The Heritage Foundation
LEADERSHIP FOR AMERICA

BACKGROUNDER

No. 2680 | APRIL 16, 2012

States Must Reject National Education Standards While There Is Still Time

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Abstract

For four and a half decades, the federal role in education has been growing, but this expanding federal control has failed to improve outcomes for America's children. National standards will further expand Washington's role and remove parents from decisions about the content taught in their children's schools. Yet the Obama Administration is intent on nationalizing the content taught in every public school across America. Without congressional approval, the Administration has used a combination of carrots and sticks to spur states to sign on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and federally funded national assessments have been crafted to align with these standards. State leaders who believe in limited government and liberty should resist the imposition of national standards and tests in their states.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at
http://report.heritage.org/bg2680

Produced by the Domestic Policy Studies Department

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The Obama Administration is intent on nationalizing the content taught in every public school across America. Without congressional approval, the Administration has used a combination of carrots and sticks to spur states to sign on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Common Core includes standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, and federally funded national assessments have been crafted to align with the standards.

The Common Core effort, originally spearheaded by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), became quickly entangled with Washington. Billions in federal funding was used to create incentives for states to adopt the standards, yet the effort has left state taxpayers to pick up the tab for their implementation, conservatively estimated to cost more than $16 billion.

Growing concern over the national standards push is well-founded: The effort to centralize control of education has never had more momentum. While the Obama Administration has been a driving force behind the Common Core standards, state leaders have also jumped on the bandwagon. With little public

Talking Points

- The Common Core State Standards Initiative, once driven by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, has become a federally incentivized enterprise with the goal of further centralizing control of education.
- National standards are unlikely to increase academic achievement, but they do pose a significant cost to taxpayers and further remove parents from decisions about what their children are taught.
- National standards are the antithesis of reform that would put control of education in the hands of those closest to the students: local school leaders and parents.
- The push to nationalize standards and testing—and ultimately curricula—is a costly challenge to educational freedom.
- State leaders who believe in limited government and liberty should reclaim control of the content taught in their schools by preventing the imposition of national standards and tests in their states.

notice, 46 states have agreed to adopt the Common Core national standards.

The Department of Education offered $4.35 billion to states in Race to the Top grants, conditioned in part on adoption of "standards common to a significant number of states." The only standards option that qualified at the time (and currently) was the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Moreover, suggestions that $14.5 billion in federal Title I money for low-income school districts could be tied to standards adoption and, more recently, the availability of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waivers conditioned on common standards adoption have coaxed many state leaders to go along with the overhaul.

The constitutional authority for education rests with states and localities, and ultimately with parents—not the federal government. The federal government has crossed this line in the past, but dictating curriculum content is a major new breach that represents a critical level of centralization and a major setback for parental rights.

Adopting Common Core national standards and tests surrenders control of the content taught in local schools to distant national organizations and bureaucrats in Washington. It is the antithesis of reform that would put control of education in the hands of those closest to the student: local school leaders and parents. But it is not too late for state leaders to regain control of the content taught in their local schools. States should take immediate steps to reject the nationalization of standards and tests—and, ultimately, curricula—and work to improve outcomes through reforms to state and local policy.

Federal Involvement with the Common Core State Standards Initiative

The Common Core State Standards Initiative began in earnest in the spring of 2009 with an announcement by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers that they would be developing Common Core standards and assessments. States were told they could choose whether to replace their existing standards with the Common Core standards in math and ELA—but the Obama Administration quickly became involved, raising questions about the neutrality of the federal government in the effort and ultimately, the voluntary nature of the Common Core push.

One of the first indications of federal involvement in common standards came on February 17, 2009, when President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) into law. The ARRA provided an unprecedented $98 billion in new federal funding to the U.S. Department of Education, of which $4.35 billion was earmarked for the Race to the Top (RTT) competitive grant program. RTT invited states to compete for $4.35 billion during a difficult budgetary climate and doled out grants to states that agreed to the Administration's policy proposals. Notably, applications for RTT funding required states to describe how they would transform their standards and assessments to "college and career-ready" standards that were common to a significant number of states. By June 1, 2010, applicants had to submit "evidence of having adopted common standards."[1]

The Department of Education defines common standards as "a set of content standards that define what students must know and be able to do and that are substantially identical across all states in a consortium."[2] While there was no explicit requirement to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed by the NGA and CCSSO, the Common Core standards were the only standards that met the Education Department's criteria for commonality at the time, as well as today.

