

Common Core Education in Mississippi

Mississippi's approach to K-12 education has been under scrutiny in the news, in educational circles and in local communities. Parents and grandparents, as well as educators and legislators, have been questioning an "agreement" that the MS Board of Education (the Board) unanimously entered into with the U.S. Department of Education.

Many people are concerned about the standards and other educational elements. They claim the standards are untested, unproven and will result in a further decline in schools. The curriculum is said to contain morally objectionable and pornographic content. It is alleged that the Board enacted demoralizing, race-based performance criteria. These claims have been investigated and the concerns are valid.

There are four educational tools that are of concern. First is the standards or learning goals students are expected to achieve. The second is the curriculum or textbooks. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment that measures a school's performance is the third. The fourth is the longitudinal data system that collects students' data.

The MS Department of Education (MDE) stated that 44 states initially adopted the standards and assessment, but about half of them are now in various stages of rejecting it and/or its related components. Also, several MS Legislators have been educating the public on these problems, and they have been calling for educational reforms in the 2014 session.

Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves recently opposed legislative action to address these issues. He claimed the time to address these problems "was four years ago, when the department made the decision that was the direction they were going to head . . . For those individuals who were in the Legislature four years ago, who didn't say anything but now decided they are going to complain — shame on them."

It is more shameful for Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves to stall or deny legislators a review of Common Core. Measures that deny legislators and the people they represent the constitutional right of due process is unethical and unjust. Intimidation and veiled threats should never be part of the democratic process.

The Speaker of the House, Phillip Gunn, has taken a different approach. Speaker Gunn has said, "I'm willing to take a step back and look at it, certainly, but I'm still trying to understand what all the objection is."

History

The beginning of Common Core Standards can be dated back to 2007 with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Since then, the Gates Foundation has awarded over \$27 million to trade associations with no governmental authority to promote the Common Core Standards initiative.

In 2008 the Gates Foundation funded these trade associations and others to write the report, *Benchmarking for Success*, to present the standards to the

Obama Administration. In February 2009 the federal "Stimulus Bill" set aside \$4.35 billion for states improving their educational standards. The US Department of Education (USDE) made these funds available through the *Race to the Top* state-based grant.

If a state did not win the grant, that state would still be committed to the USDE policies in the agreement. MS did not receive any Race to the Top grants, but the Board has committed MS to federally "conditioned" standards and more.

On February 22, 2010, President Obama said in a meeting to the National Governors Association that, "we're calling for a redesigned Elementary and Secondary Education Act that better aligns the federal approach to your state-led efforts . . . First, as a condition of receiving access to Title I funds [for low-income households], we will ask all states to put in place a plan to adopt and certify standards that are college and career-ready in reading and math."

MS could have upgraded their own standards without Common Core Standards and had them certified through IHL and developed their own assessment and still be in compliance to receive Title 1 funds.

In March 2010 the USDE stated that "Beginning in 2015 [that Title 1] formula funds will be available only to states that are implementing assessments based on college and career ready standards." (In 2010 MS received over \$200 million in Title 1 funds.)

On June 25, 2010, minutes from the MS Board of Education stated that, "the Board voted unanimously to adopt the Common Core Standards [in English and Math] . . . based on finding of imminent peril to public welfare in the loss of substantial federal funds. . ." (It is alleged that the federal government's threat or induced fear of losing Title 1 funds was the basis for adopting the standards and the assessment that were so conveniently made available.)

In June 2010 the standards were published by the NGA and August 2010 was the federal deadline for *Race to the Top* grant applications. The MDE was committed to the standards in August. Two months is not much time for educators, parents and policy makers across the state to assess the standards. Was the narrow timeframe of this coincidental or intentional?

Common Core Standards

These standards are described by the MDE as "what students are expected to learn." Dr. Lynn House, Interim State Superintendent for the MDE, stated in a meeting on August 19, 2013, that "our [previous adopted educational goals or] standards are good but not where we need to be."

Dr. House has compared raising the standards to "When an Olympic high jumper wants to reach new heights, he doesn't leave the bar where it is and expect to meet that goal. To be competitive with other high jumpers, he must raise the bar. That's exactly what Common Core State

Standards will do . . . They will ensure that Mississippi's children are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive . . ." [italics added].

This statement is a "statement of hypothesis." Notice the phrase, "will do" and "will ensure." Since these standards have never been tested, a casual reading of this would lead one to believe this statement is a tested, proven and factual statement. It is not.

