



## Common Core Basics

### ***What is the Common Core?***

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), or “the Common Core,” are a set of learning standards, statements of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. The CCSS were written between 2009-10 under the auspices of the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, who claimed that such standards were necessary to address the nation's “stagnant” academic progress and “lost ground to international peers.” They suggested that their “consistent” standards would ensure student academic and career success (from *corestandards.org*).

The development of the CCSS featured:

- extensive involvement of test publishers including the College Board, the ACT, and Pearson, with input from only one classroom teacher and no parents;
- closed door sessions with no public records;
- \$160 million in funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation;
- a total timeline of 14 months including a brief 2-month “comment” period which few people knew about; and
- no provision for monitoring or revisions.

Federal law forbids the imposition of national education standards, so U.S. Department of Education (DoE) officials claimed that the CCSS was “voluntary.” However, the CCSS were the only existing set of standards that met DoE requirements for funding under its Race to the Top competition or for waivers to the increasingly impossible mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act. Given school budgets tightened by recession, most states decided to adopt the CCSS to get federal funds. Since then, several states have dropped the CCSS or put implementation on hold.

### ***Testing and the Common Core***

The same testing companies who worked on the CCSS have received multi-million dollar contracts to write the CCSS tests for the two groups overseeing test development for the states – the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Originally, most states signed on to one or both of these groups' test programs, but several have recently pulled out.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan claims that the new tests will be far better than current standardized tests. No one knows if that is true. What we do know is that the CCSS tests will:

- have high stakes, since, in order to get federal funds, most states agreed to connect student test scores to teacher, principal, and school evaluation;
- cost an estimated \$1 to \$8 billion to develop, with profits going mainly to test publishers;
- look a lot like the current error-prone standardized tests, since they will be written by the same test makers; and
- require major investments in technology hardware, software and connectivity, which will open up more opportunities for data mining of private student information by for-profit companies.