



Background and Analysis of the Common Core State Standards As They Relate to Georgia

Executive Summary

The Common Core State Standards have become a hot-button issue recently in Georgia and across the country. Georgia is one of 45 states that adopted the Common Core standards for math and English language arts.¹ The Georgia Public Policy Foundation has been asked by elected officials and citizens for guidance on this important issue. The goal of this study is to analyze the impact of Common Core on students and education practices in Georgia from an objective and factual perspective.² This paper is a presentation and analysis of the standards, not a policy recommendation for the state or the nation.

It is important to preface this discussion by emphasizing that many of the Common Core debates are occurring at the national level, which obscures the different impacts of the Common Core among states.

Adopting the Common Core was a significant policy change for many states, whether it weakened existing standards in states like Massachusetts or increased rigor in states where existing standards were very weak. Georgia is among a handful of states where the existing standards were very similar to the Common Core standards, which is an important factor to keep in mind.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative³ is “a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt.” Proponents argue the standards “promote equity by ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad. Unlike previous state standards, which were unique to every state in the country, the Common Core State Standards enable collaboration between states on a range of tools and policies.”

Opponents are concerned that the Common Core standards are not as rigorous as they should be, are not benchmarked to international standards and have not been tested. They are concerned that no evidence supports the premise that uniform standards will positively impact student achievement. Finally, the federal government’s support of Common Core through waivers and grant programs causes concern over local control.

A summary of key facts and concerns:

- In 2004, Georgia adopted the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for all subjects and all grade levels. These standards were universally recognized as a great improvement over the

¹ Minnesota has adopted the English language arts standards only.

² In 2011, the Georgia Public Policy Foundation joined education experts across the nation in opposing a national curriculum by signing a document titled, “Why One National Curriculum is Bad for America, Closing the Door on Innovation: A Critical Response to the Shanker Institute Manifesto and the U.S. Department of Education’s Initiative to Develop a National Curriculum and National Assessments Based on National Standards,” (<http://cityonahill.squarespace.com/education-blog/2011/5/9/shanker-institute-manifesto-a-critical-response-to-it-as-ame.html>). The document, which became known as the “Anti-Shanker Manifesto,” was in response to the Albert Shanker Institute’s “A Call for Common Content Standards,” (<http://cityonahill.squarespace.com/education-blog/2011/5/9/shanker-institute-manifesto-a-critical-response-to-it-as-ame.html>), which was also signed by numerous national education experts.

³ <http://www.corestandards.org/>

state's previous standards. Both the math and English language arts standards were ranked in the top 10 in the nation.

- Georgia's public and private schools have voluntarily participated in national tests for decades. These include the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), SAT, PSAT, ACT, GED and Advanced Placement (AP) tests.
- Georgia was a leader in the Common Core initiative. Former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue co-chaired the initiative for the National Governors Association and the press conference for the national release of the Common Core standards was held in Georgia in 2010.
- The Georgia State Board of Education adopted the Common Core in 2010.
- State legislatures rarely approve state education standards, instead deferring to their State Boards of Education. This was the case in Georgia for both the GPS and the Common Core.
- At the time, Georgia made the argument that the Common Core standards were very similar to the state's GPS standards. Outside analyses agreed. One analysis found 81 percent of the Georgia English language arts standards⁴ and 90 percent of the Georgia math standards⁵ matched the Common Core standards. Another analysis called the differences "too close to call."⁶
- Multiple federal laws "ban federal departments and agencies from directing, supervising or controlling elementary and secondary school curriculum, programs of instruction and instructional materials."⁷
- The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Affordable Care Act litigation further protects the states from federal government coercion in health care. This ruling applies to other areas, including education. Any attempt by the federal government to make Title I or other existing federal funding programs contingent upon Common Core participation would be held unconstitutional.
- The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)⁸ is a consortium of states that is developing Common Core assessments. (Another consortium, Smarter Balanced, is also designing comprehensive assessments.⁹) Georgia recently decided not to use the PARCC assessments. Alabama has withdrawn from both consortia and is working with ACT to develop its comprehensive assessment system.¹⁰ Kentucky, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Utah have also announced they will not use the PARCC assessments. Florida's legislative leaders have signed a letter urging the state to withdraw from PARCC.

Concerns

Control of what is taught in our classrooms:

- Common Core proponents are correct in noting that the Common Core does not specify state curricula. Yet Common Core opponents have a legitimate concern that curricula and instruction will be impacted by the assessments. In business, a common maxim is "What gets measured gets done." In education, the corollary is "What gets tested gets taught." It is a realistic concern that tests will be based on the standards and the standards will therefore dictate what is taught in the classroom. Were Georgia to refuse to adopt certain Common Core standards, it would also

⁴ "Georgia State Board Report: Mathematics Findings," Achieve, June 2010, <https://eboard.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=1262&AID=244381>, <https://eboard.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=1262&AID=244380>)

⁵ "Georgia State Board Report: English Language Arts Findings," Achieve, June 2010, <https://eboard.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=1262&AID=244380>

⁶ "The State of State Standards – and the Common Core – in 2010," The Thomas Fordham Institute, http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/ExecutiveSummary.pdf

⁷ "The Road to a National Curriculum," The Pioneer Institute, February 2012, <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/the-road-to-a-national-curriculum/>

⁸ Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, <http://www.parcconline.org/>

⁹ Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>

¹⁰ "Having Rejected Common Tests, Alabama Opts for New ACT Exam," Education Week, April 15, 2013, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2013/04/having_rejected_common_tests_alabama_opts%20for_new_act_exam.html

need to ensure those standards are excluded from its testing.

