

**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE
NEVADA LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
CONCERNING THE PROBLEMS WITH THE COMMON CORE NATIONAL STANDARDS**

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My name is Jane Robbins. I am with the American Principles Project, an organization dedicated to restoring our nation's founding principles. I'm grateful for the opportunity to submit this testimony about the problems with the Common Core national standards.

The essential problem with Common Core is that it embraces and exacerbates everything that has damaged public education over the last 40-50 years. There is no reason to believe that doing more of what failed in the past will succeed in the future.

- **First, Common Core increases the centralization and loss of local control that have damaged education.** Remember when our schools were good? It was when the local communities, and local parents, actually were in control. As power moved (unconstitutionally) to the federal government, working through what became bloated state education bureaucracies, the schools got worse. Common Core takes this centralization and loss of control one step further. It puts control over the standards, and ultimately over the curriculum, into the hands not even of distant, unresponsive governments, but of anonymous, unaccountable **private** interests in Washington.

Common Core was not developed by "the governors." Although it was created under the auspices of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, those are merely two private trade associations that had no grant of legislative authority from anyone to do anything.¹ They worked through a private nonprofit group in Washington called Achieve, Inc. And as evidenced by the fact most people in Nevada only recently even heard of Common Core, the state legislatures and the people had no idea this radical shift in education was even happening.

¹ <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/controlling-education-from-the-top/>

Where did the money come from? Primarily from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has spent literally hundreds of millions of dollars promoting Common Core.² Much of that went to the Common Core owners – NGA and CCSSO.³ Many more millions went to other organizations to get them to sign on – the Chamber of Commerce, the national PTA, the national teachers’ unions which (until recently, at least in the case of the National Education Association⁴) were happily selling out their members for Gates money, and large private foundations such as Jeb Bush’s foundation in Florida.⁵ The list goes on and on. The president of one of these Gates-funded foundations, the Fordham Institute, admitted: “It is not unfair to say that the Gates Foundation’s agenda has become the country’s agenda in education.”⁶ Not a single Nevada parent has ever voted for Bill Gates. But because he is richer than we are, he is making the rules – and he has given us standards that are owned and copyrighted by two private DC organizations that almost no one ever heard of.

So who actually wrote these standards? A small group of hand-selected people of dubious qualifications who jumped at the chance to write their elitist, progressive education theories into national standards.⁷ Essentially five people wrote the standards – not one of whom was a K-12 teacher, and not one of whom was from Nevada. And the “development teams” were heavily populated less by teachers than by administrators, consultants, and representatives from testing companies.⁸

The federal government then eagerly hopped on board by offering massive amounts of stimulus money, through the Race to the Top competition, to the states that would adopt the national standards, sign onto the aligned national tests, and build out massive student databases.⁹ Through Governor Gibbons and Superintendent of Public Instruction Rheault, later ratified by the State Board of Education, Nevada agreed to do all this.¹⁰ The lure of federal money in a time of deep recession took precedence over maintaining state sovereignty over education. And the federal government took the

² <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/11/27/gates-foundation-pours-millions-into-common-core-in-2013/>

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mercedes-schneider/a-brief-audit-of-bill-gat_b_3837421.html

⁴ <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/02/national-education-association-common-core-103690.html>

⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mercedes-schneider/a-brief-audit-of-bill-gat_b_3837421.html

⁶ <http://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/stories/2009/05/18/story2.html?page=all>

⁷ <http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2013/06/07/five-people-wrote-state-led-common-core>

⁸ <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/2010COMMONCOREK12TEAM.PDF>

⁹ <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase2-applications/nevada.pdf>

position that merely by submitting a Race to the Top application, a state bound itself to the national standards – whether or not it won any money.

Another avenue through which the U. S. Department of Education enforced the adoption of Common Core was the dangling of waivers from the more onerous requirements of the No Child Left Behind law. Touting its adoption of the Common Core standards, Nevada applied for and received such a waiver.¹¹

- **Second, Common Core removes even more local control over the revision of the standards.** The owners of the standards, and the federal government, have made it clear that the standards are to be implemented 100 percent,¹² and even adding the allowable 15 percent of local standards on top is discouraged.¹³ And as long as Nevada remains committed to administering a Common Core-aligned test – whether the national test from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium or something else – it will have to maintain the standards that are aligned with the test.

When the standards have to be revised, as they inevitably will, the owners have not yet decided how that will be done.¹⁴ Even if states are given a voice, Nevada will have only one voice among many. Thus ends Nevada control over Nevada education.

- **Third, despite the insistence of Common Core proponents, these standards will inevitably drive curriculum.** That is the point of standards, and that is the goal of the progressive “reformers” in DC who wrote the standards. I commend to you a report called “The Road to a National Curriculum,” written by two former U.S. Department of Education officials, who explain exactly how this will happen.¹⁵ These experts also explain why this federal involvement in curriculum violates three federal statutes. But the illegality of the scheme has not deterred its proponents. As Bill Gates declared, “[I]dentifying common standards is not enough When the tests are aligned to the common standards, the curriculum will line up as well”¹⁶

To say that local administrators and teachers will continue to control the curriculum despite the national standards is to ignore how curriculum decisions are made.

