



Gov. Pence, your new academic standards are shoddy

By Richard M. Reinsch II 1

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Nearly a year ago, Gov. Mike Pence called for the suspension of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. His appeal was predicated on the lack of pedagogical substance within the Common Core Standards and Indiana's subservient position to Washington required under its tutelage. It seemed Pence recognized that Common Core's adoption under former Education Secretary Tony Bennett was an unwelcome education revolution.

Pence, we thought, understood the disturbing reality that Hoosiers were no longer in control of the public education of their sons and daughters. Big Philanthropy, backed by the federal government, was now in the lead. Pence, we thought, grasped that the education portended by the Common Core Standards, and its accompanying testing apparatus, was not an improvement over our now discarded excellent standards. Have we been wrong? The content of the new draft standards, released April 15, indicates that the answer is, unfortunately, yes.

Discerning citizens see in the draft standards a disregard of Pence's call for "uncommonly high standards" written by Hoosiers and for Hoosiers. The elaborate committee structure and process instituted by Pence's aides to draft new standards didn't produce a product commensurate to his insistence on having superior education standards. For the current result, Pence surely bears responsibility.

Michael Cohen, president of Achieve Inc., a nonprofit group that developed the Common Core, remarks that the draft's resemblance to Common Core reveals that the process of formulating new Indiana standards has been a waste. Nothing has really changed. Cohen notes that the state could easily remain within an official Common Core testing consortia because of how tightly aligned the draft standards are to Common Core. Other states considering leaving the Common Core will surely rethink enduring a similar superfluous process, Cohen further observes. He's right.

For what has become clear in each successive draft of standards (earlier drafts have been panned by academic reviewers and citizens) is that Indiana will remain a satellite in Common Core's pedagogical universe. We can conclude that the governor and Republican leaders in the

legislature were not serious about Hoosiers becoming masters of our education domain. Of this fact, Hoosiers should take note.

As Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute observes, what the left hand giveth in SB 91 ordering the state out of Common Core standards, the right hand taketh in the same bill with its instructions that Indiana remain under the yoke of the federal government. Translation: Indiana will continue to rest under a waiver from No Child Left Behind given by President Obama's Education Department. The price: Adopt college and career ready standards, i.e., the Common Core or its equivalent. We are now poised to adopt the latter. Alas, the waiver will likely be ours, but so also will be a deficient education product masquerading as top standards. Pence's call for excellence stands mocked.

To undo Indiana's fealty to the federal government in education required leadership. Instead our governor and the so-called conservative legislature hid behind a shield from No Child Left Behind. Indiana's leaders were not ready to step out from Washington's rule. Freedom comes with responsibilities and duties, its journey more arduous than living under Washington's educational lead. Keeping the waiver seemed easier to our leaders. It has translated into our current shoddy draft standards that retain an overwhelming amount of Common Core content.

What really has transpired is a low form of politics. Pence's forces sought to appease an increasingly restive citizenry that is turning against the Common Core revolution. Pence's first move was publicly condemning Common Core while still wanting the approval of Obama's Department of Education for any new standards. Pence's calculation is that the folks would applaud like trained seals because of his public declamations against the Common Core and not notice his approval of deceptive legislation. Pence pushed one button, while unbeknownst to us, he would push an opposing button undoing any real burdens on him of authentically exiting the Common Core. It didn't work, though.

Instead, he has given us half-baked standards. Many of us believed that Pence as a congressman showed great courage in his opposition to key policies of George W. Bush, ranging from No Child Left Behind to the Medicare drug benefit. Pence knew why he came to Washington, even while many fellow conservatives had forgotten why they came. The same integrity and independence Pence displayed would now find even greater expression, we thought, in the governor's seat. On this issue, we were wrong, it seems.

Being conservative isn't enough. The need now is for a reformer and that requires statesmanship. The question for the governor is will he make right what has gone so wrong? There is time, until July 1, to adopt better standards. Indiana could re-adopt its former high education standards, widely praised by leading academics. I urge the governor to embrace the moment he created and find the "uncommonly high standards" in education for which he has called.

Reinsch is a fellow at Liberty Fund, Inc., and the editor of the online journal Law and Liberty. The views expressed herein are solely his own. He wrote this for the Indiana Policy Review Foundation.