Specific weaknesses in the standards:

- Georgia appears to have the legal authority to address issues such as teaching Algebra in eighth grade rather than ninth grade, supplementing the amount of literature in the curriculum and other concerns. As mentioned previously, however, it is crucial these changes are also addressed in the tests so students are tested on the material they have been taught and in the appropriate grade level.

Student data and privacy:

- The Common Core initiative does not address student data. Even so, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal issued an executive order in May 2013 clarifying the state’s policy: “Intrusive data tracking is an invasion of student rights. No personally identifiable data on students and/or their families’ religion, political party affiliation, biometric information, psychometric data and/or voting history shall be collected, tracked, housed, reported or shared with the federal government. No student data shall be collected for the purpose of the development of commercial products or services.”

Federal influence on state education authority:

- In his executive order, Governor Deal “firmly asserts the state’s sovereignty over educational standards.” The order states, “The federal government has no constitutional right to determine how children in the State of Georgia will be educated, no educational standards shall be imposed on Georgia by the federal government, and all decisions regarding curriculum and instruction shall be made at the local level.”¹¹ The Georgia Department of Education has a similar view, according to a spokesperson: “We have the flexibility to change [standards] as we see fit. And if we ever stop having that flexibility, that is the day we will be out of Common Core.”¹²

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Timeline</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1985 – Georgia adopts the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC)• 2002 – After scathing audit by Phi Delta Kappa of the QCC, an overhaul of Georgia’s standards begins• 2004 – State Board of Education adopts the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) after a public comment period• 2009 – National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers begin the Common Core effort; NGA chooses Gov. Sonny Perdue as co-chair• June 2010 – National release of Common Core standards at Peachtree Ridge High School in Suwanee, Ga.• July 2010 – Georgia State Board of Education adopts the Common Core standards after a public comment period

Cost to implement the Common Core:

- Estimates of the cost of implementing the Common Core (over and above current spending) range from an increase of more than \$300 million to a net savings of more than \$40 million. A major concern is the cost of the assessments, which was the primary reason cited for why Georgia withdrew from the PARCC consortium. The new Common Core assessments were estimated to cost more than twice as much as Georgia’s current assessments.

What are the implications for opting out of or continuing to participate in the Common Core?

- Both the Governor and State School Superintendent agree that Georgia retains the flexibility to make changes to its standards.

¹¹ May 15, 2013 Executive Order, http://gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/05.15.13.01.pdf

¹² Dorie Turner Nolt, assistant director of communications for the Georgia Department of Education. June 6, 2013, <http://www.times-herald.com/local/554480-20130605CommonCore-StateResponse-SQ>

- None of the four states that decided not to participate in the Common Core – Texas, Virginia, Alaska and Nebraska – lost federal funding as a result.
- Virginia, which never adopted the Common Core, was able to negotiate a waiver to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) without implementing the Common Core. It is uncertain how the federal Department of Education would treat states opting out of the Common Core.
- Georgia decision makers should also be aware that publishers of national tests such as the SAT, ACT and AP tests have announced plans to align these tests to the Common Core. If this happens, Georgia's public, private and home-schooled students could be at a disadvantage if they are tested on material they have not been taught.

Background and Analysis of the Common Core State Standards As They Relate to Georgia

Background: Education Standards in Georgia

Quality Core Curriculum (QCC)

In 1985, under the leadership of Gov. Joe Frank Harris, the General Assembly passed the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act. In addition to creating the state funding formula still used today, the Act required the Georgia State Board of Education to adopt a set of standards known as the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC).

In 2002, a Phi Delta Kappa audit concluded that the QCC lacked depth, could not be covered in a reasonable amount of time, and did not meet national standards. This spurred Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue, the State Board of Education and State Superintendent Kathy Cox to embark upon the task of overhauling and strengthening Georgia's standards.¹³

Also in 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which addressed state standards and assessments. NCLB required states to set standards for Mathematics, Reading/Language Arts and Science in grades 3-8. States were required to develop assessments aligned with their standards and curricula in Mathematics and Reading/Language Arts. States were required to administer annual assessments to students in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school by the 2005-06 school year. Standards, assessments and cut scores for determining performance levels were all at the discretion of the State. Georgia had already established the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) based on the QCC.¹⁴

In 2004, after a public comment period, the Georgia State Board of Education adopted the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). These standards were phased in over the next eight years.

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)

The adoption of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) was universally recognized as a great improvement over the QCC. In its 2008 report, "Sizing Up State Standards," the American Federation of Teachers gave Georgia's standards a "strong" rating (the highest rating) for clarity, specificity and content in all subjects except social studies in the elementary grades.¹⁵

In 2010 the Fordham Institute, a nonprofit research organization that evaluates state education standards, gave Georgia's GPS an A- in Math and a B+ in English language arts. These grades ranked Georgia sixth best in the nation in Math and seventh in English.

Georgia recounted its transition to the GPS in its 2010 Race to the Top application: "In only a few years the State has moved from laggard to national leader in standards and assessment work. Since 2002, Georgia has abandoned weak standards in favor of high performance standards coupled with rigorous assessments, jettisoned its tiered diploma system in favor of graduation requirements which ensure that all students graduate college and career ready, and taken a lead role in national standards efforts, including the Common Core State Standards Initiative."¹⁶

¹³ <http://toolbox.gpee.org/Curriculum-and-Standards.238.0.html>

¹⁴ "Agenda 2004," Georgia Public Policy Foundation.

