

**Dr. Phyllis Hudecki
Michael Brickman**

Embargoed Until June 2, 2014



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview

Background

Six Reasons Why HB 3399 Is Bad Policy

1. The Fiscal and Educational Costs of Repeal
2. Avoid A Shortsighted Political Takeover
3. Ready to Compete Through Higher Standards
4. An Opportunity to Demonstrate Political Courage
5. A Political Advantage with Most Voters
6. Opponents Will Not Be Satisfied

Conclusion

Biographies

Impact Analysis: Six Reasons Why HB 3399 Is Bad Policy

OVERVIEW

On May 23, 2014, the Oklahoma State Legislature approved HB 3399, legislation that would withdraw the state from the Common Core State Standards initiative. The bill is now with the Governor for review.

Reversing course on this important education reform is a poor policy decision. Over the past four years, Oklahoma and its teachers have made significant investments of time and resources to implement the Common Core. Reverting back to the state's prior standards would nullify the progress that has been made and carry significant fiscal and educational costs, which have gone largely unspoken in the current debate.

BACKGROUND

The Common Core is a state-led effort that establishes a single set of clear education standards for Kindergarten through 12th grade students in mathematics and English language arts. Initiated in 2009, the standards were written through two consortia that included governors and state education officials from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia. Development teams, made up of subject specialists, state education officials and local teachers, consulted ACT National Curriculum Surveys, which incorporated the views of 55,000 teachers. During a public input period, over 10,000 comments were received nationally, the majority of which came from parents and teachers.

In May, 2010, the Oklahoma State Senate and House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly (37-10 and 75-25, respectively) to approve SB 2033, which directed the Oklahoma Board of Education to adopt Common Core Standards by August 1.¹ In June, 2010, Oklahoma officially adopted Common Core, as did 44 other states and the District of Columbia that year. Oklahoma received no federal incentives to do so. Critics often inaccurately charge that state officials adopted the program in return for a chance to win stimulus funding under the Obama Administration's Race to the Top education initiative. In fact, Oklahoma had not adopted Common Core when it applied for the first round of Race to the Top funds, and never won any Race to the Top competition.

House Bill 3399 requires Oklahoma to abandon the Common Core; revert to Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS), the state's prior academic standards; create its own set of education requirements within two years; compare the new standards against Common Core to ensure they are not aligned; and prohibit student assessments developed outside the state. Governor Fallin has until June 7 to sign or veto the bill, or do nothing, in which case the bill will not take effect.

Analysis of HB 3399 and of the similar measures taken in Indiana, South Carolina and Missouri, the only other states to repeal Common Core or pass legislation to do so, raises several important red flags, outlined below.

The Fiscal and Educational Costs of Repeal

Withdrawing from Common Core will carry significant costs, both for taxpayers and for teachers and students. Some of these are quantifiable; others are more intangible.

The Oklahoma Department of Education estimates that the one-time costs associated with replacing Common Core will total approximately \$1.24 million. That figure includes the expense of writing, reviewing and adopting new standards (\$60,000 per subject, totaling \$120,000); creating new tests to measure the success of the new standards (\$150,000 per grade level, totaling \$1,050,000); and evaluation of the new standards to ensure they do not align with Common Core (totaling \$70,000).²

We believe the Department dramatically underestimates the actual cost.

For one, withdrawing from Common Core could cost Oklahoma its waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act, may cause the state to forfeit control of about \$27 million of federal funding. That would put greater control in the hands of federal authorities and could result in sanctions for hundreds of Oklahoma schools.³

Secondly, Indiana, the first state to withdraw from Common Core, provides a good case study on true fiscal costs of repeal. A report from the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency estimates new testing may cost as much as \$26 million more per year and require \$2,000 of training per teacher.⁴ New assessments are estimated to cost between \$44 and \$54 per student, double the cost of the two national consortia's college- and career-ready assessments. In total, the change could cost upwards of \$125 million.

A harder cost to quantify is the impact repeal will have within the classroom. As noted above, for nearly four years, teachers and students have been preparing for the Common Core Standards. A sudden departure from that course will create greater uncertainty in curriculum planning, and inevitably introduce several shifts as schools readjust to PASS standards and then again to new standards in two years. While some teachers might remember PASS standards from prior years, many newer teachers will have little to no exposure to these standards.

“How are you supposed to plan and prepare,” Felix Linden, an eighth grade teacher in Oklahoma City, recently told the *New York Times*, “when you have so much uncertainty around what you’re supposed to teach and how you’re supposed to teach it.”