¹¹ <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/nv.pdf>.

¹² <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf> (p. 12 -- standards must be “substantially identical across all States in a consortium”)

¹³ <http://www.achieve.org/files/FINAL-CCSSImplementationGuide.pdf>, p. 22.

¹⁴ <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/now-what-imperatives-and.html>

¹⁵ <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/the-road-to-a-national-curriculum/>

¹⁶ <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/media-center/speeches/2009/07/bill-gates-national-conference-of-state-legislatures-ncsl>

Especially in the age of Common Core, when a substantial portion of the textbook and digital-education market is controlled by mega-publisher Pearson,¹⁷ and when Pearson was intimately involved in the development of the standards and the tests, the only textbooks that local districts will be able to choose from will be those from Pearson or the other smaller publishers that advance the Common Core ideology. The right to choose one Common Core textbook over another Common Core textbook is hardly meaningful control over curriculum.

- **Fourth, Common Core mandates a type of teaching – essentially, the old, discredited “outcome-based” education – that has done nothing to enhance education and much to harm it.** Academic knowledge is to be diminished – the idea seems to be that if a student wants to learn factual information, he can Google it – but much focus during school time is to be on something called “21st-century skills.” This includes fuzzy concepts such as collaboration, communication, leadership, etc.¹⁸ By devoting so much time not to instilling knowledge but rather to cultivating these government-approved habits of mind, Common Core enforces mediocrity – but it will be across-the-board mediocrity, so it will not be apparent to the casual observer. This is one way to make the education system look better, but probably not the way most parents would prefer.
- **Fifth, Common Core exacerbates the problem that we’ve seen in English classes for the last 40 years – the replacement of classic literature with less demanding “pop” literature in an effort to be “relevant” to children.** As in other areas, Common Core takes this problem and makes it worse.

Dr. Sandra Stotsky, the nation’s premier expert on creating and implementing state ELA standards, served on the Common Core Validation Committee but refused to sign off on the ELA standards because of their poor quality. From her vast experience Dr. Stotsky knows what produces good readers and truly literate citizens – study of classic literature. But to her dismay, Common Core not only downgrades the classics but requires that ALL literary study be reduced to less than half the time in the English class.¹⁹ Most of the class time, according to Common Core, should be devoted to nonfiction “informational texts” – supposedly to better prepare students for the world of work. But as Dr. Stotsky has emphasized in numerous reports, there is absolutely no evidence for this approach, and much evidence supporting what we all used to know --

¹⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-singer/protest-builds-against-pe_b_1586573.html

¹⁸ <http://thejournal.com/articles/2011/08/02/common-core-toolkit-aligns-standards-with-21st-century-skills-framework.aspx>

¹⁹ <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/how-common-cores-ela-standards-place-college-readiness-at-risk/>

that students will be better educated by studying Milton, Dickens, and Twain than by reading EPA regulations and court decisions.

- **Sixth, as evidenced by the list of books and other texts included on Common Core’s recommended Appendix B, Common Core is designed less to educate than to advance certain political and sexual attitudes.** For example, Dr. Terrence Moore of Hillsdale College has explained how the items on Appendix B, while purporting to promote study of the Constitution, actually advance the argument that the Constitution is a “living document” that must evolve to correct the sins of our racist, sexist Founders.²⁰ And consider some of the novels on the list: *The Bluest Eye*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *Dreaming in Cuban*.²¹ These books, regardless of whatever literary merit they may have, are manifestly inappropriate for inclusion in an English course for teenagers. What kind of people would consider sexually explicit books with themes of rape, incest, and pedophilia to be appropriate for high-school English classes? The people who wrote Common Core.

Even if the state department of education or the state board were to dispense with Appendix B and say local districts do not have to use it (because it is suggested, not mandatory), that would not solve the problem. The reason is that many of the objectionable materials of Common Core are incorporated into all those Common Core-aligned textbooks. The Alabama Department of Education recently officially disapproved Appendix B, but parents immediately discovered some of the offensive texts in their children’s English textbooks. Common Core is an infection, and only major surgery can get rid of it.

- **Seventh, the Common Core math standards are designed to prepare students only for nonselective community colleges, not selective universities.** Jason Zimba, one of the three men who essentially wrote the math standards, admitted this at a public meeting in Massachusetts in March 2010.²² He also admitted at the same meeting that the math standards are not designed to prepare students for STEM studies (science, technology, engineering, math).

