

The federal government has no place in our classrooms. Over the past 50 years the United States Congress has been steadily increasing federal involvement in education, but even the wide-reaching Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) were intended to close the performance gap associated with underprivileged students, not to assert control over classroom activities of all students.

United States law on this matter is clear and undeniable. United States Code Title 20 deals with the federal role in education. **U.S. Code Title 20 Chapter 70 Subchapter 1** prohibits the Federal Government from:

...mandating, directing, or controlling a state, local education agency, or school's specific instructional content, academic achievement standards and assessments, curriculum, or programs of instruction.

This is a proverbial "line in the sand" written into the United States Code. **If anything goes beyond this line, the U.S. Department of Education is committing usurpation of authority.**

INTRODUCTION

In the following pages I will attempt to tell a balanced, factual, educated story of the development of the Common Core State Standards Initiative in the United States and its effect on our local school system here in Calcasieu Parish. At the end of this document I state some of my opinions and concerns and I make some statements on what I believe needs to happen going forward. However, beginning now and lasting until the declared "conclusion," everything I state is factual to the best of my knowledge, and if any issue or topic that seems important is omitted it is because I was either unaware of it at the time of the writing of this document, or unable to find sufficient reliable, objective information regarding it to merit inclusion in this paper. When I use a publicly available document I include where it can be found. If I cite a web page I include the URL and a screenshot where appropriate. I refer only to documents produced by official sources, not news outlets or interest groups. If I cite something from the web it is always from the official website of the organization I am discussing.

If you intend to read beyond this point I ask that you commit to read my entire document. It is quite detailed, but that detail is what is severely lacking in most Common Core related discussions. I also ask that where recommended you take your own time to review the sources used and follow the links included. Thank you for taking the time to read my work, and thank you for your concern for our education system. Regardless of your (or my) stance on Common Core right now, I believe that only by considering all the opposing viewpoints can we discern the best course.

EARLY FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

For nearly 200 years of our country's history there was essentially no federal involvement in local education. Until 1953 there was no U.S. cabinet level department responsible for education. On April 11th of that year the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was created. In 1980 an education specific cabinet level department named the U.S. Department of Education was formed, documenting its primary activity as the following:

Establishes policies related to federal education funding.
Collects data and oversees research on America's schools.
Identifies major issues in education and focuses national attention on them.
Enforces federal laws prohibiting discrimination in programs that receive federal funds.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/what-we-do.html>

Over the past 50 years the United States Congress has been steadily increasing federal involvement in education, but there are limits to the reach of federal influence. United States law on this matter is clear and undeniable. United States Code Title 20 deals with the federal role in education. **United States Code Title 20 Chapter 70 Subchapter 1** prohibits the Federal Government from:

...mandating, directing, or controlling a state, local education agency, or school's specific instructional content, academic achievement standards and assessments, curriculum, or programs of instruction.

Title 20 was updated in 1965 by the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**, and re-authorized every five years until 2001 when it received another major update in the form of the **No Child Left behind Act (NCLB)**. Both of these acts are sweeping education reform attempts targeted at increasing the achievement potential of underprivileged students. Congress' passage of both of these acts greatly expanded the federal role in education, yet both included the protective language quoted above. (NCLB in 2001 was the first correlation of federal funding with standardized test scores that I have been able to find.)

In July of 2009 President Barack Obama and U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced the "**Race to the Top**" (RTTT) program. It is important to note that RTTT is not U.S. law; it receives its funding from the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009**. RTTT is a competitive grant contest in which states compete against each other for a share of \$4.35 billion in federal rewards for performance in several graded criteria. A few of the concerning criteria are: (selected items, taken verbatim)

Developing and adopting common standards (40 points)
Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments (10 points)
Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system (24 points)
Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance (58 points)
Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters (40 points)

The U.S. Department of Education has orchestrated every step along the path to the creation of Common Core beginning with its very inception. States signed on to a **Common Core State Standards Memorandum of Agreement** when beginning the application process for RTTT. Here is a link to that document.

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/appendixes/louisiana.pdf>

(As we have come to expect from our government the application is a 500 page monstrosity. The memorandum begins on page 154.) After the obligatory "state-led" wording it includes the following paragraph, indicating U.S. DoE intent to essentially finance the entire project, as long as the states stay on board.

effort. In particular, the federal government can provide key financial support for this effort in developing a common core of state standards and in moving toward common assessments, such as through the Race to the Top Fund authorized in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Further, the federal government can incentivize this effort through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability structure, and offering financial support for states to effectively implement the standards. Additionally, the federal government can provide additional long-term financial support for the development of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, other related common core standards supports, and a research agenda that can help continually improve the common core over time. Finally, the federal government can revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from states' international benchmarking efforts and from federal research.

