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### Common Core State Standards: Analysis and Policy Proposal

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# Common Core State Standards: Analysis and Policy Proposal

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## **COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: ANALYSIS AND POLICY PROPOSAL**

Common Core was developed in response to several long-standing education issues, such as the United States' relatively low global education ranking and individual states' inability to educate their workforce to fill employers' needs. In 2006, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano was appointed Chairwoman of the National Governor's Association, the bipartisan society that all governors are a part of. She challenged the governor's to support and take part in her initiative, which was to "strengthen our nation's competitive position in the global economy by improving our capacity to innovate" (Napolitano). Governor Napolitano championed the notion that success in innovation depended on having an educated workforce, especially in subjects that contribute to information technology fields. This workforce would need to rival those of our national competitors, and the only way to do this is through a competitive education curriculum that reflected the "advanced" nature of other countries' school systems. In 2006, not only did the United States fall below the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) educational averages in mathematics, science, and reading, we also were ranked in the high teens/low twenties for most education categories and ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> out of all nations in reading (OECD). These cracks in our educational foundations were seen as the ultimate hindrance to the United States' competitive economic edge by the NGA Chairwoman and several governors. The need for a new, modern, and rational approach to public education reform was never greater.

Not only was the United States as a whole struggling to keep pace with global education standards, individual states experienced problems. Before the 2006 initiative, states created their own education standards and then received federal funding for educational success under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The program was beneficial at first, giving states the autonomy they desired and allowing curriculums to be created that reflected individual states' unique industry needs and cultural ideals. However, after time the program showed detrimental elements. By attaching a monetary incentive to educational success, states were logically motivated to implement lower standards that produced higher educational results to procure funding. In a simplified sense, this plan appeared to boost students who fell behind in education at the cost of hindering high-achieving students by lowering their standards. This caused a decrease in overall education quality which was harming employers who demand more highly educated personnel. No Child Left Behind is based on a set of educational averages that are responsible for its shortcomings. In his PhD dissertation concerning NCLB, James Schul states that the averages "...foster an environment within the administration of schools that restricts the teacher's creative power. Great teachers rely on good judgment that may go against the averages." The Roosevelt Institute also conducted a study concerning the success of NCLB, finding that after a decade of implementation, "a large portion of schools are not on track to achieve proficiency goals" (Cooper). These realities culminated in a 2004 report called *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts*. The report made the correlation between the basic skills not being taught because of the public education gap and the demands of the workforce: if education did not improve, employers would not have the accomplished workers needed and would be forced to seek employees elsewhere. It is the relative failure of the No Child Left Behind Act combined with the United States' unsatisfactory ranked positions in

global education that inspired Governor Napolitano to make education improvement her mission, resulting in Common Core State Standards. (Achieve, Inc.)

In 2006, Governor Napolitano organized a panel of officials with interest or experience in education, such as education commissioners, corporate CEOs, actual educators, and education experts. These individuals were brought together through the National Governor's Association and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The group was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, and there is speculation that Bill Gates had the greatest influence on the standards, which is a point of discontent that will be discussed. Other key developers of the standards are David Coleman, President of the College Board which develops the SAT tests, William McCallum, a mathematics Department Head at the University of Arizona, and the founders of Student Achievement Partners, Jason Zimba and Susan Pimentel. Though the standards were put into legislation by Congress, they were not developed by the federal government. The task force was not originally formed to create a set of education standards, they were simply asked to create their idea of the best plan for positive education reform and improvement. The idea of the standards is to create a high school diploma that has not only taught the basic foundations of each subject, but taught them in a way that utilizes cognitive problem-solving skills, academic ideas that encompass larger and more interconnected ideas, and the development of academic grit and endurance. The Gates Foundation believed this could be accomplished with standards that were "fewer, higher, and clearer," and the committee concurred (Phillips).

