



**Annotated References for
PAA fact sheet “Common Core Basics” and
position paper “PAA opposes Common Core State Standards, PARCC/SBAC tests”
April 2015**

1. There is no evidence to support claims by corporate interests that the U.S. needs common standards to address poor academic results and be “globally competitive.”

The National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), which are primarily lobbying groups heavily funded by the Gates Foundation, joined together to proclaim that “higher” learning standards were necessary to address the nation's “stagnant” academic progress and “lost ground to international peers.” They suggested that “consistent” standards would ensure student academic and career success (*CCSSO web site***).

This argument was an outgrowth of the efforts of ideologues to undermine the nation's democratic public school system in order to advance their privatization and union-busting agenda. Frustrated by the public's consistent and strong support for public schools, and fueled by millions in Gates, Walton, and Broad foundation funds, these corporate interests launched a massive propaganda campaign to convince people that our schools were in fact terrible failures (*see, for example, Advance Illinois, “The State We're In,” 2008*). They used an apples-to-oranges comparison of US with international students' test scores to proclaim our inferiority, a process that has been soundly debunked by many researchers (e.g. Carmoy and Rothstein, *EPI report*).

The effort to undermine public schools went nationwide under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), now the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB labeled schools as failures based on their students' failure to meet the law's impossible demand that 100% be proficient by 2014. The same “crisis” will simply refuel under CCSS/PARCC/SBAC,* whose “higher standards” have already led to significantly higher test failure.

2. There is no evidence for CCSS originators' claims that their standards are significantly higher and produce “college and career ready” graduates.

Anti-public school ideologues claimed that U.S. public education needed higher, common standards in order to be economically competitive. They offered no factual evidence for such a claim (*Mathis, “Effective Reform?” p.6*).

*CCSS = Common Core State Standards

PARCC= Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career

SBAC = SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium

** Parenthetical references are detailed at the end of this paper.

On the contrary, while the CCSS standards are just barely established in a handful of states, the U.S. economy has rebounded strongly. Other countries around the globe – even some touted as ahead of us in student achievement, such as Japan, China and Canada – remain in an economic slump (*Reuters*). And research has shown no correlation between the use of national standards and countries' scores on international tests (*Mathis, "Effective Reform?" p.7*).

Many states did indeed lower their “proficiency” cut scores on state tests in an attempt to make appear that they were meeting NCLB requirements for significant proficiency growth over time, that is, to avoid failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) (*Mathis, "Effective Reform?" p. 5*). However, the states did not change their written standards.

The term “college and career ready” is essentially meaningless in this context, but it was the phrase used in U.S. Department of Education (USDE) competitive grants programs under the leadership of Education Secretary Arne Duncan. For states to qualify for Race to the Top funds, for example, they had to agree to adopt “college and career-ready standards,” which was, conveniently, a self-proclaimed virtue of CCSS. In fact, USDE made it clear to applicant states that adopting the CCSS and its associated tests was a preferred strategy (*Hess, p.3*).

The claim that CCSS are “higher standards” was based on “the subjective judgment of four evaluators hired by the pro-Common Core Thomas B. Fordham Institute in 2010, who opined that the new standards were better than about three-quarters of existing state standards” (*Hess, pp. 2-3*).

3. CCSS development was secretive, overhasty, and dominated by test publishers

The history of CCSS development has become more familiar to the public as the controversy over the program grows, and can be reviewed in the Hess, Ravitch, and Mathis pieces noted below, among others.

Briefly, in 2009, the NGA and the CCSSO contracted with Achieve, Inc., a program of the NGA, to draft “common core” standards. The bulk of the funding for this project came from the Gates Foundation (*Gewertz, "Allies"*).

Drafting the standards took place over the course of about a year. Work groups met in private and were made up predominantly of representatives from ACT, the College Board, and Achieve, with a few others from conservative think tanks and other business-oriented groups such as America's Choice and the Hoover Institute (*NGA press release, <http://tinyurl.com/lbv6m85>*). Only one classroom teacher worked with the group, and there were no other school-level educators (*Stotsky, "Invalid"*).

ACT has stated that they played a “leading role” in developing the CCSS, and that ACT's “definition of college and career readiness **is the one on which the Common Core standards are based**” (*emphasis added, ACT reports*).

