



Common Core Fight Shadows Presidential Campaign

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Grassroots anger against the Common Core education standards has spilled into the emerging 2016 presidential campaign. Much is at stake as potential candidates stake out their positions.

Forty-six states adopted Common Core in 2010. The original goal was to create national standards in English and math that would better prepare students for college and career needs.

For many states struggling in the Great Recession, the decision was easy. The federal Department of Education encouraged adoption, offering a total of \$4 billion in Race to the Top grant funding for those states that adopted the standards.

Dr. Neal McCluskey is the associate director of the CATO Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

"Most people weren't even aware it was happening. It wasn't until two or three years later when districts were finally at the level of implementation and states said, 'Okay -- schools and districts, now you have to implement these things,' that the public even became aware and when they became aware they became angry," he explained.

For many parents, the way Common Core makes many basic math problems more complicated with multiple steps has been a major source of frustration. Parents across the country have complained that they don't understand their children's elementary school math homework. Their frustration has led to jokes and criticism across social media.

Parents have also realized that Common Core has led them to lose control of their local schools. They're concerned that they can't change the standards because they're copyrighted and the standards have ended up driving both curriculum and testing.

New York state parent Mitchell Rubinstein told CBN News that he was shocked by the way Common Core quickly changed his children's school.

"It was never publicized and there were certainly never any public hearings or discussions among parents about the fact that this was going to be a major paradigm shift in how almost everything happens in school," he said.

Since the implementation of the standards, parents have organized social media networks and campaigns on Facebook and Twitter, catching the attention of school officials and lawmakers.

"Many parents, rightly so, are up in arms about the policy and in many cases they're lashing out at Washington bureaucrats," Jessica Anderson, grassroots director for Heritage Action for America, told CBN News.

Anderson said these parents want their states to reject the Core. So far, four states have done that.

Now, potential presidential candidates, like Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, are seizing on the momentum.

"We need to remove Common Core from every classroom," he recently told a conservative audience at CPAC in Washington, D.C. Thunderous applause followed.

Jindal and Govs. Chris Christie, R-N.J., Scott Walker, R-Wis., and former Gov. Mike Huckabee, R-Ark., once supported the standards but now oppose them. Sens. Rand Paul, R-Ky., Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., all opposed the Core.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush, R-Fla., is the only potential candidate who supports it.

"He has been perhaps the primary conservative proponent of Common Core, and lots of other candidates want to pin that on him because this is clearly a major federal intrusion into education," McCluskey explained.

Even with all the political fuss about federal over-reach it won't be easy to get rid of Common Core. Due to its links with federal funding and No Child Left Behind, states opting out will face financial and regulatory punishment so some states are going another route and simply refusing to use the Common Core tests.

"If you control the tests ultimately, you control what your schools teach," McCluskey said.

It's the perfect political storm: angry parents plus social media plus spotlight-seeking candidates. The hope is that this contentious debate will actually lead to better education for millions of American schoolchildren.