Race to the Top also required states to join one of two testing consortia crafting assessments that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards Initiative. More than $350 million of Race to the Top was earmarked for the funding of national assessments in math and ELA. Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated that the Common Core standards and assessments "will help put an end to the insidious practice of establishing 50 different goalposts for educational success."[3]

1. "Overview Information; Race to the Top Fund; Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010," *Federal Register*, Vol. 74, No. 221 (November 18, 2009), http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-27427.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).
2. Ibid. As found in Robert S. Eitel, Kent D. Talbert, and Williamson S. Evers, "The Road to a National Curriculum: The Legal Aspects of the Common Core Standards, Race to the Top, and Conditional Waivers," Pioneer Institute *White Paper* No. 81, February 2012, http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/120208_RoadNationalCurriculum.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).
3. Arne Duncan, "See Beyond the Bubble Tests: The Next Generation of Assessments," remarks to the American Diploma Project Leadership Team, September 2, 2010, http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/beyond-bubble-tests-next-generation-assessments-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-state-l (accessed April 4, 2012).

President Obama was not shy about the incentives in Race to the Top to push states to adopt common standards and tests. During his remarks at James C. Wright Middle School in 2009, President Obama stated:

> In the coming weeks, states will be able to compete for what we're calling a Race to the Top award. We're putting over $4 billion on the table—$4 billion with a "b"—one of the largest federal investments that the federal government has ever made in education reform ... . And I have to tell you, this was not an easy thing to get through Congress. This is not normally how federal dollars work.
>
> ... I want to commend the leadership of the governors and school chiefs who've joined together to get this done. And because of these efforts, there will be a set of common standards that any state can adopt...and I urge all our states to do so.[4]

Secretary Duncan echoed the President's support of the common standards effort, stating: "We have 50 different standards, 50 different goal posts ... . We want to fundamentally reverse that. We want common, career-ready internationally benchmarked standards."[5]

The Obama Administration has also linked federal policy to the Common Core State Standards Initiative beyond Race to the Top funding. In February 2010, Secretary Duncan told a group of governors that access to the nearly $15 billion in Title I funding for low-income school districts could be tied to the adoption of common standards.[6] That March, the Obama Administration released its "blueprint" to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind. The blueprint suggested renaming the Title I program for low-income children the "College- and-Career-Ready Students program" and states:

> Following the lead of the nation's governors, we're calling on all states to develop and adopt standards in English language arts and mathematics that build toward college- and career-readiness by the time students graduate from high school. States may choose to upgrade their existing standards or work together with other states to develop and adopt common, state-developed standards.[7]

More recently, in fall 2011, the Obama Administration announced that it would offer NCLB waivers to states that agreed to conditions stipulated by the Department of Education. States applying for a waiver must adopt "college- and career-ready standards" in math and ELA that are "common to a significant number of states" or have been "certified by a state network of institutions of higher education."[8]

Taken together—the budget shortfalls and expensive NCLB compliance burden—RTT funding and the temporary relief from the waiver proposal have created strong incentives for states to sign on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative—in many cases, without engaging citizens or even legislators in the decision to cede educational authority to Washington, D.C. Race to the Top, the Administration's blueprint to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I access, and NCLB waivers have left little doubt that the federal government has become heavily invested in the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Problems with Pushing the Common Core National Standards

The push to nationalize the content of what is taught in every local public school across America is riddled with problems. First and foremost, the constitutional authority for education rests with states and localities, not the federal government. The federal government has crossed this line already, but

