



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 24, 2014

## Privileged “White Male” Teacher: Common Core Will Help Kids Read (Video)

A Manchester, New Hampshire, history teacher said earlier this week he helped write the standards for Common Core so minority students could have the same opportunity to learn to read as he had as a privileged “white male.” Dr. David Pook, who chairs the history department at Derryfield School, a prestigious private academy in Manchester, offered that observation on May 19 during a [debate on Common Core](#) at Saint Anselm College in neighboring Goffstown. (See the end of this article for a video of his comment.)



“The reason why I helped write the standards and the reason why I am here today is that as a white male in society, I’ve been given a lot of privilege that I didn’t earn,” declared Pook, as members of the audience groaned and booed. “I think it’s really important that all kids have an equal opportunity to learn how to read.”

Pook said his thinking has been influenced by visits to “places like Roberto Clemente High School on the west side of Chicago.” He added, “I think it’s really important those kids learn how to read just as well as I had the opportunity to read. And in creating an equitable educational opportunity for all kids, I think this is actually the greatest civics lesson we could teach our kids.”

Though New Hampshire is one of the states that signed on to Common Core, controversy over the standards and testing requirements continues in the Granite State, as in others among the 45 states that have enlisted in the program and the five that have remained outside its orbit. Advocates argue passionately that the Common Core standards will remove barriers to inequality in education and better prepare all American students to compete in the global marketplace. Opponents contend that it will destroy local control over schools and that the “cradle to career or college” program will put content of school curricula in the hands of distant corporate and academic elites.

“The Common Core State Standards hold promise for low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities, who traditionally perform significantly worse than their peers,” claims the Center for American Progress, a non-profit organization dedicated to “progressive ideas and actions.” Common Core “helps address inequity in education by ensuring all students are taught to the same high standards and held to the same rigorous expectations,” the Center says. “This helps make sure that ZIP codes do not determine education quality.”

While no one disputes the goal of raising the academic performance of underachieving students, what has been debated since the Common Core program was launched in 2009 is whether Common Core standards make better learners of kids who aren’t learning now.

When President George W. Bush was promoting the No Child Left Behind Act, he often condemned “the soft bigotry of low expectations” for minority and disadvantaged students. With Common Core, as with



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No Child Left Behind, the expectation is that more demanding standards, frequent testing, and holding teachers and schools responsible for results will raise the performance levels. Education historian Diane Ravitch calls that wishful thinking dressed up in academic jargon.

“We have a national policy that is a theory based on an assumption grounded in hope,” Ravitch said in an [address to the Modern Language Association](#). Testing, she argued, is a much over-rated tool for either motivating students or evaluating teacher performance.

Our students are the most over-tested in the world. No other nation — at least no high-performing nation — judges the quality of teachers by the test scores of their students. Most researchers agree that this methodology is fundamentally flawed, that it is inaccurate, unreliable, and unstable, that the highest ratings will go to teachers with the most affluent students and the lowest ratings will go to teachers of English learners, teachers of students with disabilities, and teachers in high-poverty schools.

To expect tougher standards and a renewed emphasis on standardized testing to reduce poverty and inequality is to expect what never was and never will be.

Aside from whether the standards will produce better math or reading skills, there is concern among educators over what children ought to be reading in school. Writing in the *New York Times* in 2012, Newark, New Jersey, school teacher Sara Mosle noted that “the Common Core dictates that by fourth grade, public school students devote half of their reading time in class to historical documents, scientific tracts, maps and other ‘informational texts’ like recipes and train schedules. Per the guidelines, 70 percent of the 12th grade curriculum will consist of nonfiction titles. Alarmed English teachers worry we’re about to toss Shakespeare so students can study, in the words of one former educator, ‘memos, technical manuals and menus.’”

But Mosle, who teaches writing to middle school students, also noted there are those in the education establishment who are quick to point out that neither a lasting appreciation of literature nor a student’s creative writing skills is likely to be a highly prized attribute of a future employee. “It is rare in a working environment,” said College Board President David Coleman, “that someone says, ‘Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood.’”

