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## Donald Trump has little power to scrap Common Core

*Must convince states to follow his vow*

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Donald Trump vowed to scrap Common Core if elected to the White House, but supporters and critics alike agree the incoming president has little, if any, power over the education standards that already are in place across the vast majority of states.

Making good on his campaign promise to get rid of the standards — which he repeated throughout the GOP primary and general-election campaign — would depend almost entirely on Mr. Trump using his bully pulpit to convince states to dump Common Core, scholars say. The nature of the system gives virtually all authority to the states, and a Trump administration will face an uphill climb in convincing many of those states to abandon the standards.

“I don’t think there’s a federal lever there, and many of us made this point throughout the campaign that we’re not sure why Donald Trump thinks he can [eliminate Common Core]. This is not a promise he’s going to be able to keep,” said Michael Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a leading education think tank, adding that Mr. Trump also would run into philosophical problems in telling states what to do with education policy.

“Does he tell states they should get rid of Common Core? That causes some heartache for conservatives from a federalism perspective,” Mr. Petrilli added.

Common Core, which does not constitute a strict federal curriculum but instead established baseline standards in math, English and other subjects that all students are expected to meet, now is in place in 42 states and the District of Columbia. Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina initially adopted the standards but later opted out.

Leaders in other states, such as Kentucky, also have signaled they want to remove their schools from Common Core.

Mr. Trump became a leading voice against the standards early in his campaign.

“Common Core is a total disaster. We can’t let it continue,” the incoming president said in one campaign commercial

But doing so will depend almost entirely on action at the state legislature level. Common Core, crafted by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), was not the product of federal legislation and was adopted voluntarily by state education leaders.

Both supporters and detractors, however, concede the Obama administration pushed states into adopting it through federal incentives, such as tying Race to the Top grant money to implementation of the standards.

It was that involvement from the federal government, coupled with the fact that most parents and local school officials weren’t involved with their states’ adoption processes, that’s led to the deep dissatisfaction with Common Core across the country, according to Neal McCluskey, director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the libertarian Cato Institute.

“Common Core became something that was representative of inside-the-beltway, or inside-your-state-capitol people, establishment people, deciding something was good for everyone else and they were going to push it on them, going to use federal leverage to do it, and then basically dismiss people who weren’t comfortable with it by just saying, ‘You just don’t know what’s going on,’” Mr. McCluskey said. “Common Core was part of this bigger revolt.”

Mr. Trump tapped into that revolt through his populist campaign, citing Common Core as an example of local power slowly being eroded by a political establishment.

The incoming president’s problem is that federal legislation passed in December 2015 forbids the Education Department from in any way forcing or coercing states to adopt education standards. That language was included specifically to prevent a repeat of the Obama administration’s effort to nudge states toward Common Core.

It’s possible Mr. Trump could try to tie some federal education funding to states’ willingness to withdraw from Common Core, but such a strategy seems politically tenuous and legally questionable, at best, in light of the latest federal legislation.

Supporters say that despite Mr. Trump’s rhetoric, they’re confident the incoming administration won’t make Common Core a target.

“We think it’s sort of settled that states are in control of their standards,” said Chris Minnich, executive director of CCSSO, one of the driving forces behind Common Core. “We don’t want this administration or the Trump administration messing with states’ ability to set their own standards ... We’re moving forward and this question is largely settled.”

Even Common Core critics such as Mr. McCluskey have said it was misleading for candidates such as Mr. Trump to tell voters a new president would be capable of eliminating the standards.

“I didn’t think it was right to say you could repeal it,” he said, adding that it would be difficult at this point for states to withdraw after years of effort implementing the standards.

“If states wanted to get rid of Common Core, it’s something that really had to happen in 2010 and 2011, maybe 2012,” said Mr. McCluskey.