

# EDUCATION WEEK

## Common Core "State" Standards Test Items to Get Federal Review

By: [Anthony Cody](#) – April 3, 2013

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Neal McClusky at the Cato at Liberty blog highlighted some news yesterday related to the Common Core.

Yesterday news came out that made clear just how serious--and unfunny--concerns about a federal takeover are. According to Education Week, the U.S. Department of Education will start a "technical review process" for the Department-selected consortia creating the national tests to go with the standards. And what will that review look at? Not compliance with accounting standards or something administrative, but test "item design and validation." That means, most likely (in-depth information from the Department was off-line as of this writing) reviewing the specific questions that will go on the tests. And what is tested, of course, ultimately dictates what is taught, at least if the test results are to have any concrete impact, ranging from whether students advance to the next grade, to whether schools gain or lose funding. Since the ultimate point of uniform standards is to have essentially uniform accountability from state to state, they will have to have some concrete impact, rendering this a clear next step in a major Federal incursion into curricula.

The reason this is significant is that the Federal government is forbidden, under the law that created the Department of Education, from establishing "national standards." That was part of the deal made by Congress when the Department of Ed was created under the Carter administration.

Secretary of Arne Duncan has insisted quite indignantly that the Common Core is a state-led initiative. When pressed by John Merrow in 2011 about the expanding role the federal Department of Education was playing, he said this:

Well, it's not more control over education. It IS saying where states are raising standards, we want to give them room to hit those higher standards. Right now under the current law, they get penalized for doing the right thing. And I just think we have to give a lot more flexibility, a lot more autonomy, so I would argue it's a narrower, a smaller federal footprint, a lot more autonomy, a lot more flexibility at the local level. I am frankly trying to get Washington out of the way.

But Washington -- and the Gates Foundation -- are pretty much everywhere you look in the Common Core project. The states were given significant incentives under Race to the Top to sign on the "career and college ready standards," with the Common Core being the primary means to accomplish this. And now we see that the test items themselves will undergo technical review in a process managed by the Department of Education.

It is significant also that this analysis comes from the conservative/Libertarian source,

the Cato Institute. As I have noted, opposition to the Common Core is rising in conservative circles, where people have historically been against Federal involvement in schools. The debacle of No Child Left Behind left educators weary, and as Common Core has been promoted as an improvement, many have embraced the shift. I have been a skeptic from the start, because I believe that the primary goal of the new standards is the creation of uniform high stakes assessments. Thus this will create MORE pressure to teach to the tests, rather than less. Whatever flexibility we experience during the transition period will be lost when the inevitable tests arrive.

This report on Cincinnati, Ohio, local Fox News affiliate shows how the reaction to the Common Core is developing.