

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.

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