4. "President Obama Announces $4 Billion Investment in Education," The White House, November 4, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/president-obama-announces-4-billion-investment-education#transcript (accessed April 4, 2012).
5. "Excerpts from Secretary Arne Duncan's Remarks at the National Press Club," U.S. Department of Education, Homeroom blog, June 1, 2009, http://www.ed.gov/blog/2009/06/excepts-from-secretary-arne-duncan%E2%80%99s-remarks-at-the-national-press-club/ (accessed April 4, 2012).
6. "ESEA Plan Could Tether Title I to College-and-Career Standards," *Education Week*, February 21, 2010, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2010/02/as_part_of_the_obama.html (accessed April 4, 2012).
7. "A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," U.S. Department of Education, March 2010, http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).
8. ESEA Flexibility Request, U.S. Department of Education, September 28, 2011, http://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/esea-flexibility-request.doc (accessed April 5, 2012).

dictating curriculum content is a major new breach that represents a critical level of centralization and a major setback to parental empowerment. Moreover, national standards and tests are unlikely to increase academic achievement, will not fix the fundamental misalignment of power and incentives that defines education today, will lead to the standardization of mediocrity, will create significant new expenses for states, and will significantly grow the federal role in education.

Unlikely to Increase Academic Achievement. The math and ELA standards have drawn criticism from content-matter experts across the country and even from members of the Common Core standards validation committee.

Former U.S. Department of Education official and mathematician Ze'ev Wurman notes that the math standards are deficient in several key areas. Notably, the standards do not expect students to learn Algebra I by eighth grade, which both "reverses the most significant change in mathematics education in America in the last decade" and is "contrary to the practice of the highest-achieving nations."[9] Wurman argues that the Common Core national standards represent the "cessation of educational standards improvement in the United States" and that they fall short on these fronts:

> [T]he Common Core mathematics standards fail on clarity and rigor compared to better state standards and to those of high-achieving countries. They do not expect algebra to be taught in grade 8 and ... their promise of college readiness rings hollow. Its college-readiness standards are below the admission requirement of most four-year state colleges.[10]

University of Arkansas professor Sandra Stotsky, a member of the Common Core standards validation committee for English Language Arts, refused to sign off on the proposed standards. Stotsky argues that by adopting the Common Core national standards, states like California and Massachusetts will "significantly weaken the intellectual demands on students in the areas of language and literature."[11] She notes that weaknesses in the ELA standards were to be expected, since the standards were prepared by the "same special interests that gave us the poor state standards they were designed to replace."[12]

Beyond specific deficiencies in both the math and ELA standards, national standards are unlikely to increase academic achievement for a host of other reasons.

The Brookings Institution, which notes that the Common Core State Standards Initiative is a project that President Obama has "backed enthusiastically," predicts that the proposed national standards will have "little to no impact on student learning," since most of the variation in student performance occurs *within* states:

> Consider Massachusetts and Mississippi, a state with low scores but not at the very bottom. Their NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] means differ by 25 points. Every state, including Massachusetts and Mississippi, has a mini-Massachusetts and Mississippi contrast within its own borders. That variation will go untouched by common state standards ... . The empirical evidence suggests that the Common Core will have little effect on American students' achievement. The nation will have to look elsewhere for ways to improve its schools.[13]

National standards are unlikely to improve academic achievement for students across the country. They are also unlikely to increase

9. Ze'ev Wurman and W. Stephen Wilson, "The Common Core Math Standards," *Education Next*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 2012), http://educationnext.org/the-common-core-math-standards/ (accessed April 4, 2012).
10. Ibid.
11. Sandra Stotsky and Ze'ev Wurman, "Common Core's State Standards Still Don't Make the Grade: Why Massachusetts and California Must Regain Control Over Their Academic Destinies," Pioneer Institute *White Paper* No. 65, July 2010, http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/common_core_standards.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).
12. Sandra Stotsky, "How to Avoid Dumbing High Schools Down in Reauthorizing ESEA," Jay P. Greene's blog, February 22, 2011, http://jaypgreene.com/tag/sandra-stotsky/ (accessed April 4, 2012).
13. Tom Loveless, "How Well Are American Students Learning?" Brookings Institution *2012 Brown Center Report on American Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (February 2012), http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/reports/2012/0216_brown_education_loveless/0216_brown_education_loveless.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).

