

Why the Common Core is Bad for America

by Jonathan Butcher, Emmett McGroarty and Liv Finne

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Key Findings

1. The Common Core is the basis for a national curriculum and national test.
2. Three hundred prominent policymakers and education experts warn the Common Core will close the door on innovation.
3. The Common Core standards are of insufficient quality.
4. The cost of the Common Core is considerable, yet unknown.

1. The Common Core is the basis for a national curriculum and national test.

Federal law prohibits the U.S. Department of Education from “exercis[ing] any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction” or selection of “instruction[al] materials.” However, the Department circumvented these prohibitions by making Race to the Top funding and No Child Left Behind waivers contingent on a state’s adoption of the Common Core and the aligned assessments. Because curriculum must be aligned with standards and assessments, the Department would thus be able to exercise direction and control over curricula, programs of instruction, instructional materials.

2. Three hundred prominent policymakers and education experts warn the Common Core will close the door on innovation.

Local control of public school curriculum and instruction has historically driven innovation and reform in education. A one-size-fits-all, centrally controlled curriculum for every K–12 subject threatens to close the door on educational innovation, freezing in place an unacceptable status quo and hindering efforts to develop academically rigorous curricula, assessments, and standards that meet the challenges that lie ahead. State and local leaders cannot change Common Core content or the assessments. There is no evidence that national standards alone lead to higher academic results.

There is no “best design” for curriculum sequences in any subject. Requiring a single set of curriculum guidelines at the high school level is questionable, given the diversity of adolescents’ interests, talents, and pedagogical needs. American schools should not be constrained in the diversity of the curricula they offer to students. We should encourage — not discourage — multiple models.

3. The Common Core standards are of insufficient quality.

Common Core’s standards are of insufficient quality to warrant being this country’s national standards.

The Common Core math standards fail to meet the content targets recommended by the National Mathematics Advisory Panel, the standards of leading states, and our international competitors. They exclude certain Algebra 2 and Geometry content that is currently a prerequisite at almost every four-year state college, essentially re-defining “college readiness” to mean readiness for a non-selective community college. They abandon the expectation that students take Algebra 1 in eighth grade. (This expectation is based upon what high-performing countries expect of their students, and has pushed about half of America’s

students to take Algebra 1 by eighth grade). The Common Core math standards also require that geometry be taught by an experimental method that had never been used successfully anywhere in the world. The Common Core math standards do not teach least common denominators; delay until sixth grade fluency in division; eliminate conversions between fractions, decimals and percents; adopt a new definition of algebra as “functional algebra” that de-emphasizes algebraic manipulation.

In English Language Arts, Common Core standards are inadequate. The Common Core “college readiness” ELA standards can best be described as skill sets, not fully developed standards. As such, they cannot point to readiness for a high school diploma or four-year college coursework. Skill sets in themselves do not provide an intellectual framework for a coherent and demanding English curriculum. The Common Core document expects English teachers to spend over 50% of their reading instructional time on informational texts in a variety of subject areas, something English or reading teachers are not trained to teach. This requirement alone makes it impossible for English teachers to construct a coherent literature curriculum in grades 6–12. The ELA Common Core Standards will impair the preparation of students for competing in a global economy.

A version of this paper was submitted to the American Legislative Exchange Council by authors Jonathan Butcher of the Goldwater Institute, goldwaterinstitute.org, Emmett McGroarty of the American Principles Project, americanprinciplesproject.org, and Liv Finne of Washington Policy Center, washingtonpolicy.org.

4. The cost of the Common Core is considerable, yet unknown.

States and their taxpayers face significant increased costs in four areas: textbooks and instructional materials, professional development, assessments; and technology and infrastructure. One peer-reviewed study estimates this at \$16 billion. The assessment costs will further increase if the consortia are unable to sufficiently refine technologies to score open-ended questions (such as short answer questions) for use in large-scale high-stakes testing. Few states have evaluated these issues.