Two sets of standards were developed by the NGA and CCSSO task force; for mathematics and English language arts, the most fundamental of subject matters pertaining to work force development and advancement. According to the introduction published with the

Standards, Common Core requirements are “(1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked,” reflecting Governor Napolitano’s charge and the United States’ educational needs. The “research and evidence based” aspect of the Standards is primarily referring to results of testing and studies conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which provides uniform tests for all American public school students. NAEP gathers results from students in grades 4, 8, and 12 because these are the most crucial years in adolescent education development, and they track “subject-matter achievement, instructional experiences, and school environment for populations of students and groups within those populations” (NAEP website). The Standards were not permanently fixed by the task force, they are intended to be dynamic and adaptable to ever-changing needs of the workforce and the continual development of technology. A similar task force of education experts is to be commissioned for the maintenance and revision of standards to ensure that they remain current.

The English language arts standards (ELA) encompass reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language, and specific standards are established for each elementary grade level from kindergarten to grade 8, but are implemented in two-year bands to 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders. The Standards in their entirety are quite lengthy, but below are a small portion of the benchmarks necessary to be met by students ending elementary school and after development, ending high school.

## Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (K-5)

Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<b>Phonics and Word Recognition</b>		
<p>3. Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Identify and know the meaning of the most common prefixes and derivational suffixes.</li> <li>b. Decode words with common Latin suffixes.</li> <li>c. Decode multisyllable words.</li> <li>d. Read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.</li> </ul>	<p>3. Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Use combined knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (eg. roots and affixes) to read accurately unfamiliar multisyllabic words in context and out of context.</li> </ul>	<p>3. Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Use combined knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (e.g. roots and affixes) to read accurately unfamiliar multisyllabic words in context and out of context.</li> </ul>
<b>Fluency</b>		
<p>4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.</li> <li>b. Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.</li> <li>c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</li> </ul>	<p>4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.</li> <li>b. Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.</li> <li>c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</li> </ul>	<p>4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.</li> <li>b. Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.</li> <li>c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</li> </ul>

(English Language arts Standards p. 17)

## Language Standards 6-12

Grades 9-10 Students:	Grades 11-12 Students:
<b>Conventions of Standard English</b>	
<p>1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Use parallel structure.</li> <li>b. Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.</li> </ul>	<p>1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.</li> <li>b. Resolve issues of complex or contested usage, consulting references (e.g. <i>Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage</i>, <i>Garner's Modern American Usage</i>) as needed.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses.</li> <li>b. Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation.</li> <li>c. Spell correctly.</li> </ul>	<p>2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Observe hyphenation conventions.</li> <li>b. Spell correctly.</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge of Language</b>	
<p>3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Write and edit work so that it conforms to the guidelines in a style manual (e.g. <i>MLA Handbook</i>, Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>) appropriate for the discipline and writing type.</li> </ul>	<p>3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g. Tufte's <i>Artful Sentences</i>) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.</li> </ul>

(English Language Arts Standards p. 52)



The Standards clearly state the learning objectives for each year of schooling, and they are straightforward, especially to trained educators who are aware of what type of reading materials are appropriate for each grade level. The previous sample is a miniscule section of the entire Standards, however all of Common Core aims to directly highlight curriculum necessities, but still allow for teacher creativity. The specific standards in the ELA portion were chosen based on NAEP results, as previously discussed. NAEP studies determined that a well-rounded English education must “balance the reading of literature with the reading of informational texts” and also that the “focus of writing must throughout high school should be on arguments or informative texts” (English language arts Standards p. 5). Though the Standards have benchmark understanding levels that must be met, there is not a list of mandated readings that must be taught to reach the standards. The goal of the standards is to develop a fundamental learning system based on the education product gained by the student, rather than the process by which this learning takes place. After all, the skills one has gained are what make a desirable and productive employee or college student. If followed correctly, high school graduates should be proficient in English language arts and information analysis, along with being familiar with basic technology and media common to society.

Common Core Standards for mathematics were developed along the same guidelines as English language arts, with the emphasis being on fewer, more focused, and more concise standards than were previously implemented by individual states. The Standards take a ‘quality over quantity’ approach, with less concepts learned, but learned more in-depth and in a way that allows them to be pragmatically practiced by high school graduates. The foundations of the Standards in math are also derived from NAEP, but were heavily influenced by the uniform mathematical education standards of other world powers such as Japan and European nations.

