



Policy in Practice

What's Really Going on With the Common Core?

Not sure what the Common Core is or what all the fuss is about? Don't worry, you're not alone. Here are some common questions and answers that will hopefully clarify things.

What is the Common Core?

The Common Core State Standards set out guidelines for what students from kindergarten through 12th grade should know in English and math. They were created by the Council of Chief State School Officers, which includes representatives from the top education officers in each state; the National Governors Association; and Achieve, an education policy nonprofit group. The idea behind the Common Core was that public education needed to improve to meet the demands of a globally competitive economy. It was voluntarily adopted by 45 states.

Why are people so upset about the Common Core?

For many reasons. In most states, adoption of the Common Core did not require approval by state lawmakers but only by state education agencies and/or chief education officers. One side effect of this was that many people heard of the new standards only as they were about to be implemented. As these new requirements often turned out to be controversial (see main text), state legislatures increasingly began to feel pressure to pause, modify, or even scrap the Common Core standards.

Was the Common Core mandated by the federal government?

No. States voluntarily opted into the program, and a handful of states (e.g., Texas, Nebraska) have chosen not to adopt the Common Core. President Obama's administration has been a strong supporter of the initiative,

and the federal government spent \$348 million helping develop standardized tests aligned to the Common Core; however, this is not a federal program.

How does the Common Core compare with previous standards?

There are different perspectives on this. A Fordham Institute report says the Common Core standards are clearer and more rigorous than existing standards in the vast majority of states. A team of researchers at the University of Pennsylvania concluded that the Common Core standards were not a significant improvement over existing state standards. Researchers at Michigan State found that states with standards that looked more like Common Core standards did better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (or "the nation's report card").

Is there evidence that Common Core standards will increase student achievement?

As the Common Core has not been fully implemented, no one knows if it will significantly increase student achievement nationally.

Why are some people so opposed to national standards in education?

Public education has always been a function of state and local government in the United States, and there has always been resistance to ceding any significant degree of control over education policy to the federal government. The Common Core is the closest the United States has ever come to national educational standards and is viewed by some as a pathway for a federal takeover of public education.