

ARKANSAS EDUCATION REPORT
Volume 11, Issue 3

THE COMMON CORE DEBATE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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June 11, 2014
UPDATED: July 23, 2014

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The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have ignited a passionate national debate about the standards that guide the education of our nation's and state's students. The purpose of this Arkansas Education Report is to add some clarity to the Common Core debate as well as offer a perspective that is specific to the Natural State.

Since the 1980s, there have been several unsuccessful attempts by a variety of education stakeholders to encourage the adoption of national educational standards; this movement has again recently gained momentum in the form of the voluntary but "national" Common Core State Standards. In order to be eligible for the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) contest and waivers from certain provisions of No Child Left Behind, states were required to adopt standards that prepare students to be "college-and career-ready." States had the choice to adopt the Common Core State Standards, which were recognized as meeting these criteria, or to develop their own "college-and career-ready" standards.

Initially, forty-six out of fifty states adopted (at least portions of) the CCSS. However, there has been a great deal of state-level resistance to the Common Core. Most significantly, Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina passed laws that voided their adoption of the Common Core State Standards, bringing the total number of states using CCSS down to forty-three.¹ Some of the greatest pushback has been prompted by changes in standardized testing. For example, in New York, Common Core-aligned testing has drawn recent protests from students, teachers and principals.²

Meanwhile, in Arkansas, there has been both resistance to and support for the standards. Two resolutions to consider bills to defund the CCSS were proposed and voted down in the February 2014 legislative session.³ So far, it does not appear that Arkansans are taking any extraordinary measures to withdraw from the CCSS.

In this report, we identify and evaluate the key arguments for and against the CCSS, as well as list the critiques of the CCSS that we believe are not credible.

The arguments *for* the Common Core are that the CCSS:

- 1) are more rigorous than many states' existing standards
- 2) will lead to a new (and possibly improved) testing regime
- 3) will lead to greater access to instructional resources for educators
- 4) will improve national curricular coherence, making the transition easier for students who

¹ Ujifusa, A. (2014, June 6). Days Apart, Two States Opt to Replace Common Core. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/06/06/35commonore.h33.html>

² Strauss, V. (2014, April 8). Principals slam 2014 NY Common Core tests as badly designed. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/04/08/principals-slam-2014-ny-common-core-tests-as-badly-designed/>

³ Fiscal session update-private option funding approved; education bills stall. *Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families*. Retrieved from <https://www.z2systems.com/np/clients/aradvocates/viewOnlineEmail.jsp?emailId=d05fd6458146ef2c61e2b43cd0dfa34fdm497423d05>

move from one state to another

The arguments *against* the Common Core are that:

- 1) CCSS are not rigorous
- 2) centralized control of standards is harmful
- 3) higher standards do not affect achievement
- 4) there are many implementation challenges associated with CCSS

The arguments that we believe are *not credible* are that CCSS:

- 1) represent an overreach of the federal government
- 2) have no proven track record of success
- 3) promote “fuzzy” math and lack of literature
- 4) will lead to breaches in student data privacy
- 5) will lead to lots of harmful testing

After evaluating these arguments, we conclude that Arkansas education policymakers should continue on the current track to implement the Common Core standards for three primary reasons:

- 1) Many of the complaints lodged against the Common Core revolve around issues that are actually not connected to these new standards.
- 2) The consensus is that the Common Core standards are generally stronger than the Arkansas Curricular Frameworks that preceded the CCSS and thus have the potential to improve the level of rigor in Arkansas schools.
- 3) The assessments that are currently employed in Arkansas have less usefulness today than they did ten years ago, and a new and improved assessment system has the potential to be beneficial for students in Arkansas.