

CONSERVATIVES *for* HIGHER STANDARDS

Eagle Forum's Claims V. FACT: Setting the Record Straight on Common Core State Standards

BACKGROUND:

Recently, Phyllis Schlafly, founder of Eagle Forum and a respected conservative leader and author, authored an opinion piece for Townhall.com, detailing her criticisms of the Common Core State Standards.

Ms. Schlafly deserves great respect for her strong record of conservative leadership, but on this issue, her claims are inaccurate. 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 versus facts in Ms. Schlafly's piece:

Claim: "Common Core means federal control of school curriculum, i.e., control by Obama administration left-wing bureaucrats."

Fact:

- Common Core State Standards are not a national mandate or a national curriculum. States voluntarily chose whether or not to adopt the standards and retain full authority for implementation, preventing the possibility of a federal takeover. State leaders, accountable to their constituents, can withdraw their states from the standards at any time.

Claim: "Federal control will replace all curriculum decisions by state and local school boards, state legislatures, parents and even Congress because Obama bypassed Congress by using \$4 billion of Stimulus money to promote 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. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards will continue to make important decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.
- The standards will actually help *preserve* freedom for curriculum choice. Because every state's standards are currently different, the test and textbook publishers now have the upper hand and currently drive the market when it comes to pricing and available products. Common Core will put the customers - states and districts - back in charge and allow them access to better products, more vendors and a more diverse marketplace, ultimately holding the potential to drive down costs for taxpayers in states across the nation.

Claim: "It's not only public schools that must obey the fed's dictates. Common Core will control the curriculum of charter schools, private schools, religious schools, Catholic schools and homeschooling."

Fact:

- While the Common Core Standards are internationally benchmarked, rigorous, clear and straightforward enough to lend themselves easily to voluntary adoption by charter schools, private and faith-based schools and home schools, these entities will continue to have maximum flexibility on how and what they teach their kids. Whether schools of choice have to conform to state accountability policies remains a *state*, not a federal decision.

Claim: “The control mechanism is the tests. Kids must pass the tests in order to get a high school diploma, admittance to college or a GED. If they haven't studied a curriculum based on Common Core, they won't score well on the tests.”

Fact:

- Measuring student performance against standards is the cornerstone of accountability and the higher standards will yield a higher quality of education that better prepares students for college and the workforce.
- **States** are **voluntarily** adopting more rigorous assessments based on higher standards in exactly the same way those **states voluntarily** adopted higher standards in the first place.
- States make the decision as to whether or not they require an exit exam to earn a high school diploma. Many states have had exit exam requirements in place for decades.
- The SAT and the ACT are the universally-accepted college admissions tests. Scores on college entrance exams are set by the institution or the state.

Claim: “Common Core cannot be described as voluntary. Since CC is so costly to the states (estimated at \$15 billion for each state for retraining teachers and purchase of computers for all kids to take the tests), CC is foisted on the locals by a combination of bribes, federal handouts, and as the price for getting a waiver to exempt a state from other obnoxious mandates, such as No Child Left Behind.”

Fact:

- Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a state-driven, voluntary initiative. They were **not** created by the federal government.
- 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 Common Core 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).
- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (previously called No Child Left Behind) waiver process said that states had to adopt career and college ready standards. They could adopt Common Core **or** standards that their higher education institutions signed off on. Virginia did not adopt Common Core, but did receive a federal waiver.

- **Common Core will not cost each state \$15 billion.** According to the Pioneer Institute, it will cost 15 billion among *all* of the participating states over the course of seven years. This number does not take into account that states already have substantial funding dedicated to assessments, technology, professional development, textbooks and other education needs.
- Because every state's standards are currently different, the test and textbook publishers now have the upper hand and currently drive the market when it comes to pricing and available products. Common Core will put the customers - states and districts - back in charge and allow them access to better products, more vendors and a more diverse marketplace, ultimately holding the potential to drive down costs for taxpayers in states across the nation.

Claim: “The Common Core academic level is lower than what many states use now, and the math standards are so inferior that the only real mathematician on the validation committee refused to sign off on the math standards.”

Fact:

- A Thomas B. Fordham Institute study showed that Common Core State Standards are 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. The shared standards will increase accountability by providing transparent data that allows for true comparisons across state lines.
- There were 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.

Claim: “(Milgram) said the CC standards are two years behind international expectations by the 8th grade, and fall further behind in grades 8 to 12. The CC math standards downgrade the years when algebra and geometry are to be taught.”