The MDE reported in 2013 that 60% of the schools in MS graded "C" or lower, and 92 received an "F." Thirty of these failing schools are facing a state takeover or conservatorship. Consider these schools when pondering the following: If an Olympic high jumper has not been able to clear a 6' bar, then it defies natural reason that the jumper could clear a 6'4" bar. The Olympian, with help from a coach, must first master the 6' bar before raising it higher. Applying this type of logic to underperforming and failing schools is an educational recipe for disaster.

Dr. House conveniently admits that academic performance will initially be lower. She said that, "These are higher standards and when standards are raised, test results tend to be lower at first and then will improve."

Again, note the MDE's usage of the term of certainty, "will" improve. Still, again, the standards have never been tested. This is an empty promise. This is like saying, "we've never flown this new airplane before, but I anticipate once it's off the ground it will lose altitude at first. But, trust me—it won't crash!" Do you want to buckle your children's and grandchildren's educational future into this plane?

Curriculum

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison is on Common Core's exemplary reading list and in MS public schools. This book demonstrates hardcore, sadistic and pornographically explicit material that details a step-by-step account of sexual intercourse and incestuous pedophilia (ref: 84-85, 130-131, 148-149, 162-163, 174, 181). Is this the type of literary stimulation you want exposed to your children and grandchildren? It is apparent that the judgment of a Common Core validation panel of "experts," who placed a book like this on a recommended reading list, cannot be trusted.

Assessment

Mississippi has shared these standards with 44 other states, and these states either joined one of two testing consortia or groups to gauge school performance. MS joined the PARCC consortium along with: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Washington DC, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. *Alabama and Georgia saw the problems with the standards and the testing and have withdrawn from the PARCC assess-*

ment. Other states (CO, FL, IN, LA, NY, OH, PA) are in discussions or introduced legislation to withdraw from or delay the standards and/or the assessments.

Race-Based Objectives

The MDE has said, "I believe that if we raise expectations, our students and educators will rise to meet those expectations." If this statement is true, then why is the MDE expecting less of certain racial subgroups in their Annual Measurement Objectives (AMO)?

At a bare minimum, it is morally demeaning and degrading to suggest that it will take 12 more years (on top of the past 12 years of failed NCLB) for the lowest race-based subgroup to reach the equivalency of another. Based on the MDE's actions it follows that they believe it will take nearly a quarter-century for the lowest race-based subgroup to reach the level of the highest. This is an unjust and immoral attack on a student's psyche.

Conclusion

Based on research and analysis of the recently adopted educational components being implemented through the MS Department of Education, the conclusion was reached that there are valid, fundamental problems.

The primary problem is that the standards actually represent a *hypothesis only*. This means these standards have not been tested, there is no empirical data, and the outcome of the standards is at best an educated guess.

Furthermore, in keeping with the "scientific method" that requires the testing of the hypothesis, there have been none in any US public school. Therefore, the standards is not a *scientific theory*, and there is no valid basis for any claim that these standards will work. Pure reason dictates otherwise. Neither are the standards *scientifically valid* because the standards have not been proven to be just as effective in one state as they are in another. The one shoe fits all approach will not work.

A starting point could be that government officials work together in delaying further implementation of the standards and related components. Then, work together in full disclosure with the citizens and develop a solution that is just, fair and equitable. And in doing so, ensure that proposed solutions respect the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which declares that "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people."

Our children will be used to determine if their educational theory will or will not work—unless citizens get informed, contact their elected officials, and hold them accountable.

The author of this analysis, Rob Chambers serves as consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3331 or rchambers@christianaction.com.

Common Core and the MS Department of Education

Mississippi Department of Education
Proposed AMO (Proficiency Index) Objectives by Subgroup for the State
(Option A in waiver - Reduce gap by half in 6 years)

Subgroup	Reading/Language(Proficiency Index)							
	2011 (Baseline)	Annual Increase	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
ALL	70	2.50	73	75	78	80	83	85
IEP	40	5.00	45	50	55	60	65	70
LEP	58	3.50	62	65	69	72	76	79
Economically Disadvantaged	62	3.17	65	68	72	75	78	81
Asian	86	1.17	87	88	90	91	92	93
Black	60	3.33	63	67	70	73	77	80
Hispanic	69	2.58	72	74	77	79	82	85
Native American	69	2.58	72	74	77	79	82	85
White	80	1.67	82	83	85	87	88	90

Last month I wrote the article *Common Core Education in Mississippi* that pointed out valid problems and concerns with Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In addition to untested and unproven standards, also identified was immoral curriculum and the violation of parental and student's right to privacy and religious freedom.

My conclusion called for halting any further implementation of Common Core and related parts such as the PARCC annual school performance assessment. I received great response from educators, parents, grandparents and concerned taxpayers all over the state.

