



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on February 2, 2015

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Correction, Please!

Nationalizing School Standards Through ObamaCore



Not thinking critically: Advocates of Common Core accuse detractors of letting partisan beliefs stop needed national standards. Not only do national standards not foretell the quality of public schooling, Common Core actually lowers school standards nationally, rather than increase them. **Not thinking critically:** Advocates of Common Core accuse detractors of letting partisan beliefs stop needed national standards. Not only do national standards not foretell the quality of public schooling, Common Core actually lowers school standards nationally, rather than increase them.

Item: *In the New York Times for December 27, 2014, in an article entitled “Rage Against the Common Core,” David Kirp writes: “Starting in the mid-1990s, education advocates began making a simple argument: National education standards will level the playing field, assuring that all high school graduates are prepared for first-year college classes or rigorous career training.”*

Kirp, a professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley, asserted that the “movement took off in 2008, when the nation’s governors and education commissioners drove a huge effort to devise ‘world-class standards,’ now known as the Common Core.”

Saying that the Obama administration “didn’t craft the standards,” he acknowledged that “it weighed in heavily, using some of the \$4.35 billion from the Race to the Top program to encourage states to adopt not only the Common Core (in itself, a good thing) but also frequent, high-stakes testing (which is deeply unpopular). The mishandled rollout turned a conversation about pedagogy into an ideological and partisan debate.”

Item: *In a piece for the online Huffington Post for November 7, 2014, entitled “The Common Core Standards: A Matter of Nation,” David Scott Clegg insists that “the Common Core is an attempt to standardize standards in American education. It does not represent an attack upon our freedom to deliver education through the only way education is delivered — of, by, for and through people.”*

Clegg, the managing director of the HEAD Foundation and UNITE Education, concludes: “The Common Core recognizes we are one nation, and as such require an established set of national standards for achievement in education. What we must ensure through a focused, coordinated — dare we say united



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— *effort in the implementation of such is equal access to quality education for all.*”

Correction: If those who continue to promote more centralization in public policies learned from their mistakes, they would by now have a fantastic education. Yet, the advocates of Common Core apparently think one can keep making the same miscalculations and get different and better results.

Then, again, if you have been paying attention to how math is taught under Common Core standards, you already know that controlling the process is more important than getting the right answer.

Yet, many who once bought into pro-Common Core sales pitches are finding they were sold a phony bill of goods. An early supporter of Common Core, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal is one of these. The governor last year filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging that the Obama administration’s Department of Education used a \$4.3 billion grant program and waiver policy to ensnare states to nationalize school curricula at the expense of local and state control. Said Jindal:

Common Core is the latest effort by big government disciples to strip away state rights and put Washington, D.C., in control of everything. What started out as an innovative idea to create a set of base-line standards that could be “voluntarily” used by the states has turned into a scheme by the federal government to nationalize curriculum.

Meanwhile, the pressure that is being exerted at the grassroots level against the idea of having a national school board in Washington has caused proponents to spend a lot of time denying what the effort entails, quibbling over word meanings, and dragging in the Founding Fathers for support — as if a federal republic would have bureaucrats thousands of miles away deciding what local schools should be teaching children.

There’s no denying that the Obama administration has been in this effort up to its eyeballs — hence the derisive nickname “ObamaCore” and the mocking meme that “if you like your curriculum, you can keep it,” echoing the false claim made about healthcare. However, the campaign now being pushed from Washington also built on efforts that took place when Republicans were in the White House. The money being used as a cudgel against the states stems from programs such as “Race to the Top” and “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB).

Some dare call this bribery, with our own money, with states being coerced to adopt federal standards or risk losing the billions of dollars of bait. The feds know how hard it is for state politicians to turn down “free” money, especially in times of recession. With the enticements there for the taking, the regulatory hooks often get ignored. Or, to mix metaphors, as one pundit put it, the incentives to adopt the federal standards are the “carrot that feels like a stick.”

Prior to ObamaCore’s rollout, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers were pushing for federalized policies that offered money on the one hand and relief from regulations on the other. What resulted should have been obvious, since there really ain’t no such thing as a free political lunch.

The Race to the Top program came along with the economic “stimulus” in 2009 that in essence demanded that states sign on to Common Core so they could get a slice of the \$4.35 billion payoff. That, as correctly noted by Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute, was “the foot in the door.” And then,



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once most states were using the same standards and tests, there was little question what Washington would eventually say: "Since everyone's using the same tests and standards anyway, might as well make federal policy based on that."