Fact:

- Research by William Schmidt, a Distinguished Professor at Michigan State University, 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.
- The Common Core math standards for grades K through 7 include all of the prerequisite content needed to be prepared for Algebra in the eighth grade. That means that state and local leaders can decide for themselves whether to require Algebra in the eighth grade. States retain full control over all decisions related to course requirements and sequencing, and the Common Core requirements pave the way for different courses in grades 8-12, depending on the priorities of state and local educators and leaders.

Claim: “CC standards call for teaching kids to add columns of figures from left to right instead of right to left.”

Fact:

- This is incorrect. The standards merely require that students understand adding or subtracting multiple-digits must be based on the place value of the numbers – e.g. add tens and tens, ones and ones. The standards do not require students to add columns of figures from left to right.

Claim: “CC advocates claim that the new standards will make students college-ready. That promise is a play on words: Students will be ready only to enter a two-year non-selective community college.”

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: “Common Core means government agencies will gather and store all sorts of private information on every schoolchild into a longitudinal database from birth through all levels of schooling, plus giving government the right to share and exchange this nosy information with other government and private agencies, thus negating the federal law that now prohibits that. This type of surveillance and control of individuals is the mark of a totalitarian government.”

Fact:

- The federal government does not have access to the student-level information housed in state data systems. Common Core is not a mechanism for federal data collection, nor does state implementation of Common Core and its related assessments require any data collection beyond the aggregate data authorized by No Child Left Behind.
- As part of broader education reform efforts, states have already adopted data systems that allow educators and parents to measure the progress of student achievement and growth from year to year. This is not a result of Common Core standards, but rather a more than decade long bipartisan effort to ensure students are learning a year’s worth of knowledge in a year’s time and that the taxpayers are seeing a return on their enormous investment in education.

- States and districts have the responsibility under state and federal law to protect the privacy of our students under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This act expressly forbids the use of any personal student data without the consent of parents.

Claim: “(Common Core) is not, as advertised, "state" written; it is a national project created in secret without any input from teachers or state legislatures.”

Fact:

- States led the development of the standards. No federal official was on the work teams and feedback groups that developed the standards, but teachers served on the development, feedback and validation committees.
- 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 from parents.
- The development and review process included a wide range of stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents and state leaders, including chief state school officers.

Claim: “The readings assigned in the CC English standards are 50 percent ‘informational’ texts instead of great American and English literature and classics. The result is that CC standards are very political.”

Fact:

- Common Core State Standards continue to provide a heavy focus – at least 50 percent – on the reading and comprehension of great American and English literature classics, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Pride and Prejudice*.
- Students will be required to read more ‘informational’ texts, which means reading original works, but which texts are read is left up to the teacher – just as it is today.
- Examples of informational texts are: Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, President Ronald Reagan’s “Address to Students at Moscow State University,” and “The Declaration of Independence.” Other examples of informational texts are: Maps, charts, graphs, and info-graphics.
- The increased focus on information and original texts is to prepare students for college and real world reading and writing requirements. For example, 80 percent of the reading and writing done in the workplace requires individuals to read material, analyze the material using critical thinking skills and articulately write or verbally respond to the material.

Claim: “The suggested readings include a sales talk for government health care (such as Obamacare) and global warming propaganda (including a push for Agenda 21). Some of the fiction suggested is worthless and even pornographic, presumably chosen to reflect contemporary life. Another suggested reading favorably describes Fidel Castro and his associates without any indication they are tyrants, Communists and mass murderers.”

Fact:

- There is no mention of Obamacare, Fidel Castro, Global Warming, Agenda 21 in the Common Core State Standards.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative website does provide a suggested [list](#) of fiction and non-fiction texts as examples for teachers, but *they are not required*. The ultimate decision is up to local districts and teachers. Parents concerned about what their child might be required to read must be involved in their child's education and vigilant to review their assignments, just as they must be vigilant today.
- Common Core State Standards simply require greater analysis, critical thinking and reading comprehension than most states expect of their students. In fact, the standards place a greater emphasis on the reading of more difficult-to-understand "original texts" such as President Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" or Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" creating a greater understanding of more rigorous material – exactly what is expected in accelerated high school courses, such as Advanced Placement courses; at the college level and in the workforce.

Claim: "CC advocates admit the standards cannot be changed or errors corrected because they are already printed and copyrighted by the private owners such as the Gates Foundation."

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 the CCSS 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.

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