

## **Rotten to the (Common) Core**

### *Four Reasons Homeschooling Families Should Fight the Common Core State Standards*

By Shane Vander Hart

“The philosophy of the classroom today is the philosophy of government tomorrow.” Questionably attributed to Abraham Lincoln, it is one of my favorite quotes when debating education policy. It encapsulates one of the primary reasons my wife Cheryl and I homeschool – to be the main influencers of our children while they are in their formative years.

These words bring home why education policy is so important. It doesn't just impact an individual child, but eventually impacts us all. We must, as part of a constitutional republic, have a voice in the direction of education policy as it relates directly to us as home educators and indirectly in public education.

Over the past few years, a mix of political, corporate and foundation interests have launched American education on a profound yet largely unnoted revolution that victimizes the democratic process, educational freedom, local control and parental authority. The Common Core State Standards is the silent revolution that turned education policy on its head.

#### **What are the Common Core State Standards?**

The Common Core State Standards are a set of learning standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics developed by the National Governor's Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, Inc.; all largely funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. These standards, when adopted by a state, replace existing state standards in these subject areas. Each state joins an assessment consortium providing annual assessments aligned to the Common Core. These consortiums are largely funded through the U.S. Department of Education.

45 states have adopted Common Core State Standards through the impetus of federal stimulus money in the form of Race to the Top (RTTT) grants and No Child Left Behind waivers. Iowa's State Board of Education adopted the standards replacing our math and ELA standards in July of 2010. Iowa also joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium as a governing state.

There are four primary reasons I believe homeschooling families should fight Iowa's adoption of the Common Core State Standards.

#### **1. Flawed Implementation.**

“We the People” were cut out of the decision-making process. The standards and the process in which they were introduced centralize education and erode local control.

In Washington, DC, Race to the Top was an executive earmark so Congress was completely cut out of the decision-making process behind this spending. President Obama bypassed Congress again when he issued waivers (conditional upon a state's adoption of the Common Core) for No Child Left Behind.

There was little to nothing said in the local media about the Common Core when the Iowa Board of Education approved those standards keeping parents in the dark. Our state legislature missed the opportunity to debate these standards and vote on them. Instead an unelected board made this decision for Iowa's children and we could not object.

If we believe education policy is important and that it impacts our entire community we should expect our elected representatives to be involved so that "we the people" can have a voice. The way this was implemented sets a horrible precedent for future policy decisions.

## **2. It is a budget buster.**

A year-old study<sup>1</sup> by Pioneer Institute and American Principles Project shows the estimated costs to the states for implementing the Common Core is \$16 billion including \$10.5 billion in one-time costs. The study also found an estimated additional \$801 million will be incurred annually in years two through seven of the standards rollout. New assessments (Smarter Balanced and PARCC) under development will require this for ongoing support of the enhanced technology infrastructure.

Florida is a prime example of how the runaway costs of assessments were overlooked. *The Orlando Sentinel* recently reported<sup>2</sup> that there is a gap of \$300 million between what schools say they will need for technology upgrades compared to what Florida Governor Rick Scott has budgeted.

If Iowa fits the same pattern we will be spending more for assessments. The Iowa Department of Education plans to add the Smarter Balanced Assessments not just replace the current Iowa Assessments. Our assessment spending, should the Iowa Legislature approve the Smarter Balanced Assessments, will increase dramatically. Currently, we do not know how ready our school districts are to meet the new technology requirements either.

As taxpayers, we are on the hook for this increased spending even though we are not in the public education system.

## **3. Homeschool Resources Being Aligned to Subpar Standards.**

With 45 states adopting the Common Core publishers are under tremendous pressure to align to them, even homeschool publishers, especially if they service public schools. Saxon Math and Math-U-See for example, have now aligned their resources to the Common Core<sup>3</sup>. When selecting curriculum this is something homeschool families need to consider.

These standards have been found to be subpar to some existing state standards. For instance Dr. Sandra Stotsky, former professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas, was a member on

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<sup>1</sup> *National Cost of Aligning States and Localities to the Common Core Standards* by AccountabilityWorks; Pioneer Institute and American Principles Project; February 2012.

