

# REAL CLEAR POLICY

## 'Misinformed' About Common Core, Indeed

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Defenders of the Common Core national curriculum standards have a favorite tactic: deem opponents "misinformed." This has been especially popular in response to plummeting public support for the Core, and pollsters behind a new **Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) survey** say they've found proof. But the evidence doesn't support the charge.

The Core certainly has popularity problems. While total support depends on how questions are worded, even the most loaded ones reveal plummeting approval.

A question from the **journal *Education Next*** paints the Core in the kindest light, making adoption sound fully voluntary while saying the standards will "be used to hold public schools accountable for their performance." This elicits high support — who doesn't like accountability? — but the trend has been distinctly southward. In 2013, it garnered 65 percent support. Two years later, it hit 49 percent. Among teachers, approval crashed from 76 percent to 40 percent.

PACE asked Californians this and other questions used in major polls, revealing what an outlier the *Education Next* question is and how limited is Core support, at least in the Golden State. The *Education Next* question garnered 52 percent support, but when respondents were asked, straightforwardly, "To what extent do you approve or disapprove of the Common Core State Standards?" a mere 26 percent approved and 31 percent disapproved. Respondents were also asked a question from the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll: "To what extent do you support or oppose having the teachers in your community use the Common Core State Standards to guide what they teach?" It's an odd wording, but got essentially the same response as the straightforward question: 24 percent support, 27 percent opposition.

Why such flimsy support? In the **summary** accompanying the poll, University of Southern California professor Morgan Polikoff said, "There remains a great deal of misinformation about the standards, and this is almost certainly driving some portion of the opposition."

Polikoff based this conclusion on several questions. From the summary: "A plurality of voters also had misconceptions about several tenets of the standards: 34 percent ... said Common Core requires more testing than California's previous standards. ... 25 percent said the federal government required California to adopt the Common Core ... and 30 percent said the statement that Common Core only applies to English and math is false."

Here's the problem: For two of these, the answer simply cannot be reduced to true or false. Reality is just too messy.

First, while Washington did not outright order states to adopt the Core, it did require that they promise to adopt standards common to a majority of states — a description fit only by the Core — to get maximum points in the \$4 billion Race to the Top competition, held at the nadir of the Great Recession. After the vast majority of states had made that promise — but many had not

won money — the Obama administration declared that, to get waivers from the hated No Child Left Behind Act, they would have to either adopt the Core most had already promised to use, or standards certified "college- and career-ready" by a public university system. Washington also selected and paid for Core-aligned tests — including the Smarter Balanced assessment used by California — that would be plugged into NCLB's testing requirements.

So Core adoption was not imposed by federal fiat, but was coerced using money taxpayers had no choice but to give, and rules to escape parts of a despised, punitive federal education law. Well-informed people could easily see that as de facto federal imposition.

How about the Core applying only to English and math? PACE says that's true, but the Core itself **begs to differ**. It consists of mathematics standards, English language-arts standards, and standards for "literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects." It also mandates that students read "documents of historical and literary significance" including the Declaration of Independence and Lincoln's Second Inaugural. And when supporters argue that the Core's focus on "informational texts" will not push great literature out of English classes, they **often say** much of the informational reading will be done in science and history classes.

Here again, people who responded in a way the pollsters deem misinformed may have been quite well-informed, thank you.

Of course, Core opponents do get things wrong; reality is complicated. Indeed, it is far more complicated than Core supporters crying "misinformation" would have you believe, and perhaps more complicated than they even know.

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