

CONSERVATIVES *for* HIGHER STANDARDS

American Principles Project's Claims V. FACT: Setting the Record Straight on Common Core State Standards

BACKGROUND:

Recently, Maggie Gallagher, a fellow at the American Principles Project, wrote an opinion editorial for [National Review Online](#) detailing criticisms of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The American Principles Project deserves great credit for its work on important conservative causes, but on this issue Ms. Gallagher's claims are not accurate. As it is important to set the record straight on this important education reform initiative, below is a point-by-point look at the claims in Ms. Gallagher's piece versus the facts:

Claim: "The standards define what every schoolchild should learn each year, from first grade through twelfth, and the package includes teacher evaluations tied to federally funded tests designed to ensure that schools teach to Common Core."

Fact:

- Common Core State Standards define what students need to know; they do not dictate how teachers should teach or how students should learn. That decision is left to each state. Common Core does not dictate what lesson plans, programs, or textbooks teachers will use for curriculum.
- Common Core State Standards also do not dictate the process for evaluating teachers and their effectiveness. What *is* included in annual teacher evaluations is up to each state, and in many cases, local leaders. States retain the authority to decide how they evaluate their teachers, principals and school leaders.
- Many states have joined one of two – voluntary – state partnership organizations to develop Common Core assessments together. However, states decide if they want to join one of the organizations, join both or join neither. They can withdraw at any time and are *not* required to necessarily use the developed tests. They can develop their own.

Claim: "Over 40 states hurriedly adopted Common Core, some before the standards were even written, in response to the Obama administration's making more than \$4 billion in federal grants conditional on their doing so."

Fact:

- The federal government provided incentives through Race to the Top for states to adopt bold education reforms, including higher standards, but each state voluntarily made the decision to adopt new standards and followed its own specific constitutional, legislative or administrative processes to do so.
- A state's decision to adopt Common Core played a very minor role in the Race to the Top competitive scoring process (making up just 8 percent of an individual state's score under the federal application).

- 23 states were not awarded Race to the Top Funds, but chose to adopt the Common Core State Standards.

Claim: Common Core was actually lowering standards in their children’s schools. Instead of many arithmetic problems, the homework would contain only three or four questions, and two of those would be explain your answer. Like, ‘One bridge is 412 feet long and the other bridge is 206 feet long. Which bridge is longer? How do you know?’

Fact:

- While this question may seem simple on its face, the higher expectation under the Common Core State Standards is that students will not only be able to know the correct answer but also understand and communicate “why” that is the correct answer. This requires greater critical thinking skills that will ultimately prepare students for more challenging coursework and real-world applications.

Claim: “The ‘right’ answer involved heavy quotation from Common Core language. A program designed to encourage thought had ended up encouraging rote memorization not of math but of scripts about math. “

Fact:

- Requiring a ‘cut-and-paste’ answer from a script would be something driven by a textbook. The Common Core State Standards are only expectations, not curriculum. Curriculum is the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks used to teach to those standards. Common Core doesn’t come with required curriculum.
- Curriculum adoption and guidelines vary by state, none of that changes just because a state decides to adopt the Common Core math and English language arts standards. That there is good curriculum, bad curriculum and biased curriculum is nothing new – that is an issue that parents should continue to be vigilant on with their teacher, principal and district and state leaders.

Claim: “Professor Milgram was the only math content expert on the Validation Committee reviewing the standards... R. James Milgram withheld his approval from the Common Core math standards. He told the Texas Legislature they are, “in large measure a political document that . . . is written at a very low level and does not adequately reflect our current understanding of why the math programs in the high-achieving countries give dramatically better results.”

Fact:

- There were actually **eight** math experts on the Validation Committee, and six endorsed the standards. Professor R. James Milgram’s assertion that the math standards set “low expectations” for students has been refuted by the conservative Fordham Institute study that found the Common Core standards are superior to the math standards in the majority of states across the nation.
- In total there were more than 70 math experts on the development and feedback team for the math standards and 25 of them came from some of the most respected universities the country.
- For the names and credentials of the Validation Committee members who endorsed the math standards, click here (insert link)

- Hung-His Wu, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at UC-Berkeley, a member of the development team made the following statement about the standards, “The Common Core mathematics standards succeed in being both mathematically coherent and grade level appropriate. Overall, they are the best standards that I have seen in the past 20 years. If we can design a professional development program of the same caliber to go with these standards, then our nation will be making a substantial first step towards educational excellence in mathematics.”

