Clash over Common Core: Your Say

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Common Core, a new set of academic standards, is being implemented in 45 states. Bill Gates wrote a column last week defending the standards. Letter to the editor:

With the Common Core getting hammered across the country, Bill Gates attempted to dispel some "myths" about it. Alas, he spread his own ("Bill Gates: Commend Common Core").

First, Gates said the Core "will improve education for millions of students," but he failed to cite empirical evidence. Perhaps that's because analyses from the left-leaning Brookings Institution, right-leaning Hoover Institution, and libertarian Cato Institute all suggest the opposite.

The Microsoft founder also asserted that national standards are needed because "Americans move more than 10 times" in their lives. But Gates' source indicates that before age 18, the figure is just 2.6 times, and other data show relatively few out-of-state — and hence uniform standards — moves.

Next, Gates implied there was no compulsion behind Core adoption, ignoring that Washington de facto required it to compete for Race to the Top funds, and offered little alternative to get a waiver from No Child Left Behind.

Finally, Gates wrote that the Core is not a "curriculum." But it inherently restricts what curricula can include, and does not just say, for instance, that students should be able to multiply. It says how to do it, including using "arrays" and "area models."

So much for dispelling myths.

Neal McCluskey, associate director, Center for Educational Freedom, Cato Institute; Washington, D.C.

Comments from Facebook are edited for clarity and grammar:

Common Core is not so bad as a concept, but when you have school bureaucrats and unions all pushing their own agendas, the kids suffer and the potential benefit of Common Core won't be realized.

— Phil Smith

When I was in school, and a new student arrived from a Southern state, we could count on him or her being almost a year behind the other students. Things have improved, but Common Core makes it possible to move into a new school and not miss a beat — to be in sync with what is being taught there.

— Dorothy Herman

What we need for kids who move is smaller class sizes, more teachers and equitable resources for all public schools. Kids should be able to progress at their own pace. If classes are small enough, teachers can cater to all students — not just ones who move — as they work at their own pace within common-sense grade-level guidelines. We have always known this. My children are being abused by standardized tests.

— Liza Jackson

Have you looked at the testing that is being pushed on kids now? Do you think giving up instructional time to take tests under Common Core is going to make education better? No. It simply will make the testing companies rich.

— Bill Fritz

It's amazing to me how many people are defending our status quo. By and large, the public school system has been failing millions of students for decades.

We tried letting states set their own standards, and many set them way too low, passing child after child through the system without them really learning anything.

It's about time we actually put some real standards in place, as well as testing to make sure those standards are being met.

— Mathew Andresen

To people who think Bill Gates should be thanked: For what? He's supporting a one-size-fits-all mandate. The curriculum is age inappropriate and in many cases lower than before.

— Glen Dalgleish

There is nothing to prevent states from adopting higher standards if they choose.

— Bob Rejefski