

THE DAILY CALLER

Fishy Polls On Common Core

By Robert Holland

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Never let it be said that Common Core entirely lacks educational value.

Consumers can learn a big, valuable lesson about polling that seeks to shape public opinion rather than honestly gauge it, by exercising even a little of the critical thinking proponents of these national standards claim to want mandated in all classrooms.

The one constant in the spate of polls being taken as Common Core heats up as a political issue is that a sizable portion of the population still knows little or nothing about how these curricular guidelines were developed or what they do. To some prominent pollsters, the knowledge gap is an opening to feed respondents an entirely positive portrayal and then ask them leading questions likely to elicit pro-Common Core responses.

A recent example was a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll done June 11–15, purporting to find support exceeds opposition to Common Core by almost a 2–1 margin. But first, the pollsters found almost half their participants said they had seen, read, or heard zilch about the national standards. So then *WSJ*/NBC “educated” them with the following description:

“The Common Core standards are a new set of education standards for English and math that have been set to internationally competitive levels and would be used in every state for students in grades K through 12.”

That is a grossly misleading description. It utterly ignores serious scholarly findings about weaknesses of the math and English standards and their lack of comparability to the best in the world. Furthermore, it fails to acknowledge heavy Obama administration pressure to get states signed up, or the growing number of states now bailing on Common Core testing and Common Core itself.

In a June 18 *Cato at Liberty* blogpost, Cato Institute education analyst Neil McCluskey likened the *WSJ*/NBC approach to failing to tell people that pufferfish are poisonous, then telling them “pufferfish are delicious and nutritious,” then finally asking, “would you like to eat some pufferfish?”

The first week of May, a survey by Republican pollster John McLaughlin used similar pufferfishy questioning to convert an almost equal split of opinion on Common Core (35 percent approval, 33 percent disapproval, 32 percent don’t know) to a whopping two-thirds level of support, by feeding respondents what it called a “simple, neutral” description. Again, it was anything but objective. It was Common Core puffery.

The political takeaway from McLaughlin was that Republicans should beware of opposing Common Core, because national standards will have a big upside with swing voters in the general election. Scribes from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a nominally conservative think tank, then sought to drive home that point with commentary warning Republican candidates that criticizing Common Core is a losing issue.

It would have been reasonable for media reporting on all this to have noted the McLaughlin Poll was commissioned by the Collaborative for Student Success, recipient of heavy funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has spent hundreds of millions of dollars both creating Common Core and now purchasing support for it. And Fordham also does PR for the Gates people.

Someone might ask Oklahoma state school superintendent Janet Barresi how much being a red-hot supporter of Common Core in a deep-red state helped her. Despite reportedly putting more than \$1 million of her own money into her campaign, she lost in a landslide to Common Core opponent Joy Hofmeister in the June 24 GOP primary. In fact, Barresi finished third with just 21 percent support.

Here and there, some polls are beginning to reflect the growing anger of citizens over undemocratically imposed nationalized standards they like less the more they find out about them. A little-noted University of Connecticut poll conducted the last week of April found just that: Opposition was highest among people who said they were most highly informed about Common Core.

Now, one of the polling heavyweights, Rasmussen Reports, has done a straightforward survey (June 21–22), using no leading or trick questions, and finds support for Common Core plummeting among parents with school-age children. Only 34 percent of those parents favor schools nationwide having to meet the so-called Common Core State Standards, a drop of 18 percentage points since a Rasmussen survey last November.

Citizens should closely scrutinize all public-opinion surveys for embedded bias. A critical assessment of the accumulating data indicates a growing proportion of parents who have brought themselves up to speed independently on Common Core — as opposed to being pollster-led — oppose this top-down imposition of shoddy, one-size-fits-all standards and subjective testing on their children.