I also received a letter via email from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) that I made "glaring allegations" and "unfounded criticisms" in my article. After I examined the MDE's claims, none of them were valid and most allegations were based on straw man fallacies when an accuser takes another person's original position and distorts it in such a way to make and then attack a misrepresentation of the facts. Below I state two MDE claims and a response.

MDE Claim: "Mr. Chambers states that claims outlined in the article 'have been investigated and the concerns are valid.' However, prior to writing the article, Mr. Chambers had not discussed any of the concerns with the Mississippi Department of Education staff members."

CAC Response: The validity of any analysis does not require dialogue with any party subject to the analysis. (If I see a pothole in the highway, I don't have to call the highway commissioner to tell me if I really saw a pothole.) The MDE questioning the validity of my analysis based on discussing these issues with them is irrelevant.

But I actually communicated with MDE employees about Common Core at a meeting I attended on August 19, 2013, sponsored and led by the MDE. I spoke directly with them and some of my questions were addressed at the meeting. My question is in bold below, and the MDE's response is in italics and a reflection follows.

What about the unfunded mandate for Common Core State Standards and technology? The MDE, Dr. House, answered this by saying, "Finding the funding for technology—both hardware, software, infrastructure of all kinds is still an issue and we are still trying to determine what the price tag is. No

state that we know of has quite figured out how to determine that because it varies so much from district to district."

My response to this is that financial stewardship is a fundamental tenet of Christianity, and it also extends to the realm of economics (Matt 25:14ff; Luke 14:25ff). For the MDE to adopt educational measures in which there is no known starting point or ending point to the cost is an unethical approach to an unfunded mandate.

What about the lack of educational and financial resources to fully implement CCSS? Dr. House said, "It's a real dilemma for districts that have limited resources and I don't have a perfect answer for that and if I did I assure you I'd be out there somewhere with fairy dust sprinkling it on everybody."

Along these same lines of mystical solutions for unfunded ideas, acting MS Superintendent, Dr. Carey Wright, who also strongly endorsed Common Core, stated that "If I were able to waive a magic wand, I would have universal prekindergarten for age 3 and up." What Dr. Wright of the MDE desires for pre-K is to place 3-year-old children under the domain of federal and state government education, and, to be clear, she is not talking about mother's-day-out programs.

Unfunded mandates for nationalized education standards are reminiscent of nationalized healthcare. This time it is education nationalized through "common" standards and nationalized testing. The American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten recently said, "You think the Obamacare implementation is bad? The implementation of the Common Core is far worse."

How will CCSS elevate lower performing schools to higher performance? Dr. House answered, "What we are

On the web

For an extended version of this column, please visit www.christianaction.com/blog/comments/common_core_and_the_ms_department_of_education

seeing is that many of our lower performing schools are ramping it up. You do know we have something called conservatism. . . . So if you are a "D" or an "F" school you are going to get intensive intervention from the MDE. The expectations [are] that you raise those scores. Again, ramping up is going to be very, very high. And, so that means that if you are at the bottom you have to work doubly hard to rise up to a reasonable level."

Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves agrees with the implementation of Common Core standard and the PARCC assessment and said he will "monitor" it. Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves also said, "You are going to continue to hear stories of kids who perhaps had not struggled in the past that are struggling now. That's because we are raising the standards, we are making it more difficult. I'm convinced that over time Mississippi kids will rise up and meet those increased level of expectations."

More than fairy dust, magic wands, data manipulation and rose-colored glasses will be needed when it comes to realistically improving MS school performance. The MDE reported in 2013 that 60% of the schools in MS graded "C" or lower, and 92 received an "F." Thirty of these failing schools are facing a state takeover or conservatorship. Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves also recently said that within successful school districts there are 45,000 children trapped in failing schools. A rational conclusion to these comments is that if students in failing schools

cannot pass an exam at lower standards, then he or she cannot pass a more rigorous exam with higher standards.

MDE Claim: "We have no race-based standards. Mr. Chambers asserts that it is 'an unjust and immoral attack on a student's psyche' to have annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for subgroups of students..."

CAC Response: This is a straw man. The real truth is there are race-based "objectives" the MDE agreed to as a guide for the U.S. Dept. of Education to measure academic proficiency among different groups of people. (See inset chart). Obviously, the MDE and federal government concluded that it will take 12 years for the lowest race-based subgroup to reach the same proficiency as the highest.

But this is an outright sin against God and man to demoralize a race by suggesting they have a lower mental ability to excel than any other race-based subgroup. In the eyes of God, all are of equal, moral worth and are made in the image of God.

