



November 22, 2013

Rep. Marleen O'Toole  
Chair, House Education Committee  
313 House Office Building  
402 S. Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Representative O'Toole,

I am writing on behalf of the Florida Stop Common Core Coalition, composed of thirty-eight groups representing hundreds of thousands of parents and citizens from Florida and nationally. I hope both to respond to several contradictions present in the [letter](#) that you received from The Thomas B. Fordham Institute dated November 5, 2013 and to elucidate more of our concerns about the Common Core standards as the State Board of Education and you in the legislature consider Florida's road ahead with both the standards and the aligned assessments.

The scope of the contradictions in the Fordham letter is astonishing. For Mr. Finn and Mr. Petrilli to say their organization "reviewed Florida's old standards as well as the Common Core State Standards and found them to be comparable to one another" and then a few lines later say that the Common Core represents "higher, clearer school standards" is stunning in its illogic. How can they say that "Florida, to its credit, has opted to raise expectations for student learning" and that the two sets of standards are "comparable" at the same time?

Two other contradictions derive from the following statement in the Fordham letter, "If states choose to use flexibility built into the Common Core to improve their standards even more, we will support that, too." First of all, if the standards are as "high," "clear," and "rigorous" as proponents claim, why would they need to be improved?

Even more important, however, is this whole touting of this false idea of "flexibility built into the Common Core." States that wanted to meaningfully compete for desperately needed federal Race to the Top funds during a severe recession were [required to adopt 100%](#) of the [copyrighted Common Core](#) standards [verbatim](#). They were then ["allowed" to add 15% percent of their own standards](#), which were not going to be on any of the aligned national assessments developed by PARCC and SBAC. This was substantiated by Mr. Finn in his [Michigan testimony](#) (37:30) when he said, "The assessment will be the checkpoint here." Florida [made the conscious decision not to adopt](#) any of their own standards. If as a result of the public hearings and comment, Florida does decide to change or add to the standards in order to make them actually rigorous enough for STEM majors at selective four year universities, developmentally appropriate, teach a coherent literature curriculum, and to fix other glaring problems, Florida will run afoul of the copyright issue, the "15% rule," and alignment with the national assessments by PARCC, to [which Florida still belongs and whose test the state is still considering](#). In other words, Florida must either make only superficial changes continuing to impose the Common Core against all of the substantive opposing academic, legal, and public opinion or they must withdraw.

Messrs. Finn and Petrilli also contradict members of their own institution when they say, "We also believe that key education decisions belong with states, communities, teachers and parents and were therefore glad that the Common Core limited its work to standards and did not push into curriculum." Yet, Finn and Kathleen Porter McGee admit in a Fordham study, "In order for standards to have any impact, however, they must change classroom practice." Also, according to [Professor Jay Greene](#):

"The [National Council on Teacher Quality](#), with support and praise from the Fordham Institute, are grading teacher training programs on whether 'The program trains teacher candidates to teach reading as prescribed by the Common Core State Standards.' Wait. 'Prescribed?' I thought Common Core didn't prescribe pedagogy."

The Fordham letter also does not acknowledge the presence of the [Common Core text exemplars](#) and the [federally funded national model curriculum](#) that accompanies the national tests under development that are aligned to the Common Core standards. As already stated, Florida is still considering the PARCC test. The stakes for this national test are very high and include district funding, teacher pay and tenure, and student grade advancement and graduation. So, it is highly unlikely that teachers and districts will choose curriculum that is different from either the national model curriculum or the text exemplars. Even though the State Board of Education has rejected the official Common Core exemplars, according to the commissioner, districts are still able to choose them. Therefore, the very controversial curriculum that is present on that list, such as the pornographic novels *The Bluest Eye* or *In the Time of the Butterflies*, can still be presented to the children of Florida, and likely will be, as test taking is emphasized over learning.

The letter acknowledges the major concerns of many with Common Core by saying, "It's appropriate, of course, to worry about threats like federal intervention into schools, ideological indoctrination of students, and poor-quality instruction." Unfortunately, they then immediately go on to dismiss those issues out of hand by saying, "But the Common Core doesn't promote any of those things," without any evidence to justify those claims. Here are just a few of the reasons why those concerns are in fact justified:

**Federal Intrusion** – There is abundant evidence that this major concern of Governor Scott and many legislators around the country, including Rep. Mayfield and the other co-sponsors of HB 25, is justified. This evidence is found in federal documents, as well as legal and academic research, including our [policy analysis](#), and is outlined in Appendix A.

**Ideological Indoctrination of Students** – This is an issue both because the federal government and numerous state and national groups have admitted that the Common Core standards are teaching subjective psychosocial skills and multiculturalism, but also because there are many examples of curriculum aligned to the Common Core that are subjective, politically correct and indoctrinating, while gathering psychosocial attitudes, opinions and beliefs from our children via Common Core aligned curricular assessments and national tests. This is extensively documented in the [written comments that I submitted](#) to the Department of Education during the comment period and in Appendix B.