Claim: The Common Core math standards deemphasize performing procedures (solving many similar problems) in favor of attempting to push a deeper cognitive understanding — e.g., asking questions like, “How do you know?”

Fact:

- Below is a sample math question that shows how simplistic most state math questions were in comparison to the additional thinking and understanding required under Common Core.

Grade Level	Previous Math Expectation	CCSS Math Expectation
Middle School	A bird flew 20 miles in 100 minutes at constant speed. At that speed, how long would it take the bird to fly 6 miles? <i>This question requires one calculation, using a formula.</i>	A bird flew 20 miles in 100 minutes at constant speed. At that speed: (a) how long would it take the bird to fly 6 miles? (b) How far would the bird fly in 15 minutes? (c) How fast is the bird flying in miles per hour? (d) What is the bird’s pace in minutes per mile? <i>This question requires BOTH calculations and reasoning. It measures if students understand why the formula works. Students would only be able to complete this problem if they had mastered the performing of procedures.</i>

Claim: “...according to a scholarly 2011 content analysis published in Education Researcher by Andrew Porter and colleagues, the Common Core math standards bear little resemblance to the national curriculum standards in countries with high-achieving math students.”

Fact:

- Research by William Schmidt, University Distinguished Professor at Michigan State, a leading expert on international mathematics performance and a previous director of the U.S. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (U.S. TIMSS), found that no state’s previous math standards were as close a match (a 90 percent consistency rate) to those of high performing countries as the Common Core. Not even Massachusetts, which is widely viewed as having the highest standards in the nation.

Claim: These standards are designed not to produce well-educated citizens but to prepare students to enter community colleges and lower-level jobs. All students, not just non-college-material students, are going to be taught to this lower standard.

Fact:

- According to a 2011 [ACT study](#), the three-quarters of students who *do* achieve a high school diploma are not ready for college coursework and often need remedial classes at both the university and community college levels.
- According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a global leader since their founding in 1943, the Common Core State Standards were developed to equip students who meet these standards to enroll in a **two or four-year institution** without needing remediation.
- Common Core State Standards clearly spell out what students need to know and be able to do to be ready for their freshman year in four-year colleges without remediation. Research conducted by the Education Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) at the University of Oregon found that professors of first-year college courses agree that the standards reflect the knowledge and skills students need to have in their courses. They also found that the standards “match well with the expectations students encounter in such highly regarded programs as the International Baccalaureate.”

Claim: There was, “...no press coverage of the key moment when Indiana’s Board of Education abandoned it’s fine state standards and well-regarded state tests in favor of Common Core.”

Fact:

- News outlets across the state covered the Indiana Board of Education’s decision to adopt higher standards, including the *Indianapolis Star*, the *Evansville Courier Journal* and the *Northwest Indiana Times*. The Indiana Department of Education highlighted the initiative as well and it was also part of then-Indiana Superintendent of Public Education Tony Bennett's State of Education Address in 2010.

Claim: In Indiana, as in most states, Common Core was adopted by the Board of Education without consulting the legislature.

Fact:

- In more than 30 states, state law or the State Constitution designates the State Board of Education as the entity with oversight of adopting state standards. Membership of State Boards of Education differ by state, but in every case they are accountable to constituents, whether directly elected or appointed by the Governor or Legislature.
- As it relates to Indiana specifically, four state legislators sit on the Indiana Education Roundtable, which was briefed about Common Core three times in 2010.

Claim: “They [Indiana] brought in David Coleman, the architect of the standards, to give a presentation, they asked a few questions, there was no debate, no cost analysis, just a sales job, and everybody rubber stamped it.”

Fact:

- [Indiana](#) was involved in the development of the standards beginning in 2007. They participated in discussions with other state education leaders and governors and held numerous public hearings through the Indiana State Board of Education and the Indiana Education Roundtable. Indiana provided feedback on the standards in February, April, and May of 2010, and K-12 educators were included in that process.

