



## **Best curriculum for our kids is one we develop ourselves**

By Ed Jones

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To Americans, liberty is a cherished word. There are times when government mandates overstep their bounds and violate basic liberties that have been held as a cornerstone to our society. This is the case with the Common Core initiative that is sweeping through our nation's public schools.

Colorado has embraced this initiative without adequately understanding the liberty that each district and school is letting go and giving away to a broader agenda. It's time to call attention to these liberties we are giving up: Parental control is essentially lost. We have elected bureaucrats having local control over a school board. Parents' power to elect a school board matters less.

The United States Department of Education is not the fourth branch of government. It does not have the power or authority to mandate a set of standards for our local districts. Education in schools thrives when parents and students find the appropriate choice or fit for their own child. To deny families the power to choose individual schools of choice or school districts they prefer is denying a fundamental right.

In March 2009, President Barack Obama's secretary of education, Arne Duncan, expressed the administration's commitment to helping "states develop and implement rigorous, college-ready academic achievement standards along with improved assessments." And the Obama administration would make good on this promise by funding and overseeing the development of the assessment tests that states have promised to implement by 2014-15. Duncan testified to that effect before the U.S. House Budget Committee on the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request. Obama had planned to cement Common Core via his latest budget proposal, according to Neal McClusky of the CATO Institute in Washington, D.C.

Remember that this is the same president who resides in the worst local school system in America - but is against school vouchers that could empower parents of Washington's largely black, inner-city schoolchildren to get them out of failing schools. The president, of course, makes sure his daughters attend a private school.

In a recent television interview with Fox's Bill O'Reilly, Obama discussed the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and stated that private-school vouchers "didn't actually make that much of a difference" and had not "significantly improved the performance of kids in these poorest communities." Imagine!

Now, as the possibility of widespread impact of Common Core becomes increasingly apparent, and the pedagogical weakness of the standards is exposed, states that originally adopted the standards are scrambling to delay or defund implementation. The Michigan Legislature passed a budget bill cutting off funding for implementation of Common Core on June 4 of last year. Legislators in New York and Pennsylvania are also considering similar legislation. Gov. Tom Corbett of Pennsylvania has ordered schools to discontinue plans to implement Common Core until he can consult lawmakers.

Arne Duncan wrote, in "Beyond the Bubble Tests: The Next Generation of Assessments," that the Department of Education has praised Common Core for its focus on computer-adaptive testing to supply teachers with data so that they can adjust their teaching styles and provide their students with individualized instruction.

Individualized is widely regarded as an ideal way to teach. But in practice, Common Core's rigid technology-laden approach to learning makes individualized education almost impossible.

The success of home schooling in Colorado - where it is thriving - and across America stands in contrast to the top-down suffocation of Common Core; home schooling offers further evidence of the benefits of decentralized education. In 2013, Robert Kunzman of Indiana University and Milton Gaither of Messiah College evaluated multiple studies and showed that home-school students score above average in reading and English arts. They noted that home-school students transition into post-secondary life much more successfully than public school students. Kunzman and Gaither cited 10 independent studies indicating that home-schoolers outrank their brick-and-mortar-schooled counterparts in assorted measures, including collegiate grade-point average and strength of religious and political views. They also observed that home-schoolers soar far above their peers in leadership ability.

We cannot afford to entrust our children's education - and their preparedness for tomorrow's advanced, technology-driven economy - to a distant federal bureaucracy that is driven a lot more by politics than by what's best for our kids. Our Founding Fathers would have appreciated that; they never intended for the central government to dictate policy to our schools. Indeed, there was no U.S. Department of Education until the late 20th century!

As with government in general, so it is with our public schools in particular: The policies that serve us best are those that are developed the closest to home.