**Poor Quality Instruction** – The Common Core standards lead to poor quality instruction because they are low quality standards. Appendix C contains a sample of the research and significant academic opinion from across the nation and the political spectrum dealing with both subject matter concerns as well as whether this effort is likely to be successful.

This letter provides only a small fraction of the research that shows the many problems with the Common Core standards. As for the alternative plan that Messrs. Finn and Petrilli demand, we would suggest at a minimum staying with Florida's previous math standards that their organization already rated higher and better than the Common Core. Our coalition views the other recommendations of Wurman in math and Stotsky in English as rock solid and far preferable to the academic atrocities being committed with the Common Core. We also believe that Representative Mayfield's bill, HB 25, will best allow proper examination as was ordered by Governor Scott, and fiscal analysis to really provide for a proper vetting of the standards, which certainly were implemented without that proper examination and fiduciary analysis.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and views. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. Best wishes as you make these important decisions for the future of the children of the great state of Florida.

Sincerely,



Karen R. Effrem, MD

President of Education Liberty Watch and Co-Founder of the Florida Stop Common Core Coalition

CC:

Representative Elizabeth Porter

Representative Betty Reed

Representative Janet Adkins

Representative Michael Bileca

Representative Mark Danish

Representative Manny Diaz, Jr.

Representative Reggie Fullwood

Representative James W. Grant

Representative Travis Hutson

Representative Charles McBurney

Representative Jeanette M. Nuñez

Representative Keith W. Perry

Representative Kathleen M. Peters

Representative Joe Saunders

Representative Cynthia A. Stafford

Representative Victor Manuel "Vic" Torres

Representative Carl F "Z" Zimmerman

Representative Deborah Mayfield

Representative Will Weatherford

## Appendix A – Evidence of Federal Intrusion in the Development of the Common Core Standards

- As pointed out by [Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute](#), the 2008 report [Benchmarking for Success](#), published by Achieve, The National Governors Association, and The Council of Chief State School Officers, admits that federal incentivizing of the national standards was the plan all along: “First, federal policymakers should offer funds to help underwrite the cost for states to take the five action steps described above [including ‘adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards in math and language arts.’]...As states reach important milestones on the way toward building internationally competitive education systems, the federal government should offer a range of tiered incentives to make the next stage of the journey easier, including increased flexibility in the use of federal funds and in meeting federal educational requirements and providing more resources to implement world-class educational best practices.” This provision of “more resources” ultimately led to the Race to the Top grant program and “increased flexibility in...meeting federal education requirements” ultimately led to the illegal No Child Left Behind waiver program, both of which all but required the Common Core. This same call for federal incentives was originally on the Common Core standards website but has been removed.
- The National Governor’s Association, one of the major developers of Common Core, [receives 80% of its funding from the federal government](#).
- The federal government is funding the PARCC and SBAC national tests and [model curriculum](#), as well as supervising the [development of test questions](#) for those tests with a technical review panel that includes the Fordham Institute’s Kathleen Porter-McGee.
- General Counsel Kent Talbert and Deputy General Counsel Robert Eitel of the US Department of Education during the George W. Bush administration have done extensive legal research in a [whitepaper for the Pioneer Institute](#) and found that with the Common Core standards, aligned assessments, and model curriculum, ***“The result is a de facto national curriculum and instructional materials effectively supervised, directed, or controlled by the USDOE.”*** (Emphasis added)
- [David Axelrod](#), former senior adviser to President Obama, said on October 24, 2013, “Today we are having a discussion, as you know, about the ***Common Core standards, which was an initiative of the Obama administration.***” (Emphasis added).
- Here is one example of language passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in its reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (HR 5) indicating significant concern about federal overreach:

SEC. 5521. PROHIBITION AGAINST FEDERAL MANDATES, DIRECTION, OR CONTROL. (a) In General- No officer or employee of the Federal Government shall, directly or indirectly, through grants, contracts, or other cooperative agreements, mandate, direct, or control a State, local educational agency, or school’s specific instructional content, academic standards and assessments, curricula, or program of instruction, (including any requirement, direction, or mandate to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative or any other academic standards common to a significant number of States), nor shall anything in this Act be construed to authorize such officer or employee to do so. (b) Financial Support- No officer or employee of the Federal Government shall, directly or indirectly, through grants, contracts, or other cooperative agreements, make financial support available in a manner that is conditioned upon a State, local educational agency, or school’s adoption of specific instructional content, academic standards and assessments, curriculum, or program of instruction, (including any requirement, direction, or mandate to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative, any other academic standards common to a significant number of States, or any assessment, instructional content, or curriculum aligned to such standards), even if such requirements are specified in an Act other than this Act, nor shall anything in this Act be construed to authorize such officer or employee to do so.

