

Common Core Concerns

Discussion Points Bulletin

Research Base and Academic Excellence

Why should successful Catholic schools use untested standards, in whole or in part, when a tradition already exists of successful student outcomes?

- **On the Federal National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, Catholic schools have significantly outperformed public schools for 20 years using their own created standards.¹**

Public Schools		Catholic Schools	
Reading	226	Reading	286
Math	284	Math	295

- **In 2011, religious schools far outperformed public schools on the SAT²**

Public Schools		Catholic Schools	
Reading	449	Reading	531
Math	506	Math	533
Writing	483	Writing	528

- **The Common Core Standards for Math and English Language Arts lack a research base that would justify moving from successful standards and curriculum to untested standards and curriculum.**
- **The outcome of using these standards is still very much in question.**

In "[Common Core Validation Committee Member: 'Nobody thought there was sufficient evidence' for the standards](#)", Richwine (2014a) guides readers toward the pernicious underpinning of the common core standards, its lack of a research base. Richwine references research by UC Santa Barbara professors Lorraine McDonnell and Stephen Weatherford who provide quotes from the developers of the standards regarding the difficulty of finding a research base. One developer stated, "We wanted to be able to cite non-peer-reviewed research because there's not enough research available, and often the findings are inconclusive".

¹ <http://www.ncea.org/data-information/2013-mathematics-and-reading-report-card>

² <http://www.ncea.org/data-information/2011-sat-results>

Richwine writes that another developer of the standards remarked, “If we waited for the perfect research to inform the development of the standards, we would never have the standards today.... As we move deeper and deeper into implementation...further research will inform future iterations of the standards.” [ellipsis in original]. Richwine pulls another quote from the research by McDonnell and Weatherford of a committee member remarking on the standards after the drafting stage:

It was pretty clear from the start that nobody thought there was sufficient evidence for any of the standards....The review process, in short, was inclusive and involved feedback from a lot of different perspectives. This is not ‘sufficient research evidence,’ but it is thoughtful professional judgment, applied systematically. [ellipsis in original]

Finally, Richwine states “The Common Core developers were warned by some researchers that the link between standards and achievement was tenuous, and that other reforms (“enabling conditions”) would be necessary to see real progress”.

In “[The evidence behind Common Core is really weak](#)”, Richwine (2014b) again identifies researched based findings that call into question the academic excellence of the standards. He points to two research reports taken from George Washington University’s compendium on the Common Core State Standards. These were the only two researched reports (out of 60) focusing on the effect of Common Core State Standards and students’ math achievement. Two Michigan professors who examined the relationship between the 50 states’ math scores in 2009 and the similarity of their standards to the Common Core Math Standards found that only after they adjusted for state cut-points and demographics related to socioeconomic status and poverty, that states with standards more like the Common Core Math standards had higher NAEP scores (Schmidt, & Houang, 2012). The second follow-up study contradicted the first study and showed states whose math standards were *least* similar to the common core math standards had higher NAEP scores between 2009 – 2013 (Loveless, 2014). Also, when an improvement in NAEP scores was identified by states having a more robust implementation of the standards (through professional development, new instructional materials, and joining a testing consortia) the average gain of .33 points per year *lagged far behind* the overall gain of 22 points, or almost 1 full point per year, on the historic NAEP math scores from 1990 – 2013. In other words, even with full implementation of the common core math standards in the classroom, scores on the NAEP are *lagging two-thirds behind what they historically were before the new standards*.

This research is startling and should give all schools reason to *pause and rethink their implementation of the common core math standards. As schools of excellence, we would hardly want to implement math standards and curriculum that are inferior to what we have found to work best.*

While reviewing the Common Core English Language Arts Standards, Pearson (2013), a proponent of the standards and a member of the Common Core Validation Committee discussed one aspect of the Standard's graduated levels of reading complexity and identified what he thought appeared to be an unorthodox reading progression. He identified that five different strands for graduating reading complexity had been created by what looked like a process of *general consensus*. He believed that this general consensus process was probably based upon the experience of the authors [of the](#) Common Core English Language Arts Standards (none were classroom teachers or child psychologists), whatever research might be relevant for these unique strands (there isn't any), and best practice (samples of exemplary national and international standards). This general consensus process was confirmed by his personal conversation with Susan Pimentel, [co-author of the](#) Common Core English Language Arts Standards. According to Pearson (2013), this type of progression is not something normally seen from a test development perspective, but more of a "common sense notion" (p. 4). He stated *because of the general consensus process and the fallibility of professional judgment, these standards need to be reviewed and updated periodically based on current knowledge, research, and best practices*. According to his professional opinion, we should expect revisions of the standards and updates to the copyrighted material.

Sandra Stotsky (2013), past senior associate commissioner and developer of the Massachusetts State English standards, and Validation Committee member for the Common Core State Standards, [stated](#) her committee was *never* given any names of countries used for benchmarking of the standards.

The Common Core Standards address the 'internationally benchmarked' issue with three statements in Appendix A, page 41, of the ELA standards stating the writing team consulted "numerous international models" and found several emerging patterns. It was from these emerging patterns, as identified by their professional judgment, that the CCSS were developed and not from field tested, empirical evidence.

Just [recently](#), the American Enterprise Institute hosted a panel discussion on the current state of the standards in which Chris Minnick, the Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers (co-owner the Common Core Standards copyright along with the National Governors Association) was queried about how, 10 years from now, we would measure the success of the Common Core State Standards. All three panelists stated we would have to look at the outcomes – the results - inferring that right now we really don't know what to expect! One panelist, Rick Hess from the American Enterprise Institute, stated that we should watch Kentucky since they are the furthest along with implementation and testing and wait and see how they do!

This is an experiment for which it is not necessary to jump on the bandwagon and, as a result, lower the bar of excellence in Catholic schools. Continuing to use what

has proven to work is a more prudent use of time and resources for our Catholic schools.

References

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