



Common Core Treats Students Like Soulless Widgets

By Neal McCluskey

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There is nothing wrong with national-level education yardsticks. We've had them for decades: the SAT, Advanced Placement tests, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, etc. What is wrong is imposing one standard on everyone, which ignores that all children are unique and no standards-setters omniscient. But that is exactly what Washington is doing with the Common Core.

First, it is necessary to establish that the Core is largely being imposed by the feds. It is not, as Core supporters insist, "state-led" and "voluntary."

The Core was created by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, but these groups do not represent states. Legislators do, and while people vote for governors, doubtless few, if any, have ever done so based on what they expect a candidate might do in the powerless NGA.

Next, the impetus behind Core adoption in most states was federal action. To compete for a part of the \$4.35-billion Race to the Top purse, states [de facto had to adopt](#) the Core. Indeed, Race to the Top required state leaders to promise to adopt the Core before the final version [had even been published!](#)

Cementing adoption, the Obama administration gave only [two options](#) for states to get waivers from the hated, illogical, No Child Left Behind Act: adopt the Core, or have a state university system certify state standards as "college- and career-ready."

Topping it all off, the U.S. Department of Education selected and [funded two consortia](#) to create national tests to go with the Core.

On the too-rare occasion when advocates have [acknowledged the federal force](#) behind the Core, they have typically implied that the Obama administration acted against their intent that adoption be purely up to states. But in "Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Get a World-Class Education" – [a report](#) published before Barack Obama became president – the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers implored Washington to offer "a range of tiered incentives," including funding and regulatory relief, to move states onto national standards. The call was eventually reiterated on the Core's website, then removed.

Despite advocates' incessant protestations, the facts are clear: Common Core was federally pushed, just as they requested. This top-down imposition is a huge problem for two fundamental reasons.

The first is that all children are unique. They learn different things at different rates, and have myriad talents and goals. Yet Common Core, by its very nature, moves all kids largely in lock-step, processing them like soulless widgets. That's likely a major reason there is [no meaningful empirical evidence](#) that national standards produce better outcomes, and education experts across the spectrum have [dismissed the Core](#).

The second basic problem is that no one is omniscient. As the raging [debate over the quality](#) of the Core painfully illustrates, even if there could be a one, best standard for all kids, we don't know what it is. But with a monopoly, no alternative standards will be able to compete, and better ways of doing things won't be revealed.

So is the Common Core a bad idea? Absolutely. It is a federally coerced, one-size-fits-all regime that ignores basic, human reality.

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