some advances in some areas, overall, they did not feel that CCGPS represented a significant improvement over No Child Left Behind.

Teacher morale is important to the success of education and the successful implementation of any new standards, and as previously stated, also has a large impact on teacher retention. Studies indicate that when teacher morale is low, teachers are less motivated to do their jobs and are also less motivated to successfully implement any changes to the educational process (Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Low teacher morale could, therefore, have a negative impact on the implementation of CCGPS or any other standards based reform. Previous research indicates that teacher morale was negatively impacted by NCLB and other standards based reforms (Mertler, 2011), and this study indicates that under CCGPS, teacher morale is still low, which is due in part to the increased workloads caused by the transition. It should be noted, however, that workload should decrease each year following the implementation of any new standard as teachers become proficient with their new lesson plans.

Transitioning to any new set of curricular standards requires effort by students, teachers, and administrators alike, and the teachers in this sample overwhelmingly agreed that they have put a considerable amount of time into converting to the new standards. They also disagreed that the transition has had a positive impact on their workload, which is not unexpected whenever a

change is made to the curriculum, and also indicated that they have spent too much time transitioning to the new standards instead of teaching students to the best of their ability.

As for teacher morale, teachers did not report feeling more professional under CCGPS, and instead, felt that their creativity and options for selecting different types of instructional strategies have been restricted. They also indicated that they would like more input on the overall decision-making process when it comes to curricular standards, and most noteworthy, teachers indicated that they would not encourage others to enter the teaching profession at this time.

### **Limitations**

In order to increase participation, it was hoped that this survey would be able to be performed at all schools across the district, including all elementary, middle, and high schools. The reality, however, is that some principals may not have asked their teachers to participate for a variety of reasons including time constraints and workload. There might also have been an unwillingness to draw attention to any negative opinions of the new standards since they were only recently been implemented.

In addition, the respondents in this survey were from a largely homogenous population with a majority of female, elementary school teachers. The schools polled were also located within a highly successful school district with schools identified as having an "excellent" rating. A more diverse population with a broader scope of school ratings could yield more generalizable results. In addition, the sample size of 70 was adequate for our purposes, but a larger sample would also be more desirable.



## **Future Research/Implications**

More research is needed on the new CCGPS in order to obtain its true impact on students, teachers, parents, administrators, and education in general. These standards are very new and have not been in effect long enough in order for any meaningful research to be performed, reviewed, and published. Therefore, the field is wide open for a variety of studies to determine if the transition to CCGPS has been an improvement and overall worthwhile. In addition, this study was a result of a relatively small sample size on a homogenous population. Future sampling can result in a clearer picture and more generalizable results.

When conducting future research, it should also be noted that teachers' perceptions about standards can change over time. And as previously stated, the standardized testing tool could also change, which could in turn impact teachers' perceptions. Any other policy changes to education could also affect any future results.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, CCGPS is currently seen as bringing little improvement to the classroom, while at the same time, causing a huge increase to teachers' workloads as they work to implement the new standards. And as we have already discussed, when teachers' workloads are negatively impacted, their morale declines, particularly when they see the workload as not being worth the effort.

In addition, CCGPS has currently become quite controversial (Timm, 2014). In fact, as of the writing of this paper, more than a dozen states are considering adopting new legislation that would repeal their involvement in the Common Core State Standards. This movement is a result of surging discontent from conservatives, parents, unions, and teachers. A major concern, therefore, is the impact that removing and replacing these standards could have on teachers if

CCGPS is replaced by yet another set of standards, which would cause teachers to have to rework their strategies and lesson plans yet again. Given that the current study identifies a strong positive correlation between teacher workload and teacher morale, adding to teachers' workloads by modifying standards once again will more than likely negatively impact teacher morale, which for a profession that is already struggling with low morale and high teacher turnover, does not bode well for the profession, or for education in general.

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**Appendix A - Demographics**

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b><u>Gender:</u></b>		
Male	4	5.71
Female	66	94.29
<b><u>Teaching Level:</u></b>		
Elementary	53	75.71
Middle	13	18.57
Secondary	4	5.71
<b><u>Education Level:</u></b>		
Bachelor's	13	18.75
Master's	30	42.86
Specialist	26	37.14
Doctoral	1	1.43
<b><u>Years of Teacher Experience:</u></b>		
1 - 5	8	11.43
6 - 10	16	22.86
11 - 15	15	21.43
16 - 20	13	18.57
21 - 25	9	12.86
26 - 30	6	8.75
30+	3	4.29
<b><u>School Rating:</u></b>		
Excellent	44	62.86
Effective	18	25.71
Continuous Improvement	6	8.57
Academic Watch	2	2.86
Academic Emergency	0	0.00

## **Appendix B - Survey Questions**

### **Demographics:**

1. Gender (Male, Female)
2. Teaching Level ((Elementary, Middle, Secondary)
3. Education Level (Bachelor's, Master's, Specialist, Doctoral)
4. Years of Teaching Experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 25-30, 30+)
5. School Rating (Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, Academic Emergency)

### **Survey:**

1. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) have had a positive impact on my everyday workload.
2. I feel that I could use more information about the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.
3. I believe that the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards have helped to raise student achievement.
4. The implementation of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards is more of a positive than negative step in education reform.
5. I believe that the CCGPS will be more effective than No Child Left Behind (NCLB) at preparing students to be college and/or career ready upon high school graduation.
6. The work that I put into preparing and transitioning to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards has been worthwhile.
7. I am sufficiently prepared through professional development to transition from teaching current standards to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.
8. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards will help me become a more effective teacher.
9. Especially with the emergence of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, I feel that I am spending more effort to comply with mandates rather than to teach students to the best of my ability.
10. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards makes me feel more like a professional.
11. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards have restricted my creativity and the types of instructional strategies that I use.
12. I would encourage others to enter the teaching profession at this time.
13. Under the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards I am spending too much time preparing students for testing.
14. I would like more decision-making power over the curriculum than what I currently have under Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.
15. I look unfavorably upon the amount of time students spend taking standardized tests.
16. In hindsight, No Child Left Behind was a more positive than negative step for education reform.
17. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards will enable me to spend more time teaching higher-level critical and creative thinking skills.
18. Transitioning to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards has required new or substantially revised curriculum materials and lesson plans.

19. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, as a single, common set of curricular standards, will help to make the collaboration and sharing of instructional materials more effective and efficient.
20. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards are easier to understand than No Child Left Behind.
21. I have a voice in creating and responding to new education-policy legislation such as Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.
22. I feel less pressure on standardized testing with Common Core Georgia Performance Standards than I did with No Child Left Behind.
23. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards will have little to no impact on raising test scores in Georgia.
24. With No Child Left Behind, I spent more time "teaching to the test" than I do with the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.
25. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards are important to ensure that Georgia students are keeping pace academically with other students across the nation.
26. I am happy that the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards replaced No Child Left Behind.