



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 1, 2014

Obama Administration Punishes Oklahoma for Rejecting Common Core

The Obama administration has punished the state of Oklahoma for repealing the Common Core standards despite assertions that the standards are entirely “voluntary.” Last week Oklahoma became the second state to lose its waiver from the disastrous Bush-era No Child Left Behind (NCLB) scheme. Washington State was the first, losing its waiver in April after the state legislature failed to come up with a solution that would allow the state to tie its student test results to teacher evaluations.



Common Core State Standards Initiative is the official name of the scholastic standards copyrighted by the Washington, D.C.-based National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Common Core has come under significant fire from parents, teachers, and school administrators across the country this year, who declare that the standards are a bid by the federal government to take over the education system. Additionally, privacy advocates have voiced concerns over the distribution to contractors of personally identifiable information about students and their families.

[Breitbart.com reports:](#)

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States that adopted “college- and career-ready standards” in math and English Language Arts that are “common to a significant number of states” or “certified by a state network of institutions of higher education” avoided education “[NCLB requirements](#), which include providing school choice, tutoring, and reconfiguring failing schools. Most states simply adopted the Common Core to obtain the waivers, inviting even further federal intrusion into their education policies.

By contrast, when the state of Indiana repealed the Common Core standards, the Obama administration granted it a one-year extension of its waiver because Indiana’s replacement standards remained close enough to those set by Common Core. Therefore, Indiana still met the requirements for the waiver.

The Department of Education’s response to Oklahoma’s repeal has major implications, as it ultimately disproves any claims by the Obama administration that the standards are voluntary and “state-led.”

The Department of Education’s response to Oklahoma marks the first time the agency stripped a state of its waiver on the grounds of academic standards, notes senior policy analyst for Bellwether Education Partners Anne Hyslop. “This is obviously dicey water for the Secretary [Arne] Duncan, given growing opposition to Common Core,” she said.

Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin was a supporter of the Common Core standards, even defending the standards at a National Governors Association meeting that took place in January. She later rescinded



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her support.

Fallin observed,

Unfortunately, federal overreach has tainted Common Core. President [Barack] Obama and Washington bureaucrats have usurped Common Core in an attempt to influence state education standards. What should have been a bipartisan policy is now widely regarded as the president's plan to establish federal control of curricula, testing and teaching strategies.

In June Fallin signed a bill repealing the standards and returning the state to its previous standards, the Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills standards. "We are capable of developing our own Oklahoma academic standards that will be better than Common Core," she said.

Fallin was not the only official in Oklahoma to experience a complete reversal on the standards. Oklahoma State Superintendent Janet Barresi, who once supported Common Core, said that once it became clear that the standards were tied to the federal government, she changed her mind. "At one time, as it was emerging from Republican and conservative ideas from individual states, I did support Common Core," Barresi said in a statement. "As it has become entangled with federal government, however, Common Core has become too difficult and inflexible."

The federal Education Department asked the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to determine whether its old standards were high enough, but the agency failed to do so before Oklahoma filed its application for a waiver extension.

Education Department Press Secretary Dorie Nolt defends the department's decision. "Having college- and-career-ready standards matters because it provides critical thinking and problem solving skills — skills that students need to succeed in college and beyond," Nolt said. "Oklahoma was unable to demonstrate that its students are learning high standards this year, which the state committed to do under its ESEA flexibility request. State leaders still have the opportunity to demonstrate that their standards are rigorous or design new standards to ensure their students are ready for college, career and life — just like Indiana and several other states have done."

Politico notes that without the waiver from the Department of Education, 100 percent of students will have to perform at grade level in math and reading by this school year at most Oklahoma schools. The state will have to use test results from last year as the bar to measure achievement. Schools that do not meet the standard will have to take significant steps to improve scores.

Oklahoma will have to set aside nearly \$30 million in federal Title I dollars to pay for tutoring and school choice.

Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute asserts that the experiences of Oklahoma and Washington highlight "what a lawless process" the waiver system has become. "I defy anybody to go through and find any shred of consistency in the decisions that have been made here," he said.

Hess added, "States were ushered into signing up for the Common Core en masse ... and it's brought us to this predictable place. They're now stuck in this place where they're told if you move off the Common Core, you're supposed to come up with new assessments and standards in a matter of weeks ... it's a somewhat unreasonable expectation."

According to Fordham Institute President Michael Petrilli, the Department of Education's decision is a "terrible" one and Fallin has grounds for a lawsuit. "Nothing in ESEA gives the secretary of education the authority to push states around when it comes to their standards," Petrilli said.



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A lawsuit may be the next step for Governor Fallin, whose anger was palpable in a statement she issued responding to the Department of Ed's move. "It is outrageous that President [Barack] Obama and Washington bureaucrats are trying to dictate how Oklahoma schools spend education dollars," she said. "Because of overwhelming opposition from Oklahoma parents and voters to Common Core, Washington is now acting to punish us. This is one more example of an out-of-control presidency that places a politicized Washington agenda over the well-being of Oklahoma students."



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