

What exactly is Common Core?

Common Core is a set of education standards in math and English for students in third through 12th grades. In most cases, the standards are more rigorous than the standards previously in place. They emphasize analytical and critical thinking skills for both subject areas, which has resulted in a new way to teach, but is mostly addition, subtraction and comprehension.

Where did it come from?

After Congress and the George W. Bush administration passed No Child Left Behind in the early 2000s, which was a federal plan that prioritized standardized testing to assess the success or failure of education, educators realized that NCLB centered on the lowest-performing students. They realized that while low-performing students performed better in school, the rest of the students' performance was suffering.

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There was nearly unilateral consensus among governors that the problem needed to be addressed. With buy-in and funding from the Gates Foundation and the support of the business community, Common Core was crafted in 2009. Since then, 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted it.

Who hates it?

Opposition bubbled up from parents whose children brought home homework that was confusing. Opponents tend to fall on the conservative end of the political spectrum, and some liberals don't like Common Core either.

Who defends it?

Common Core has split Republicans. The libertarian-leaning and tea party-leaning components of the party dislike Common Core, but the business community, including the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Round Table, support it.

Teachers generally support Common Core but are still opposed to testing, which isn't really a part of Common Core, but the standardized tests, which were put in place long before Common Core, have been adapted to take into account the new standards and method of teaching.

What do the critics say?

Critics of Common Core fall into three camps: those who oppose the federal government's involvement in schools, those who don't like testing, and those who don't like the curriculum or the standards. We'll break those down:

Anti-government critics: These people tend to have conservative political beliefs and say that national standards have removed control of education from the states. "It places a greater distance between a parent and their child's education," Erin Tuttle, a mom who became

active opposing Common Core, said. This is the position that many Republican politicians have adopted.

Anti-testing critics: These people tend to have liberal tendencies and can include teachers. They say that too much emphasis is placed on testing, which determines teachers' merit and student advancement. Tests aren't really a part of Common Core, as they were put in place before Common Core standards were implemented, but the tests have been altered to fall in line with Common Core to determine whether students are meeting the Common Core standards.

Anti-standards critics: These people have a problem with the curriculum associated with the standards. Because the standards emphasize critical thinking and the process of getting to the correct answer instead of only grading the final answer, new methods are used to teach core subjects. "The standards are very difficult for the average person to understand," said Tuttle, who started the group Hoosiers Against Common Core.

What do the defenders say?

Defenders say that Common Core standards will help prepare students for 21st century jobs and better prepare students for college.

"It's not what you know but how you think," said Richard Keil, a spokesman for Exxon Mobil, a company that supports Common Core. Keil added that creative thinking and reasoning are skills that are highly sought after and hard to find in job applicants.

The defenders of Common Core also say high standards are needed to raise the performance of students. They also note that the federal government has not taken over the education system, but that the states adopted the standards on their own and can opt out at any time. They also add that there's latitude to allow states to determine how they implement the standards and that teachers have flexibility to teach in a way that best helps their students meet the standards.

What do the teachers say?

Teachers say that Common Core could be good for students but that the transition is rocky because the testing to assess students, which takes into account the higher Common Core standards, is more advanced than the students' knowledge in this first year or two of Common Core.

"I think the idea of the Common Core standards are fine, but giving it enough time for the curriculum and teacher training to catch up. I think it will get better just naturally," said Kevin Teeley, president of the Lake Washington Education Association in Washington.

Teeley also said that the standards "aren't dictating particular teaching methods." He said there's enough freedom for teachers in the classrooms.

Teachers are still concerned, however, with a continuation of tying teachers' performance to the tests, especially now that the standards have been raised.

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What does a Common Core math problem look like?

Here's a third-grade school math problem for $195+665$:

COMMON CORE

100	90	5
+ 600	+ 60	+ 5
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700	150	10

Is Common Core going away?

No. Not now, anyway. It really is a state-by-state initiative. Five states never adopted it. More than a dozen states have tried to repeal it, but few have succeeded. Indiana, Oklahoma and South Carolina have repealed it, but Oklahoma and Indiana have replaced it with standards that are not much different than Common Core, according to both critics and supporters of the program.

How will this impact the 2016 presidential election?

It's unclear. Common Core isn't likely to be a determining factor in the Republican primary, but candidates' support will play into how the Republican base judges a candidate.

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Republican presidential hopefuls have run away from Common Core even though most supported it in the past, including Jindal, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and Huckabee. Bush, the former governor of Florida, ran a foundation that promoted Common Core, but since he has embarked on the presidential journey, he has been avoiding use of the words "Common Core." He has expressed opposition to any

federal involvement in education and shifted the focus of his education record to his stringent support of vouchers while he was governor.

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