

Can't we all agree on a few Common Core facts? pundits ask in newspaper

By Danielle Dreilinger
September 2, 2014

The fight over the Common Core academic standards is so polarized, with so few points of agreement, that if the Gershwins were alive today they could rewrite their lyrics as "You like po-TAY-toe, I like supercallifragilisticexpialidocious." But two prominent Common Core pundits -- one pro, one con -- are insisting in the Washington Times that there are a few facts on which both sides should agree.

"The debate has been marked by acrimony rather than analysis, but there is hope that both sides want a reset," write Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute and Michael Petrilli of the Fordham Institute.

The standards set benchmarks for what children should be able to accomplish each year in mathematics and English. Louisiana public and Catholic schools are in their second year teaching to the standards. However, Gov. Bobby Jindal now has joined a conservative backlash that considers them federal coercion. Last week, he sued the federal Education Department.

Namely, Petrilli and McCluskey say:

- Most advocates are well-intentioned.
- The federal government did not create Common Core, and the effort predates Barack Obama's presidency. "However, federal involvement played an important role in the Core," by dangling financial incentives few states could resist.
- The standards do not require states to collect data or evaluate teachers.
- Common Core does not impose a set curriculum.

Jindal likely disagrees with that last point. His lawsuit argues that "Louisiana now finds itself trapped in a federal scheme to nationalize curriculum."

Petrilli and McCluskey are optimistic that civility may be returning, noting that people on both sides have asked for an end to name-calling. They want to move on to different questions: whether standards make a difference and whether the Common Core framework is good enough.