The National Research Council also published a study called *Mathematics Learning in Early Childhood: Paths Toward Excellence and Equity*, which included rhetoric that inspired Common Core Standards in mathematics. The study's primary conclusion is that the focus of mathematics education for grade-school students should be "... (1) number (which includes whole number, operations, and relations) and (2) geometry, spatial relations, and measurement, with more mathematics learning time devoted to number than to other topics" (NRC). The Standards are objectively simple and straightforward, yet in depth after many years of practice laid forth for each grade level until high school. In the four years of high school education, there are simply six categories of standards that must be mastered, number and quantity, algebra, functions, modeling, geometry, and statistics and probability. However, students and educators have autonomy over the order in which the categories must be learned. The follow examples of the Standards for a student completing 5<sup>th</sup> grade and also a graduating senior from high school demonstrate important aspects of the Common Core Standards.

## Grade 5 Overview

<b>Operations and Algebraic Thinking</b>	-Write and interpret numerical expressions. -Analyze patterns and relationships.
<b>Number and Operations in Base Ten</b>	-Understand the place value system -Perform operations with multi-digit whole numbers and with decimals to hundredths
<b>Number and Operations- Fractions</b>	-Use equivalent fractions as a strategy to add and subtract fractions. -Apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication and division to multiply and divide fractions.
<b>Measurement and Data</b>	-Convert like measurement units within a given measurement system. -Represent and interpret data. -Geometric measurement: understand concepts of volume and relate volume to multiplication and to addition.
<b>Geometry</b>	-Graph points on the coordinate plane to solve real-world and mathematical problems. -Classify two-dimensional figures into categories based on their properties.

(Mathematics Standards)

## Highschool Geometry Overview

<b>Congruence</b>	-Experiment with transformations in the plane -Understand congruence in terms of rigid motions -Prove geometric theorems -Make geometric constructions
<b>Similarity, Right Triangles, and Trigonometry</b>	-Understand similarity in terms of similarity transformations -Prove theorems involving similarity -Define trigonometric ratios and solve problems involving right triangles --Apply trigonometry to general triangles
<b>Circles</b>	-Understand and apply theorems about circles -Find arc lengths and areas of sectors of circles
<b>Expressing Geometric Properties with Equations</b>	-Translate between the geometric description and the equation for a conic section -Use coordinates to prove simple geometric theorems algebraically
<b>Geometric Measurement and Dimension</b>	-Explain volume formulas and use them to solve problems -Visualize relationships between twodimensional and three-dimensional objects
<b>Modeling with Geometry</b>	Apply geometric concepts in modeling situations

(Mathematics Standards)

The mathematical standards are more empirical and concrete than the English language arts standards, however there is still room for educators to exercise their personal education styles. The Standards once again do not require a certain form of teaching, a specific test format, or a set list of practice problems. A student who follows the Standards is expected to be able to understand problems and demonstrate endurance when solving them to completion, use both abstract and concrete problem-solving skills and logic, create sound arguments and recognize flaws in others' reasoning, construct mathematical models, know and use the most helpful mathematical tools, produce precise results, conduct mathematical tasks in a structured manner, and recognize patterns and continue to utilize them.

Both the English language arts Standards and mathematical Standards fulfill the inherent aim of Common Core, which is to train every high school graduate to have the pragmatic and advanced skills necessary for a sustainable job in the work force or the rigors of a college education. The standards are based on formulaic results of NAEP studies, the demands of employers, and the expertise of experienced professionals in education. Once Common Core State Standards were developed, they were implemented by being tied to Federal grants by President Barack Obama. Common Core is not passed legislation, rather an initiative. States had the option to adopt the education standards or not for a trial period that we are currently in, with full federally mandated implementation a possible goal if the standards succeed. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards, with Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia, Alaska, Nebraska, and Indiana abstaining. Since it's implementation, several states have found faults with the Standards and have voted to appeal. The Standards are associated with political controversy, but also with success in education advancement on a global scale.