... Indeed, the "tripod" of standards, tests, and accountability that many Core-ites believe is needed to make "standards-based reform" function, logically demands federal control. After all, a major lesson of NCLB is that states will not hold themselves accountable for setting and clearing high academic bars.

While it's a crucial fact, the full story on the Common Core isn't that the feds coerced adoption. It is that the end game is almost certainly complete federal control by connecting national standards and tests to annual federal funding. And that, it is now quite clear, is no conspiracy theory.

The federal takeover is bad enough to oppose in itself. Yet, making matters even worse, the standards and the "Common Core-aligned" curricula (promoted in part by those whose materials will be used) will be detrimental to what most reasonable people would view as a good education.

One of those who studied the Common Core program very closely is James Milgram, a professor emeritus of mathematics at Stanford. The professor served on the validation committee for Core mathematics (he didn't agree to approve the standards). As Milgram later told a committee of the Indiana state Senate:

The Common Core standards claim to be "benchmarked against to international standards," but this phrase is meaningless. They are actually two or more years behind international expectations by eighth grade, and only fall further behind as they talk about grades 8-12. Indeed, they don't even fully cover the material in a solid geometry course, or in the second-year algebra course.



Have you tried to help public schoolchildren with simple arithmetic homework recently? The most basic concepts have been changed beyond recognition, which also drives a wedge between parent and child. Thank the federalization of standards, and the teachers forced to teach to the testing of those so-called standards, for the bollixed-up situation. One critic is Marina Ratner, a math professor at the University



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of California at Berkeley. Columnist Phyllis Schlafly, herself a Common Core adversary, is among those who have paid attention to the professor's rather specific criticism. Writes Schlafly:

Professor Ratner became alerted to the stupidity of Common Core by looking at the homework assigned to her grandson in 6th grade Berkeley middle school. Fractions are taught by having the kids draw pictures of everything, such as 6 divided by 8, and 4 divided by $\frac{2}{7}$, and also by creating fictional stories for such things as $\frac{2}{3}$ divided by $\frac{3}{4}$. A student who gives the correct answer right away and doesn't draw a picture or make up a story loses points.

Ms. Ratner concluded that Common Core is making simple math concepts "artificially intricate and complex with the pretense of being deeper, while the actual content taught was primitive." The bottom line is that Common Core is inferior to the current good California standards, and the \$15.8 billion spent nationally to develop and adopt Common Core was a gigantic waste.

In addition, English language arts and literacy standards have also been downgraded to a large degree in favor of short "informational" texts. In many such cases, teachers are given minute-by-minute directions, what amounts to scripts to follow. In the meantime, hanging over their heads are potential poor grades in the teacher evaluations that are part of the federal programs.

The former Texas state commissioner of education, among others, has acknowledged that he was urged to adopt the Common Core standards even before they were written. This is an unjustifiable leap of faith to benefit those who have proven unworthy of such trust, and who will pretend to stand for anything you might fall for as part of their bunko game.

The students are losing too. Sandra Stotsky, a professor emeritus of education reform at the University of Arkansas, has concluded that Common Core's "diminished emphasis on literature in the secondary grades makes it unlikely that American students will study a meaningful range of culturally and historically significant literary works before graduation."

Traditionally, if you didn't like how your neighborhood schools were run, you could have your voice heard locally. But when education is federalized, there is no way to get a response from faceless bureaucrats in Washington who are driving the problematic coursework.

And the proponents of Common Core are not keen on getting criticized. Not that long ago, Education Secretary Arne Duncan let his arrogance show through (when it became a public embarrassment, he was forced to apologize for saying what he really meant). He berated "white suburban moms" for opposing reforms because, as he put it, they suddenly found out that "their child isn't as brilliant as they thought they were."

These are the people behind Fed Ed — which is one more reason why parents are fed up.

The federal educrats are fighting on many fronts to maintain and expand their powers and perks. The Common Core promoters have numerous avenues to get at our children. Writing in *Townhall* magazine in September, Sarah Jean Seman noted that David Coleman, one of Common Core's "lead writers," recently became "president of College Board, the organization responsible for the SAT. Coleman proceeded to alter the SAT to align with Common Core. This means states, or even home-schooled



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students who remain out of the broad system, may find the test caters to students who have been raised on the standards.”

You may not think your kids are common, but the planners in Washington do. When it comes to education, you probably want a choice for your child. The goal of the federal educrats is more direct. They want your child.



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