Gov. Jeb Bush supports nationalized Common Core standards and assessments, and he founded The Foundation for Excellence in Education which held an educational summit this past October. MS Senate Education Chairmen Sen. Gray Tollison, who also supports Common Core, was a panelist on grading systems for schools, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel was the closing keynote speaker at the summit. Interestingly, Gov. Bush's foundation also received a \$2 million dollar grant last month from The Gates Foundation "to support an outreach and public information project that builds support and understanding of the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments in states."

But even Microsoft's Bill Gates recently admitted that, "It would be great if our education stuff

worked, but that we won't know for probably a decade." Based on Bill Gates' gross admission, this nationalized educational laboratory experiment will likely be conducted till your child or grandchild graduates from high school—unless you help legislative action take place in the 2014 MS Legislative session.

Gov. Mike Huckabee also supports Common Core, and he said on June 3, 2013, that "States and local school districts will determine how they want to teach kids, what curriculum to use, and which textbooks to use." Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves made a similar statement this month that "if you don't like the books that your kids are reading in school, you don't need to go complain to Washington. . . . You need to go to your school board, your local superintendent because either the school board or the teacher made that decision."

The rhetoric that curriculum is locally controlled sounds good, but it does not match emerging facts. Two months before Lt. Gov. Reeves' comments, the ACLU had already forced the Ohio Department of Education to keep the controversial and pornographic-containing book, *The Bluest Eye*, on the state's Common Core reading list. Gov. Huckabee and Lt. Gov. Reeves' comments are incorrect. MS cannot conclude that we have absolute statewide and local control over curriculum. If we think we do, then we better be aware of what's happening.

Private, parochial, and home school students are not immune from Common Core. In a phone conversation I had with Dr. David Coleman, who is known as one of the premier architects of Common Core and president of the College Board, he told me the college entrance exam they oversee will be aligned to Common Core standards. This means non-public school children will be at a predetermined disadvantage when taking college entrance exams. Your religious freedom/right to teach your child as you wish is eroding.

The 2014 MS Legislative session is just around the corner, and this will be a primary focus of Christian Action this upcoming session. Go to <https://votervoicenet/CAC/Home> to sign up for email alerts. Also, you can receive text alerts on your cell phone by texting CAC to 601-207-7077.

The author of this analysis, Rob Chambers, serves as consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3331 or rchambers@christianaction.com.

Common Core and its failed promise

Education is fundamental to the development of a child's mind. Children are most formative in their early years and is why the Bible places so much emphasis on instructing children (Deuteronomy 6:6 and Ephesians 6:4). Based on Scriptural authority Christians have placed a strong emphasis on education through small group study and Sunday school.

Education since pre-modern times has shifted to public school. Also, education has been locally controlled until recently. Families have benefited from legal rights over local control of education. With the implementation of Common Core much has changed. These standards have set forth a radical change in education of what students are expected to learn and when. There are two fundamental problems with Common Core: the surrender of local control and the failed promise of higher standards.

Common Core Standards are controlled and directed from Washington, D.C.

In 2010, with the possibility of federal dollars being dangled in front of it, Mississippi adopted the Common Core State Standards for k-12. Common Core promised to be rigorous, evidence-based, and internationally bench-marked to high performing countries.

At the request of the Mississippi Board of Education, Common Core was approved by Gov. Haley Barbour in the Race to the Top application. Gov. Barbour signed this application that included the Standards that were not even finished. This in turn unconditionally bound Mississippi to Washington, D.C. control and manipulation. Congressional supporters were Congressmen Bennie Thompson and Congressmen Thad Cochran as they signed letters of support of this educational agenda that included the Common Core Standards.

These Standards are owned by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), both in Washington, D.C. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) that will be assessing students under Common Core is also a Washington, D.C. entity. PARCC is also funded and overseen by the federal government. These Washington, D.C. entities are not accountable to the people of Mississippi.

David Coleman, primary author of Common Core said,

Year: 2009-2010 (pre Common Core)			Year: 2011-2012 (Common Core)		
Subject	Number Tested	% Passing	Subject	Number Tested	% Passing
Algebra	364	93.1	Algebra	476	56.5
Biology	325	88.6	Biology	689	66.0
English	376	75.0	English	408	73.8
U.S. History	332	98.8	U.S. History	336	81.0

Figure 1: Gulfport School District: Subject Area Testing Program Source: Mississippi Department of Education

"The standards are nothing if the assessments built in them are not worthy to teach to. . . Teachers will teach towards the test. There is no force strong enough on this earth to prevent that." So, if the learning goals are necessarily connected to the assessment, then what connects the two? The curriculum. This federal hand in glove approach to education, over and beyond Mississippi control, drives the curriculum to be "aligned" to Common Core.

