



## On Common Core, Washington still owns Indiana

Neal McCluskey

March 27, 2014

From an immediate political perspective, it's great news: This week, Gov. Mike Pence signed legislation making Indiana the first state to [officially drop the Common Core](#). (Four states never adopted it.) Now other states don't have to be the first to say "sayonara, Core," and anti-Core forces appear to have real political potency. But the change may well be superficial: While the new law officially dumps the standards called "Common Core," Hoosiers are still taking curricular orders – and quite possibly the Core by another name – from the federal government.

Here is the operative part of [the legislation](#):

“Before July 1, 2014, the state board shall adopt Indiana college and career readiness educational standards, voiding the previously adopted set of educational standards. The educational standards must do the following:(1)Meet national and international benchmarks for college and career readiness standards and be aligned with postsecondary educational expectations.(2) Use the highest standards in the United States.(3) Comply with federal standards to receive a flexibility waiver under 20 U.S.C. 7861, as in effect on January 1, 2014”

Unless I'm totally bleary eyed, there are two giant red flags billowing in the wind here.

The first is that points 1 and 2 call for meeting or beating some kind of national benchmark, and point 1 calls for hitting international benchmarks. To my knowledge, the only standards-producing group claiming to hit international benchmarks is the Common Core, and the Core is the only existing national benchmark. (The National Assessment of Educational Progress, to my knowledge, does not claim to offer “standards.”) At the very least, if the goal isn't to *de facto* stick with the Core – as some standards writers [claim is happening](#) – these points raise two mammoth questions: Who will determine if new Hoosier standards meet international and national benchmarks, and who will decide if they are “the highest standards in the United States”?

Unfortunately, point 3 likely gives the answer to these questions: the federal government – more specifically, the U.S. Secretary of Education – will decide whether Indiana's new standards cut the mustard. As No Child Left Behind waiver regulations currently stand, Indiana really only has two ways to meet the “college- and career-ready standards” provision: Either adopt the Common

Core – or some set of standards the secretary is willing to say are so close to the Core they are “common to a significant number of states” – or have a state college system declare the state’s standards college- and career-ready. And I don’t see the latter anywhere in the new law.

It is possible I am missing something – legislation, regulation, and unilateral waiver decisions can often be very opaque – but from what the statute seems to say, Indiana may be giving up the Core in name only. And even if it really can distance itself from the Core, Indiana doesn’t at all appear to be telling Washington, “we’ll run our own education system, thank you very much!”

There is one upside to this: It illustrates once again the great power of federal NCLB waivers, a power Core supporters [continue to disingenuously pretend](#) does not exist.

*McCluskey is the associate director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom.*