¹⁵ "Sizing Up State Standards 2008," American Federation of Teachers, <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/teachers/sizingupstandards0308.pdf>

¹⁶ Georgia's Race to the Top grant application, January 2010, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/georgia.pdf>

Background: Testing in Georgia

State Tests

Georgia students currently take the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in grades 3-8 and End of Course Tests (EOCTs) in high school. (The Georgia High School Graduation Test is being phased out.)

National Tests

Georgia students currently take a number of national tests. Although not required, some public schools and many private schools administer norm-referenced tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Other national tests administered to Georgia public and private school students include the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the SAT, PSAT, ACT, GED and Advanced Placement (AP) tests.

Many of the publishers of these national tests have stated their intention to align their tests with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Students in all states – even those in states that have not adopted the Common Core – could be impacted by these national tests. Home school and private school students could also be impacted. According to Dr. Eric Wearne, a Senior Fellow at the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, “If accrediting bodies were to build CCSS into their requirements, many private schools would have to either address them or seek another form of accreditation. The organizations responsible for the SAT, ACT, and GED have said they will align their work with the CCSS. So private and homeschooled students could be disadvantaged when taking those tests and trying to compete for spots at selective colleges.”

This should be an important point of discussion as Georgia debates its participation in Common Core. Common Core may well impact our children regardless of Georgia’s official participation. The question is whether Georgia, and other states that refuse to adopt certain aspects of Common Core, should remain as participants in Common Core in order to maintain their voice in these important decisions.

Background: Legal Issues Related to Common Core

Georgia Governor Nathan Deal maintains that the state, not the federal government, has sovereignty over educational standards, curriculum and instruction. He has a strong legal case to support that statement.

As noted in a recent legal analysis of Common Core by the Pioneer Institute, “with only minor exceptions, the General Education Provisions Act (“GEPA”), the Department of Education Organization Act (“DEOA”), and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (“NCLB”), ban federal departments and agencies from directing, supervising or controlling elementary and secondary school curriculum, programs of instruction and instructional materials.”¹⁷

One of the concerns, however, is that the federal government will withhold federal education funding from states that choose to make changes to their standards or assessments that do not meet the exact criteria of the Common Core. Fortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in the Affordable Care Act litigation further protects the states from federal government coercion. This applies to any attempts by the federal government to make Title I or other existing federal education funding programs contingent upon Common Core participation.

Alexa Ross, an attorney with the Atlanta firm of Robbins, Ross, Alloy, Belinfante and Littlefield, notes, “In the Affordable Care Act decision, the Court held that Congress can withhold Medicaid expansion funding from states that do not implement Affordable Care Act policy, but Congress cannot stop funding those states’ current versions of Medicaid. States are sovereign entities, the Court emphasized, and they can reject federal funds if doing so is necessary to uphold policy that the state highly values.”

¹⁷ “The Road to a National Curriculum,” The Pioneer Institute, February 2012, <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/the-road-to-a-national-curriculum/>

Mario Loyola, Director of the Center for Tenth Amendment Studies at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, writes in a forthcoming study, “The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)¹⁸ revamped Title I. It made the states’ continued receipt of most Title I funds¹⁹ contingent on the state’s compliance with the educational assessment requirements of NCLB, pursuant to a federally-approved state plan.

“By making it contingent on state compliance with an entirely new program, this modification of the existing Title I funding stream is virtually identical to the penalty struck down by the Supreme Court in the ObamaCare decision. As a result, states may now be able to opt out of NCLB without risk of losing Title I funds. Today, the statutory authority for the Secretary of Education to cut off any Title I funds for noncompliance with NCLB would now likely be ruled unconstitutional. And states don’t risk anything by trying: the law provides for judicial review of a decision to cut off funds, and time for remedy in case of an adverse ruling.”

The four states that decided not to participate in the Common Core – Texas, Virginia, Alaska and Nebraska – have not lost any federal funding.

One possible outcome of pulling out of the Common Core is that it would invalidate Georgia’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver. This federal waiver allowed Georgia to opt out of the No Child Left Behind Act. Virginia, however, provides a helpful precedent: It recently negotiated a similar waiver without agreeing to implement the Common Core.

Governor Deal and State School Superintendent John Barge have both clearly declared that Georgia has the legal authority and flexibility to make educational decisions based on what is right for Georgia. Federal law, the Supreme Court’s recent ruling and the treatment of the states that have not adopted the Common Core all support this position.

Standards and Curriculum

Standards have always been controversial, from the debate over Outcomes Based Education in the 1990s to the recent debate in Georgia over integrated math.

Standards are intended to define the skills and knowledge a student should possess upon graduation. By necessity, state standards typically represent a floor rather than a ceiling: A student who plans to enter the workforce immediately after graduating will not need the same amount of rigor as a student who plans on enrolling in a research university.

Determining what skills and knowledge are included in the standards is only the first decision. The sequence and the timing of when each content standard should be taught is also important. The GPS, for example, adopted integrated math based on the success of this approach in other countries. Instead of teaching distinct courses in the traditional sequence – Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Trigonometry, Calculus, etc. – integrated math taught basic principles from each of these subjects in Math I, added more depth in Math II and completed the content standards in each area in Math III. Students learned the same material in both approaches, but in a different sequence.