Common Core came about after years of widespread dissatisfaction with the standards and testing regimen of the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind Act. While federal law prevents the U.S. Department of Education from creating a national curriculum, states are urged to adopt as their own the standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers for the purpose of establishing consistent education standards throughout the nation. Since Common Core was unveiled in 2009, critics have faulted it for the way it was developed — in private sessions without public input — and for the lack of any “field testing” on a small scale before it was launched as a national program.

Though state participation has been called voluntary, joining the program makes states eligible to receive federal grants through the Obama administration’s Race to the Top program and waivers from the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Common Core has been backed by grants from a number of private foundations, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has put a reported \$75 million behind the effort.

But Ravitch argues that too little attention has been paid to the costs the program imposes on states and school districts.



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All Common Core testing will be done online. This is a bonanza for the tech industry and other vendors. Every school district must buy new computers, new teaching materials, and new bandwidth for the testing. At a time when school budgets have been cut in most states and many thousands of teachers have been laid off, school districts across the nation will spend billions to pay for Common Core testing. Los Angeles alone committed to spend \$1 billion on iPads for the tests; the money is being taken from a bond issue approved by voters for construction and repair of school facilities. Meanwhile, the district has cut teachers of the arts, class size has increased, and necessary repairs are deferred because the money will be spent on iPads.

The spending spree — for textbooks and tests as well as computers and iPads — is an acknowledged goal of the Department of Education in promoting Common Core. In a 2011 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, Joanne Weiss, chief of staff to Education Secretary Arne Duncan, [wrote](#):

The development of common standards and shared assessments radically alters the market for innovation in curriculum development, professional development, and formative assessments. Previously, these markets operated on a state-by-state basis, and often on a district-by-district basis. But the adoption of common standards and shared assessments means that education entrepreneurs will enjoy national markets where the best products can be taken to scale.

On a Fox News panel on May 5, Juan Williams defended the program. “This was something the governors initially did and most Republican governors were on board at that time,” Williams said. “The military is on board, the Chamber of Commerce is on board. Even Condoleezza Rice and the Council on Foreign Affairs — on board.” The Council on Foreign Relations (where Rice, the former secretary of state, and Joel I. Klein are co-chairmen of the Task Force on Education Reform) is an organization advocating a one-world government.

In the Fox News May 5 program, co-panelist George Will argued that

[Common Core is a] thin end of an enormous wedge of federal power that will be wielded for the constant progressive purpose of concentrating power in Washington so that it can impose continental solutions to problems nationwide.

Will warned that the danger in the following argument is in the verb “align”:

They’re going to align the SAT [Student Achievement Testing] and ACT [American College Testing] tests with the curriculum. They’re going to align the textbooks with the tests and sooner or later, you inevitably have a national curriculum that disregards the creativity of federalism.

Will added that instead of states developing different and creative educational approaches, there will be “one creative constant permanent Washington bureaucracy overlooking our education.”

Though they are called State Standards, the label is misleading, since it suggests each state independently develops its own standards. Yet the whole purpose of Common Core is to establish a uniformity of standards, as indicated by the following statement from the Common Core State Standards website:

For years, the academic progress of our nation’s students has been stagnant, and we have lost ground to our international peers. Particularly in subjects such as math, college remediation rates have been high. *One root cause has been an uneven patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.* [Emphasis added.]



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In a video cartoon on the site (“Learn About the Common Core in 3 Minutes”), the narrator explains that with Common Core, “The standards are consistent from school to school and they match up with international standards, too.”

In other words, the states may develop their own standards, as long as they are the same. While they may sound alarmist to some, warnings about a national curriculum may be understating the case if the goal is to bring the instructional guidelines into conformity with “international standards.” Addressing the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2010, Education Secretary Arne Duncan [spoke of education](#) as “the key to eliminating gender inequities, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, and to fostering peace,” adding: “Today, education is a global public good unconstrained by national boundaries.... It is no surprise that economic interdependence brings new global challenges and educational demands.”

While today’s school systems were unknown and perhaps unimagined at the time the nation’s Constitution was drafted, it is nonetheless significant that the Constitution makes no mention of education and delegates no power to the federal government regarding it. The Constitution leaves most matters to, in the words of the Tenth Amendment, “the States respectively, or to the people.” In that way, as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis observed a century and a half later, “a state may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.”

Common Core is the latest in a series of experiments in education (Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind) that pose a risk to the nation’s students, teachers, and schools.

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