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Race for Common Core Standards Begins

By Lauren Barack -- *School Library Journal*, 10/8/2009

The nation is one step closer to a unified platform for educational standards, as the **first draft** of what students need before entering college, or launching their career, went live last month.



Neal McCluskey

A joint effort by the **National Governors Association** (NGA) and the **Council of Chief State School Officers** (CCSSO), this first set of Common Core State Standards is meant to create a guideline on what students will need as they leave high school. A second set, which will create a roadmap, so to speak, for K-12 students during their educational career, is expected early next year.

But many in the education sector say the standards are just more cloak and dagger. Most states already have local standards in place that they assert over public schools, measurements that students and educators must meet. And yet, critics say, they don't work; that states will adjust those numbers if they need to—and will likely do the same with national standards.

"I can't see these standards coming to mean anything," says Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Intellectual Freedom. "They will just get watered down. The only way to see any accountability is with school choice. If schools want money, they have to be answerable to parents and students. Not politics."

And politics are an issue in the standards debate. States that want a piece of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's **Race to the Top program**, which will award \$4.3 billion in competitive educational grants to states, are being strongly encouraged to adopt the upcoming K-12 standards by June 2010. The problem? That may not be enough time after the standards are formalized for states to have ratified them, says Dane Linn, director of the NGA's education division.

"We appreciate the need for states to be implementing higher standards, but the time line presents a challenge for states," says Linn.



Dane Linn

But that's unlikely to soften Duncan's stance. Drumbeats are already being heard throughout the country that U.S. students are dramatically behind in core subjects such as math and science, compared to other countries such as China and India. While most educational experts agree that the way we teach students must evolve, getting everyone on the same page on how to make that happen is unlikely.

Still, the American Association of School Librarians plans to take a close look at this draft, says executive director Julie Walker. And at the recent **School Library Journal Leadership Summit**, attendees were heard talking about the best way for educators to view the standards and incorporate them in schools.

"People talked about how these standards are the minimum standards, not the capstone standards," says Sara Kelly Johns, a school librarian at Lake Placed Middle/High School in Lake Placid New York.

Still, NGA and CCSSO hope the public will comment on this first draft of academic and career standards by October 21 to have their voices heard. While the two believe that creating national standards is a step in the right direction, they agree that it's just a launching point.

"Standards are important, but this is not just about standards," says NGA's Linn. "We also need better assessments,

improving the preparation of teachers and more instructional tools, including digital media to help teachers.”

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