

# The Washington Times

## Common Core education supporters want Obama administration to shut up

By [Ben Wolfgang](#)

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The [Obama administration](#)'s cheerleading for the Common Core State Standards Initiative is designed to calm critics and rally supporters for the ambitious overhaul of the nation's elementary and secondary school curriculums.

But that effort may be backfiring, and some analysts say it's time for the president, Education Secretary [Arne Duncan](#), and other officials to back off or risk fueling more opposition.

Common Core, which establishes specific benchmarks for students in math, English and other subjects, is designed to align often-diverse state curriculums.

After an early rush to embrace reform, a growing number of states are pulling back from Common Core or from the tests and assessments based on the initiative.

Louisiana and Massachusetts are the latest to announce delays in tests and assessments tied to Common Core amid growing skepticism from parents and others.

Michigan and Indiana are among several states that have delayed Common Core, made adjustments to its implementation or are considering taking one or both of those steps. Four states, including [Virginia](#), have fully rejected Common Core; Minnesota adopted only the English standards.

The backlash has been accelerated by the [Obama administration](#), which had no role in drafting the system but has sought to latch on to the effort and take credit for higher education standards, said [Michael Brickman](#), national policy director at the conservative-leaning [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#) in Washington.

"I think it's time for the [Obama administration](#) and [Arne Duncan](#) to take a back seat. They've tried to jump in and cheerlead. It's time for the states to tell the [administration](#) that 'we've got it from here,'" he said. "They think it's a good idea, but it's not their place or any administration's

place to be pushing states on this. It's something that started as a state initiative and it should continue to be a state initiative.”

Opposition is growing among political activists such as tea partyers and conservative commentators including [Glenn Beck](#). The [Republican National Committee](#) in the spring passed a resolution against Common Core, and a group of 130 prominent Catholic educators and professors recently published an open letter saying the standards threaten the “character and curriculum of the nation’s Catholic schools.”

### **Assigning blame**

Critics contend that Common Core represents, to some degree, the loss of local control over what is taught in schools, and there is no denying that the standards didn’t come directly from the federal government.

The bipartisan National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers took the lead on the system, which has been adopted in whole or in part by 45 states and the District of Columbia.

What is equally undeniable is that the [Obama administration](#), specifically its Education Department, has used words, actions and money to push states toward Common Core.

In its first few years, the [administration](#) tied grant money from its signature Race to the Top program to the adoption of college- and career-ready standards, similar to those found in Common Core.

[Mr. Duncan](#) has frequently spoken of the virtues of the system and has taken shots at its critics.

He has said opposition to Common Core is driven by “white suburban [moms](#)” who fear their children’s test scores will drop as the more rigorous standards take effect.

[Mr. Duncan](#) later expressed regret for his “clumsy wording.” In a blog post on the Education Department’s website, he zeroed in on the states’ roles in Common Core — a not-so-subtle reminder to skeptics that he and President Obama aren’t in charge of the system.

“I have not been shy in letting the country know the enormous [value](#) of the state-led movement to prepare young people for college and careers,” he wrote Nov. 18. “The state-created standards known as the Common Core are widely supported by teachers and by leaders from both sides of the aisle,” including prominent Republican figures such as former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

### **Dealing with the backlash**

[Mr. Duncan](#) had good reason to give such reassurances.

A few weeks earlier, former White House senior adviser David Axelrod — one of the political masterminds behind Mr. Obama’s election — publicly described Common Core as “an initiative of the [Obama administration](#).”

For some concerned parents and others who worry that they and their local school boards will lose their voice under Common Core when it comes to curriculum, Mr. Axelrod’s comments and the [administration](#)’s actions have confirmed their suspicions, analysts say.

“I don’t think the [Obama administration](#) drove this [backlash]. But as Secretary [Duncan](#) has made [inflammatory](#) comments and tried to champion the Common Core, and as the [administration](#) has tried to say that it raised standards around the country, it has cemented what most people learned about it,” said [Neal McCluskey](#), associate director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom.

[Mr. McCluskey](#), like other critics, said Common Core isn’t the bottom-up, state-led effort it is often portrayed to be, and he argues that the standards are deeply flawed.

He said the primary backlash is the result of parents and others finding out more about the standards and not liking what they see.

[Mr. McCluskey](#) also said the public prodding by Mr. Obama and [Mr. Duncan](#) clearly “doesn’t help” Common Core proponents because the education secretary could be viewed as strong-arming states and schools into a system he favors.

“That means he thinks it’s his job because [[Mr. Duncan](#) believes] people aren’t well-informed enough or smart enough to make their own decisions,” he said.