As with any major public policy implementation, Common Core has been met with both support and opposition. Though it was originally implemented by forty-six states, it has been reexamined and attempted to be repealed in over nineteen states, Tennessee being the most recent to vote to repeal the standards in our latest legislative session. The standards are obviously a progressive project, originating with Democratic Governor Napolitano and being implemented by the Obama administration. Logically, Common Core is supported by liberal and Democratic entities while opposition comes from the Republican party and those connected to it. Support or opposition for the standards does not strictly fall with party lines, however. There are several noteworthy Republicans who support the standards, such as Governor Jeb Bush of Florida (a possible 2016 Presidential candidate), and on a state level, Tennessee State Representative Bill Dunn is a major supporter though he is considered by media and citizens to be one of the most Conservative members of the Tennessee House of Representatives. Education is often a non-partisan issue given that both parties feature members from a wide and diverse educational background, and Common Core State Standards are no different.

Support for Common Core begins with liberal entities, such as think tanks and the Democratic Party itself. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute for Advancing Educational Excellence is a Democratic think-tank that works to reform education through progressive means. After extensive research, they believe that Common Core State Standards not only raise and maintain educational standards for all students, but that socially they promote equality. The standards force failing schools to engage with students to help them develop necessary skills, and it makes schools legally obligated to produce educated students with a chance of success as opposed to just putting forth a minimal educational effort. The Institute addresses opposition by stating that non-supportive groups fear federal government overreach and they see the Standards

as such an overreaching attempt. They hold that opposing parties have not truly considered the benefit of the Standards because of this fear, and without the assumed surface political implications they would support the raw data of the Standards. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute states on their website that the Standards "...are clearly superior to those currently in use in 39 states in math and 37 states in English. For 33 states, Common Core is superior in both math and reading" (The Education Gadfly). This determination of educational benefit along with the predicted social benefit is why this institute, along with several other Democratic research entities support the Standards.

Along with actually policy research institutes, Common Core Standards are primarily supported by those who actually implement the standards in the classroom level: teachers. The National Education Association, our nation's teachers' union, conducted a study showing that seventy-six percent of teachers support the standards and found them applicable in the classroom in 2010. Favor with Common Core State Standards has fallen in recent years, but is still supported by over half of educators surveyed. Along with the NEA, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Parent Teacher Association want the standards to be further implemented, as of 2013. (Brown)

Like previously stated, politically Common Core State Standards enjoy bipartisan support, however they receive more widespread support from members of the Democratic Party. After their creation, the Standards were first advanced legislatively by United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. As a member of President Obama's cabinet, Secretary Duncan championed legislation carrying the Standards through a Congressional vote, and still supports the Standards today through growing opposition. Secretary Duncan promotes the Standards from a position of promoting equality and honesty. He has stated several times that since the United

States falls behind other world powers in education and workforce success, our schools and their staff have been “lying” to students about their level of capability to handle higher education or compete in the workforce. Secretary Duncan has alluded to the possibility that our generation of parents and teachers would rather see students experience the instant gratification of “succeeding” with low standards as opposed to putting in more effort, possibly receiving lower grades, but ultimately becoming more educated by the challenging Standards. In a Common Core promotion speech in 2013, Secretary Duncan states “We are no longer lying to kids about whether they are ready. Finally, we are telling them the truth, telling their parents the truth and telling their future employers the truth. Finally, we are holding ourselves accountable to giving our children a true college and career-ready experience” (US Dept. of Education). Secretary Duncan mirrors the attitude of the entire Obama administration: support for the Standards because they build a United States workforce that can compete globally and they demand skill development from every student, even if it is challenging. The Standards are a progressive policy in that they advance racial and social equality, inherent goals of the Democratic Party. By implementing uniform standards, a child in a low income inner-city school will receive the same education as a child in the wealthiest suburb, which helps bridge the gap of opportunities between these demographics. Also, there is a proven correlation between low-income school districts and lower-quality teaching, shown by a National Education Association study reporting that “...low-income schools with high minority populations are three to ten times more likely to have unqualified teachers than students in more affluent, predominantly white schools” (Long). Common Core State Standards are the Obama administration’s attempt to require unsatisfactory educators to put more effort into successful teaching in these or any schools where apathetic

teachers are employed. The level playing field that Common Core State Standards creates is why it is appealing to and supported by the Democratic Party.

