

Is Common Core Entering Virginia Education Through Adult Programs?

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As a new resident in Virginia, I was happy to learn that Virginia did not adopt the Common Core Standards for States. Virginia honored the wisdom of our Founding Fathers by respecting the limits they placed on federal power in favor of allowing states to provide their citizens with more efficient services tailored to state and local needs and values. I am also pleased that my three grandchildren who live in Virginia will not be educated with the Common Core “one size fits all” national approach to education.

Common Core is the culmination of a movement that began in the 1990's to adopt national academic standards and assessments while building huge student data bases to track students from kindergarten into the workforce. This agenda has been accomplished by the involvement of both private and government organizations. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has poured millions of dollars into the creation of Common Core. The formulation of the standards began in 2009 by a group of governors, their head staff members and a group of policy makers. They are referred to as the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Chief Council of State School Officers (CCSSO), names which make them sound as if the states had input in the development of Common Core Standards. However, the standards were actually developed by a 24-member Standards Development Work Group whose deliberations were confidential throughout the process. (Eye on Virginia Education: “Education Without Representation: Common Core State Standards”) The stated purpose of Common Core is to make students “college and career ready”. Yet one member of the Common Core Validation Committee, Dr. Sandra Stotsky, refused to sign off on the standards stating that “college and career readiness” (CCR) has never been clearly defined by the authors of the standards. This raises the question whether the motivation of Common Core has been the standards themselves or has it been the progressive philosophy that a nationalized system is the best method of education. (Home School Legal Defense Association HSLDA: Common Core Issues/ Topic Papers: “What is Common Core?”)

When I learned that Greene County was considering the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), which is aligned with Common Core College and Career Readiness (CCR) as an alternative for adults to earn a high school diploma, I wanted to know more about it. The NEDP Director, Stacy Downey, directed me to the websites of 4 organizations which had relevancy in the revision of NEDP allowing it to become aligned with CCR standards. Those organizations were **Common Core State Standards**, the **Partnership of 21st Century Skills Standards**, **Casas National Consortium Content Standards**, and the **Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC)**.

As a former middle school social studies teacher, I specifically asked for information related to social studies content within the NEDP. After a careful review of each of the websites, I perceived that the national organization, **Partnership For 21st Century Skills**, likely had the most influence on the social studies content for NEDP. The Partnership (**P21**) online manual entitled ***Reimagining Citizenship for the 21st Century***, was produced after the Partnership (**P21**) embarked on a year-long project to “redefine and reimagine 21st Century citizenship”. After reading that manual, my impression of their “reimagining” effort is that more emphasis is placed on a “global citizenship” concept with less emphasis on the concept of “American citizenship”. Another document produced by the Partnership (**P21**) entitled, ***Framework for State Action on Global Education***, stated that it is a goal to provide content for teachers to embed global themes and problem-based learning that focuses on global issues, with a priority on the core subjects while giving teachers access to content and tools within and across state borders to accomplish this.

While teaching social studies during the second half of the 20th Century, I observed an educational point of view moving away from an emphasis on America’s heritage as a unifying “melting pot” of cultures made strong by our founding principles of government and our shared history while, at the same time, observing a growing emphasis on multi-culturalism which, in my opinion, weakens our unifying “melting pot” concept of citizenship. I do not want a growing emphasis on a global perspective of citizenship to further weaken the study of our country’s heritage and founding principles.

While seeking information, I also visited the United States Department of Education Website where I learned that a 3-day workshop was held in DC during March, 2015, with educators from 12 states learning the core instructional actions to effectively implement CCR standards in adult education classrooms. Virginia, a state that did not adopt Common Core, was listed as one of the 12 states participating in that workshop. It was stated that the participants were instructed how to:

- Determine the alignment of an instructional resource to the CCR standards
- Revise the resource to improve its alignment, and
- Create CCR-aligned lessons

It was also stated that participants left the workshop equipped with training materials that will enable them between then and June 2015, to pilot training for up to two local-programs in their states while they are engaging in longer-range planning to scale up what they learned for instruction statewide. In September 2015, everyone will return to DC for a second training workshop. These workshops are conducted by Standardworks, Inc., an education consultancy which has been awarded a contract by the US Dept of Education/Office of Vocational and Adult Education to continue OVAE's work implementing college and career readiness in adult education. (U.S. Department of Education Website) Standardworks co-founder, Susan Pimentel, will be the principal investigator on the project and, according to the Standardworks Website, Ms Pimentel is also the lead writer for the English Language Arts and Literacy standards for the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Virginia and 3 other states (Texas, Nebraska and Alaska) in their wisdom did not opt for Common Core. However, Common Core aligned curriculum appears to be "creeping" into our Virginia schools through our adult education programs. Several states who adopted Common Core are already considering legislation that partially or fully pulls back from their commitment to Common Core. Indiana has already opted out completely. I am strongly opposed to funding any additional Common Core aligned programs in our Virginia schools, and for that reason, at the April 8, 2015, school board meeting, I asked the Greene County School Board not to implement NEDP.

Recently the Virginia Legislature passed a bill that would have blocked the State Board of Education from adopting curriculum from the national Common Core Standards without prior approval by the legislature, but it was vetoed by Governor McAuliffe. The Governor stated “this bill infringes on the authority of the Virginia Board of Education, particularly given the fact that Virginia has no plans to adopt the Common Core Standards.” Yet, this spring the Virginia Board of Education approved the participation of Virginia educators in the before mentioned national workshop and ongoing project designed to “effectively implement College Career Readiness Standards in adult education classrooms”. (U.S. Department of Education Website)

Unfortunately, monitoring education curriculum is no longer as easy as a parent picking up their child’s textbook and looking at the content of the book. With educational products increasingly becoming computer programs requiring user names and passwords to even log into the program, content is being farther removed from both parents and the general public. I personally feel that we as citizens have both the right and the responsibility to evaluate education content. If there is a national “from the top down” system of education, such as Common Core, it becomes even more difficult for local citizens to have influence over their children’s educational experience. For that reason, we must be vigilant and stop the encroachment of Common Core into our Virginia schools.

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(This discussion includes content about Common Core which was included in my original writing. However, due to the time constraint of 3 minutes allowed for public comment, some of these facts were omitted from my School Board presentation.)