

## **11. Who supports the Common Core and why?**

Arguments supporting the Common Core fall in three basic categories: the new standards' superiority to current state standards, the ease of moving from state to state made possible by the standards, and the benefits of standardized curricula and assessments. The support for the standards by liberals such as Joel Stein (former chancellor of the New York City Schools) and Michelle Rhee (former chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools) is not surprising. But several prominent conservatives are also backing the Common Core based on these three main arguments.

The first argument—superiority to state standards—was born out of the havoc wreaked by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Desperate to show student proficiency under the utopian demands of NCLB, many states dropped their standards so drastically that only two states had standards for 8th-grade mathematics that reached the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proficiency threshold, and no states had standards that fulfilled the NAEP requirements for reading proficiency.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, students in some states could be labeled “proficient” after correctly answering fewer than 50% of the questions on assessments.<sup>2</sup>

Supporters of the Common Core contend that it will rebuild these crumbled state standards. Chester E. Finn, Jr., president of the Fordham Institute, bases his support on a Fordham Institute study that found that the Common Core will boost the English language arts standards in 37 states and the mathematics standards in 39 states.<sup>3</sup> Jeb Bush and Chris Christie also support the Common Core for this reason.<sup>4</sup>

Though proponents assert that the Common Core will remedy the failures of NCLB, there is a lack of education experts endorsing the Common Core. Jay P. Greene, professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas, warns:

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<sup>1</sup> Neal McCluskey, *Behind the Curtain: Assessing the Case for National Curriculum Standards*, Policy Analysis 661 (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2010), 4, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa661.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> John Cronin et al., *The Proficiency Illusion*, (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute and Northwest Evaluation Association, 2007), accessed June 12, 2013, [http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2007/200710\\_theproficiencyillusion/Proficiency\\_Illusion\\_092707.pdf](http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2007/200710_theproficiencyillusion/Proficiency_Illusion_092707.pdf); and Tabitha Grossman, Ryan Reyna, and Stephanie Shipton, *Realizing the Potential: How Governors Can Lead Effective Implementation of the Common Core State Standards* (National Governors Association, 2011), 6, accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1110CCSSIIMPLEMENTATIONGUIDE.PDF>.

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Byrd Carmichael et al., *The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010* (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, July 21, 2012), 3, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/the-state-of-state-of-standards-and-the-common-core-in-2010.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Jeb Bush and Joel Klein, “The Case for Common Educational Standards,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 23, 2011, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304070104576399532217616502.html>; and “Christie Administration Takes Action to Implement Building Block of High Academic Standards in New Jersey Schools,” State of New Jersey Press Release, September 13, 2011, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/news/552011/approved/20110913a.html>.

The only evidence in support of Common Core consists of projects funded directly or indirectly by the Gates Foundation in which panels of selected experts are asked to offer their opinion on the quality of Common Core standards. . . . The few independent evaluations of Common Core that exist suggest that its standards are mediocre and represent little change from what most states already have.<sup>5</sup>

The second argument raised for the Common Core is academic mobility:

The standards will provide more clarity about and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country . . . . This initiative will allow states to share information effectively and help provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education that will prepare them to go to college or enter the workforce, regardless of where they live. . . . [Common standards] will ensure more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences through curriculum, instruction, and teacher preparation among other supports for student learning.<sup>6</sup>

Finn also employs this argument, saying that the Common Core allows families “in our highly mobile society” the opportunity “to enroll their kids seamlessly in schools that are teaching the same things at the same grade levels.”<sup>7</sup>

In attempting to further the mobility argument, Finn ironically undercuts an important point in the case for the Common Core. Proponents must show that the Common Core does not lead to a national curriculum, because a national curriculum is prohibited by federal law. But if the mobility argument is to stand, it requires a national curriculum. Gaps in education when a student transfers from a school in Vermont to a school in Texas can only be avoided if the *same* things are being taught at the *same* time across the entire nation.

The final argument—the benefits of standardization—hinges on the premise that one textbook, or just a few aligned with the Common Core, would be an improvement over the numerous and

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<sup>5</sup> Jay P. Greene, “Testimony before the United States House of Representatives Education and Workforce Committee,” U.S. House of Representatives, September 21, 2011, accessed June 12, 2013, [http://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/09.21.11\\_greene.pdf](http://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/09.21.11_greene.pdf). Most vocal supporters were involved in the writing or evaluation of the Common Core, such as David Cole, now president of the College Board, who has since announced that the SAT will be aligned with the Common Core standards.

<sup>6</sup> Frequently Asked Questions, Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/frequently-asked-questions/>, in Robert S. Eitel and Kent D. Talbert, “The Road to a National Curriculum: The Legal Aspects of the Common Core Standards, Race to the Top, and Conditional Waivers,” *Engage* (The Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies) 13, no. 1 (2012), accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.fed-soc.org/publications/detail/the-road-to-a-national-curriculum-the-legal-aspects-of-the-common-core-standards-race-to-the-top-and-conditional-waivers>.

<sup>7</sup> Chester E. Finn, Jr., “The War against the Common Core,” *Flypaper* (blog), Thomas B. Fordham Institute, March 1, 2012, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-weekly/2012/march-1/the-war-against-the-common-core-1.html>.

varied textbooks available today. Bill Gates explains, “It’s ludicrous . . . to think that multiplication in Alabama and multiplication in New York are really different.”<sup>8</sup> In 2008, the Mathematics Advisory Board told the Department of Education that textbooks in the United States have become bloated trying to cater to the standards of every state.<sup>9</sup> William Bennett, secretary of education under Ronald Reagan and founder of K12 Online Learning, adds a sociological element to this argument by emphasizing that the common knowledge imparted by the Common Core will lead to more fervent national discussions.<sup>10</sup>

Without diverse curriculum options that enhance the ability of teachers to tailor lessons to their students, quality of education will inevitably suffer. Will curriculum material be influenced by anyone other than wealthy benefactors and the few professors writing curriculum? Will regionalisms be lost? Is it even possible for national discussion to flourish if no student has any unique knowledge to contribute?

The argument for the superiority of Common Core standards is poorly documented, and the only other arguments for the standards implode upon inspection. The arguments against the Common Core, however, are increasingly substantiated.

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Loveless, *The 2012 Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning?* Brown Center Report on Education Policy, vol. 3, no. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings, 2012), 7, accessed June 12, 2013, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/newsletters/0216\\_brown\\_education\\_loveless.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/newsletters/0216_brown_education_loveless.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> National Mathematics Advisory Panel, *Foundations for Success: The Final Report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2008), xxiv, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/report/final-report.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> William Bennett, “*A Nation at Risk*” 30 Years Later: *The State of American Education*, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, April 26, 2013, videorecording, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.edexcellence.net/events/a-nation-at-risk-30-years-later.html>.