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Resist the Common Core by Jordan Cash

Until 1980, primary education policy generally fell under the purview of state and local governments and the federal government had little involvement with how states ran their educational programs. In 1980 the Department of Education was established as a Cabinet-level agency, resulting in greater federal involvement in education.^[1] Over the past several years, another movement has sought to further nationalize K-12 education through the implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, often referred to simply as the Common Core.

The Common Core Standards are an effort to establish uniform standards across all fifty states. So far, 45 states have adopted the standards; only Nebraska, Texas, Alaska, Minnesota, and Virginia have not.^[2] However, the Nebraska Department of Education has begun aligning Nebraska state standards in reading and mathematics with those of the Common Core, even without formally adopting them.^[3]

Important issues must be discussed before Nebraska's educational administrators further align with the standards.

The first issue is whether or not Common Core standards are effective. A study by the Brookings Institution found that "the empirical evidence suggests that the Common Core will have little effect on American student's achievement."^[4] Indeed, for some states the Common Core would actually lower their standards; California and Massachusetts-states widely recognized for their rigorous educational standards-would be lowering their institutional expectations with the implementation of Common Core.^[5] Students in North Carolina's elementary schools would even see their choice of classes restricted, as they would no longer be able to take middle school math classes because changes to the curriculum from Common Core would deem such classes as being "too difficult."^[6]

In addition to questions about academic standards, there is the theoretical issue of the federal government creating a one-size-fits-all national curriculum. The Obama administration is moving in this direction by issuing waivers to states for No Child Left Behind in exchange for states adopting certain federal standards, i.e. Common Core.^[7] Additionally, the administration ties discretionary grant money to stipulations related to Common Core standards.^[8] Using waivers and grants to control state education policy essentially "plac[es] the nation on the road to federal direction over elementary and

secondary school curriculum and instruction." [9]

Part of the strength of America's federal system is the ability of the states to act as metaphorical "laboratories of democracy;" states can experiment and innovate with new policies and ideas and adopt the best practices of other states and improve upon them. A national standard would smother innovation and limit educational standards beyond those set by the federal government. [10]

Additionally, there is the issue of cost. The implementation of Common Core is expected to cost the 45 states involved a combined total of \$16 billion over seven years, which is nearly four times the amount of money given through the federal government's Race to the Top grant program, leaving state and local taxpayers to pay approximately 90 percent of the cost to transition to Common Core. [11]

Common Core would also make state and local officials less accountable to parents and students. If standards are set by the federal government rather than at the state and local level, parents would have little input on the process, as public hearings-like those Nebraska recently had to discuss new social studies curriculum [12]-would have to be held across the nation, diluting the impact of suggestions by local teachers, parents, and students. With Common Core, responsiveness to the needs of local communities would be lost.

Nebraska should resist adopting Common Core standards because it costs too much to implement, does not raise student achievement, and it would lead to a federal takeover of education, something that should be handled at the state and local level.

Nebraska does have substantial work to do to improve student achievement, but giving into the Common Core and abdicating the responsibility of educating our children to the federal government is not the answer.

[1] United States Department of Education, "The Federal Role in Education," available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>, accessed June 6, 2012.

[2] Common Core State Standards Initiative, "In the States," available at <http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states>, accessed June 6, 2012.

[3] Nebraska Department of Education, "Update: Standards, Assessment, and Accountability (SAA-7): Winding Down the 2010-2011 School Year-March 2011," Volume 7, March 2011. Available at http://www.education.ne.gov/Assessment/pdfs/Final_SAA_7_Update.pdf, accessed June 6, 2012.

[4] Tom Loveless, "How Well Are American Students Learning?" Brookings Institution, Brown Center on Education Policy, February 2012, Volume III, Number 1, 14. Available at

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/newsletters/0216_brown_education_loveless.pdf, accessed June 6, 2012.

[5] Sandra Stotsky and Ze'ev Wurman, "Common Core's Standards Still Don't Make the Grade," Pioneer Institute No. 65, July 2010. Available at http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/common_core_standards.pdf, accessed June 6, 2012.

[6] Gregory Kristof, "Common Core Math in North Carolina Would Keep Elementary Students From Taking Middle School Courses," *Huffington Post*, June 1, 2012. Available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/30/wake-education_n_1556315.html, accessed June 6, 2012.

[7] Neal McCluskey, "The *Other* Federal Takeover," Cato Institute, March 27, 2012. Available at <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/the-other-federal-takeover/>, accessed June 6, 2012; Benjamin Riley, "Waive to the Top: The Dangers of Legislating Education Policy from the Executive Branch," American Enterprise Institute, No. 1, March 2012. Available at http://www.aei.org/files/2012/03/12/-waive-to-the-top-the-dangers-of-legislating-education-policy-from-the-executive-branch_151023576072.pdf, accessed June 6, 2012.

[8] State Ed Watch, "ESEA Plan Could Tether title I to College-and-Career Standards," February 21, 2010. Available at http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2010/02/as_part_of_the_obama.html, accessed June 6, 2012.

[9] Robert S. Eitel and Kent D. Talbert, "The Road to a National Curriculum, Pioneer Institute, No. 81, February 2012. Available at http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/120208_RoadNationalCurriculum.pdf, accessed June 6, 2012.

[10] Lisa Snell, "Is the U.S. School system a National Security Threat?" Reason Foundation, March 23, 2012. Available at <http://reason.org/news/printer/is-the-us-school-system-a-national>, accessed June 6, 2012.

[11] Pioneer Institute, "National Cost of Aligning States and Localities to the Common Core Standards," No. 82, February 2012. Available at http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/120222_CCSSICost.pdf, accessed June 6, 2012; "Common Core State Standards Estimated Cost is \$16 Billion for States," February 22, 2012. Available at <http://caffeinatedthoughts.com/2012/02/common-core-state-standards-estimated-cost-is-16-billion-for-states/>, accessed June 6, 2012.

[12] Joe DeJka, "Social studies rewrite: Benjamin Franklin, Malcolm X optional," *Omaha World Herald*, April 30, 2012. Available at <http://www.omaha.com/article/20120429/NEWS01/704299926>, accessed June 7, 2012.



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