Claim: “...Common Core standards ensure that curriculum will follow.”

Fact: Common Core doesn’t come with required curriculum. Curriculum adoption and guidelines vary by state; none of that changes just because a state decides to adopt the Common Core math and English language arts standards.

Claim: “...Common Core standards ... are not evidence-based.”

Fact:

- Common Core State Standards are steeped in evidence. They were developed using the best research available on what students need to know. There were 50 experts on the English language arts work/development committee and 51 experts on the math work/development committee. The majority were content experts, but the committees also included experts in standards development, assessment, students with disabilities, English language learners, international standards, and assessment. Many of the experts are professors, faculty members and researchers from well-known, highly respected universities.

Claim: “Their effect on academic achievement is simply unknown, because they have not been field-tested anywhere in the world.”

Fact:

- Their effect is known because international benchmarks were used to guide the development of CCSS. International assessments that compare the performance of students from 34 advanced countries reveal that American students are ranked 25th in math.
- A Thomas B. Fordham Institute study showed that Common Core State Standards are dramatically superior to standards currently in use in 39 states in math and 37 states in English. For 33 states, the new standards are superior in both math and reading. .

Claim: Standards and assessments are copyrighted and cannot be changed or modified by the states.

Fact:

- Eleven states have adopted additional standards on top of CCSS. Four states have stated that they may add additional content in the future; four have stated they will not add any additional content and 27 have not stated either way.
- For example, when New Mexico adopted Common Core in 2010, they studied the difference between the Common Core standards and their current standards, particularly as it related to their culture. As a result, they chose to adopt additional standards to measure whether their students were knowledgeable about their unique New Mexican culture.

Claim: “They [CCSS] are not internationally benchmarked. In fact, for math in particular, they are exactly contrary to the kind of national standards used in high-performing countries.”

Fact:

- In addition to the compelling research cited above, the Common Core State Standards are internationally benchmarked based on numerous sources and research including the International Baccalaureate syllabi, the American Institutes for Research Report and the same framework used for respected international tests that compare the performance of students from 34 advanced countries.
- Developers of the Common Core State Standards studied the standards in high performing countries, including Belgium, Canada [Alberta], Chinese Taipei, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Singapore.

Claim: The two major experts on content who were on the Validation Committee reviewing the standards backed out and repudiated them when they saw what the standards actually are.

Fact:

- There were eight math content experts that served on the Validation Committee, and six endorsed the standards. The eight included a math teacher, two math assessment experts, three math professors at Colleges of Education and two math professors in Departments of Math in the Colleges of Arts/Sciences.
- Furthermore, there were more than 70 members of the development and feedback team for the math standards and 25 of them came from some of the most respected universities the country. There were more than 60 members of the development and feedback team for the English language art (ELA) standards and 15 of them came from some of the most respected universities the country.

Claim: “State legislatures and parents were cut out of the loop in evaluating the standards themselves or the cost of implementing them.”

Fact:

- All states received at least four full drafts of the proposed standards throughout the process, with smaller reviews and feedback periods throughout the process. In addition, there were two public review and comment periods. Nearly 10,000 comments were received to help shape the final draft. Of those 10,000, 20 percent were parents.
- The development and review process included a wide range of stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents and state leaders, including chief state school officers.
- In more than 30 states, state law or the State Constitution designates the State Board of Education as the entity with oversight of adopting state standards. Most state laws and codes require State Board of Education meetings to be publicly noticed, open to the public and allow for public testimony. In some states, such as Indiana, legislators sit on the Indiana Education Roundtable, which was briefed about CCSS three times in 2010.

Claim: “The Common Core standards are owned by private trade organizations, which parents cannot influence.”

Fact:

- Both the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) are made up of state leaders – state governors and the education chiefs to be exact, who are accountable to their constituents. They meet together to learn best practices, discuss lessons learned, share information and research and collaborate. Parents can certainly influence these organizations by influencing their Governor or Department of Education chief.

For more information on the movement to raise academic standards, please visit www.highercorestandards.org.