



## Cobbs Hill Consulting

**Jeff Smink, President, Cobbs Hill Consulting  
Testimony for New York Common Core Task Force  
November, 2015**

I'm pleased to submit testimony in support of New York's Common Core standards and aligned assessments. My comments are informed by nearly [twenty years of experience](#) working in national education policy, with an emphasis on policies that support children inside and outside of the classroom. I am also the proud parent of two children attending New York public schools and am active in efforts to improve student outcomes in my hometown of Rochester.

While I was not deeply involved in the implementation of Common Core in New York, I did play a key role in the development and implementation of a similar national effort, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). [As I wrote about in 2013](#) for the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, both Common Core and NCLB represent well-meaning, well-designed national efforts to close the achievement gap that have been plagued by poor communication and a lack of capacity at the local level.

Common Core, in particular, has been hampered by a combination of poor messaging from state leaders, a misinformation campaign led by opponents of education reform, and a lack of capacity to implement the standards at the local level. As a result, my recommendation is for NYSED and other Common Core supporters to launch a **targeted communication and capacity-building campaign** focused on the benefits and opportunities associated with Common Core for students, teachers, parents, and community organizations.

### **Recommendations:**

Target the communications campaign to the following stakeholders:

#### **1) Parents**

##### **a. Suburban:**

- i. Emphasize that New York has some of the **highest standards in the nation**, giving their children an advantage in preparation for college and career success
- ii. Emphasize Common Core's focus on **critical thinking skills** that are necessary to succeed in college and career
- iii. Acknowledge that NYSED has **heard and responded to the concerns** about Common Core and testing

##### **b. Urban**

- i. Provide tools and resources for parents to **better understand Common Core and support their children** in meeting the higher standards

- ii. Emphasize that Common Core and annual assessments are a **civil rights issue** designed to ensure schools are held accountable for the performance of poor and minority students
- iii. Emphasize that Common Core **levels the playing field** by ensuring that poor and minority students strive towards the same high-standards as wealthier students

## 2) Teachers and School Leaders

- a. Emphasize that **schools need support** from parents and the community to help students meet Common Core standards
- b. NYSED and others should re-frame Common Core as an **opportunity** for teachers to take ownership of their craft by developing innovative lessons that meet the standards and support critical thinking skills.
- c. NYSED should work with NYSUT and others to **co-develop high-quality professional development** that shares best practices and facilitates collaboration with other teachers

## 3) Community Organizations

- a. Acknowledge the critical role that **community organizations** (afterschool, summer, and early childhood providers; business and philanthropy; civil rights and faith-based organizations) can and must play in helping students meet Common Core standards with targeted guidance and tools for each group