student performance relative to other nations. Many of the countries that perform worse than the United States on international assessments, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), have national standards. The Cato Institute's Neal McCluskey points out that eight countries outperformed the United States on eighth-grade math on the TIMSS. All eight had national standards—as did the 33 of 39 countries that performed worse than the U.S. In all, 11 of the 12 worst-performing countries on the TIMSS math assessment in 2007 (the most recent year for which data are available), had national standards.[14]

Similarly, 27 nations outperformed the United States on the PISA 2006 science assessment. Seventeen of the 27 countries that outperformed American students had national standards. Of the 28 countries that the United States outperformed, 12 had national standards.[15] National standards, it seems, are not the critical differential in explaining international competitiveness.

Ignoring Fundamental Misalignment in American Education. National standards will fail to improve academic outcomes because they do not fix the fundamental misalignment in American education today. The problems that plague American education are deeply ingrained in a power and incentive structure that disenfranchises parents and taxpayers, due in large part to a monopoly public education system that has little incentive to be responsive to the needs of families.

National standards will only exacerbate this fundamental misalignment by further centralizing control of education at the Department of Education while forcing schools to demonstrate compliance with Washington's demands instead of requiring accountability to parents and taxpayers. The type of information provided by national standards will be more useful to bureaucrats in Washington who need to make decisions about funding formulas than it will be to parents interested in their children's educational progress.

One of the most powerful ways in which parents can affect school improvement is by influencing state and local policymakers on matters concerning the academic content and standards that are taught in their child's school. National standards and tests would completely remove parents from this important aspect of local school governance, separating parents from the education decision-making process. If parents are to have a say in what is taught in local schools—and if standards and class content are to be strengthened—policymakers should pursue the opposite approach to what the Common Core effort proposes: Competition among various standards should be encouraged in order to spur improvement. As University of Arkansas professor Jay P. Greene noted in testimony before the House Education and the Workforce Committee:

> The best way to produce high academic standards and better student learning is by decentralizing the process of determining standards, curriculum, and assessments. When we have choice and competition among different sets of standards, curricula, and assessments, they tend to improve in quality to better suit student needs and result in better outcomes.[16]

Greene went on to explain that centralized standards "lack a mechanism for continual improvement" and warned that they are nearly impossible to amend once implemented. "If we discover a mistake or wish to try a new and possibly better approach, we can't switch. We are stuck with whatever national choices we make for a very long time. And if we make a mistake we will impose it on the entire country."[17]

Information Useful to Bureaucrats, Not Parents. As noted, the Brookings Institution finds that most of the variation in student learning occurs *within* states, and, national standards will therefore have little bearing on improving test score outcomes. That observation reveals another underlying problem with national standards—they are addressing a question that only bureaucrats are asking: How is one set of students performing relative to another set of students in a given state?

Comparisons of state data are unlikely to be the type of

14. Neal McCluskey, "Behind the Curtain: Assessing the Case for National Curriculum Standards," Cato Institute *Policy Analysis* No. 661, February 17, 2010, http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa661.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).
15. Ibid.
16. Jay P. Greene, testimony before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, Committee on Education and the Workforce, United States House of Representatives, September 21, 2011, http://edworkforce.house.gov/UploadedFiles/09.21.11_greene.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).
17. Ibid.

information that is useful to parents. Information about how their children are mastering course content, gleaned from school assessments and by talking to teachers, will be far more valuable to parents than the type of information provided through national standards—information that is more useful to bureaucrats who distribute funding.

Standardizing Mediocrity. National standards will not only further remove parents from the education decision-making process; they will result in the standardization of mediocrity rather than establishing high standards of excellence. The same pressures that have caused states to water down the rigor of their state standards—by education unions and federal sanctions, among others—will also afflict the Common Core national standards. The rigor of the standards will align to the mean among states, undercutting states like Massachusetts that have higher quality standards.[18]

Significant Cost to States. One aspect of the national standards push that has largely escaped discussion is the likely cost to states to cover their implementation and maintenance. Although many states received grants through the $4.35 billion Race to the Top program, many more did not. For those states that did receive grants—ranging from $100 million to $700 million—the one-time funding is unlikely to cover the massive standards and assessments overhaul currently facing states and local school districts.

