



Author: Common Core ‘Worst Large-Scale Educational Failure in 40 Years’

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Ted Rebarber of AccountabilityWorks, co-author with Cato Institute’s Neal McCluskey of the Pioneer Institute study, discussed at a Heritage Foundation event last week how Common Core has not only damaged public-school education, but also has presented obstacles to real school choice.

Rebarber observed the danger when politicians succumb to the allure of standards-based education reforms.

“Standards become the blueprint around which schools organize their teaching, their day-to-day academic operations,” he said. “They’re effectively curriculum central planning by government.”

In the study, the authors observed that since Common Core was implemented in 45 states and Washington, DC, students have demonstrated sharp drops in academic performance. Additionally, those students who were already performing poorly— many of them minority students – declined even further.

Yet, in the name of accountability, when private school choice programs receive taxpayer-funded vouchers, they are often forced to adopt the curriculum on which the state standardized test is based. In most cases, that curriculum is aligned with Common Core.

According to the study, about two thirds of the nation’s tuition grant (“voucher”) programs mandate that schools administer a single curriculum-based test, usually a Common Core-aligned test, in order to receive the public funds.

An example is Central Christian Academy in Indiana, a state that has touted its extensive “school voucher” program. In 2017, the Christian school was presented with a “D” rating from the state because of students’ scores on the state-mandated test – which they must take because the school is receiving public funds. The poor rating was accompanied by a threat of a loss of voucher funding, a prospect that could have led to the closing of the school since vouchers help many families afford this private school option.

Ultimately, Chalkbeat observed that Indiana made some changes to how it evaluates schools and Central Christian’s students had to become more test-focused in order to remain open.

Nevertheless, the education news outlet noted that, in Indiana, private schools also “now live or die by test scores, too,” just as public schools, because of vouchers.

“That money comes with strings attached, and low test scores have cost 16 schools the right to accept new vouchers,” the report observed. “At least three have closed.”

Ironically, private schools that accept vouchers are forced to do things the “Common Core way,” even though dramatic declines in U.S. student performance on national and international assessments have occurred since the Core was implemented.

“Common Core blunts the innovation, dynamism and competition that is the heart of the school choice movement,” McCluskey noted.

The Core was sold not only as a set of standards that was “rigorous” and designed to encourage higher levels of achievement, but also as a program that would shrink the achievement gap between middle-class students and those from the lower socioeconomic levels.

In April of 2016, only about 37 percent of U.S. 12th graders were shown to be prepared for math and reading at the college level, according to the 2015 NAEP – also known as the Nation’s Report Card.

Additionally, results released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showed that on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the U.S. has declined in performance from fifth in international ranking in 2011 to 13th in 2016 out of 58 international education systems.

The PIRLS revealed achievement for the top-performing 20 percent of students became flat over time, while the lowest 20 percent declined further.

“We seem to be declining as other education systems record larger gains on the assessment,” said Peggy G. Carr, acting commissioner for the federal NCES, according to the Washington Post. “This is a trend we’ve seen on other international assessments in which the U.S. participates.”

Accountability to the government has also become a major factor in terms of the content of what is taught and the services provided in religious schools that accept school vouchers.

NWItimes.com provides another example from Indiana.

Jennifer McCormick, the Republican state superintendent of public schools, has decided private schools that accept state voucher funds should not discriminate against LGBT children in admissions and other services – regardless of the school’s faith beliefs.

McCormick’s justification for her decision is based upon the Common Core “workforce development” model of education that views children as prospective laborers who can fulfill big business’s needs for inexpensive, local workers.

“If our goal as a state is to develop a well-educated workforce, and one that we want businesses to come here because we’re inclusive, we are accepting. I think part of that goes to our actions,” McCormick said. “And when we still have schools that receive taxpayer dollars that can exclude students — that’s a problem.”

According to the report, McCormick said private schools that accept vouchers would need to have their admissions policies controlled by the state.

