



A plea to Arizona Legislators regarding Common Core

By Heather Kays
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The Arizona House of Representatives Education Committee meeting on House Bill 2190 was strikingly similar to the landscape of American opinion on Common Core. Among the legislators and others who spoke at the meeting there were some supporters, some who were starkly against Common Core and some still on the fence.

The House bill to repeal and replace Common Core passed in a 5–2 vote on February 18 along party lines to move out of committee and onto the House floor.

According to both legislators and grassroots activists, since the committee approved the bill, the education establishment and its allies have mounted intense pressure to scrap HB 2190. The bill's opponents say opposition to Common Core is nothing more than "a popular conservative political tack."

All Arizona legislators should truly examine this issue and think before voting casting their votes. To so easily dismiss the voices of their constituents, including parents and teachers, would be a great disservice to Arizona's students, families, and taxpayers. Here are five reasons Arizona should repeal and replace Common Core.

First, even if forfeiting state and local control of education is a good idea (and it isn't), the standards should set the bar higher for students than Common Core does. Curriculum experts and educators across the country say the Core standards are mediocre at best.

Prominent among these critics is Sandra Stotsky, a professor of education at the University of Arkansas who served as senior associate commissioner at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, where she was in charge of developing the state's renowned K–12 English language standards. Stotsky was once a member of the validation committee for Common Core, but she refused to sign off on the standards once she saw how lackluster they are. Stanford University mathematics professor James Milgram is another former Common Core validation committee member who has since lambasted the standards.

Other professors across the country have joined policy analysts such as Jim Stergios of the Pioneer Institute, Lindsey Burke of The Heritage Foundation, and Neal McCluskey of the Cato

Institute to identify major flaws in the standards. Those against Common Core include teachers unions, Democrats and Republicans, and parents, teachers, and taxpayers.

Second, the standards do not meet the needs of many students. Common Core largely fails to help students who are on the highest and lowest ends of the achievement scale, because it prescribes specific methods as the only way to arrive at a correct answer. For special-needs students and younger students, especially in grades K–3, the standards are widely considered developmentally inappropriate, according to educators and child psychologists.

Third, the rigidity of the Common Core standards forces many teachers to build lesson plans based on what they think will be on a standardized test rather than based on students' needs. Standards, curricula, and assessments require different proposals, programs, and plans, although they are intrinsically interconnected.

The tests aligned with Common Core come from two consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced. The educational resources used by districts mostly come from three publishers vying for the same money. The big three publishers that sell products aligned with Common Core standards are Pearson, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and McGraw Hill. District officials purchase textbooks and other educational resources, so teachers follow standards set for them. Unless state officials select and implement different standards, the educational resources and assessments used will inevitably be aligned with Common Core. Given the extent to which standards and assessments affect curriculum development, it's obvious teachers have no room to decide what to teach and how to teach it if the state mandates use of Common Core.

Fourth, under both the U.S. Constitution and existing federal law, the states have full authority over education and curricula. State and local control is valuable because it leads to the incorporation of community values in education, parental involvement, and accountability to local taxpayers. Scientific evidence shows education standards do not improve student achievement.

Finally, states imposed Common Core not by their own choice but because of coercion by the federal government. State officials signed up for the standards because the Obama administration offered a chance to obtain billions of federal dollars through the Race to the Top program and threatened to remove No Child Left Behind waivers. To get that carrot and avoid the stick, state officials forfeited their own authority and the rights of the taxpayers. Even if Common Core is a valuable program (and again, it isn't), the price is far too high for its supposed benefits.

Common Core is not what its proponents promised, and lawmakers should not compound their mistake by carrying on with these bad standards. The Arizona legislature should take back control of the state's education system by dumping Common Core and implementing better standards designed by Arizonans for Arizonans.