

# ARKANSAS TIMES

## First the Blueway: Now the Common Core school standards

By: Max Brantley – July 22, 2013

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The legislature's education committees are meeting today and tomorrow and a hot topic is the Common Core standards, a bipartisan effort that arose from the state's governors and school officials to devise a unified set of goals for American education.

Sigh. It has become the latest conspiracy-theory-run-amuck for the extreme rightwing. Attacking the Common Core is a tea party fave. It's so extreme, that even some arch-conservative education think tanks (the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, to name one) have risen in defense and will be among those testifying in Arkansas.

When Sen. Jason Rapert started Tweeting concern about the Common Core, you knew where this was headed. The question is whether the wackjobs can rout the education establishment like they routed the conservation establishment on the White River Blueway.

The Billionaire Boys Club, in the form of the Gates Foundation, has provided a lot of the support for the effort to set a comprehensive agenda for grades K-12. The Washington Post explains here about the Tea Party warpath. The fear now is that states will back away from the Common Core and thus ruin the central idea of having the whole country pulling together toward a common goal of matching education standards in other countries.

Some of the objections that will be raised in the Arkansas hearings are alleged de-emphasis of literature for non-fiction writing, fuzzy arithmetic standards and a potential for privacy invasion in use of the data. The other side is prepared to rebut all that. But if the debate runs to form, the fear of the unknown — or fear of potential harm — will outweigh facts in the discussion, along with the abiding belief that government is always bad.

After receiving the Fordham Insitute's prepared remarks for delivery tomorrow in defense of Common Core, my first reaction was to suggest a pox on all of them. Sample of its overheated defense:

In all of these ways, they are miles better than three-quarters of the state standards they replaced—including those previously in place in Arkansas — standards that hardly deserve the name and that often pushed the left-wing drivel that Common Core critics say they abhor.

We see the Common Core as a conservative triumph. The standards are solid and traditional. They don't give in to moral relativism, blame-America-first, or so many other liberal nostrums that have infected our public schools.

Going to be a lot of drivel and nostrums heard in the education committees today and tomorrow, and not solely from the liberal side. But, hey. What's new?

As the Fordham Institute shows, the players don't necessarily fall precisely where you might expect them to fall. For example, one outspoken critic of the Common Core is Sandra Stotsky, who's been on the payroll at the Walton U. education reform school in Fayetteville. Here, she draws some defense of her criticism of English standards from none other than Diane Ravitch, normally a dedicated foe of the Walton-paid reformists.

I'll be on the lookout for local testimony highlights and lowlights.

I don't expect the Beebe administration or Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell to back off their Common Core support, by the way. Here's the state homepage on Common Core, for more information on what it's about. Says Kimbrell there:

"All Arkansas students deserve an education that prepares them for college and careers. Access to a college and career ready education shouldn't be determined by a student's ZIP code. That's where Common Core comes in."

Forget this nonsense about national standards says the likes of the Cato Institute. What's needed is school "choice" — aka vouchers and quasi-private charter schools funded with public money.