

Next North Country Matters On Education

POTSDAM - North Country Matters, the local video public affairs magazine produced at WCKN, recently spent time with St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES School Superintendent Tom Burns examining many of the issues that surround the Common Core standards.

Burns sat down with AAUW-NYS Public Policy VP Donna Seymour and education blogger Ann Carvill, both of Potsdam. Due to technical issues in the studio, this show is available as a podcast rather than a YouTube video. The podcast can be heard at <http://slc-leaguewv.org/CommonCore.mp3>.

The discussion starts with a look at the history of education policy in the U.S. since 1980 which describes how the current politically charged talk about the Common Core is a result of decisions made (or not made) at both the federal and the states' level.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led, voluntary effort that established a single set of educational standards for K-12 in English and mathematics. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter college programs or the workforce. The standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach.

Testing is one of the educational flashpoints tied to

Common Core. But most of the testing at issue is a result of No Child Left Behind, which was enacted in 2001. NCLB tied federal funding for public schools to student scores on standardized tests. Among other things, it started a huge transfer of wealth from public education into the private hands of the curriculum and testing business, which made more than \$1 billion selling textbooks and bubble tests in 2012.

The panel also takes a look at the teacher evaluation process, which again predated the implementation of the Common Core last year, but has gotten conflated with the standards. They discuss places where Common Core standards are working well and how what stared out as a rocky process at the beginning of the school year is much smoother now.

One of the most troubling aspects of the Common Core process is how it is being co-opted by politicians at every level - state and federal - in an election year. Early frustration with implementation is now seen as a way to leverage votes in November at the expense of much needed long-term educational reform.

Another North Country Matters show that deals with the Common Core is with Steve Todd, the Assistant Superintendent for St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES. He discusses how BOCES leverages their multi-

district resources to write successful grants. In particular he talks about the \$2 million in grant money to create a cadre of local teachers to help implement the new Common Core standards here in St. Lawrence County. The YouTube link is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZeWuU1rzqU>.

The NCM civic partners working to educate North Country residents about critical public policy issues facing our region include AAUW-St. Lawrence County, the League of Women Voters of St. Lawrence County, and Clarkson Media and Mass Communication students, who provide the technical expertise for the productions. The shows are filmed at the WCKN studio on the Clarkson campus.

Upcoming new North Country Matters programs this spring will feature the a look at education grants, the Potsdam Public Library budget vote, and a Clarkson student video about body image and media literacy.

In addition to local broadcasts, the shows are also available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/danieledullea>. Check the websites for AAUW-St. Lawrence County (<http://www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/index.html>) and the League of Women Voters of St. Lawrence County (<http://slc-leaguewv.org/>) for specific program links as they become available.