Faculty Work: Comprehensive List

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Common Core: Good or Bad?

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Abstract

"What comes to your mind when someone mentions the Common Core (or otherwise known as the Common Core State Standards)? Do you appreciate them? Are you scared of them? Suspicious? The Common Core is an aspect of education that typically gets a strong response today when the topic enters conversations. As an educator, I find that many people respond negatively based on what they have heard about the standards from others rather than based on facts. However, because these standards have a political nature, it's often hard to determine what the facts and truth are regarding this set of curriculum standards."

Posting about the Common Core from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

http://inallthings.org/the-common-core-good-or-bad/

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Comments
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The Common Core: Good or Bad?

Ed Starkenburg

What comes to your mind when someone mentions the Common Core (or otherwise known as the Common Core State Standards)? Do you appreciate them? Are you scared of them? Suspicious? The Common Core is an aspect of education that typically gets a strong response today when the topic enters conversations. As an educator, I find that many people respond negatively based on what they have heard about the standards from others rather than based on facts. However, because these standards have a political nature, it's often hard to determine what the facts and truth are regarding this set of curriculum standards.

I would like to share what this educator believes to be the truth about the Common Core State Standards before entering some of the murky issues that surround them. According to the Common Core website, the CCSS is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (it also includes standards for processing social studies and science information but not the content of those subjects). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live.

In 2009 the state chief school officers (directors of education in each state) and members of the National Governors Association coordinated a state-led effort to develop the Common Core State Standards to try and meet the need for consistent learning goals across states. Designed through collaboration among teachers, school chiefs, administrators, and other experts, the standards provide a clear and consistent framework for educators.

Prior to the Common Core State Standards, curriculum standards were determined and enforced by each state. When we compared the achievement levels of students in the United States to those in many other countries with whom we typically compete (in education, commerce, and many other ways), we saw that we were falling behind. In several studies trying to determine why, we learned that most of these other countries have a national curriculum so that typical third graders (for instance) will be taught basically the same material regardless of where they live in that country. That has not been the case in the United States. Our local school curricula differed a great deal based on several factors including where you lived.

So the chief state school officers and the governors decided that in order to shrink achievement gaps in our country, we needed to accomplish two important goals: 1) raise the standards and expectations of schools and teachers and 2) standardize those expectations across state lines. The Common Core State Standards set out to accomplish both. States each had the choice to adopt these common standards or to stay with their own. Over 45 sates initially agreed to go with this common set of standards, the closest thing we've had to a national curriculum.

The federal government's Race to the Top competitive funding required states to adopt and participate in the Common Core. In many people's eyes, this linked the Core with the federal government's Department of Education. That's when the political nature of these standards became a bit more obvious to the public. They have now encountered significant resistance following that initial groundswell of support.

It's interesting to note that support for and opposition to the Common Core come from across the political and educational spectrums. Both Democrats and Republicans speak in favor of and against it. Teachers

and administrators both favor and oppose it. The same is true for parents of school students and of others with a vested interest in education. The media tends to proclaim more of the opposition than the support, and yet 43 states and the District of Colombia are moving forward with the Common Core. What causes the support and opposition?

The support stems primarily from high expectations for all students along with a greater likelihood that students will graduate actually ready for college and work. Many appreciate the grade level descriptions of knowledge and skills to guide schools and teachers while not requiring specific resources (suggestions are given but states and local schools still have the freedom to select their own textbooks and sources). Some of the support comes from a higher level of accountability for education while still allowing states and schools some freedom in the assessment tools used to demonstrate proficiency in the standards.

One major point of opposition is the belief that the federal government has taken on an educational role that the constitution designates to states. This is closely related to a concern that local control of schools has all but disappeared in lieu of state and national control. Some groups claimed the existence of conspiracies to steal and misuse personal information about students and their families through the tests that will be used to track achievement trends tied to the Common Core (since states ultimately make those decisions, much of that concern has subsided). Teachers and parents have expressed opposition because the expectations have been raised too high too quickly to allow students to be successful. Social and news media have made fun of the conceptual understanding and thinking the standards strive to develop in students (as opposed to learning and applying a process). The authors and processes used to articulate the standards have also raised suspicion.

So what's an appropriate response to the Common Core? Like much of the work we do in education, the "answer" or right response is neither easy nor clear. In my experience, few people (even educators) have the same reactions to and opinions about these standards. There are many opinions and reactions. I suspect readers will disagree with some of what I've presented here as the CCSS basics. I encourage you to do some of your own research rather than just responding to what you hear others say. Spend some time on the Common Core website to read the information presented and especially to look at the standards themselves. This will give you a firm basis for the opinions you develop on the Common Core. I hope it will also lead you to look deeper into related issues.

I appreciate the clear expectations and high standards of the Common Core because for too long, many schools and teachers have been encouraged and allowed to do what they thought best rather than what was collectively agreed upon as best for students. I believe God wants us to hold high standards for students and teacher as we build his kingdom through education. I believe curriculum standards help us to do that as well as serve and challenge each other. I believe they also serve to assist us in shrinking achievement gaps between sections of our population and between our students and those in other countries. While the Common Core State Standards have weaknesses we need to address, I believe that moving forward by working within the structure of curriculum standards will serve us and God's kingdom better than everyone (schools, teachers, parents, students) doing what's best in our own eyes.

Dig Deeper

What are your thoughts on Standardized Tests? Steve Holtrop shares his insights in Standardized Tests: Help or Harm?.

Check out iAt tomorrow for another installment in our education series with thoughts **"Regarding Homework"**.