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Interesting Reactions to Common-Core Standards

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on March 11, 2010 2:46 PM | [No Comments](#) | [No TrackBacks](#)

If you don't live or work here in Washington, it could be hard to wrap your head around the intense **inside-the-Beltway** mentality that shapes dialogue around here. But since our office is inside that Beltway, for better or worse, it came as no surprise that I was inundated with official statements yesterday about the first public draft of the common standards.

Most were fairly predictable, of course, given their long-standing agendas or their roles supporting the project (or the politically sensitive prospect of saying anything nasty about the standards). See statements from [Achieve](#), the [Business Roundtable](#), the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#), and the [National Association of State Boards of Education](#).

So that's why a handful of these statements did actually get my attention. They were the more interesting, nuanced, against-the-grain (or at least just not unbearably bland) statements.

The folks at [Common Core](#) have been upset by the dearth of required content knowledge in many standards, so their [awarding of an A-minus](#) to the common-standards draft yesterday was interesting. Ditto for the folks at the [Core Knowledge Foundation](#). Tom Vander Ark over at VA/R Partners offers interesting [thoughts](#), especially focused on how the assessments designed for these standards could make or break their potential impact. Checker Finn at the Fordham Institute [makes the point](#) that states that demur on adopting the common standards, citing their own "higher" standards, might well just be, uhh, undercommitted to the work.

While some might assume that the big urban districts would view rigorous standards as an unmanageable challenge, the Council of the Great City Schools—which has been pushing high, shared standards for some time now—[speaks for its 66 big-city districts](#) in saying, "bring it on."

Intriguing among the bland, praising statements was one by the National School Boards Association, whose members—local boards of education—will likely have to put these standards into practice without voting thumbs-up or -down to do so (that power lies with state boards and/or legislatures). Note the headline in the [NSBA release](#): It supports the *process* of common standards. The Cato Institute [took a different angle](#), arguing that the common standards should spark worry about standardization.

In a sea of blandness, a [statement by Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty](#) stands out for its "ouch" effect. And this from the leader of one of the 48 states that signed on to support common standards! (His statement echoes a theme already stated in [my story](#) by one of his top department of education folks.)

Two authors of a recent [study](#) criticizing the common standards as a "race to the middle" penned detailed critiques ([here](#) for one by Sandra Stotsky, who helped craft Massachusetts' curriculum frameworks and is still on that state's board of education, and [here](#) for one by Ze'ev Wurman, who helped write California standards in the 1990s).

A group of early-childhood activists and educators banded together to raise "[grave concerns](#)" about the common standards, worries I'm betting we're going to hear more about (once again, touched on at the end of my story by Hartford's chief academic officer).

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