

Common Core gets AWFUL review in new study

By Robby Soave

03/18/2014

Bad news for supporters of national education curriculum: States with education standards most closely aligned to Common Core fared worse on math tests than states with their own standards, according to a new study.

The study, [conducted by the Brookings Institution](#), compared standardized test scores for all 50 states over the last five years. It found that states using education standards that are most dissimilar to Common Core tended to score the highest on math.

Though the difference is small, it nevertheless undermines the claims of Common Core's high profile backers, which include President Obama's Department of Education, several moderate Republican governors, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

"Supporters of Common Core argue that strong, effective standards will sweep away such skepticism by producing lasting, significant gains in student learning," wrote the study's authors. "So far at least—and it is admittedly the early innings of a long ball game—there are no signs of such an impressive accomplishment."

States that followed a hybrid approach to standards — utilizing some aspects of the Common Core and some aspects of their own standards — fared worse than both full-Common Core states and non-Common Core states.

Common Core is an increasingly divisive issue. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Republican governors such as New Jersey's Chris Christie and Florida's Jeb Bush vigorously support its implementation. The Gates Foundation has poured millions of dollars into efforts to promote the standards. Thanks to heavy establishment support, the standards are currently being implemented in most of America's 50 states.

Grassroots conservatives — and even teachers unions, who oppose the standardized testing component — are pushing back, however, and full implementation is threatened in at least a few states.

Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute, noted that Brookings isn't typically known for publishing arch conservative opinions.

“This study, from the hardly Tea Party aligned Brookings Institution, is another nail in the coffin of the over-hyped promises of many Core advocates,” he told The Daily Caller.

The study provides useful evidence that Common Core in theory and Common Core in practice are two very different things, said McCluskey.

“It’s increasingly clear that even if the Core is a significant uptick in rigor over previous standards in many states—a contested ‘if’—translating that into improved academic performance is very difficult,” he said.

Joy Pullman, a research fellow at The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News, said that the Brookings study might not be quite so damning, but only because its research was based on a wildly flawed pro-Common Core study.

“The authors [of the original study] basically played with their data to push their conclusion that Common-Core lookalike states had higher performance,” she told TheDC. “So this new study bases its analysis on the old study’s rating scale, which itself is flawed.”

In either case, there’s little solid data to suggest that Common Core-aligned states perform better on math. Pullman pointed to a portion of the Brookings analysis that predicted Common Core would make no difference in students’ math performances for a least a quarter century.

“What a horrific condemnation of the piles of mandates, taxpayer money, teacher time, and disruption to students Common Core has caused,” she said. “All that — so far for nothing, and with no signs of any positive return in sight.”

It is a shame that Common Core implementation is so widespread, given the lack of evidence to support it, said McCluskey.

“What’s most unfortunate is that, thanks to federal coercion encouraged by Core supporters, we weren’t able to look at evidence like this before almost every state in the nation was pushed into adopting the Core,” he said.

The Obama administration incentivized adoption of the standards by tying implementation to federal grants — something that vexed even supporters of the standards, such as the Fordham Institute’s Michael Brickman.

U.S. Senate Republicans have recently proposed a resolution instructing Obama to stop coercing states into Common Core implementation.