Much to the chagrin of what mainstream media and leading Mississippi Republicans and Democrats say, Mississippi education is in the hands of entities in Washington, D.C. Only read the Common Core Standards "Terms of Use" to realize the extent these Washington, D.C. entities have gone to keep a firm grip on Common Core. The "Terms of Use" state that "A court of competent jurisdiction in Washington, DC shall be the exclusive forum for the resolution of any dispute between you (Mississippi) and NGA Center or CCSSO, and you irrevocably consent to the personal and subject matter jurisdiction, and venue, of such court" (emphasis added).

Supporters of the Standards say the federal government was not involved in the Common Core initiative, but David Axelrod, President Obama's former Senior Advisor, said that these standards were "the Common Core Standards which was an initiative of the Obama Administration." This is a significant admission that Republicans and Democrats are glossing over. They are echoing a message that is all too similar to what Pres. Obama said, "If you like your health care plan, you'll be able to keep your health care plan." In the words of George Will, supporters of Common Core say, "If you like your local control of education, you can keep it. Period." To which a burgeoning movement is responding: "No. Period."

Common Core Standards failed its promise.

Gulfport School District was a pilot test school for the implementation of Common Core English, Language, Arts and Math for the 2011-2012 school year. Figure 1 compares Gulfport District scores from the Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) before and after the implementation of Common Core Standards. Passing the SATP test is required to graduate. If they fail the SATP, they don't graduate. Scores are lower across the board after the implementation of Common Core. There is a significant drop in the Algebra score from 93.1 to 56.5 and in Biology from 88.6 to 66.0. In the 2012-2013 year there was no SATP testing and as a result the Mississippi Department of Education has placed Gulfport School District on academic probation.

Despite these abysmal test scores, Senate Education Chairman Gray Tollison said "I hope we all stick together, because at the end of the day there is a tremendous benefit for the state and for students to raising the achievement level." The evidence certainly points the other direction, toward the Race to the Bottom.

Why was there no SATP test given in the 2012-2013 year? Did students who failed the SATP from other districts not graduate while those who would have failed at the Gulfport District School passed? How is this fair? Are those who failed held to a higher standard than those from Gulfport District School? These are real problems and is why the MS Department of Education and Education Committee Chairmen Sen. Gray Tollison (Lafayette, Tallahatchie, Yalobusha) and Rep. John Moore (Rankin and Simpson) need to address it.

MS politicians and educators and businesses repeatedly emphasize the need for more high school graduates to be prepared for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) studies. But the Com-

mon Core fails the promise to prepare students for STEM.

President Obama, quoted in the Race to the Top application, said "Reaffirming and strengthening America's role as the world's engine of scientific discovery and technological innovation is essential to meeting the challenges of this century." In the section of the application emphasizing STEM it stated, "Equally important is the need to support and promote the STEM majors and careers for the reasons expressed in the President's statement above—it literally is a matter of national security and Mississippi has the chance to do its part." So, according to the MS Board of Education, STEM education and careers are a "matter of national security." But Common Core failed its promise to deliver on STEM.

Common Core Math Standards elaborate on this problem stating that "Research consistently finds that taking mathematics above the Algebra II level highly corresponds to many measures of student success....Of students taking (Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II and no other mathematics courses), only thirteen percent of those students met the benchmark for readiness for college algebra...(Common Core Math only goes up to Algebra II)....STEM-intending students should be strongly encouraged to take Precalculus and Calculus."

Dr. Zimba, the lead writer of the Common Core Math Standards, has admitted Common Core's deficiencies in this regard; in defining "college readiness," Zimba acknowledged that Common Core is "not only not for STEM, it's also not for selective colleges."

PARCC states that students who graduate under Common Core math standards "must progress well beyond the initial threshold of college and career readiness as defined by the (Common Core) standards" if they "wish to pursue science, technology, engineering or mathematics (S.T.E.M.) majors in college."

Dr. Bud Peterson, the president of Georgia Tech stated that "for admission to a 'technology based' college program, algebra needs to be taught in 8th grade so that the students can have some exposure to calculus before entering college." Common Core teaches Algebra I in the 9th.

Math standards expert Ze'ev Wurman said "When children are not prepared to take algebra I at the start of eighth grade, they have to accelerate three years of math into two years in order to be prepared for calculus by twelfth grade. As is, the Common Core does not include even pre-calculus expectations. This makes for a significant disadvantage to children from economically disadvantaged communities because they cannot afford the private tutoring and private courses to help them negotiate the accelerated learning."