Integrated math also changed another variable – rigor. Rigor can mean including more advanced topics or it can mean incorporating more content areas into a given class so students must learn more material in the same amount of time. The conversion to integrated math was difficult because it modified the traditional sequence and added rigor.

Standards are designed to simply outline what students should know. **Curriculum** involves how those standards are taught, including the teaching methods and lesson plans, the textbooks and other resources. The Common Core outlines standards, leaving Georgia teachers and other local education officials to develop the curriculum.

¹⁸ P.L. 107-110.

¹⁹ 20 U.S.C. Sec. 6302.

When Common Core proponents argue that the Common Core does not specify state curricula, they are correct. But Common Core opponents have a legitimate concern that curricula and instruction will be impacted by the assessments.

In business, a common maxim is “What gets measured gets done.” In education, the corollary is “What gets tested gets taught.” The Common Core does not directly control curriculum, but a realistic concern is that tests will be based on the standards and the standards will therefore dictate what is taught in the classroom. Were Georgia to refuse to adopt certain Common Core standards, it would also have to ensure those standards are excluded from its testing.

Dr. Jay P. Greene, head of the department of education reform at the University of Arkansas, made this point in *The Wall Street Journal*: “Supporters say states, districts and individual schools would be free to surpass the national standards, just not fall below them. But testing would constrain what was taught and when. Say California wanted to maintain its more rigorous standard of covering algebra in eighth grade, rather than teaching it in ninth grade as required in Common Core. If national assessments aligned with Common Core call for children to be tested on their knowledge of algebra in ninth grade, California students who had already moved on to geometry would fare poorly being tested on material they hadn't covered for a year. States would be penalized with lower scores on the national test if they taught subjects at a different time and in a different manner than what Common Core requires.”²⁰

Assessments

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)²¹ is a consortium of states that is developing Common Core assessments. (Another consortium, Smarter Balanced, is also designing comprehensive assessments.²²) Georgia recently decided not to use the PARCC assessments. Alabama has withdrawn from both consortia and is working with ACT to develop its comprehensive assessment system.²³ Kentucky, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Utah have also announced they will not use the PARCC assessments. Florida's legislative leaders have signed a letter urging the state to withdraw from PARCC.

Cost: One of the arguments for the Common Core was cost savings due to economies of scale in the purchasing of assessments and instructional materials. Higher than expected cost estimates for the new assessments, however, have caused Georgia and other states to drop out of the multi-state consortia designing the Common Core assessments.

National Comparisons: Another argument in favor of the Common Core is that common assessments would allow states to compare their results with other states. It is questionable, however, if states will agree on comparable cut scores. A recent study shows that low cut scores in many states create a false sense of achievement compared to achievement levels on the NAEP test, with Georgia the worst offender.²⁴

It is important to note that the NAEP test already provides accurate state comparisons for students in grades four, eight and 12 in multiple subjects.²⁵ The NAEP results are based on representative samples

²⁰ “Should All U.S. Students Meet a Single Set of National Proficiency Standards?,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 2012,

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204603004577269231058863616.html>

²¹ Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers <http://www.parcconline.org/>

²² Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>

²³ “Having Rejected Common Tests, Alabama Opts for New ACT Exam,” *Education Week*, April 15, 2013, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2013/04/having_rejected_common_tests_alabama_opts%20for_new_act_exam.html

²⁴ “Despite Common Core, States Still Lack Common Standards,” *EducationNext*, Fall 2013, <http://educationnext.org/despite-common-core-states-still-lack-common-standards/>

²⁵ From the NAEP web site: “The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas.

of students, so results are available for states and for some school systems, but not on the individual level.

One of the primary drivers of technology spending under Common Core is the requirement for online assessments. If all the students in the school are taking a test at the same time, this requires not only a large amount of bandwidth but also a computer or other Internet-enabled device for each child.

Michael Horn, a national education expert, addressed this issue at a Georgia Public Policy Foundation event in June 2013.²⁶ “My sense is most states aren’t ready for a massive shift of assessments online,” Horn said. “The assessment consortia are also creating paper-based assessments so there is another alternative to doing the assessments online. I think you will see a lot of people revert to doing those sorts of old assessments.”

Horn added that there is another, better alternative: shifting to a competency-based learning where the typical long, end-of-the-year assessments are broken down into smaller, bite-sized tests that are available on demand.

“In terms of infrastructure, this would actually dramatically reduce the infrastructure needed from the outset,” Horn said. He estimated that only about 20 percent of the students would be taking tests at the same time under this approach, greatly reducing bandwidth needs and the need for a computer for every child. This approach is also better because it provides real-time data rather than an “autopsy” at the end of the year.

GPS vs. Common Core

In 2010, the Fordham Institute compared the new Common Core math and English standards to the standards in all 50 states.²⁷ The Common Core standards were “clearly superior” to the standards in 37 states. Georgia was one of 13 states where Fordham judged the existing standards to be “at least as clear and rigorous as the Common Core standards.”

Fordham’s 370-page report gave every state and the Common Core a grade. The Common Core received an A- in Math and a B+ in English – the exact grades given to Georgia’s GPS standards.

Achieve, a national non-profit research organization focused on education that has been closely involved in the Common Core initiative, also compared the GPS to the Common Core. Achieve’s 2010 analysis found that 81 percent of the Georgia English language arts standards²⁸ and 90 percent of the Georgia math standards²⁹ matched the Common Core standards.