The first CCSS draft was released to the public in March, 2010, and the final draft came out a couple of months later, on June 2. In order to qualify for Race to the Top funds, states were required to have adopted the CCSS (or one of the mythical “other” sets of college- and career-ready standards) no later than August 2, 2010, the deadline for RTTT applications. This extremely tight timeline left little opportunity for public input, much less thoughtful deliberation by state boards of education or legislators.

4. There are no provisions for community input into revising the CCSS.

CCSS are owned by and the intellectual property of the NGA and CCSSO. According to them, adoption of the Common Core standards means accepting 100 percent of the standards verbatim. States are allowed to add an additional 15 percent of their own standards, though most states have not done so (*Kendall, “15% Rule,” p. 5*).

A spokesperson for Achieve told the State Impact online newspaper that states can make subtractions and changes to the CCSS, but they do so “at their own peril,” because the PARCC and SBAC test the Common Core “as it’s written” (*State Impact*).

The FAQ section of the CCSSO web site states that “The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers will continue to serve as the two leading organizations with ownership of the Common Core and will make decisions about the timing and substance of future revisions to the standards in consultation with the states.”

5. PARCC/SBAC assessments will not be “better tests”

PARCC/SBAC tests are being written by the same companies that have fed NCLB's test mania. These companies, including Pearson, Educational Testing Service, and CTB/McGraw-Hill, have long histories of mistakes and incompetence. CCSS tests continue to be dominated by multiple-choice questions. There will be more tests under CCSS, not fewer (*FairTest: Myths and Realities*). Students are already getting pre-tests to see how they are likely to do on the test, regular practice tests, and other interim versions of the final test. The time needed for the tests is longer in most cases, up to 10-11 hours at upper grade levels (*Gewertz, “Pressure”*).

As with most standardized tests, questions and answers on PARCC/SBAC tests are secret, which means that we either have to take the test makers' word that the tests are better – or even good – or else someone has to blow a whistle on the test, as famously happened with the pineapple question on a state test in New York (<http://tinyurl.com/cdwa44f>).

Much has been made by people from Education Secretary Duncan on down that the Common Core will test deeper, more critical thinking. The PARCC and SBAC consortia have made some sample questions available on their web sites, and many of these have already raised red flags. In addition, teachers, students and parents have been dismayed by what they feel are unnecessarily complex and often sheer nonsensical questions on the Common Core-aligned worksheets and other homework assignments and quizzes designed to prepare students for the PARCC/SBAC tests.

Dumb PARCC/SBAC test questions

Look at these test questions and homework worksheets and ask yourself if CCSS/PARCC/SBAC might be ***trying to make the standards/tests seem smarter by making our children seem dumber.***

From a sample PARCC third-grade test question on a story about creatures who were having a bad day. The story said,

“And they were cross — oh so cross!”

What does the word “cross” means in the story?

- a) excited
- b) lost
- c) upset
- d) scared.

Here’s how dictionary.com defines the adjective “cross”: “angry and annoyed; ill-humored; snappish: Don’t be cross with me. Synonyms: petulant, fractious, irascible, waspish, crabbed, churlish, sulky, cantankerous, cranky, ill-tempered, impatient, irritable, fretful, touchy, testy.”

Apparently the wanted answer is “upset,” but that does not appear as ***any of the choices*** above. It’s just not a very good synonym for “cross.”

Why should third graders be expected to choose a “right” answer that isn't even in the dictionary (*PURE blog*)?

A teacher from New York wrote an article describing the problems one particular fourth-grade student had with a PARCC math test, which asked students to “Draw a model using equal groups or an array to show the problem” (*Hernandez, “9-Year Old Eyes”*). The student was stumped – he couldn't remember what an “array” was. Can you?

A second-grader in California had a funny but reasonable response to a CCSS-aligned homework assignment's “higher order thinking” challenge. She figured correctly that when “Mike saw 17 blue cars and 25 green cars at the store,” Mike saw 41 cars. But when she was asked to explain “how the number sentence shows the problem,” she wrote: “I got the answer by talking in my brain and agreed of the answer that my brain got” (*Owens, “Revenge”*).

A New York teacher wrote anonymously about the PARCC test:

One of the reasons I actually support certain parts the Common Core is due to the emphasis on getting kids to go beyond the surface level of a text, but none of these questions tested their ability to do that. Instead of a question like: “What caused the character to (insert action here) in the middle of the story?” (which, mind you, is hard enough for an 8-year-old to identify as it is), there were questions like: “In Line 8 of Paragraph 4, the character says ... and in Line 17 of Paragraph 5, the character does ... Which of the following lines from Paragraph 7 best supports the character’s actions?” This, followed by four choices of lines from Paragraph 7 that could all, arguably, show

motivation for the character's actions in the preceding paragraphs. Additionally, MANY of the questions on the third-grade tests were aligned with fifth-grade standards (especially related to the structure of the text itself, rather than its meaning), and did not address the third-grade expectations (*Slate*).

