

We, the Media

An interesting study came across my desk not long ago and made a small splash in the education policymaking world. In this report from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), the authors detailed how Twitter has shaped the Common Core debate—specifically, what sort of impact #CommonCore has had. After analyzing nearly 200,000 tweets, the authors of *#CommonCore: How Social Media Is Changing the Politics of Education* draw a few conclusions:

- On Twitter, the debate over Common Core is less about the standards themselves and more about broader political disagreements over education policy.
- There are two distinct ways Common Core is discussed: Supporters talk about the standards using rational, logical “policyspeak,” while opponents tend to appeal to peoples’ emotional side using “political speak,” grouping their disdain for Common Core with other soapbox issues.
- Common Core is frequently explained through catchy metaphors. These tweets get widely retweeted and often not accurately or in the spirit in which they were intended. This is one way misinformation spreads, say the authors.

These findings have garnered praise and criticism. “Just how does one tell whether 140 characters are ‘political’ or ‘policy?’” asked the American Enterprise Institute’s Frederick Hess in his review of the study. He also took issue with the overall methodology, which he felt was rather imprecise. But whether you agree with the study or not, one thing is clear:

Social media are making it easier than ever before for individuals to bring attention to the issues they care about most and over which they have an influence. Report co-author Miguel del Fresno has a name for this phenomenon: “we, the new media.” And he’s right. We now have the tools to broadcast messages ourselves anytime, anywhere.

Taking this argument a tad further, not only is it easier to be a megaphone, it is also a necessity. According to the Pew Research Center, the number of full-time reporters covering state legislatures for daily newspapers has declined by 35 percent. The same can be said for a shrinking education beat. No longer can members of the education policymaking community depend solely on outreach to traditional mass media to help deliver its messages. To have an impact, they must take matters into their own hands and be more creative in their efforts to communicate. That is where NASBE and this column will come in handy. In this space, I’ll cover the how-tos: from tactical questions such as how to craft an effective tweet or set up a Facebook page to more strategic questions of how to communicate about the important work state boards of education do through storytelling, op-ed writing, social media networking, and more.

With so much happening in education at the state level, amplifying the national voice of state boards of education has never been more important, and it has never been easier to attain. The key is knowing how to use social media effectively.



Renée Rybak Lang
Communications Director