



Can President Trump Get Rid Of Common Core?

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"Common Core is a total disaster. We can't let it continue."

So said presidential *candidate* Donald J. Trump in a campaign ad on his website.

To make sure there's no confusion about where he stands on the learning standards that are now used by the vast majority of states, Trump also tweeted earlier this year:

"Get rid of Common Core — keep education local!"

The question for *President-elect* Trump and for the millions of teachers, parents and students living in Common Core states is pretty simple:

Can he do it? Can he get rid of the Core standards?

First, a bit of backstory.

The Common Core standards were developed by governors and state school superintendents and adopted at the state level. They were not created by the Obama Administration or forced on states. Indeed, several states chose not to make the switch. That said, President Obama did use federal dollars, through the Race to the Top program, to encourage (critics prefer "coerce") states to adopt new, more rigorous standards. And, in the throes of a downturn, that extra school money was a powerful enticement.

But, with most states using the Core outright or standards that clearly resemble them, can President Trump actually scrap them?

"The writing of education standards is still, and always has been, up to the states," says Chad Colby, spokesman for Achieve, a national nonprofit that helped develop the Core. "It remains to be seen if the new administration will use the same federal overreach to try and get rid of the Common Core in states the way they accused the Obama administration of coercing states to adopt it."

Michael Petrilli, president of the Core-supporting but conservative-leaning Thomas B. Fordham Institute, is also doubtful.

"[Common Core is] not an issue any president has much say over—academic standards are under the firm control of the state," Petrilli wrote after Trump's big win.

But what do the Core's critics say?

"The problem is that the main levers of coercion — the Race to the Top contest and waivers out of the No Child Left Behind Act — are gone," writes Neal McCluskey of the libertarian Cato Institute. "Race to the Top is over, and No Child has been replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)."

ESSA, as McCluskey points out, is the new federal education law. And, in it, lawmakers committed to paper new rules that will make it even harder for the next administration to influence states' learning standards, like this one:

SEC. 8526A. [20 U.S.C. 7906a] PROHIBITION AGAINST FEDERAL MANDATES, DIRECTION, OR CONTROL. (a) IN GENERAL.—No officer or employee of the Federal Government shall, through grants, contracts, or other cooperative agreements, mandate, direct, or control a State, local educational agency, or school's specific instructional content, academic standards and assessments, curricula, or program of instruction developed and implemented to meet the requirements of this Act (including any requirement, direction, or mandate to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative, any other academic standards common to a significant number of States, or any assessment, instructional content, or curriculum aligned to such standards), nor shall anything in this Act be construed to authorize such officer or employee to do so.

Ultimately, Cato's McCluskey echoes the standards' defenders: "Unless Trump tries to coerce states to dump the Core — make receipt of funds or regulatory relief dependent on ditching it— he can't end the Core."

To be clear, even the Trump camp seems to be cooling its Core rhetoric. Just yesterday, when Education Week asked Gerard Robinson, a leader of Trump's transition team for education, about the President-elect's plans for the standards, he offered the vaguest of answers:

"To be determined. But he will expect his secretary of education to have something to say about common core," Robinson said.

Does all of this mean the Common Core standards are here to stay, even under a Trump Administration?

Not necessarily, writes Petrilli:

"The Trump victory will surely give boost to anti-Common Core Republicans at the state level, in places like Kentucky (now under full GOP control). We Common Core supporters could be in for some more rough sledding."

In short, with Republicans riding a populist wave to the White House and continued control of Congress, state lawmakers may feel emboldened to challenge the Core standards where they're truly vulnerable — at the state level.

Before the election, the list of repeal-and-replace states was short. But it's a new day.