

Thompson: Common Core Will Double Dropout Rate, Says Carnegie Corporation*

How did I miss it? The single most important study on Common Core implementation was published by the Carnegie Corporation in 2013, but its key finding has been ignored.

Hat tip to [Tom Hoffman](#) and [Larry Ferlazzo](#) for showcasing the evidence that is so unnerving.

Carnegie's Leah Hamilton and Anne Mackinnon, in [Opportunity by Design](#), and the McKinsey Group estimate that the implementation of Common Core (without first establishing a level of systematic supports that would clearly be impossible) would double the nation's dropout rate.

Even if Common Core was implemented only by top-quartile teachers – who “‘move’ student performance at the rate of 1.25 grade levels per year” – the best teachers “cannot possibly meet the demand to raise student achievement to Common Core levels.”

School reformers have long misused multi-colored graphs by the McKinsey Group to argue that improved teacher quality could drive school improvement. So, it is doubly important that Carnegie commissioned McKinsey to use the reformers' data “to test whether or not it might be possible to avoid large drops in graduation rates using human capital strategies alone.”

A year ago, Carnegie and McKinsey concluded, “The short answer is no: 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.”

They determined that the six-year dropout rate would double from 15% to 30%. If, as Carnegie projects, the four-year graduation rate drops from 75% to 53%, that would be a blow that Common Core probably couldn't survive.

And, what about high-poverty urban school systems, where the graduation rates have slowly risen to 65% or so? Surely, their graduation rates would drop even further. Even if they declined by the national average of 30%, the outcry should be deafening.

The goal of Carnegie “Challenge” research papers is **“to lift up ideas and issues in a way that we hope will elevate them to the nation's agenda.”** So, why has this all-important finding not influenced the debate over the Common Core agenda?

Apparently, Carnegie seeks to focus on the positive. If, over the last few years, systems had focused on building personalized learning environments and if states had invested unlimited billions of dollars on high-poverty schools, Common Core might not have become a trainwreck. If New York City's “Small Schools” (generously funded by the Gates Foundation and others) had actually served the “same kids” as students in large failing high schools, in theory the same expensive methods could have eased the transition to Common Core.

It is now 2014, however, and high-poverty schools across the nation have yet to receive a blank check and the freedom to stop the education malpractice of teaching to the bubble-in test. I suspect that the

Carnegie Corporation doesn't want to explicitly criticize the Gates Foundation's commitment to test-driven accountability. But, surely it doesn't anticipate a happy ending to Common Core implementation and testing in 2015. – JT(@drjohnthompson)

*Correction: The previous version of this post incorrectly referred to the Carnegie Foundation, not the Carnegie Corporation.