

# The Washington Times

## McCLUSKEY: Common Core, the worm in the teacher's apple

*National curriculum standard is crumbling, and we know who to blame*

By Neal McCluskey

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The reality of the Common Core national curriculum standards is finally coming out, and suddenly the Core has big parts falling off. Unfortunately, it is a contraption on which, thanks to Core supporters wielding federal power, almost the whole country has been coerced to fly — and crash.

In the past two weeks, South Carolina and Oklahoma officially chose to dump the Core. Indiana did the same in March. They join Texas, Alaska, Virginia and Nebraska, which never adopted, while Minnesota adopted only the English standards.

Oklahoma is perhaps the biggest blow to the Core, as Republican Gov. Mary Fallin is the chairwoman of the National Governors Association, which created the Core along with the Council of Chief State School Officers. The dominoes are likely to keep falling, with both houses of the North Carolina General Assembly approving Core-dumping bills last week, and the National Conference of State Legislatures reporting that 64 bills to slow or stop the Core have been introduced in state legislatures this year.

Indeed, it is in testing that the bigger exodus has occurred. Not counting states that eventually dumped the Core or never signed on, as of January, six states had left the two Common Core testing consortia selected and funded by the federal government. All of this happened before any state has officially used the Core's exams. If test scores drop significantly after full implementation, as happened in New York when it used its own Core-aligned exams, opposition is likely to go from yell to scream.

Regrettably, to shore up the Core, supporters have often resorted to calling Core opponents misinformed, while simply asserting that high standards will drive high achievement. To a lesser extent, they have argued that dropping the Core would squander time and money.

The two main arguments are hollow. Analysis from across the spectrum, including the left-leaning Brookings Institution, right-leaning Hoover Institution and my own work at the

libertarian Cato Institute, has concluded that standards alone do not translate to improved achievement.

On the “misinformed” charge, while some anti-Core arguments are dubious — the Core would not impose a United Nations curriculum — most are substantive. For instance, despite Core proponents calling it “state-led” and “voluntary,” Core adoption was driven by Washington, which made it crucial for states to compete for grants in the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top program. Adoption was also just one of two ways to meet the “college- and career-ready standards” requirement for No Child Left Behind waivers.

On its quality, the Core has been heavily critiqued by subject-matter experts such as Stanford University’s James Milgram and the University of Arkansas’ Sandra Stotsky. Finally, imposing a single standard for millions of children, who learn different things at different rates, fails basic logic.

On the cost of withdrawing, though, Core supporters have a point. States have sunk significant time and money into implementation, which would be wasted if they backed out. For instance, the Core-backing Fordham Institute and Oklahoma Business Education Coalition pegged Oklahoma’s cost of jumping at \$125 million, and Indiana has found that quickly creating new standards is tough work.

Blame for costly withdrawal, however, lies squarely on Core supporters, who pushed adoption through Race to the Top. Indeed, the Race required that state officials promise to adopt before the final version of the Core was even published, much less robustly debated. As a result, states undertook years of implementation before the public had any idea what was happening.

Once implementation hit districts and schools about a year-and-a-half ago, a previously dodged public finally became aware of the Core. Not only aware, but angry, demanding answers to crucial questions — What is this? What evidence supports it? Where did it come from? Who controls it? — that should have been fully debated long before state adoption.

What the public has learned is that the Core is an empirically dubious creation driven by Washington. With that discovered, they have increasingly accepted that they do, indeed, have to sacrifice valuable time and money to get the education they want. For having to make that sacrifice, they have only Common Core supporters to thank.

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