Washington State's superintendent of public instruction estimates that Common Core implementation will cost state taxpayers more than $300 million.[19] Estimates exceed $1.6 billion in California and $3 billion in Texas.[20] According to the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, taxpayers in states that have agreed to adopt Common Core national standards will be on the hook for nearly $16 billion in new spending, cumulatively, in order to align state and local education systems to the new standards over the next seven years.[21] That cost, notes Pioneer, is four times the amount of money awarded to states through Race to the Top.

According to the National Governors Association and the National Association of State Budget Officers, 17 states project some $40 billion in budget gaps for FY 2013.[22] Already-strained state budgets will be further burdened by the standards overhaul necessary for Common Core implementation. Overhauling state accountability systems will likely be far more costly than the RTT funds appropriated to states thus far, putting state and local taxpayers on the hook for a standards overhaul of questionable value. And, despite the tremendous price tag that will likely accompany the nationalization of standards and assessments, the biggest cost to families will be measured not in dollars, but in educational liberty.

Greater Federal Role in Education. At its heart, education is an interpersonal issue that should be handled at the local level. Education researcher Andrew Coulson notes that in Colonial America, "parents enjoyed a great deal of control over district schools," a tradition which continued into the 1800s. Even placing power in the hands of a state Department of Education was met with significant skepticism. Massachusetts's education subcommittee warned that establishing a Board of Education in the commonwealth would be the "commencement of a system of centralization and monopoly of power in a few hands."[23]

Per the U.S. Constitution, education is the domain of states and local school districts. A great deal of educational control shifted from localities to states in the century that followed, but it was not until 1965 that major federal involvement in

18. Lindsey M. Burke and Jennifer A. Marshall, "Why National Standards Won't Fix American Education: Misalignment of Power and Incentives," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2413, May 21, 2010, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/05/why-national-standards-won-t-fix-american-education-misalignment-of-power-and-incentives.
19. Liv Finne, "Federal Takeover of Instruction Will Cost Washington State More than $300 Million—New Exit Strategy for States Emerges," Washington Policy Center, December 3, 2011, http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/blog/post/federal-takeover-instruction-will-cost-washington-state-more-300-million-new-exit-strategy (accessed April 4, 2012).
20. Lindsey M. Burke, "National Standards and Tests: Big Expense, Little Value," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 3157, February 18, 2011, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/02/national-education-standards-and-tests-big-expense-little-value (accessed April 4, 2012).
21. Theodor Rebarber, "National Cost of Aligning States and Localities to the Common Core Standards," Pioneer Institute and American Principles Project *White Paper* No. 82, February 2012, http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/120222_CCSSICost.pdf (accessed April 4, 2012).
22. "The Fiscal Survey of the States: Fall 2011," National Governors Association and National Association of State Budget Officers, 2011.
23. Ibid.

education commenced. Even then, however, involvement was largely compensatory—providing additional federal resources to specific categories of students.

In the decades that followed, Washington, determined to increase its role in education, became involved in systemic reform, ushering in a proliferation of federal education programs and new spending that sought to influence the entire public school system. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 marked another new extent of federal intervention into education, dictating, for the first time, subject matter and frequency with which states had to test students. This newest federal overreach in the form of national standards takes a significant new step toward centralized control of education.

Despite four and a half decades of ever-increasing federal involvement in education—and nearly $2 trillion in taxpayer money spent at the federal level over the same time period—education outcomes have been largely unchanged.[24] Math achievement has increased only nominally, reading achievement has flat-lined, and high school graduation rates are the same today as they were in the 1970s. Stubborn achievement gaps between white and minority children, and between low-income children and their more affluent peers, also persist.