From reading Georgia’s Race to the Top application, it is clear the similarity between GPS and the Common Core was not unexpected: “The State believes that the GPS is already very well aligned to the

Assessments are conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, and beginning in 2014, in Technology and Engineering Literacy (TEL). Since NAEP assessments are administered uniformly using the same sets of test booklets across the nation, NAEP results serve as a common metric for all states and selected urban districts. The assessment stays essentially the same from year to year, with only carefully documented changes. This permits NAEP to provide a clear picture of student academic progress over time, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>

²⁶ A video of the event is available on the Foundation’s YouTube site, http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0Rv0McRVFrNmXwRc38duuNH0dh6sG_vp

²⁷ “The State of State Standards – and the Common Core – in 2010,” The Thomas Fordham Institute, http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/ExecutiveSummary.pdf

²⁸ “Georgia State Board Report: Mathematics Findings,” Achieve, June 2010, <https://eboard.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=1262&AID=244381>, <https://eboard.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=1262&AID=244380>

²⁹ “Georgia State Board Report: English Language Arts Findings,” Achieve, June 2010, <https://eboard.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=1262&AID=244380>

new standards. ... In the case of CCS [Common Core standards], the tight alignment between GPS and CCS should allow the State to use the current assessment system to test the CCS until the common core assessments are implemented.”³⁰

It is beyond the scope of this report to independently verify these studies by thoroughly evaluating, standard by standard, the differences between the Common Core and Georgia’s GPS. This type of study should analyze what specifically changed and whether these changes improved or weakened Georgia’s standards. Where the standards can be improved, an open and objective process should be established to make the needed changes going forward.

Grading Standards Analysis by the Fordham Foundation					
	QCC	QCC	GPS³¹	GPS³²	Common Core
	1998	2000	2006	2010	2010
English	B	B	B	B+	B+
Math	B	B	B	A-	A-
Science	D	F	B	C ³³	n/a
World History	D	C	A	n/a	n/a

Student Data and Privacy

The Common Core addresses standards and assessments, not student data. Through the federal stimulus plan and the Race to the Top federal grant program, Georgia and many other states have received funds to develop State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS).³⁴ According to the Georgia Department of Education, this student information system “is designed to improve instruction by delivering student data, curriculum standards, and instructional resources to the teacher’s desktop through a district’s student information system.”

The database includes seven years of testing data, attendance records and each student’s transcript. Recent additions include more than 20,000 instructional resources that are linked to the standards. For example, if a student is struggling with multiplying fractions, there are several videos available that the student can access voluntarily or the teacher can assign to help the student grasp the concept. Eventually the student will be able to access questions to measure whether he or she has mastered the concept.³⁵ The SLDS is a valuable tool for teachers and administrators allowing them to easily analyze data to develop strategies to improve student achievement.

³⁰ Georgia’s Race to the Top grant application, January 2010, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/georgia.pdf>

³¹ “2006 The State of State Standards,” The Thomas Fordham Institute, http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2006/200608_thestateofstatestandards2006/State%20of%20State%20Standards2006FINAL.pdf

³² “The State of State Standards – and the Common Core – in 2010,” The Thomas Fordham Institute, http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/ExecutiveSummary.pdf

³³ “The State of State Science Standards 2012,” The Thomas Fordham Institute, January 2012, <http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2012/2012-State-of-State-Science-Standards/2012-State-Science-Standards-Georgia.pdf>

³⁴ Georgia’s Statewide Longitudinal Data System, <http://slds.doe.k12.ga.us/Pages/Contact-and-Connect-with-SLDS.aspx>

³⁵ This is very similar to Khan Academy, www.khanacademy.org/

The SLDS has not and will not include data such as religious preference, political party affiliation of the family, biometric information or psychometric data. To reinforce this, Governor Deal issued an executive order in May 2013 clarifying these protections.

Some of the concerns over student data were related to Georgia's participation in the PARCC consortium. Now Georgia has decided not to use the PARCC assessments. Once Georgia determines its strategy on assessments, it will be important to determine what data will be collected and how that data will be used. The NAEP, for example, requires students to complete an extensive questionnaire on their family background.³⁶

While responsible use of student data can improve and personalize education, we should be vigilant about its misuse.³⁷ To date, Georgia has been a responsible steward of this information.

Governor Deal's Executive Order

On May 15, 2013, Governor Deal signed an executive order³⁸ addressing some of the concerns expressed about the Common Core. The executive order "prohibits the state from collecting or sharing with the federal government any personally identifiable data on students or their families" and "firmly asserts the state's sovereignty over educational standards."

"Common Core standards do not require information sharing with the federal government and they do not impose a federal curriculum," the governor declared. "This executive order aims to send a clear and unambiguous message that, in Georgia, we will maintain local control over curriculum while working diligently to achieve high educational standards."

Highlights of Governor Deal's executive order:

- "The federal government has no constitutional right to determine how children in the State of Georgia will be educated"
- "Intrusive data tracking is an invasion of student rights"
- "No educational standards shall be imposed on Georgia by the federal government"
- "All decisions regarding curriculum and instruction shall be made at the local level"
- "No personally identifiable data on students and/or their families' religion, political party affiliation, biometric information, psychometric data and/or voting history shall be collected, tracked, housed, reported or shared with the federal government"
- "No student data shall be collected for the purpose of the development of commercial products or services"

In January 2014, the Georgia Legislature will be able to place these protections into law.

