

8. Does the Common Core lead to a national curriculum?

“To make standards meaningful, they have to be integrated with changes in curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy.”⁸⁶ The words of Jay P. Greene, professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas, regarding the Common Core are proving prophetic, because implementing the Common Core is requiring states to substantially alter their curricula.⁸⁷

School officials have recognized the need for massive curriculum changes since 2011 when 64% of the officials surveyed by the Council of Chief School Superintendents Officials (CCSSO), one of the authors of the Common Core, said that their states would need completely new or significantly revised math curriculum in order to implement the Common Core. Fifty-six percent responded identically concerning their English language arts curriculum.⁸⁸ As of 2012, 29 states had developed new curriculum aligned to the Common Core.⁸⁹

Though the implementation of the Common Core is supposed to be “state-led,” the continued involvement of the federal government and the authors of the standards indicates that the Common Core is intended to realize a national curriculum. The federal government is prohibited by three sets of laws from prescribing a national curriculum, but the Department of Education has paid other organizations to do what it cannot.

The consortia receiving millions from the federal government to write standardized assessments are also being paid to produce curriculum guides for their 42 member states. The Performance Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium stressed in its application for a supplemental Race to the Top award that it would develop “model instructional units” for teachers. It received \$15.9 million to fund these efforts.⁹⁰ U.S. Secretary of Education

⁸⁶ Lindsey Burke, “Publicizing the Hidden Costs of the National Standards Push,” Education Notebook: Heritage Foundation, accessed June 7, 2013, <http://links.heritage.org/hostedemail/email.htm?h=ec4d3bd2a208dbd824288c7fa9ecb9c4&CID=9795639416&ch=2E03C8C87B70F318B54BE93A9A394F60>.

⁸⁷ As part of being members of a consortium or receiving Race to the Top funding, states are bound to implement all of the Common Core standards and may supplement the list with only 15% of their own standards. “Notice Inviting Applications,” *Federal Register* 75 no. 68 (April 9, 2010): 18171, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-04-09/pdf/2010-8176.pdf>.

⁸⁸ *Common Core State Standards: Progress and Challenges in School Districts’ Implementation*, Center on Education Policy, September 2011.

⁸⁹ *Moving Forward: A National Perspective on States’ Progress in Common Core State Standards Implementation Planning* (Education First and Editorial Projects in Education, Inc., February 2013), 7, accessed June 10, 2013, http://www.edweek.org/media/movingforward_ef_epe_020413.pdf.

⁹⁰ *PARCC Proposal for Supplemental Race to the Top Assessment Award* (Performance Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, December 23, 2010), accessed June 11, 2013, <http://www.edweek.org/media/parccsupplementalproposal12-23achievetfinal.pdf>; Joseph Conaty, *Race to the Top: SBAC Award Letter* (U.S. Department of Education, September 28, 2010), accessed June 11, 2013, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/sbac-award-letter.pdf>.

Arne Duncan affirmed that “PARCC . . . will be developing curriculum frameworks.”⁹¹ Similarly, the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium promised to build “curriculum materials . . . to support states’ transition to the Common Core State Standards” and was rewarded with \$15.9 million.⁹² The efforts of the federal government to develop curriculum models confirm the analysis of two members of the Common Core Validation Committee who refused to sign the standards: the Common Core is “a laudable effort to shape a national curriculum.”⁹³

The groundwork for a national curriculum is also being laid by groups of states and private organizations collaborating to develop common curricula. In an effort funded by the Gates Foundation, the states of New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Colorado have started creating an open-source “platform” that will allow teachers to download and share resources aligned to the Common Core. The platform will be available to all states in 2014.⁹⁴ Additionally, Achieve, one of the organizations that advised the National Governors Association (NGA) and CCSSO during the drafting of the Common Core, has partnered with those same groups to produce model curricula for the states.⁹⁵

Implementation instructions for the states written by the authors of the Common Core suggest that a national curriculum is the goal of the standards. NGA recommends that “States and districts . . . share the costs of developing new curricula and instructional tools and not each develop their own at greater expense for each.”⁹⁶ The Common Core, Inc., calls for cooperation between the states to ensure that math standards are “translated into textbooks, workbooks, diagnostic tests for teacher use, and other classroom materials that enable teachers to bring the curriculum into the classroom in a relatively *consistent*, effective way” (emphasis added).⁹⁷

⁹¹ Arne Duncan, “Beyond the Bubble Tests: The Next Generation of Assessments,” Department of Education, September 2, 2010, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/beyond-bubble-tests-next-generation-assessments-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-state-l>.

⁹² *Supplemental Funding Scope: Overview Table* (SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, January 16, 2011), accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Smarter-Balanced-Supplemental-Funds.pdf>.

Conaty, *SBAC Award Letter*, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/sbac-award-letter.pdf>.

⁹³ Sandra Stotsky and Ze’ev Wurman, “Common Core’s Standards Still Don’t Make the Grade: Why Massachusetts and California Must Regain Control over Their Academic Destinies,” *A Pioneer Institute White Paper* no. 65 (July 2010): iii, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/common-cores-standards-still-dont-make-the-grade/>.

⁹⁴ 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), 24, accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1110CCSSIIMPLEMENTATIONGUIDE.PDF>.

⁹⁵ “Model Course Pathways in Mathematics,” Achieve, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.achieve.org/mathpathways>.

⁹⁶ Grossman, Reyna, and Shipton, *Realizing the Potential*, 25, accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1110CCSSIIMPLEMENTATIONGUIDE.PDF>.

⁹⁷ Craig D. Jerald, *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education* (NGA, CCSSO, and Achieve, 2008), 26, accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.achieve.org/files/BenchmarkingforSuccess.pdf>.

The Department of Education acknowledged in its announcement of Race to the Top that standards are supposed to affect curriculum.⁹⁸ Those who support the Common Core also recognize that standards are intended to mold curriculum.

Kathleen Porter-Magee, a fervent supporter of the Common Core, explains, “While one could choose to pit those two policy advancements against each other (standards versus curriculum), a much more logical way to view it is that while strong standards provide a solid foundation, you still need to build the schoolhouse.”⁹⁹

One of the main arguments for implementation of the Common Core is that it will increase the ability of families to move from one state to another without interrupting their child’s education. But completely uninterrupted education is only possible if the *same* material is taught at the *same* time across the entire country.

Academic standards are meaningless if they do not shape the curriculum used. If this movement to nationalize curriculum continues, it will endanger the ability of homeschools and private schools to choose their own curriculum.

Former deputy general counsel of the Department of Education Robert S. Eitel and former general counsel Kent D. Talbert warn, “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 and raising a fundamental question about whether the Department is exceeding its statutory boundaries.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ See *Federal Register* 74 no. 221 (18 November 2009): 59836, <http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2009-4/111809a.html>.

⁹⁹ Kathleen Porter-Magee, “No Love for Common Core? Why Tom Misses the Mark with His Critique,” Thomas B. Fordham Institute, February 17, 2012, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-daily/common-core-watch/2012/no-love-for-common-core.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Robert S. Eitel and Kent D. Talbert, “The Road to a National Curriculum: The Legal Aspects of the Common Core Standards, Race the Top, and Conditional Waivers,” *A Pioneer Institute White Paper* no. 81 (February 2012): 15.