Researcher Lance Izumi writes, "Nationalizing education standards and testing is exactly the type of federal scheme that goes against the intent of the Constitution and the wisdom of the nation's founders."[25] This latest federal overreach into education punctuates decades of growing federal involvement in education and will dangerously concentrate control over what is taught in local schools in the hands of Washington bureaucrats and national organizations—far from the influence of local taxpayers and parents, who have the most at stake in their children's educational well-being. In fact, this overreach is so significant that a new report argues that the U.S. Education Department has skirted the law to advance Common Core national standards.[26]

Prohibitions Against National Standards

In late 2011, Senator Marco Rubio (R–FL) issued an impassioned warning against the Obama Administration's efforts to institute national standards and tests. In a letter to Education Secretary Duncan, Rubio wrote:

> I am concerned that the administration's requirements for granting a waiver from NCLB would entail states having to adopt a federally-approved "college and career ready" curriculum: either the national Common Core curriculum standards, or another federally-approved equivalent.... Such activities are unacceptable; they violate three existing laws: NCLB, the Department of Education Organization Act, and the General Education Provisions Act. All three laws prohibit the federal government from creating or prescribing national curriculum. If you believe that conditional waivers tied to content standards do not violate these laws, I invite you to explain the reasoning underlying that belief.[27]

More recently, the Pioneer Institute issued a similar warning. Penned by Robert Eitel, former Deputy General Counsel at the U.S. Department of Education under Secretary Margaret Spellings, and Kent Talbert, former General Counsel at the department during the same time, the report suggests that the Department of Education is exceeding its statutory boundaries by incentivizing the adoption of national standards and tests through financial incentives and conditions-based No Child Left Behind waivers. The authors argue that the Department of Education "has designed a system of discretionary grants and conditional waivers that effectively herds states into accepting specific standards and assessments favored by the Department."[28] Like Rubio, the Pioneer Institute found that the Administration's support of the Common Core national standards push violates three federal laws: No Child Left Behind, the Department of Education Organization Act, and the General

24. Andrew J. Coulson, Cato Institute, "The Impact of Federal Involvement in America's Classrooms," testimony before the Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives, February 10, 2011, http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=12775 (accessed April 4, 2012).
25. Lance T. Izumi, "Obama's Education Takeover," Pacific Research Institute *Encounter Broadside* No. 27, 2012.
26. Eitel, Talbert, and Evers, "The Road to a National Curriculum: The Legal Aspects of the Common Core Standards, Race to the Top, and Conditional Waivers."
27. Letter to Education Secretary Arne Duncan from U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, September 12, 2011, http://rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=7c1cf499-4bfc-4db0-8a5b-5e3cc5291560 (accessed April 4, 2012).
28. Eitel, Talbert, and Evers, "The Road to a National Curriculum: The Legal Aspects of the Common Core Standards, Race to the Top, and Conditional Waivers."

Education Provisions Act. Eitel and Talbert concluded:

> Left unchallenged by Congress, these standards and assessments will ultimately direct the course of elementary and secondary study in most states across the nation, running the risk that states will become little more than administrative agents for a nationalized K–12 program of instruction. ... The Department has simply paid others to do that which it is forbidden to do.[29]

Exiting the Common Core National Standards

The movement to nationalize standards and testing—and ultimately curricula—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.

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.** For most states, the state board of education is the body that made the decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards. 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 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 over 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 have expended significant amounts of money 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.

   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 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.

Conclusion

For four and a half decades, the federal role in education has been growing. While costly in terms of taxpayer dollars spent and local control of education lost, this growth in federal control has failed to improve outcomes for America's children. National standards will further expand Washington's role in education and will remove parents from decisions about the content taught in local schools.

Instead of abdicating responsibility for standards and assessments—and ceding more control over education to Washington and national organizations—state leaders should exit this national standards boondoggle. They should begin by determining how the decision was made

29. Ibid.

to cede standards-setting authority and, at the same time, prohibit any spending on standards implementation. Finally, states should determine how to reverse course and regain control over the content taught in local schools.

States and local school districts can have success improving their standards and assessments without surrendering control to Washington. Increasing transparency of outcomes in a way that is meaningful to parents and taxpayers, providing flexibility for local school leaders, and advancing systemic reforms that include school choice options for families will go a long way in improving academic outcomes while at the same time preserving local control of education.

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