

## What Does 'Shared Curriculum' Mean, and Should it Scare Us?

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on March 21, 2011 10:03 AM | [2 Comments](#) | [Recommend](#)

Calls are mounting for the development of shared curriculum for the common [Tweet](#) standards. The two most recently examples come from the [American Federation of Teachers](#), and the [Albert Shanker Institute](#). The second, in particular, has drawn a lot of attention and a bit of backlash.

The debate has been captured nicely in one particular round of exchanges in the blogosphere. It has been unfolding largely between Robert Pondiscio at the [Core Knowledge](#) blog and a few bloggers at the [Thomas B. Fordham Institute's](#) blog, Flypaper, with former Gates Foundation education chief and [EdReformer's](#) Tom Vander Ark and the [Cato Institute's](#) Neal McCluskey weighing in, too.

Pondiscio kicked it off with [applause](#) for the common curriculum call. Not surprising, since Core Knowledge has long pushed for shared, sequenced curriculum spelling out the content it believes all children should know.

Vander Ark [responded](#) by saying that one common curriculum is precisely what we shouldn't be doing; technology enables individualized student learning plans, a far better approach, he said, than creating one big set of learning goals that don't consider students' varying needs. Pondiscio goes on the [counter-attack](#) against Vander Ark.

Flypaper's Peter Meyer [argues](#) that common curriculum doesn't equal loss of local control, a position McCluskey [calls](#) an "assault on logic."

Kathleen Porter-Magee from Flypaper jumps in, [arguing](#) that making curriculum decisions at the state or national level is deeply misguided. Her boss, Checker Finn, tries in his way to [get everyone to calm down](#). Come on, people, he says, shared curriculum does not mean the world is coming to an end.

None of that has a calming effect on Pondiscio, however, who [contends](#) that Porter-Magee is confused. Porter-Magee [responds](#) with some distinctions, saying that it is fine for states or a nationally shared curriculum to define the scope of what students learn, but when they get into prescribing the sequence, they're crossing the line into what should be decided closer to the classroom. Let the states get the standards and accountability pieces right, she says, and let the districts and schools figure out the curriculum pieces that get students there.

Pondiscio from Core Knowledge [jumps back in](#), expressing doubt about Porter-Magee's argument that state standards and accountability are enough to drive a content-rich curriculum locally.

Flypaper's Meyer [wonders](#) why everyone is "so afraid of curriculum." In [another post](#), Meyer expresses relief that after years of shying away from content discussions, colleagues in his school district seem to be coming together around it.

I'm sure there will much more to come in the shared-curriculum debate. What thoughts do these exchanges prompt for you?