## Appendix B – Evidence of Ideological Indoctrination and Psychological Manipulation of Students via the Common Core Standards

- “In national policy, there is increasing attention on 21st-century competencies (which ***encompass a range of noncognitive factors***, including grit), and persistence is ***now part of the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.***” ([Emphasis added](#) – p. 8 of PDF)
- “Various elements of ***SEL [social emotional learning] can be found in nearly every state’s K-12 standards framework and in the Common Core State Standards*** for the English Language Arts.” ([Emphasis added](#) – p. 6 of PDF).
- “[A]s new assessment systems are developed to reflect the new standards in English language arts, mathematics [Common Core], and science, significant attention will need to be given to the design of tasks and situations that call on students to apply a range of 21st century competencies that are relevant to each discipline. ***A sustained program of research and development will be required to create assessments that are capable of measuring cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills.***” ([Emphasis added](#) – p. 49 of PDF).
- The now Common Core aligned SpringBoard English Language Arts curriculum, having been previously adopted by several large Florida counties, such as Orange County and Hillsborough County is now bidding for the 2013-14 Florida statewide textbook adoption in grades 6-12. This English curriculum is published by the College Board, now led by chief Common Core English architect David Coleman and responsible for the SAT college entrance exam, the GED high school graduation test, and the AP tests. This curriculum contains many ideologically biased items and many controversial, non-cognitive, psychosocial survey assessments scattered throughout the curriculum that will become part of children’s academic record for life (Documentation available on request):
  - Activity 2.14 – From a Marxist Perspective in Unit 2 the Collective Perspective that describes Marx as a “philosopher, economist, political theorist, historian, and published author” and contains ten survey questions requiring children to “Review these statements about the importance of money, power, and social class, and then circle the responses that most nearly reflect your beliefs” by saying where they “Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree”
    - “I would rather marry someone I love than someone that is rich.”
    - “Middle class people are happier than wealthy or poor people”
    - “People that have power have earned it and deserve to enjoy it.”
- [September 9, 2013 Political Party Activity](#) for middle school students in Indian River County in English class linked to specific Common Core standards per the [teacher’s lesson plan](#):  
CCSS: LACC.68.RH.1.2, LACC.68.RH.2.4, LACC.68.WHST.1.2, LACC.7.SL.1.1
- The Partnership for Assessments of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), one of two multi-state consortia that are developing the federally funded, federally supervised national Common Core aligned test which will assess these various psychosocial parameters, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the federal government to share individual student data with them:
  - “Comply with and where applicable coordinate with the ED staff to fulfill the program requirements established in the RTTA Notice Inviting Applications and the conditions on the grant award, as well as to this agreement, including, but not limited to working with the Department to develop a strategy to make student level data that results from the assessment system available on an ongoing basis for research, including for prospective linking, validity, and program improvement studies; subject to applicable privacy laws” (Emphasis added)

## Appendix C – Evidence of Poor Quality Instruction Due to Poor Quality Standards and Likely Lack of Effectiveness

- One conclusion [Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institution](#) reached from his research was, “Don’t let the ferocity of the oncoming debate fool you. The empirical evidence suggests that the Common Core will have little effect on American students’ achievement. The nation will have to look elsewhere for ways to improve its schools.”
- [Eric Hanushek of the Hoover Institution](#) wrote, “We currently have very different standards across states, and experience from the states provides little support for the argument that simply declaring more clearly what we want children to learn will have much impact.”
- [Research by Neal McCluskey](#) of the Cato Institute examined the empirical evidence comparing educational outcomes for countries with and without national standards and that research found other things equal, no benefit from national standards.
- Professor Sandra Stotsky has said that the high school English standards are at a [seventh grade level](#) and that they “[weaken the base of literary and cultural knowledge](#) needed for authentic college coursework, decrease the capacity for analytical thinking,...and completely muddle the development of writing skills.”
- Dr. Stotsky’s scholarship was referenced in a [letter by 132 Catholic scholars](#) who wrote to the Catholic bishops, saying “Common Core is so deeply flawed that it should not be adopted by Catholic schools which have yet to approve it, and that those schools which have already endorsed it should seek an orderly withdrawal now.”
- [Dr. James Milgram](#), professor emeritus at Stanford University, as the only or one of very few academic mathematicians on the validation committee who refused to sign off on the final version of the standards has repeatedly pointed out that American students will be two years behind their international peers using Common Core math standards by the end of eighth grade and farther behind by the end of high school.
- [Ze’ev Wurman](#) has repeatedly testified, including for Florida, that the Common Core math standards are not internationally benchmarked, are not rigorous, and will not make students ready for college math at a four year university or for STEM careers. In his Florida testimony, he quotes Common Core math architect Jason Zimba saying, “[Common Core is] not only not for STEM, it’s also not for selective colleges. For example, for UC Berkeley, whether you are going to be an engineer or not, you’d better have pre-calculus to get into UC Berkeley.”
- Teachers have said that under Common Core, they will accept that [4 x 3 = 11 as the correct](#) answer if students show the “right” process.