There have been numerous published reports from parents who are completely baffled by CCSS questions in areas in which these parents have advanced degrees (see, for example, *Strauss*, "Parent to Obama" and *Garland*, "Math Problem").

Here's one more, reported by Carol Burris, an award-winning New York principal who has become one of the most vocal critics of the CCSS, in the Answer Sheet (*Strauss*, *Burris*):

"My music teacher, Doreen, brought me her second-grade daughter's math homework. She was already fuming over Education Secretary Arne Duncan's [remark about why "white suburban moms" oppose the Common Core](#), and the homework added fuel to the fire. The problem that disturbed her the most was the following:

3. *Sally did some counting. Look at her work. Explain why you think Sally counted this way.*

177, 178, 179, 180, 190, 200, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214.

It was on a homework sheet from the New York State Common Core Mathematics Curriculum for Grade 2 (*Grade 2 Math*).

Doreen's daughter had no idea how to answer this odd question. The only response that made sense to her was, "Because she wanted to." My assistant principal and math specialist, Don Chung, found the question to be indefensible.

6. The program design offers expanded access to the "education marketplace" and undermines student data privacy.

Overall, we believe that a significant, if not the overriding, purpose of CCSS/PARCC/SBAC is to open up the "education marketplace" to private companies. In her book, *Reign of Error*, Diane Ravitch quotes Steven Brill: "the adoption of common standards and shared assessments means that education entrepreneurs will enjoy national markets where the best products can be taken to scale" (*Ravitch, Reign*, p. 17).

Furthermore, we are very concerned about new threats to the privacy of public school students and their families, which is linked to CCSS. State tracking of all students using the same Common Core standards and tests raises the specter of a national database of private information about children and families.

Changes resulting from U.S. Department of Education initiatives have contributed to this increased threat to student data privacy. As part of its Race to the Top program, the Department of Education under Arne Duncan required states to adopt new learning standards and tests in order to qualify for certain grants. States were allowed to write their own, but time pressure and massive

funding from the Gates Foundation pushed most to adopt the Common Core State Standards and CCSS tests written by one of two test writing groups (known as PARCC and Smarter BAC).

Federal funding also required states to track all student assessment scores and other information from year to year in a longitudinal database. This information used to stay at the school district level – when a student moved out of the district, these records did not follow him or her. Now states will track all of their students.

Twice in recent years, the US Department of Education rewrote the regulations for carrying out the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), allowing student data to be shared with third parties - even for-profit companies - without parents' permission.

Finally, business interests are pushing states and school districts to expand online learning, which increases opportunity for student data collection by private companies.

7. Following the CCSS/PARCC/SBAC path will hurt our most vulnerable children, creating new barriers to their access to quality education.

High-stakes standardized testing has an especially negative impact on low-income students, students of color, English-language learners and students with special educational needs. Numerous studies have documented the role played by high-stakes testing in high dropout rates, the school-to-prison-pipeline, widespread cheating scandals, and the closing of under-resourced public schools that have anchored neighborhoods for generations, while failing to provide stable or improved alternatives (*see for example, FairTest, "Pipeline"*).

A FairTest fact sheet, "Racial Justice and Standardized Educational Testing," states that young people of color, particularly those from low-income families, have suffered the most as the explosion of high-stakes standardized testing in U.S. public education has undermined equity and school quality.

Decades of research demonstrate that African American, Latino and Native American students, as well as students from some Asian groups, experience problems with high stakes testing, from early childhood through college entrance, including disproportionate failure rates on state or local high school graduation exams, more likelihood of being held back in grade which increases the risk of dropping out, lower scores on college admissions tests leading less access to so-called "merit" scholarships and college admission, risk of suspension, expulsion, "counseling out" or otherwise removal from the school due to low scores in order to boost school results, "stereotype threat" which increases the likelihood that students of color will have inaccurately low scores, tests that are often inaccurate for English language learners leading to misplacement or retention, and frequent placement of African Americans, especially boys, in special education programs which often fail to fully educate them (*Fairtest, "Racial Justice"*).

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