Cost of Implementing the Common Core

In 2012, the Pioneer Institute published a study analyzing state Common Core costs.³⁹ The study estimated Georgia's costs to be more than \$35 million for assessment, more than \$200 million for

³⁶ Sample NAEP questionnaire, http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/bgg/student/2013_BQ_Student_G04_M.pdf

³⁷ For two helpful viewpoints, see "Clarifying the inBloom Debate," http://www.christenseninstitute.org/clarifying-the-inbloom-debate/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=clarifying-the-inbloom-debate) and "Big Education Data: That Hideous Strength," <http://educationandliberty.com/2013/05/31/big-education-data-that-hideous-strength/>

³⁸ May 15, 2013 Executive Order, http://gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/05.15.13.01.pdf

³⁹ "National Cost of Aligning States and Localities to the Common Core Standard," The Pioneer Institute, February 2012, <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/national-cost-of-aligning-states-and-localities-to-the-common-core-standards/>

professional development, more than \$200 million for technology and nearly \$100 million for instructional materials and textbooks. The study did not estimate what Georgia was already spending in these categories.

The Fordham Institute also published an analysis of implementation costs in 2012.⁴⁰ This study included costs for instructional materials, assessment and professional development. (The study addressed technology costs, but did not include cost estimates for each state.) The study also estimated the cost of various implementation models from the most expensive to a “bare bones” approach. The total implementation cost estimate range for Georgia was between \$117 million and \$494 million. (This compares to the Pioneer estimate of more than \$335 million, excluding technology costs.)

The Fordham study estimated Georgia is currently spending \$158 million in these categories. After factoring in existing spending, the study estimated Common Core implementation could save Georgia more than \$40 million using the “bare bones” approach, could increase costs by \$336 million with a “traditional” approach, or could increase costs by \$44 million with a “balanced” approach.

What does it mean to be “in” or “out” of the Common Core?

According to the Georgia Department of Education, “100% of the Common Core K-12 standards must be adopted within 3 years. Each state can then decide on an additional 15% to add to the Common Core Standards.”⁴¹ No state has yet tested what happens if a state decides to make substantive changes, such as eliminating certain standards or refusing to adopt Common Core assessments.

If the Common Core is truly voluntary, the distinction between being “in” or “out” of Common Core may not be dramatic. If the majority of Georgia’s standards were already similar to the Common Core and the state changes any standards that it finds troubling, there would be little change in the standards based on whether Georgia were “in” or “out.” Based on the opinion of legal experts, Georgia’s federal funding will not be impacted by participation or lack of participation in the Common Core.

Georgia has benefited in some ways from the Common Core initiative regardless of whether the state chooses to remain “in” or opt “out.” As a leader of the Common Core initiative, much of Georgia’s GPS were replicated in the Common Core. This brought at least 37 state standards into close alignment with Georgia. This critical mass means tests, textbooks and other instructional materials are now likely to be more closely aligned with Georgia’s standards as opposed to the old system where large states such as California, New York and Texas dominated the market and influenced the content of instructional resources.

The Georgia Department of Education’s position on this question was summed up recently by Dorie Turner Nolt, assistant director of communications: “We in Georgia adopted the standards. These are the standards that we have put in place, that we think are best, and we will continue to tweak them to do what is best,” Nolt said. “We have the flexibility to change them as we see fit. And if we ever stop having that flexibility, that is the day we will be out of Common Core.”⁴²

Governance

Even if everyone agrees with the current standards, all standards need to be regularly updated. The Common Core Initiative says the “NGA and CCSSO are committed to developing a long-term sustainability structure with leadership from governors, chief state school officers, and other state

⁴⁰ “Putting a Price Tag on the Common Core: How Much Will Smart Implementation Cost?” The Fordham Institute, May 2012, <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/putting-a-price-tag-on-the-common-core.html>

⁴¹ “Common Core Georgia Performance Standards Fact Sheet,” Georgia Department of Education, <http://archives.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/CCGPSJuly8.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6538E425D6722145B3F25DDC7CA674A057392A682351E2925&Type=D>

⁴² Dorie Turner Nolt, assistant director of communications for the Georgia Department of Education. June 6, 2013, <http://www.times-herald.com/local/554480-20130605CommonCore-StateResponse-SQ>

policymakers. There will be an ongoing state-led development process that can support continuous improvement of the standards.”⁴³ It is not at all clear who will govern that process. As noted above, this is critically important because this ongoing development may also impact national tests such as the ACT, SAT and AP exams.

Was Common Core a federal or state driven effort and what are the implications of federal involvement?

Common Core clearly began as a state-led effort, with former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue co-chairing the Common Core State Standards Initiative for the National Governors Association (NGA). Many prominent governors such as Jeb Bush, Roy Romer, Bill Haslam, Jennifer Granholm, Bobby Jindal, Mike Huckabee and Mitch Daniels were a part of the effort and continue to support the Common Core. The Council of Chief State School Officers worked with the NGA. Georgia was one of six states invited to provide feedback on Common Core Standards development.

Several private groups such as Achieve, ACT, the College Board and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) worked on the Common Core initiative. Private foundations such as the Gates Foundation funded many of these efforts.

President Obama and his education secretary, Arne Duncan, encouraged the adoption of the Common Core by favoring grant requests that included Common Core in the federal Race to the Top grants, which allocated over \$4 billion to the states. Participation in Common Core was also listed as a contingency for Georgia’s recent waiver from the No Child Left Behind law.