Avoid a Shortsighted Political Takeover

Under HB 3399, the state Legislature, not the Department of Education, will oversee the formation of the Oklahoma’s new standards, which opens the door to politicization of education policy. While the Board of Education is given official authority to write the new

standards, the Legislature explicitly reserves for itself the power to “amend the standards in whole or in part.”⁵

Previous education policies fell under the Administrative Procedures Act, which grants state lawmakers review of agency rules but limits their input to simply accept or reject the rules. HB 3399 provides the right of “legislative review,” wherein lawmakers can reject or even amend standards. The *Oklahoman* editorial board notes such a provision gives state lawmakers the right to “arbitrarily and unilaterally rewrite those standards at will.”⁶

Moving education policy entirely into the sphere of politics threatens to introduce significant bureaucratic red tape. Who is to say how many times standards will be ping-ponged between the Board of Education and the Legislature? Like a spending bill, it is conceivable lawmakers will want to put their mark on the state’s standards, and change in party control could lead to perpetual reevaluation. This will inevitably lead to disagreements and subject the standards to the perils of the political system.

Such a provision is possibly unconstitutional, but absolutely ill-advised. It could easily lead to curriculum designed around which political party is in power.

Ready to Compete Through Higher Standards

In July, 2010, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute evaluated state school systems across the country. The Fordham assessment noted that the Common Core State Standards were superior to the existing standards for 39 states in math and 37 in English. In Oklahoma, the original PASS standards appear to be about on par. Still, Fordham’s analysis indicates there remains room for improvement.

Fordham notes that Oklahoma’s PASS math standards relied too heavily on calculators and too little on standard algorithms. It points out, for example, that calculators are “suggested material” as early as first grade. As a result, standards for subsequent courses become less clear, and content for advanced math classes lack necessary content.

The Fordham report also finds the English standards “fail to provide guidance about the quality and complexity of reading that students should be doing from grade to grade. And, while the high school standards give a perfunctory nod to reading important works of American literature, the standards for grades 1-8 fail to do even that.”⁷

Although Oklahoma’s PASS standards were high compared to many states, they left students unprepared to competently step into college and the workforce. In fact, 42 percent of the state’s college-bound freshman required remedial coursework.⁸ Of the Oklahoma students who took the ACT college readiness exam, only 23 percent were ready for college or a career according to that company.⁹

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the “nation’s report card,” only 25 percent of Oklahoma eighth graders are proficient in math¹⁰ and only 29 percent are proficient in reading¹¹. Those scores fall well behind the national average. Regionally, the state Department of Education noted last year that Arkansas, Kansas and Texas all performed better on the same assessments.

An Opportunity to Demonstrate Political Courage

Governor Fallin has been a long-time advocate of meaningful education reform. Last December, the Governor issued an executive order supporting Common Core.¹² “By increasing rigor in the classroom we will help to increase student achievement and ultimately improve our workforce and our economy,” she wrote.

On March 21, Governor Fallin issued a statement that said, in part, “I have worked directly with our legislators to accomplish the goals of increasing classroom rigor and accountability while guaranteeing that Oklahoma public education is protected from federal interference. ... If [HB 3399] does so, without creating unintended consequences that would hamstring educators or invite more federal influence in education, it will have my support.”

In its final form, HB 3399 does not pass the test Governor Fallin herself set just two months ago. Governor Fallin should work with lawmakers to build upon Common Core on the Legislature’s timeline, but refuse to return to the status quo. In doing so, she will join with scores of other Republican Governors who have pledged to maintain these high standards, including Jan Brewer (Arizona), Chris Christie (New Jersey), Bill Haslam (Tennessee), Gary Herbert (Utah), Susana Martinez (New Mexico), Pat McCrory (North Carolina), Butch Otter (Idaho), and Brian Sandoval (Nevada).

A Political Advantage with Most Voters

Much of the momentum to abandon the Common Core is politically driven. Yet, research shows most individuals – including parents with children in the K-12 system – are unfamiliar with the standards. Moreover, when presented with more information most favor what they stand for.

A recent report by Republican pollster John McLaughlin, the largest such polling among conservative voters, found that after hearing a neutral description of what Common Core Standards are, nearly two-out-three respondents supported them. Even among Republican primary voters, 12 percent were more likely to endorse a candidate who supports high standards over one who criticizes them on political grounds.¹³

Of the findings, McLaughlin wrote, “there is a huge gulf between what some conservative groups are saying and what regular GOP primary voters are thinking. ... Regular voters don’t buy into the anti-Common Core rhetoric.”¹⁴

This reality recently played out publicly in several primary elections, correcting perceptions that opposition to Common Core was a ticket to public office. In Indiana, Ohio, Georgia, Idaho, Arkansas and North Carolina, incumbents and challengers that campaigned vigorously against Common Core fell to their opponents who stood up for high standards and measured reform.