<sup>2</sup> "Education leaders worry that schools won't be ready for new standards," *Orlando Sentinel*, [http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2013-02-18/features/os-schools-common-core-technology-20130218\\_1\\_new-standards-new-tests-florida-schools](http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2013-02-18/features/os-schools-common-core-technology-20130218_1_new-standards-new-tests-florida-schools), 18 February 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "To Dismay of Some Homeschoolers, Curriculum Companies Aligning with Common Core," *The Christian Post*, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/to-dismay-of-some-homeschoolers-curriculum-companies-aligning-with-common-core-91321/>, 6 March 2013.

the validation committee for the ELA standards. She noted<sup>4</sup> the impact the diminished focus on literature present within the standards will make, “A diminished emphasis on literature in the secondary grades makes it unlikely that American students will study a meaningful range of culturally and historically significant literary works before graduation. It also prevents students from acquiring a rich understanding and use of the English language. Perhaps of greatest concern, it may lead to a decreased capacity for analytical thinking.”

James Milgram, a professor of Mathematics at Standard University, was a member of the validation committee for the math standards. He would not sign off on them. Milgram in testimony<sup>5</sup> given before the Texas House of Representatives said, “there are a number of extremely serious failings in Core Standards that make it premature for any state with serious hopes for improving the quality of the mathematical education of their children to adopt them. “

While advocates of the Common Core will call these standards rigorous; my colleagues and I beg to differ.<sup>6</sup> We should be concerned when homeschooling publishers align themselves to standards such as these.

#### **4. College Admission Test Alignment.**

David Coleman, considered to be chief architect of the Common Core ELA standards, is the new head of the College Board that administers the SAT. In a recent interview<sup>7</sup> he said that one of his top priorities is to align the SAT with the Common Core. “The Common Core provides substantial opportunity to make the SAT even more reflective of what higher education wants.”

In 2010 the ACT released “The Alignment of Common Core and ACT’s College and Career Readiness System<sup>8</sup>,” offering assurance that “ACT pledges to work with other stakeholders to develop strategies and solutions that maximize the coverage of the Common Core State Standards to meet the needs of states, districts, schools, and students.”

Homeschooling families who use the GED to demonstrate content mastery could find themselves directly impacted by the Common Core State Standards as well. The GED just made a shift from their 2002 Series GED test to its 2014 GED test because “the shift to the Common Core standards is happening nationwide at the current time.<sup>9</sup>”

#### **What to Do?**

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<sup>4</sup> “Common Core Standards’ Devastating Impact on Literary Study and Analytical Thinking,” Heritage Foundation Issue Brief #3800, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/12/questionable-quality-of-the-common-core-english-language-arts-standards>, 11 December 2012.

<sup>5</sup> James Milgram, Testimony on HB 2923, Texas House Education Committee, 17 April 2011.

<sup>6</sup> “Common Core State Standards Content,” *Truth in American Education*, <http://truthinamericaneducation.com/common-core-state-standards/common-core-state-standards-content/>

<sup>7</sup> “Incoming College Board Head Wants SAT to Reflect Common Core,” *Education Week*, 16 May 2012.

<sup>8</sup> “The Alignment of Common Core and ACT’s College and Career Readiness System,” ACT, <http://www.act.org/commoncore/pdf/CommonCoreAlignment.pdf>, June 2010.

<sup>9</sup> “2014 FAQs,” GED Testing Service, <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/educators/2014-faqs#about>.

It is important for Iowa's homeschooling community to act. The Common Core State Standards impact us all both directly and indirectly. I encourage you to learn as much as you can. Truth in American Education<sup>10</sup> and Iowans for Local Control<sup>11</sup> are two great resources that you can access to learn more. Then share what you are learning with everyone, everywhere. Talk to friends, family, neighbors, people you know at church, your homeschool support groups, your school board members and state legislators<sup>12</sup>. Contact the members of the state board of education<sup>13</sup> and Governor Branstad<sup>14</sup> to let them know your opposition and the problems inherent with the Common Core.

We cannot and must not remain silent.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://truthinamericaneducation.com>

<sup>11</sup> <http://iowansforlocalcontrol.com>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/Legislators/find.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1586&Itemid=4228](http://www.educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1586&Itemid=4228)

<sup>14</sup> <https://governor.iowa.gov/contact/>