²⁰ <http://townhall.com/columnists/terrencemoore/2014/01/06/hating-the-constitution-101-the-common-core-on-the-nations-founding-n1771633/page/full>

²¹ http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf

²² Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Mar. 23, 2010), available at <https://www.google.com/webhp?hl=en&tab=ww&authuser=0#authuser=0&hl=en&q=Zimba+minutes+massachusetts+common+core>.

Here is why the Common Core standards do not prepare students for selective colleges or for STEM: First, they place the Algebra I course in high school, not in 7th or 8th grade as the top-scoring countries such as Singapore and Taiwan do.²³ This means a student on the regular Common Core track, which the great majority of them will be on, will not be able to reach calculus by senior year. And as expressed by Dr. Bud Peterson, the president of Georgia Tech, that means those students cannot be admitted to selective technology-based universities such as Georgia Tech. Indeed, the only mathematician on the Common Core Validation Committee, Dr. James Milgram of Stanford University, refused to sign off on the math standards because he concluded that under Common Core, our eighth-graders will be about two years behind those of the highest achieving nations.²⁴

The second reason the math standards shortchange college-bound students is that the standards stop with Algebra II (and not even a full Algebra II course) – almost no trigonometry, no pre-calculus, no calculus. Federal statistics show that less than 40% of students who stop with Algebra II in high school will ever go on to earn a bachelor's degree.²⁵ (Some states claim that they will have “accelerated tracks” so that students can take Algebra I early and get to calculus. But as math experts have pointed out, as a practical matter this “accelerated track” will be available primarily to students from families who can help them at home, or who can afford tutoring. Most minority students will find themselves on the regular track that ends with Algebra II.²⁶ What do you think this will do to the achievement gap?)

Two more quotes that establish beyond doubt that Common Core math is not intended for serious college preparation: Jason Zimba said in the summer of 2013, “If you want to take calculus your freshman year in college, you will need to take more mathematics than is in the Common Core.”²⁷ And College Board Vice-President Trevor Packer said that the AP Calculus course will probably be abolished, because it’s “in conflict with” Common Core.²⁸ In other words, Common Core math will not get students that far.

- **Eighth, in the early grades Common Core math recycles the discredited “fuzzy math” approaches of decades ago.** The Common Core math standards delay teaching the standard algorithms – the way math has been learned for thousands of years – in favor

²³ <http://educationnext.org/wurman-testimony-on-common-core-in-ohio/>

²⁴ <http://coehp.uark.edu/colleague/9864.php>

²⁵ <http://pioneerinstitute.org/news/lowering-the-bar-how-common-core-math-fails-to-prepare-students-for-stem/>

²⁶ <http://educationnext.org/wurman-testimony-on-common-core-in-ohio/>

²⁷ <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304020704579278060483138096>

²⁸ <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=27296>

of requiring young students to learn cumbersome, confusing “alternative” approaches.²⁹ This allows the Common Core creators to claim they are engendering “deeper learning” or “higher order thinking.” In fact, they’re simply resurrecting progressive strategies that have never worked anywhere they have been used. And these strategies of using “alternative” approaches and “explaining” what your work rather than actually working math problems is completely opposite to the way math is taught in the top-performing countries.³⁰

So, ladies and gentlemen, here is where we are: In an effort to get federal money that was yours in the first place, Nevada adopted a set of school standards that you cannot change in any meaningful way, that have no research basis, that are not internationally benchmarked,³¹ and that have never been piloted anywhere. They are “faith-based” standards – you are supposed to have faith that they will work miracles in Nevada education. How they will do that, given that they recycle all the failed fads of the past, is not clear.

Look at the track record of the people behind this. The nonprofit Achieve, Inc. is primarily known for its previous American Diploma Project – a failure. The federal government is primarily known for the US Department of Education, America 2000, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind – all failures. The Gates Foundation poured millions into its Small Schools Initiative – a failure. NGA and CCSSO can point to not one successful education initiative in their history. And now we should believe that this time, these people have it right?

Michael Cohen, the president of Achieve, said something in New York testimony in October that should be sobering to all of us. He said this: “The full effects of the Common Core won’t be seen until an entire cohort of students, from kindergarten through high school graduation, has been effectively exposed to Common Core teaching.”³² That is thirteen years. How many children will we lose in the thirteen years that it takes us to conclude that this experiment was a disastrous idea? We urge Nevada to be a leader in stepping back from the brink. Any necessary revisions of Nevada standards can, and should, be made by Nevada leaders, answerable to Nevada parents and taxpayers. Your children deserve so much better than Common Core.

²⁹ <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/07/30/do-math-common-core-massive-risky-experiment-on-your-kids/>

³⁰ <http://iowaascd.org/files/8813/2543/8288/CommonCoreResearch010112.pdf>, pp. 113-114.

³¹ <http://pioneerinstitute.org/blog/blog-education/blog-common-core/common-core-was-neither-internationally-benchmarked-nor-state-led/>

³² <http://www.achieve.org/files/Michael%20CohenAchieveNYTestimony.pdf>, p. 9.