The Pioneer Institute summarizes the concerns of Common Core opponents:

“The authors understand that the Common Core standards started as an initiative of the NGA Center and the CCSSO, but the Department’s decision to cement the use of the standards and assessment consortia through waiver conditions – a power that Congress has not granted in the waiver statute – changes matters considerably. Given the intense desire of most states to escape the strict accountability requirements of the ESEA, most states will agree to the Department’s conditions in order to obtain waivers. By accepting the Department’s conditions, these states will be bound indefinitely to the Common Core standards, PARCC-SBAC assessments, and the curriculum and instructional modules that arise from those assessments. As already evidenced by the eleven states that have already applied for waivers, most states will accept the Common Core standards and the PARCC-SBAC assessment consortia conditions. Once this consummation occurs, the Department will not permit a state to walk away from that commitment without the state losing its coveted waivers. It is also highly doubtful that states will turn away from the Common Core standards and assessments after making the heavy investment that these initiatives require. In the view of the authors, these efforts will necessarily result in a *de facto* national curriculum and instructional materials effectively supervised, directed, or controlled by the Department through the NCLB waiver process.”⁴⁴

Kathleen Porter-Magee of the Fordham Institute presents a different opinion:

“The Obama administration has certainly tried to claim credit, but the truth is the work on Common Core started before Barack Obama was sworn in as president. And while his administration did try to incentivize adoption of more rigorous state standards like Common Core through the Race to the Top competition, no other federal money is tied to Common Core adoption. The states who have opted not to adopt the Common Core – Texas, Virginia, Alaska, and Nebraska – receive exactly the amount of federal aid they would have received had they adopted the Common Core. Even more critically: any state that opts out of the Common Core today or in the future will not lose any future federal education funding.

⁴³ Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>

⁴⁴ “The Road to a National Curriculum,” The Pioneer Institute, February 2012, <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/the-road-to-a-national-curriculum/>

Some claim that the Obama administration tied Common Core adoption to its ESEA waiver process. Yet, Virginia won a waiver without ever adopting the Common Core, proving that the two were not inextricably linked.

“Similarly, there is no single national assessment being forced on states. There are two federally funded assessment consortia, but states have no obligation to join either, as was evident when Alabama and Utah backed out of both. In fact, private assessment developers continue to compete for state assessment contracts. Pearson has developed an assessment in New York that the state may choose to stick with even when the consortia assessments are ready. The ACT is in the process of developing its own version as well. Others will no doubt join them, and the federally funded consortia will be a helpful comparison – much like the NAEP is now – but will not lead to a sole ‘national’ test for all American schoolchildren.

“Finally, some argue that adoption of the Common Core – or any K–12 academic standards – will usurp local control over curriculum and instruction. On the contrary, by setting standards, rather than adopting statewide curricula, state education leaders are ensuring that local district, school, and teacher leaders remain in control of the decisions that most directly impact the students they serve. On the ELA side, this means that local leaders and teachers can and will choose the texts students will read. On the math side, it means that schools can decide whether to fast-track students to Algebra I, and so on.”⁴⁵

Regardless of where it began, there are concerns that Common Core provides unnecessary limitations on how and what children should be taught. Dr. Jay Greene articulates these concerns:

“Proposing that all children meet the same standards is essentially proposing a nationalized system of education. Some reformers may argue otherwise, but the truth is that standards drive testing, which in turn drives what material is covered, as well as how and when it is taught.

“Such uniformity would only make sense if: 1) there was a single best way for all students to learn; 2) we knew what it was; 3) we could be sure the people running this nationalized education system would adopt that correct approach; and 4) they would remain in charge far into the future. But that isn’t how things are. There is no consensus on what all students need to know. Different students can best be taught and assessed in different ways.”⁴⁶

Why wasn’t the Georgia Legislature involved in approving the Common Core?

State legislatures rarely approve state education standards, instead allowing their State Boards of Education to make those decisions. This was the case in Georgia for both the GPS and the Common Core. The QBE Act was passed by the legislature and mandated the creation of the QCC, which was approved by the Georgia State Board of Education. In just four states was legislative approval required to adopt the Common Core: Idaho, Kentucky, Maine and Washington.⁴⁷

Is the Common Core rigorous?

Each side has produced experts to make their case. Below is a sample of their arguments. The most important question, however, is whether adopting the Common Core make Georgia’s standards more or less rigorous. The Georgia Public Policy Foundation is working to answer that question. In the meantime, all we have to guide us are the arguments of “dueling experts.”

⁴⁵ Kathleen Porter-Magee, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-daily/common-core-watch/2013/a-testimony-on-the-common-core-standards.html>

⁴⁶ “Should All U.S. Students Meet a Single Set of National Proficiency Standards?,” Wall Street Journal, June 22, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204603004577269231058863616.html>

⁴⁷ Common Core State Standards, National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/common-core-state-standards.aspx>

No: *Emmett McGroarty and Jane Robbins, American Principles Project*

“Common Core’s English language arts standards consist of empty skill sets that, once implemented, might not require reading skills any higher than middle-school level. Furthermore, their de-emphasis of the study of classic literature in favor of “informational texts” would abandon the goal of truly educating students, focusing instead on training them for static jobs.

“Among the many deficiencies of the mathematics standards is their placement of algebra I in grade 9 rather than grade 8, thus ensuring that most students will not reach calculus in high school, and their mandate to teach geometry according to an experimental method never used successfully anywhere in the world. Contrary to previous claims by their creators, the Standards are not “internationally benchmarked.”⁴⁸

Yes: *Kathleen Porter-Magee of the Fordham Institute*⁴⁹

“Between 2009 and 2010, we reviewed the quality of the standards that provide the foundation for several national and international assessments: the NAEP, the PISA, TIMSS (for math), and PIRLS (for ELA). In math, the Common Core scored as well as the TIMSS, and better than both the PISA and the NAEP. In ELA, the Common Core outperformed all three: the NAEP, PISA, and PIRLS.”