Though not as common, the Standards are supported by several noteworthy Republicans because they inspire hard work and personal improvement. Traditional Conservatives value the American promise that anyone can succeed through self-motivated accomplishments, and this “American Dream” is achieved by taking on challenges and becoming better from said experiences. Since Common Core State Standards do present a more difficult educational experience than previous standards, this fact resonates with Republicans who value the bettering of oneself for future success. These GOP members believe that accomplishment can only occur with hard work, and difficulty factor of the Standards will not only build students’ determination, but also their academic endurance and will to succeed. One of Common Core’s major supporters is previous Florida Governor Jeb Bush, an expected contender for the Republican Presidential nomination in 2016. In an op-ed piece written for the magazine *National Review*, Governor Bush advocates for the Standards because they produce students who have not only learned necessary skills for higher education and the workforce, but who also have an improved work ethic. He also attempts to change his own party’s opposition by addressing it in a rational manner. He states, “Federal overreach is a real concern, and one that I share. But states’ working together to solve a shared problem is not a violation of federalism. It was state governors and state education chiefs who started and led the Common Core State Standards Initiative. And state and local leaders retain authority over the implementation and assessments” (Bush). He clearly is not just a simply supporter, he is willing to seriously advocate for the Standards, which could potentially put him in political jeopardy. Governor Bush is a not lone voice from the GOP supporting Common Core either, he is supported by previous Georgia Governor George Perdue. Perdue also



wrote a pro-Common Core article for the *National Review* stating, “Core Standards will improve the quality of education in schools at a time when only one in four students will graduate from high school fully prepared for college. Ultimately, there is no reasonable argument against that” (Perdue). Common Core State Standards is clearly an issue of high importance because it has bipartisan support and draws political figures out of the confines of the majority opinion of their parties.

Since the Common Core State Standards initiative was originally created to improve the American workforce, it’s important to note the fact that several major employers support the Standards and see beneficial results. Exxon Mobile, which employs over eighty thousand Americans, has publicly stated that the company has seen an improvement in the level of understanding and critical thinking skills that high school graduates show upon entering the company. Originating in the United States like many other major employers, one of Exxon’s major goals is to strictly hire Americans and not be forced to outsource. The Standards have proven to produce American workers that are no worse than international workers, so they receive support from companies like Exxon. Exxon states on their corporate website that “The Standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers” (Exxon). The Standards are not only advocated for by large corporations like Exxon who also require physical labor, Time Warner Cable, a media conglomerate, and Intel Corporation, an information technology based computer production company also support Common Core and see future benefits from further implementation. Though much opposition exists for the Standards, the very employers the Standards were created to benefit seem to be publicly satisfied.

Ideas for Common Core Standards were partially derived from the uniform standards of other nations, so in a sense, implementation of the Standards puts Americans on a more understanding level when communicating internationally. This is especially for the United States military, another ardent supporter of the Standards. Since the armed forces maintain a noteworthy presence in several other countries, they believe the Standards help Americans maintain a competitive intellectuality abroad. The military is also an entity that is entirely based on uniform code. Without observing strict uniformity, the military could not conduct its operations. The military has observed the organization and efficiency derived from the use of uniformity, and their leaders are active fans of a uniform education system such as the Standards. After the Standards were officially announced in 2009, the armed forces released the official statement that “National standards will raise the bar in education and, ultimately, serve our Nation by producing high school graduates fully prepared for the military” (Dept. of the Army). The support of one of the nation’s most heavily invested-in entities, the military, along with bipartisan political support, support from teachers, and support from professional policy research groups, Common Core State Standards are a policy that is backed by widespread and powerful contenders. This only serves to heighten tensions surrounding the Standards, as they are met with just as strong of an opposing force.

