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A National Education Standards Exit Strategy for States

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The push for centralized control over what every child should learn has never had more momentum. The Obama Administration has pressured states to adopt the Common Core State Standards Initiative, conditioning more than $4 billion in Race to the Top grants on its adoption. The Administration's blueprint for the rewrite of No Child Left Behind also called for Title I dollars to be contingent on states' adoption of the nationalized standards.

Some state leaders have jumped on the bandwagon to nationalize the standards and content taught in local schools. With little public notice, many states have agreed to adopt the Common Core national standards.

This movement is a challenge to educational freedom in America and is costly in terms of liberty, not to mention dollars. State leaders who believe in limited government and liberty should resist this imposition of centralized standards. Adopting national standards and tests through the Common Core State Standards Initiative surrenders control of standard-setting to distant national organizations and Washington bureaucrats.

Education reform should give control over education to those closest to students. Conservatives have the opportunity to reverse course and reject this latest centralizing overreach. It is time for states to reject the nationalization of standards, tests, and ultimately, curricula, and instead work to strengthen and improve excellence in their local schools through state and local policy.

Exiting the Common Core National Standards. State policymakers should reclaim control over the content taught in their local schools by resisting the imposition of national standards and tests and preventing their implementation. States should consider the following three strategies:

1. **Determine how the decision was made to cede the state's standard-setting authority.**

   States can exit from the national standards overreach by first determining which state entity agreed to adopt the Common Core State Standards. For most states, the state board of education is the body that made the decision.

   State boards of education have wide-ranging authority over education policy in most states. While authority varies from state to state, state constitutions and statutes generally give broad authority to state boards to implement policies governing standards, assessments, and curricula.

   The adoption of Common Core national standards represents an abdication of this authority. Putting national organizations and Washington bureaucrats in charge of standards further

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removes parents and taxpayers from the educational decision-making process.

State boards of education were elected or appointed to govern state education policy, not to surrender educational authority to a centralization movement. Advocates of federalism should be concerned that their state officials have ceded authority of the standards and assessments that drive what is taught in local schools. They should also be concerned that, in addition to the heavy cost to liberty, states stand to incur significant new expenses as a result of Common Core adoption.

2. **Prohibit new spending for standards implementation.**

Adoption of nationalized standards means overhauling existing state standards and assessments, which will be a costly endeavor for states. State and local taxpayers expended significant amounts of money in most states to implement and maintain existing state standards and tests. Making pedagogical and curricular changes, revamping professional development, and aligning textbooks and assessments to adhere to the Common Core will burden already-strained state budgets. Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott estimates national standards adoption would cost taxpayers in his state more than $3 billion.[1]

To assess the full fiscal impact, state leaders should request an independent cost analysis of national standards adoption to inform taxpayers about the short-term and long-term costs of the overhaul.

At the same time, governors and state policymakers concerned with the national standards push should refuse to expend any state or local resources to align state standards, tests, and curricula with the Common Core national standards and tests.

3. **Determine how to reverse course.**

The rushed adoption of the Common Core in many cases preceded the election of 2010, which brought in new governors, legislators, and board members. Newly elected conservative leaders should be concerned about the authority handed to centralizers by their predecessors and investigate how to bring standards and curriculum control back into the hands of state leaders.

A Better Path Forward. It is, as state constitutions and statutes demonstrate, the responsibility of states and local school districts to define and implement standards, assessments, and curricula. Although many states moved to adopt the Common Core national standards and tests prior to the 2010 election—an unprecedented surrender of state educational control to Washington—conservative leaders can reclaim control over the content taught in their local schools by resisting the imposition of national standards and tests and preventing their implementation.

A half-century of ever-increasing federal involvement in education has failed to increase academic achievement. Relinquishing control of state educational autonomy to distant bureaucrats in Washington will fail to improve outcomes for children and will further remove parents from the decision-making process. National standards would strengthen federal control over education while weakening schools' direct accountability to parents and taxpayers.

Instead, state leaders should work to strengthen *state* standards and tests, provide school performance information to parents and taxpayers, and empower parents to act on school performance data by offering more school-choice options.

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1. Lindsey Burke, "National Standards and Tests: Big Expense, Little Value," Heritage Foundation *Webmemo* No. 3157, February 18, 2011, at *http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/02/national-education-standards-and-tests-big-expense-little-value.*