Opponents Will Not be Satisfied

One evident lesson from the aftermath in Indiana is that critics will not be appeased by repeal. In fact, Indiana Governor Mike Pence’s decision to replace the Common Core seems to have emboldened opponents, who quickly condemned the state-crafted criteria

as a watered-down version of those they replaced. Of the situation, the *Oklahoman* editorial board noted:

“Citizens who insisted that Common Core standards were part of a federal conspiracy and takeover of local schools still think a conspiracy is ongoing, now that Indiana’s version has been repealed. ... So officials find themselves having to redirect millions of dollars to implement new standards that may be worse than prior standards — all in the name of placating a group of Common Core critics who refuse to accept victory.”¹⁵

A vocal faction of opponents of Common Core will continue to distrust Governor Fallin no matter what she does. However, if she signs the bill, she will also anger the silent majority who believe in high standards, aren’t swayed by heavy rhetoric and misinformation, and don’t think their governor should be either.

CONCLUSION

The Oklahoma State Legislature’s move to repeal the Common Core State Standards threatens to undermine years of important education reform at the expense of taxpayers, educators and students. Not only would the move likely cost the state millions of dollars, which would get distributed to local districts, it would create greater ambiguity in what is expected of students, thereby complicating efforts in the classroom.

Governor Fallin now faces a consequential crossroad of whether to stand up for strong education standards or to bend to vocal political critics. For the sake of Oklahoma’s school systems, we urge the Governor to veto HB 3399.

BIOGRAPHIES



Dr. Phyllis Hudecki

*Executive Director, Oklahoma Business & Education Coalition
Former Oklahoma Secretary of Education (November, 2010 – July, 2013)*

Contact: pahudecki@sbcglobal.net

Phyllis Hudecki, a native of Morris, Oklahoma, has more than 30 years of experience in many facets education. She currently oversees the Oklahoma Business & Education Coalition, which she joined in June, 2000. In November, 2010, Governor Mary Fallin appointed Hudecki as State Secretary of Education, calling her “one of the leading education-policy minds in Oklahoma.” In 2009, Hudecki was appointed by the National Assessment Governing Board to chair the NAEP Business Policy Task Force. She continues to serve on numerous national and state committees and boards.

Prior to joining the Oklahoma Business & Education Coalition, Hudecki spent nine years at the University of California-Berkeley, where she was associate director of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education. Her career includes positions with the Iowa, Missouri and Massachusetts state departments of education and the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C.



Michael Brickman

*National Policy Advisor, Thomas B. Fordham Institute
National Policy Advisor, Thomas B. Fordham Institute*

Contact: mbrickman@edexcellence.net

Michael Brickman is the national policy director at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, where he furthers educational excellence as a commentator on education-reform issues and is a regular contributor to the Flypaper blog and other publications. Michael served in communications roles on state and national political campaigns before being tapped by Gov. Scott Walker to lead his education-reform efforts in Wisconsin. While in the governor’s office, he worked to support collective-bargaining reforms, increase standards and accountability, expand school choice, and keep college affordable through innovative reforms. Michael graduated from the University of Delaware with an honors bachelor’s degree in political science. He currently lives in Washington, D.C.

¹ SB 2033, [Oklahoma Legislature](#), Approved By The Governor 5/28/10

² Bill Summary, “[Oklahoma House Of Representatives](#), 5/21/14

³ Randy Krehbiel, “Repeal Of Common Core Voted,” [Tulsa World](#), 5/24/14

⁴ Summer Ballentine, “Indiana Education Standards May Be Costly,” [Associated Press](#), 4/25/14

⁵ HB 3399, [Oklahoma Legislature](#), Sent To Governor On 5/23/14

⁶ Editorial, “Academic Standards Require Better Process Than Oklahoma Lawmakers Proposing,” [The Oklahoman](#), 5/29/14

-
- ⁷ Sheila Byrd Carmichael, Gabrielle Martino et al, "The State Of State Standards — And The Common Core — In 2010," [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#), July 2010
- ⁸ Stand For Children Oklahoma, [stand.org](#), Accessed 5/29/14
- ⁹ Stand For Children Oklahoma, [stand.org](#), Accessed 5/29/14
- ¹⁰ "The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics," [National Center For Educational Statistics](#), 2013
- ¹¹ "The Nation's Report Card: Reading," [National Center For Educational Statistics](#), 2013
- ¹² "Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin Issues Order Supporting Common Core," [Associated Press](#), 12/4/13
- ¹³ John McLaughlin, [Memo To Karen Nussle](#), 5/5/14
- ¹⁴ John McLaughlin, Op-Ed, "GOP Pollster: Republicans Should Be Careful On Common Core," [Washington Examiner](#), 5/5/14
- ¹⁵ Editorial, "Repeal Doesn't Satisfy Common Core Opponents," [The Oklahoman](#), 5/2/14