



## Common Core Supporters Can't Demonstrate Its Effectiveness. Are They Counting On A Christmas Miracle?

By [Neal McCluskey](#)

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As any Christmas show will tell you, whether it's the rejuvenation of Charlie Brown's tree or the saving of George Bailey, 'tis the season for miracles! Perhaps in that spirit, several high-profile advocates for the Common Core national curriculum standards are promising, essentially, an educational miracle. But while we can always count on a miracle on 34th Street, the children who go to school there – or anywhere else – deserve real evidence the Core will work.

One prominent voice in this vain has been that of former Democratic Tennessee Congressman Harold Ford. In a [June op-ed](#), Ford claimed that “Common Core adoption means better schools, smarter students and a stronger America.” He cited no research on the quality of the Core, or the effect of academic standards generally. He just proclaimed it.

Ford doubled down on that tack in an op-ed just [a few weeks ago](#), and added that the recent elections proved that “parents want to continue with implementation of high standards and the results they promise.” But elections turn on much more than education, and one of the few Core supporters Ford referred to – New York Governor Andrew Cuomo – ran an ad highlighting a minimum five-year delay on putting Core scores on students' permanent records. This despite being a virtual shoo-in for reelection.

And public support is clearly lacking. A [Gallup poll](#) released in September indicated that 60 percent of the public opposed the Core, part of a clear trend of plummeting support.

Common Core has plenty of other notable advocates who've recently weighed in with words, if not evidence. University of Miami president and former Clinton administration official Donna Shalala [penned an op-ed](#) stating that the country needs Common Core to address “gender-based inequities” hurting female students. Not only did Shalala offer no evidence supporting the notion

that the Core would fix inequities, when it comes to college- and career-readiness – what the Core is supposed to put on turbo boost – women are outperforming men, 57 percent of college students are female and only 43 percent male, and women far surpass men in taking rigorous Advanced Placement courses in high school.

Finally, there's former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett, who twice since September has written pieces defending the Core. In [the first](#), Bennett stated that “we can all agree” the country needs a core curriculum and he suggested that all kids should read such works as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Illiad*. He then excoriated Core opponents for perpetuating the “myth...that Common Core involves a required reading list.” Why? Because the Common Core doesn't actually have the literature nucleus Bennett thinks essential.

In December Bennett [struck again](#), suggesting that since centralized standards and testing has so far failed (see No Child Left Behind), we should centralize even further. The illogic is almost self-evident, but more important is that he again failed to offer any actual evidence the Core would improve outcomes. Like Ford and Shalala, he just assumed it.

So why the evidentiary silence? Because there simply is no meaningful evidence for Core effectiveness.

The Core itself has never been tested. Indeed, in 2009 the federal government told states that to compete for Race to the Top funds they'd have to promise to adopt the Core before it was even fully written, much less tested.

More broadly, research on centralized standards suggests they make little difference. [Research on national-level standards](#) indicates that once you control for such things as wealth and culture, standards have no discernable academic effects. Looking at the state level, the Brookings Institution's Tom Loveless reported in 2012 that there is [little connection](#) between the rigor of standards and academic performance.

“Don't let the ferocity of the oncoming debate fool you,” Loveless wrote. “The empirical evidence suggests that the Common Core will have little effect on American students' achievement.”

Don't let Core supporters' rhetoric fool you, either. Miracles may happen all the time in Christmas tales, but education must be grounded in reality.

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