So, why are we in the Common Core? Perhaps MS elected leaders and school superintendents signed onto the promise of the Common Core, that few people stopped to study whether the eventual product met that promise....or perhaps they had painted themselves into a corner, politically-speaking, and now think it would make them look bad to admit the truth.

But the future of our children is at stake. We need politicians of virtue to push for legislative change this session. Education Chairmen Sen. Tollison and Rep. Moore alone have the power to set the agenda in their committee to bring bills up that address Common Core by Feb. 4. Also, Lt. Gov. Reeves and House Speaker Gunn also are in positions of great influence. If these bills do not come up in their committee, then it will be because they refused to resolve this. Call Rep. John Moore 601-359-3330 Capitol, 601-591-4100 (W), 601-946-5833 (C) and Sen. Gray Tollison 601-359-2395 Capitol, 662-234-7070, (W). MS Capitol number is 601-359-3770. Tell these Chairmen and your legislators not to hold hostage the opportunity to create higher standards for our children and bring these bills out of committee by February 4. Text CORE to 95577 for text alerts and go to <https://votervoice.net/CAC/Campaigns> to sign up for legislative updates.

The author of this analysis, Rob Chambers, serves as consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3331 or rchambers@christianaction.com.

Common Core and its failed promise

Education is fundamental to the development of a child's mind. Children are most formative in their early years and is why the Bible places so much emphasis on instructing children (Deuteronomy 6:6 and Ephesians 6:4). Based on Scriptural authority Christians have placed a strong emphasis on education through small group study and Sunday school.

Education since pre-modern times has shifted to public school. Also, education has been locally controlled until recently. Families have benefited from legal rights over local control of education. With the implementation of Common Core much has changed. These standards have set forth a radical change in education of what students are expected to learn and when. There are two fundamental problems with Common Core: the surrender of local control and the failed promise of higher standards.

Common Core Standards are controlled and directed from Washington, D.C.

In 2010, with the possibility of federal dollars being dangled in front of it, Mississippi adopted the Common Core State Standards for k-12. Common Core promised to be rigorous, evidence-based, and internationally benchmarked to high performing countries.

At the request of the Mississippi Board of Education, Common Core was approved by Gov. Haley Barbour in the Race to the Top application. Gov. Barbour signed this application that included the Standards *that were not even finished*. This in turn unconditionally bound Mississippi to Washington, D.C. control and manipulation. Congressional supporters were Congressmen Bennie Thompson and Congressmen Thad Cochran as they signed letters of support of this educational agenda that included the Common Core Standards.

These Standards are owned by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), both in Washington, D.C. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) that will be assessing students under Common Core is also a Washington, D.C. entity. PARCC is also funded and overseen by the federal government. These Washington, D.C. entities are not accountable to the people of Mississippi.

David Coleman, primary author of Common Core said,

Year: 2009-2010 (pre Common Core)			Year: 2011-2012 (Common Core)		
Subject	Number Tested	% Passing	Subject	Number Tested	% Passing
Algebra	364	93.1	Algebra	476	56.5
Biology	325	88.6	Biology	689	66.0
English	376	75.0	English	408	73.8
U.S. History	332	98.8	U.S. History	336	81.0

Figure 1: Gulfport School District: Subject Area Testing Program Source: Mississippi Department of Education

"The standards are nothing if the assessments built in them are not worthy to teach to. . . . Teachers will teach towards the test. There is no force strong enough on this earth to prevent that." So, if the learning goals are necessarily connected to the assessment, then what connects the two? The curriculum. This federal hand in glove approach to education, over and beyond Mississippi control, drives the curriculum to be "aligned" to Common Core.

Much to the chagrin of what mainstream media and leading Mississippi Republicans and Democrats say, Mississippi education is in the hands of entities in Washington, D.C. Only read the Common Core Standards "Terms of Use" to realize the extent these Washington, D.C. entities have gone to keep a firm grip on Common Core. The "Terms of Use" state that "A court of competent jurisdiction in Washington, DC shall be the exclusive forum for the resolution of any dispute between you (Mississippi) and NGA Center or CCSSO, and you irrevocably consent to the personal and subject matter jurisdiction, and venue, of such court" (emphasis added).

Supporters of the Standards say the federal government was not involved in the Common Core initiative, but David Axelrod, President Obama's former Senior Advisor, said that these standards were "the Common Core Standards which was an initiative of the Obama Administration." This is a significant admission that Republicans and Democrats are glossing over. They are echoing a message that is all too similar to what Pres. Obama said, "If you like your health care plan, you'll be able to keep your health care plan." In the words of George Will, supporters of Common Core say, "If you like your local control of education, you can keep it. Period." To which a burgeoning movement is responding: "No. Period."