As previously stated, opposition to Common Core is primarily championed by the Republican Party and other policy groups that promote Conservative ideals. While the Democratic Party enjoys mostly unanimous support of the Standards, it is actually an issue that divides the GOP and creates organizational issues. Competition for Governor Jeb Bush in the (projected) Presidential primary, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Rand Paul passionately discredit the Standards and have formally announced campaign platforms that involve the repeal of

Common Core and transfer of education organization power back to the states. Republican issues with the Standards can be traced back to the nature of their formation. The foundation of the GOP is the avoidance of federalism and ideals that decrease central government power and increase individual state power. The fact that the Standards are endorsed by the Obama administration and promoted by the federal government ensures that they would have been met by Republican skepticism regardless of their rhetoric. In an early Presidential campaign speech, Senator Cruz referred to the Standards as “national standards being dictated from Washington” (External Resource). With labels such as these, hesitation to support will continue to exist among Republican followers.

In the last couple of years as opposition for Common Core has grown, the effects of implementation have also become a source of reasoning behind the opposition force. Several states have questioned Common Core, but specifically in Tennessee, the Standards have been opposed within every group involved: teacher, parents, school administration, and government officials. A study of state teacher satisfaction conducted by Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee showed an obvious drop from the sixty-three percent of educators who favored the Standards in 2013 (Brasher) to the thirty-nine percent of Tennessee teachers who supported the Standards in 2014 (Ballou). This decrease, however, is not completely because of a disapproval of the Standards themselves, but more of a dissatisfaction with the actual requirements of the Common Core legislation. Teachers are primarily uncomfortable with how much of their approval depends on standardized test scores and student performance. Educators point to psychological studies that show that an unhealthy home environment, lack of peaceful sleep atmosphere, or an insufficient amount of food eaten each day affects student performance arguably more than a teacher’s capabilities to help the student learn material. A discussion to

change this aspect of the standards could make teachers in Tennessee slightly more comfortable, however in Tennessee along with other states, there exists a question about the actual curriculum.

Julia Campbell, an experienced teacher from New York who has educated both before and during the implementation of the Standards, wrote an op-ed piece to the *Washington Post* exposing several issues with the English portion of the Standards. She expresses concern with the promotion of strictly evidence-based claims as legitimate. The Common Core curriculum engrains in students the idea that no matter what they claim, if it can be proven with evidence it must be factual. Though this initially sounds logical in light of real world issues, Ms. Campbell found several questionable examples of exam responses where students had manipulated evidence to prove a claim, which was correct according to the Standards, however their claims were quite ludicrous. She is legally prohibited from discussing specific problems, however she states, “The truth is, not all claims are correct and not all evidence is created equal. Making a feeble claim and using evidence out of context to support that claim is an all too common occurrence on these tests” (Strauss). Ms. Campbell’s is not the only concern voiced in recent months. There is a growing discontent with the subjectivity of a curriculum that was sold to the states by being described as empirically based and a factual representation of what students are required to know.

Opposition to the Standards also exists because of a skepticism with the original task force that developed Common Core. Because of the substantial funding provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, there is a question of how much their personal choices or developers were used. Also, though education “experts” were involved in the formation of the Standards, there was a lack of actual educators, students, and parents who contributed to their formation. This is logically viewed as unfair to these groups who work in the field on a daily basis. This fact

along with mounting concerns about the actual curriculum itself, teacher evaluations attached to student performance, and the fact that Common Core is a direct output of the federal government is what creates a strong opposition force that prevents Common Core from sustaining implementation. Conservative idealists in the form of the Republican party, research institutes such as the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the actual implementers of the Standards represent an active and passionate opposition to Common Core State Standards.

