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The editor's note

Joan Richardson

Staring down policy makers

Every mother's child knows *The Look*. *The Look* tells children they are on their mom's last nerve. *The Look* says, "Don't push me, I've had about enough of this." *The Look* may vary from mom to mom, but every mom has one — and every kid knows it.

Right now, I'd say Americans are giving policy makers *The Look*.

In the most recent PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes

Toward the Public Schools, Americans are saying that as policy makers forge ahead with education initiatives they're leaving Americans behind and out of the loop.

This year's poll revealed that Americans are largely unaware of the Common Core State Standards and that even the small number who think they know about the standards don't really understand them. They also don't believe that the increasing emphasis on testing is improving education — 77% said testing has either hurt or made no difference in education. Significantly, Americans also reject another trendy idea: that teacher evaluations should be based on how well a teacher's students did on standardized tests.

Let me make clear my bias about the Core: I want America to give the Common Core a chance to succeed. Done correctly, the Core can infuse equity and consistency into a system that desperately needs them. Yes, other supports will be necessary, and, yes, we all must be attentive to ensuring that this doesn't deteriorate into a prescriptive, test-driven strategy. But the Core offers us the hope that perhaps for the first time all U.S. schools and all educators will reach for the same standard in math and English language arts, regardless of where or who they teach. And that is an enormous stride forward.

New standards will mean new tests, of course. But that's appropriate because we will need a way to measure our progress, and because — as much as we may hate to say it — tests offer some degree of accountability. Our poll results show that Americans think the country has gone too far with testing, but I don't believe that means the public wants all testing to stop. We are a competitive lot, for good and bad, and we will always want to know how we stack up against each other and against other nations. But there is a limit. Americans are saying it's time to pause and recalibrate. Most of all, Americans see the folly of yoking teacher evaluations to testing.

But every good idea requires a degree of salesmanship, and the framers of the Common Core apparently failed to plan for this aspect of their work. Simply doing good work is never enough. The unsexy part of policy is consulting with and learning from the public before you begin and then informing and bringing them along as the work progresses.

So now policy makers are getting *The Look*. On the receiving end of *The Look* are local school board members, state legislators, and members of state boards of education — groups that have typically believed that their job is to make rules and not worry about selling anybody on following the rules. But anyone charged with implementing the Core must now step up and begin the pedestrian work of helping Americans understand how the nation and its children will benefit from this change. And, as my mother would have said, time's a wastin'. — JR