Common Core Standards failed its promise.

Gulfport School District was a pilot test school for the implementation of Common Core English, Language, Arts and Math for the 2011-2012 school year. Figure 1 compares Gulfport District scores from the Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) before and after the implementation of Common Core Standards. Passing the SATP test is required to graduate. If they fail the SATP, they don't graduate. Scores are lower across the board after the implementation of Common Core. There is a significant drop in the Algebra score from 93.1 to 56.5 and in Biology from 88.6 to 66.0. In the 2012-2013 year there was no SATP testing and as a result the Mississippi Department of Education has placed Gulfport School District on academic probation.

Despite these abysmal test scores, Senate Education Chairman Gray Tollison said "I hope we all stick together, because at the end of the day there is a tremendous benefit for the state and for students to raising the achievement level." The evidence certainly points the other direction, toward the Race to the Bottom.

Why was there no SATP test given in the 2012-2013 year? Did students who failed the SATP from other districts not graduate while those who would have failed at the Gulfport District School passed? How is this fair? Are those who failed held to a higher standard than those from Gulfport District School? These are real problems and is why the MS Department of Education and Education Committee Chairmen Sen. Gray Tollison (Lafayette, Tallahatchie, Yalobusha) and Rep. John Moore (Rankin and Simpson) need to address it.

MS politicians and educators and businesses repeatedly emphasize the need for more high school graduates to be prepared for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) studies. But the Com-

mon Core fails the promise to prepare students for STEM.

President Obama, quoted in the Race to the Top application, said "Reaffirming and strengthening America's role as the world's engine of scientific discovery and technological innovation is essential to meeting the challenges of this century." In the section of the application emphasizing STEM it stated, "Equally important is the need to support and promote the STEM majors and careers for the reasons expressed in the President's statement above—it literally is a matter of national security and Mississippi has the chance to do its part." So, according to the MS Board of Education, STEM education and careers are a "matter of national security." But Common Core failed its promise to deliver on STEM.

Common Core Math Standards elaborate on this problem stating that "Research consistently finds that taking mathematics above the Algebra II level highly corresponds to many measures of student success...Of students taking (Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II and no other mathematics courses), only thirteen percent of those students met the benchmark for readiness for college algebra...(Common Core Math only goes up to Algebra II)...STEM-intending students should be strongly encouraged to take Precalculus and Calculus."

Dr. Zimba, the lead writer of the Common Core Math Standards, has admitted Common Core's deficiencies in this regard; in defining "college readiness," Zimba acknowledged that Common Core is "not only not for STEM, it's also not for selective colleges."

PARCC states that students who graduate under Common Core math standards "must progress well beyond the initial threshold of college and career readiness as defined by the (Common Core) standards" if they "wish to pursue science, technology, engineering or mathematics (S.T.E.M.) majors in college."

Dr. Bud Peterson, the president of Georgia Tech stated that "for admission to a 'technology based' college program, algebra needs to be taught in 8th grade so that the students can have some exposure to calculus before entering college." Common Core teaches Algebra I in the 9th.

Math standards expert Ze'ev Wurman said "When children are not prepared to take algebra I at the start of eighth grade, they have to accelerate three years of math into two years in order to be prepared for calculus by twelfth grade. As is, the Common Core does not include even pre-calculus expectations. This makes for a significant disadvantage to children from economically disadvantaged communities because they cannot afford the private tutoring and private courses to help them negotiate the accelerated learning."

So, why are we in the Common Core? Perhaps MS elected leaders and school superintendents signed onto the promise of the Common Core, that few people stopped to study whether the eventual product met that promise.....or perhaps they had painted themselves into a corner, politically-speaking, and now think it would make them look bad to admit the truth.

But the future of our children is at stake. We need politicians of virtue to push for legislative change this session. Education Chairmen Sen. Tollison and Rep. Moore alone have the power to set the agenda in their committee to bring bills up that address Common Core by Feb. 4. Also, Lt. Gov. Reeves and House Speaker Gunn also are in positions of great influence. If these bills do not come up in their committee, then it will be because they refused to resolve this. Call Rep. John Moore 601-359-3330 Capitol, 601-591-4100 (W), 601-946-5833 (C) and Sen. Gray Tollison 601-359-2395 Capitol, 662-234-7070, (W). MS Capitol number is 601-359-3770. Tell these Chairmen and your legislators not to hold hostage the opportunity to create higher standards for our children and bring these bills out of committee by February 4. Text CORE to 95577 for text alerts and go to <https://votervoice.net/CAC/Campaigns> to sign up for legislative updates.

The author of this analysis, Rob Chambers, serves as consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3331 or rchambers@christianaction.com.