To conclude, Common Core State Standards have had a relatively rough transition into implementation because of the increased challenge they represent compared to the previously individualized state standards. Though opposition for the Standards are loud and clearly present, there has been proven success. As previously discussed, the Standards are designed to help employers and they are satisfied and want to see further implementation and challenging educational experiences. However, the fact that Common Core was created without the input of teachers and students and the fact that subjective elements of the curriculum are actually counterproductive to factual skills training, I propose an education plan that maintains states' rights, involves the most knowledgeable parties, and still maintains challenging standards that compete with the rest of the world.

## **POLICY PROPOSAL**

First, after analyzing the primary successes of and issues with the Standards, I believe that the premise of national education legislation should begin with challenging curriculum development by a third-party conference group that is not a government entity. The conference should be composed of one experienced educator from each state, one high school senior per state, and one education expert per state who can be the voice of each state's individual

demographics and industries. Along with these state delegations, I believe the conference should have two foreign representatives from countries with successful uniform education standards, and these representatives should show a complex knowledge of education systems and experience in the field either as an educator or an expert. Also, the conference should include representatives from the largest employers in the United States in every industry. I believe the answer to Common Core dissatisfaction and most educational problems is increased partnership between employers and school systems. Instead of being federally funded and connected to whichever party's administration is in control at the time, the states will split the financial burden of the conference and fund it either with taxpayer dollars or lottery revenues or any other funding method. The task of the conference will be simple: determine the bare benchmarks of understanding that students should reach each year. They must produce a simple written outline of what students should be able to without creating curriculums or mandating teaching techniques. The representatives of the companies will serve as Chairmen or women of the conference since education is being negotiated to meet their needs. Any benchmark that is proposed and decided on must be complete with a clear and objective way to affirm that it has been met or it has not been met, and this must be quantifiable to avoid subjective education. After these benchmarks are created, it will be put into United States legal code that states must produce education results that meet the benchmarks. States would not be able to choose whether or not to implement the benchmarks and achieve them; since they sent representatives who had a voice in creating the benchmarks, they are then legally obligated to meet them.

With this being said, curriculum development is completely left to the states. States design their curriculum however they please, and are not even required to have a state-wide curriculum. Individual teachers can determine how they will teach the benchmarks, as long as

they are met. To measure benchmarks, I believe that standardized tests are an effective and efficient way, and that standardized tests reflecting the benchmarks should be created at the time the benchmarks are created. Eighty percent of the students in a state must reach the benchmarks for that state to be successful. If a state is not successful, I propose that instead of a federal funds cut or a redistricting of school zones, school will be required to be in session extra days each year for each percentage point they fall below eighty percent. Also, I believe that teachers in states that fail should be required to teach at different schools in their school zone or area for one day per week. This will give students in “failing” schools a chance to be taught by more effective educators. This is obviously not ideal, but it is a punishment for failing to meet benchmark standards.

To reward teachers for this sacrifice, their evaluation and licensure continuation would rely on less-high stakes in my proposal. Student success on standardized tests is important, however evidence pointing to the effect of home factors on students’ grades cannot be denied. Because of this, I propose that standardized test scores only account for twenty percent of teacher evaluations. I believe the other eighty percent should be split between video review of a teacher’s actual classroom activities and interviews with state employers. Once again, I believe partnership with employers is crucial for education standards. I propose that representatives from the top employers in the state be available to interview educators and ensure they are teaching in a manner that will produce able and skilled workers. Teachers must be extensively interviewed once per year. I am not an education expert, and these are only my unrealistic ideas after delving into the Common Core State Standards initiative that has been the topic of extensive discussion in recent years. Without a doubt, United States education standards need to rise and need to be implemented onto students and teachers. Students will not readily engage in more difficult

coursework, and educators will not teach it without it being legally required, which is a dire necessity for our education system. I personally agree with the hard-working Republican rhetoric that difficulty in education only produces more ambitious and successful workers. I believe in high standards and corporate sponsorship in education, while maintaining states' power, and I hope my legislative policy ideas reflect this and answer to the successes and shortcomings of Common Core State Standards.



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