



Obama's "Common Core of Standards": Final Step in Phony School Reform

American education has seen one "reform" movement after another. The most recent incarnation, "Race to the Top," was initiated in 2009 by the Obama Administration. It is structured around a serious-sounding program called the "Common Core of State Standards Initiative Project," or CCS for short, which is set for implementation in 46 states, at last count, in 2012.

Most people alive today actually remember "reform" measures that date only from around 1970, even though many of these originated much earlier, sometimes reappearing under new names: the [Effective Schools Movement](#); [Mastery Learning](#), revived around 1980; [America 2000](#) in 1992; [Goals 2000](#), built around a program called [Outcome-Based Education](#) in 1993; and [No Child Left Behind](#) in 2002, which, in turn, promoted a curricular program called the [International Baccalaureate](#), which people mistook for its pre-War European counterpart.

As usual, the two organizations leading the charge on the Common Core Standards (CCS) are the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Like its "reform" predecessors, CCS can neither be described as classical academics nor substantive learning. The "standards" are rife with the usual misrepresentations, but this time with an added zinger: Parents will be completely cut out of the loop. This fulfills the oft-quoted prophecy of Dustin Heuston, head of the Utah-based World Institute for Computer-Assisted Technology (WICAT), who is famously quoted as having exclaimed during a [panel discussion in the 1970s](#): "Won't it be wonderful when no one can get between that child and that [computerized] curriculum?"

Computerized data collection, linked to testing and curriculum, was a pipe dream until a team comprised of former WICAT colleagues — George Hall, Richard M. Jaeger, C. Philip Kearny and David E. Wiley — figured out how to do it and wrote a ground-breaking [paper](#) for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Information in 1985 that was championed by Emerson J. Elliott. Elliott eventually headed up a then-new National Center for Education Statistics, a component of the DoE which virtually transformed the thrust of schooling in America from that of excellence and hard knowledge to one of functionality and family intervention.

Among the many education researchers and policy analysts who have written extensively on the CCS





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reform scheme is Texas-based Donna Garner. The concept, she discovered, revolves around millions in tax dollars to provide individual technology devices for every child so that a revised slate of new assessments — [remember, “assessments” are not “tests”](#) — will require constant multi-media, individualized computer access that parents do not see.

Up until recently, the National Assessment, as well as most state assessments, used a random sampling method — i.e., not every child was assessed every time. So, the cost of technical support and upgrades to include every child, every time, will be astronomical (and often unaffordable without federal “assistance”). On top of that, a new evaluation system under CCS will exacerbate the trend of teachers fudging results, as per the [scandal](#) recently uncovered in Atlanta. The scheme will also likely end what little is left of local control.

Then there’s technology support staff required to keep the hardware and software running for thousands of students per school district. Add to that, salaries for consultant-coordinators to help states “interpret” for educators the meaning of obscure CCS jargon.

So, just how expensive would implementation of the CCS really be? In California alone, conservative estimates come out to \$1.6 billion.

There’s a laundry list of other problems: For example, the “Common Core” Math Standards do not focus on attainment of chronological steps along the path to competency at incremental level, such as Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II, Trigonometry, etc., but, rather, all of these are treated as essentially one, making it impossible to tell which skills have been mastered by students and which have not. This, in turn, makes it impossible to improve instruction.

Similarly, in English, the high-school-level standards do not set grade-level-specific targets — again, specified increments to be achieved. Spelling and grammar are fused with literature and vocabulary, which of course they eventually are once a child has mastered the fundamentals. But that’s the point: The student *hasn’t* mastered the fundamentals, which is why, supposedly, children go to school.

Additionally, the emphasis in Literature is on information and modern works, not on appreciating the contributions of the classical masters in various disciplines. One is free to enjoy the great classicists, or not, but only if one knows about them. Today’s high school seniors and even college graduates have little idea what the philosophers, scholars and artists prior to 1945 said or believed, even though their works greatly affected the evolution of governance in Europe and, in turn, America — underscoring the reasons why the U.S. took such a different route.

Omaha (Neb.) Public Schools exemplify the level of deceptiveness that has become part and parcel of education initiatives. Omaha recently spent \$130,000 of its “stimulus” dollars to purchase [social justice handbooks](#) for every school district employee. Instead of helping teachers enhance their knowledge of subject matter and teaching strategies, they were required to attend “professional development” workshops that centered on the United Nations-based concept of social justice articulated in the handbooks.

There, teachers learn to “acknowledge historical systemic oppression in schools, including racism, sexism, homophobia and ‘ableism,’ defined ... as discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities....” One handbook tells educators that “American government and institutions create advantages that channel wealth and power” to elite whites, and suggests that since color-blindness will never end racism, educators should “take action” for [social justice](#).

Left out is the fact that “social justice” is not the same as “justice under the law” — the kind set out by



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the Framers of the U.S. Constitution. Yet, many Americans — possibly a majority at this point — have unwittingly signed onto social justice with no clue concerning its origins or how it flies in the face of the Founders' vision.

“Justice” in the Founder’s view was grounded in “acts” — what you do to someone and what somebody does to you — carried out by either individuals or groups, and deemed legal or illegal according to specific U.S. laws. But beginning in the 1960s, “justice” started being nudged away from the American definition toward a fuzzy view of “fairness” — a definition built into United Nations ideology.

Like most federal programs, CCS pretends to be voluntary. But Bill Costello points out in an [article](#) for *American Thinker*, that any U.S. states refusing to adopt CCS risk losing funding from Title I — the \$14.4-billion program that provides monies for low-income students. Inasmuch as most school districts are now dependent on Title I funds, this kind of blow encourages all state and local education agencies to sign on.

If fully enacted, the Common Core of Standards will be the culmination of a process that began in earnest immediately following the Second World War, with the goal of producing a nationwide, attitude-changing curriculum that molds public opinion. A victory for CCS may well finish off the Founders’ “grand experiment” in self-government and self-determination because it would further institutionalize, for the foreseeable future, progressivism’s core philosophy: that socialization (or “teamwork”) is more important than facts or context, and that political correctness rather than accomplishment is the key to success in a Nanny State.

Note: This was the third segment in a series on modification to education policy under the Obama Administration. The fourth segment will focus on how the Education Department has broken federal law on curriculum involvement and the amount of money involved; the fifth segment will show how progressivism has come to be embedded in the culture via the schools so that it now drives policy and voter decision-making. A final segment will detail how schools can be made to serve students and, in turn, the nation. The first segment covered early childhood education/subsidized day care, and the second focused on the unholy alliance between the Dept. of Education, the NEA teachers union and the United Nations.

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