U.S. government coerced MS into Common Core

Congressmen Cochran and Wicker recently co-sponsored a resolution by Sen. Graham (SC) strongly denouncing the Obama Administration's coercion of Mississippi and other states into adopting Common Core State Standards. MS Congressional Representatives Harper, Nunnelee and Palazzo have also denounced this coercion by helping pass a bill that "prohibits coercing states into adopting specific academic standards and imposing extraneous conditions on state and school districts."

Federal coercion of Mississippi is evident. Minutes from the June 2010 meeting of the MS Board of Education (BOE) state, "the Board voted unanimously to adopt the Common Core Standards...based on finding of imminent peril to public welfare in the loss of substantial federal funds." The threatening reason?

President Obama said in early 2010 that "as a condition of receiving access to Title I [education] funds, we will ask all states to put in place a plan to adopt and certify standards that are college and career-ready in reading and math." U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, also later stated that "Beginning in 2015 [education] formula funds will be available only to states that are implementing assessments

based on college and career ready standards."

Sen. Graham stated that "Blanket education standards should not be a prerequisite for federal funding...This is simply not the way the Obama Administration should be handling education policy. Our resolution affirms that education belongs in the hands of our parents, local officials and states."

The following states have recognized problems associated with Common Core and pulled out of the assessment: AL, AK, FL, GA, IN, KS, KY, OK, PA and UT. Where are Mississippi political leaders in this debate?

Gov. Bryant, Lt. Gov. Reeves, House Speaker Gunn and Education Chairmen Sen. Tollison and Rep. Moore have not publicly opposed Common Core. Indications actually point the other direction in support of Common Core. Why would Mississippi congressional leaders oppose the federal coercion of Common Core but state leaders apparently be complicit with Common Core?

State Coercion

The Board and the MS Department of Education (MDE) and many MS politicians are pushing and defending the implementation of Common Core. Interestingly, the



with Rob Chambers

MDE has adopted the same coercive tactics as the Obama Administration did that MS Congressional leaders have recently denounced.

In the Race to the Top grant application for Common Core, the MS Board of Education stated they were "committed to a bold leadership structure that does not waver... and a systematic approach for accountability that will deny funding to those districts that do not implement with fidelity." The federal coercive pattern is duplicated here by the MDE and now in their policy recommendations at the local school board level.

The MDE has recently recommended a new section be added to the Public School Accountability Standards stating: "The local school board's responsibilities shall pertain to matters of setting policy and shall not interfere in the day-to-day operations of the school district that include but are

not limited to such duties as those relating to personnel and management decisions. Failure to comply shall result in the immediate downgrade of the district's accreditation status to Probation or Withdrawn as indicated in Accreditation Policy 2.5." Is this not the MS Department of Education stripping practically all power from the local school board whom local citizens elect?

Setting policy should continue to be the chief role of school boards. However, does the local school board not have the responsibility of taking action to correct failure to follow policy? If they did so, would that be considered interference? Also, what recourse would parents have if they received no help from the district? What are the unintended consequences of the voice of citizens and parents being sequestered?

Other Concerns

Problems with the MDE are rooted in the application Gov. Barbour and the Board of Education signed that signaled the adoption of Common Core. In this binding document, the Board strongly opposed the assumption that "those kids" from high-poverty, high-needs schools don't deserve the same education as kids "whose lives are lived in the security of

abundance...It is this segregation of "intellectual rigor" that MS will no longer tolerate."

However, in the section "How will Mississippi emphasize STEM?" the Board's starting point was in northeast Mississippi. The Board's emphasis on STEM is a private-philanthropic partnership with the Toyota Corporation to develop an advanced secondary education training center called the Center for Professional Futures (CPF). It will serve several school districts in northeast MS. Is this "segregation by intellectual rigor?" How is this narrow emphasis on STEM equitable, especially when the Board states that "In MS, all kids deserve the same intellectually rigorous education that will change their lives in powerful ways?"

Should the MS legislature keep attempting to fund the CPF via general obligation bonds? Should they also grant the State Board of Education the authority to waive state law for certain districts in the state as in HB112? No. Visit <https://votervoice.net/CAC/Campaigns> for bills Christian Action are monitoring.

The author of this analysis, Rob Chambers, serves as consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3331 or rhambers@christianaction.com.

BIBL i O C i P H E R

COLAD HB L MNARF AD CNT ILK NT

PNGHRF WG: LDF INTD NT AP GRF, NT

IARR DGC FTBLOC VOGU AC.

BOGETOSP CITDCK-CIG: PAQ

Clue: B = P

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Psalm 40:11

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

Truth is not relative.

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.