



## Does PolitiFact Favor Common Core?

By Merrill Hope

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*PolitiFact* [weighed in](#) on the recent *FOX News Sunday* [Common Core debate](#) between Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Bill Bennett, Secretary of Education under President George HW Bush. Interestingly, the famed *Truth-O-Meter* only zapped Abbott. Bennett, who claimed to make the “conservative case” for the Common Core, remained unscathed. Bennett previously admitted that “he is paid by a lobbying firm for his continued work in support of the controversial standards,” which *Breitbart News* [reported](#).

Does *PolitiFact* favor the Common Core? They have a history of [claiming](#) there is little federal intervention in the Common Core State Standards. *PolitiFact* Florida which runs in the *Miami Herald* and the *Tampa Bay Times* and covered the debate between Abbott and Bennett, has [pushed](#) Common Core rhetoric. *PolitiFact* Georgia [called](#) Common Core “a set of educational guidelines aimed at creating uniformed standards for student proficiency in several subjects.”

In 2013, the *Wisconsin Watchdog Reporter* [nailed](#) *PolitiFact* Wisconsin with a failing grade for its [fact-checking](#) on the reformer standards and the role of the federal government in public education.

In the *FOX News Sunday* debate, *PolitiFact* gave Abbott a “half truth” on the statement it takes “more than a minute” to teach a student “how to add nine plus six.” In their reporting, *PolitiFact* told readers to watch the “nine plus six” [video](#) and panned to Bennett’s reaction. He said he had not viewed the footage but added, “if it’s crazy, it probably isn’t Common Core. It’s probably one of these myths that’s developed.”

*PolitiFact* insisted that Common Core math was not “a bizarre concept.” They added that the math was “in line with what “Common Core drafters had in mind.”

In 2013, *FOX News* [reported](#) that one of Common Core’s most glaring deficiencies is its handling of adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing numbers. They noted, “The classic method of, for example, adding two-digit numbers is to add the digits in the “ones” column, carry the remainder to the “tens” column, and then add the “tens” digits. This “standard

algorithm” works first time, every time. But instead of teaching this method, which enables students to solve problems quickly and routinely, Common Core creates a two-step process. The first is to let students choose from several alternative algorithms (number lines, estimating, etc.) for doing one-digit additions, subtractions, and multiplications.”

*Breitbart News* also [exposed](#) the torment of a seven-year-old girl brought to tears over the laborious calculation process of the Common Core.

*Truth in American Education* has even [displayed](#) page after page of Common Core math problems that pretty much illustrated the governor’s point. “Nine plus six” is a drop in the bucket next to Common Core math [lattices](#).

Yet, *PolitiFact* has given [the federal role in Common Core repeated passes](#). Even in the debate, Bennett admitted that the government put its “big foot” onto Common Core through Race to the Top, the contest in which states vied and were awarded federal taxpayer dollars that, in essence, brought them into Fed Led Ed family.

In 2013, the CATO Institute’s Neal McCluskey [likened](#) adopting the Common Core “in principle, no more voluntary than having a mugger take your [taxpayer] — then let you ‘voluntarily’ hand him the keys to your car to get the dough back.”

Last year, *Breitbart News* [reported](#) on Sen. Chuck Grassley’s letter which explained how the federal government pressured states to adopt the Common Core standards through the lure of the money and waivers from the federal education restrictions associated with No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

US Department of Education (USDE) Secretary Arne Duncan [threatened](#) the Common Core state of California when it pushed to opt-out of the high-stakes testing in 2013. Indiana, and Oklahoma all opted out of the Common Core and all lost their NCLB waivers. Washington lost its waiver for failing to implement promised changes to the state’s teacher and principal evaluation system.

Texas is one state that did not adopt Common Core yet had to [revamp its teacher and principal evaluation system](#) to get the [NCLB waiver](#). The state has not implemented but only piloted the new evaluation system, which *Breitbart Texas* [reported](#). The USDE recently denied the Texas application to renew its NCLB waiver because it does not comply to federal standards.

The *Montgomery County Courier* [reported](#) that Texas Education Commissioner Williams said in response to the waiver denial letter, “I have always made it clear to federal officials that as part of the waiver process, TEA could not exceed its current authority nor would we do anything to erode our state’s strong commitment to local control in public education. My position on this front has not, and will not, change.”

The state has until March 31 to resubmit the waiver with the changes that the USDE expects to see to renew the waiver. The *Courier* added that almost all of Texas public schools “will be fined for not meeting NCLB guidelines” if they are not granted a new waiver.

Williams said that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) only “pursued this federal waiver at the urging of the state’s superintendents and educators,” according to the *Courier*.

Sorry PolitiFact but the Truth-O-Meter is having some trouble gauging the federal role in public education.

Amelia Chassé, Press Secretary for Governor Abbott, spoke with *Breitbart Texas*. “Common Core is a heavy-handed, top-down attempt by the federal government to force states into adopting a national curriculum – a one size fits all approach that has no place in Texas schools,” she said.

Chassé added that the Governor “understands that each child is unique and believes Texas should establish genuine local control by giving school districts operational flexibility over their schools and empowering families to make meaningful educational choices for their children.”

*PolitiFact* remained provocative in its article, quoting Valerie Mills, president of the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics. She said, “The general belief is that the Texas state standards are modeled word for word on the Common Core state standards.”

It [linked](#) to the *National Public Radio* (NPR) Austin affiliate, which explained that Common Core and the Texas state education standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills (TEKS), were not the same but similar. Randy Bomer, Curriculum and Instruction Chair at the University of Texas College of Education said that both Common Core and the TEKS “emphasize what they call college and career readiness.”

Grassley, in his letter, also underscored that the USDE “made the adoption of “college- and career-ready standards” meeting the description of the Common Core a condition to receive an NCLB waiver.”

Last year, *Breitbart Texas* [reported](#) on those disconcerting similarities in Texas public education through the 2013 revamp of the high school graduation requirements passed into law under House Bill 5. In March, Rep. Jimmie Don Aycock (R-Killeen), who championed the bill, [praised](#) Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessments (TAMSA) at the SXSWedu 2014 Austin-held conference for the progressive activist group’s behind-the-scenes “political trades” and deals that influenced HB 5 legislation and adoption.

In 2013, former Governor Perry signed House Bill 462, which banned Common Core in Texas, however, it was not iron-clad. *Breitbart Texas* [reported](#) on its vulnerabilities and looked at multiple episodes where [Common Core materials](#) seeped into the classroom. As former Attorney General, Governor Abbott rendered a legal opinion in 2014: “[No Common Core in Texas](#).” Even the Texas State Republican Party education subcommittee added a plank to the state’s GOP platform whereby violators who [use Common Core, lose state funding](#).

TEA spokeswoman Debbie Ratcliffe spoke to *Breitbart Texas*. She emphasized that Texas has long opposed Common Core and was one of the first states to go on record in opposition to the creation of essentially national standards.

She commented that two things may be confusing people. “Texas recently implemented new math standards this year,” she said. “This occurred at the same time other states were implementing Common Core so that has led some poorly informed people to believe that Texas was implementing Common Core.”

Ratcliffe then pointed out a second issue that deals with “overlapping content.” She told *Breitbart Texas*, “There is some content found in both the Texas standards and the Common Core. Two plus two equals four is taught under both systems.”

She wanted to clarify that just because two plus two equals four is taught under Common Core and if Texas schools are teaching it, that is only because it is in the Texas standards.