“What’s more, research by William Schmidt, a leading expert on international mathematics performance and a previous director of the U.S. TIMSS study, has compared the Common Core to high-performing countries in grades K–8. The agreement was very high between the Common Core math standards and the math standards in place in the highest performing nations. In fact, Schmidt and his colleague found that no state’s previous math standards were as close a match to those of high performing countries as the Common Core (not California’s, not Indiana’s, not Massachusetts’).”

“Second, many critics complain that the Common Core standards promote low-level mathematical skills, or that they prioritize mathematical ‘practices’ or ‘fuzzy math’ over critical content. Again, a close reading of the standards reveals the opposite is true.

“The Common Core math standards prioritize essential content – and allow the time and space needed for deep mastery of that content. In the early grades, this means that arithmetic is heavily weighted, that students are asked to learn to automaticity their basic math facts, and that they are asked to master the standard algorithms. This is content they need to know – cold – in order to be prepared for the upper level math work they will do in high school and beyond. If there is one thing we know with certainty, it’s that math is cumulative. You can only move on to more advanced content when you have fully mastered essential prerequisite knowledge and skills.”

Do the Common Core standards have enough emphasis on fiction/literature? If not, how can this be fixed?

Yes: *Kathleen Porter-Magee*

“The Standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America’s Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the Standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.”

⁴⁸ “Controlling Education From the Top: Why Common Core Is Bad for America,” The Pioneer Institute, May 2012, <http://heartland.org/sites/default/files/controlling-education-from-the-top-print.pdf>

⁴⁹ Kathleen Porter-Magee, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-daily/common-core-watch/2013/a-testimony-on-the-common-core-standards.html>

No, but it can be fixed: *Mark Bauerlein, professor of English at Emory University, and Sandra Stotsky, professor of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas.*

“Among the items missing from Common Core are a list of recommended authors and titles, British literature apart from Shakespeare, and any study of the history of the English language,” according to the authors. “State policy makers can either attempt to remedy the literature deficit by using the 15 percent leeway granted through Race to the Top to customize the national standards to meet local needs or they can withdraw from Common Core.”

“Since ... Common Core's College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading are mainly generic reading skills, states can generate state-specific guidelines for a secondary literature curriculum addressing what we recommend ... without conflicting with any of Common Core's ELA standards. Otherwise, state and local policy makers will see the very problems in reading that Common Core aimed to remedy worsen.”⁵⁰

Do the Common Core standards prepare or require students to learn Algebra in the 8th grade, as many states' current standards do?

No: *Joy Pullmann, Research Fellow, The Heartland Institute*

“Former U.S. Department of Education official and mathematician Ze'ev Wurman has said Core math standards would graduate students ‘below the admission requirement of most four-year state colleges.’ He has particularly criticized that the Core pushes algebra back to grade 9, ‘contrary to the practice of the highest-achieving nations,’ which begin algebra in grade 8.”⁵¹

Yes: *Kathleen Porter-Magee*

“Some critics complain that the Common Core doesn't require Algebra in the eighth grade, something that many think is essential to prepare students for advanced math in high school. The reality, however, is that the Kindergarten through seventh grade Common Core standards include all of the prerequisite content students will need to have learned to be prepared for Algebra I in the eighth grade. And that means that it's the states, districts, and/or schools who decide for themselves course and graduation requirements.”

Conclusion

Education is a critically important issue and one that evokes strong emotions. The Common Core Initiative has divided Democrats and Republicans within their own parties has even created rifts between ideologically similar think tanks.

Whether Georgia decides to continue to participate in the Common Core initiative or not, it is important to continuously strive to improve academic standards, improve the quality of assessments and improve access to technology.

Both Governor Deal and State School Superintendent Barge have forcefully argued that Georgia should and will maintain its authority over K-12 education. Federal law and recent Supreme Court decisions support this state authority. The question is whether Georgia will be coerced with future federal or private funding to make decisions that lead to a one-size-fits-all national model.

⁵⁰ “How Common Core's ELA Standards Place College Readiness at Risk,” The Pioneer Institute, September 2012, <http://pioneerinstitute.org/education/new-study-suggests-remedies-for-common-core-literature-deficit/>

⁵¹ “The Common Core: A Poor Choice for States,” Joy Pullmann, The Heartland Institute, January 2013 (rev. May 2013), http://heartland.org/sites/default/files/05-15-13_common_core_revised_policy_brief_version.pdf

Although the math and English language arts Common Core standards are very similar to Georgia's previous standards, Georgia must retain the flexibility to make changes where necessary. There should be no barriers to maintaining high standards for our students.

Despite the national outcry over the Common Core, Georgians can be secure in the knowledge that this state's students already benefit from higher quality standards than most states due to reforms adopted in 2004. Clearly, in a nation with a transient population, a "floor" standard among the states helps families transition. Were that floor to become a ceiling because of federal requirements, the evidence indicates the state can legally and justifiably "opt out" without an expectation of retaliation. There remain several legitimate and important concerns regarding the Common Core. Georgia and its students will be best served if state leaders develop an open and objective process to focus on addressing these concerns.