Agreement. The undersigned state leaders agree to the process and structure as described above and attest accordingly by our signature(s) below.

Governor:	 Signature
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DEVELOPMENT OF COMMON CORE

With the announcement of Race to the Top in 2009, states began literally racing to claim federal grants. The RTTT criteria requiring the states to “develop and adopt common standards” prompted the **National Governors Association** (NGA) to develop the program we now know as the **Common Core State Standards Initiative**. The NGA announced in July of 2009 that the committees who would be writing the standards had been formed and completion of the K-12 standards was expected in December of 2009. It is extremely difficult to find any information on the exact membership or methods of these committees, but here is one document released by the NGA Center for best practices that lists about 60 names, mostly employees of ACT, Achieve Inc., and The College Board.

http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title_common-core-state-standards-development-work-group-and-feedback-group-announced.html

It also indicates that the groups' work would be “confidential.” The makeup of the committee that validated the standards on behalf of the NGA is clearer; there are 27 members whose names are listed in this validation document produced by the NGA.

http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CommonCoreReport_6.10.pdf

Due to the lack of public documentation on development I was unable to get a reliable estimate of educator involvement in the writing of the standards but this is a clear list of over 60 closely involved individuals of which basically none are classroom teachers.

Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) were officially validated and released in June of 2010, less than a year after the initiative began. The standards themselves are no secret, being available for review on the official website corestandards.org. Anyone claiming to have an opinion about common core should at least browse these documents.

ELA http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards.pdf
Math http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Math_Standards.pdf

CONTENT OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The standards document for ELA includes these passages in its summary pages: (The document for Math includes similar wording.)

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (“the Standards”) are the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school.

A focus on results rather than means

By emphasizing required achievements, the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed. Thus, the Standards do not mandate such things as a particular writing process or the full range of metacognitive strategies that students may need to monitor and direct their thinking and learning. Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards.

The standards, in my own personal words, are a set of clear statements about what students should be able to accomplish after finishing each grade. They are organized into categories that are easy to correlate from grade to grade and indicate a defined pattern of continuing advancement year to year in each category. They are designed to be common among all the states and comparable to international standards. This is an important fact: there is value in the ability to compare student achievement across state lines and ensure that all Louisiana students are getting a competitive education to their fellow grade-level students in other states. The standards themselves dictate what any student in any state should be capable of in a particular grade, but are general enough to allow teachers and school districts sufficient flexibility. The ELA standard includes reading, writing, and speaking skills in the English language with some primarily literacy-related study of documents from science, history, and traditional literature. Teachers and school districts will need to significantly build on the selection of literary texts in order to produce a well-rounded literary education, and as far as I have been able to determine there is a reasonable indication that this is possible and will happen locally. Here is an example of an ELA third grade reading standard:

Fluency

4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
 - a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
 - b. Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings
 - c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

The ELA standard document includes a range of suggested reading materials intended to indicate text complexity levels that should be used in each grade level. It is my understanding there is also an appendix that includes information on how “text complexity” is figured, but I was unable to locate this document.

My assumption is that it would be of little interest to anyone other than elementary reading teachers, and I also assume they know where to find it if they need it. There is a significant shift in the standards towards reading proficiency in **informational texts**. No one really knows the effect this will have on the reading habits and proficiency of young children. This table, taken from page 5 of the ELA standards indicates the suggested mix of literary and informational texts:

Distribution of Literary and Informational Passages by Grade in the 2009 NAEP Reading Framework

Grade	Literary	Informational
4	50%	50%
8	45%	55%
12	30%	70%

The corestandards.org/ website uses the following language to explain this shift: *“Students must be immersed in information about the world around them if they are to develop the strong general knowledge and vocabulary they need to become successful readers and be prepared for college, career, and life. Informational texts play an important part in building students’ content knowledge. Further, it is vital for students to have extensive opportunities to build knowledge through texts so they can learn independently.*

The Math standards include all basic math subjects from basic arithmetic up to algebra, geometry, and statistics in high school. There are significant differences from traditional teaching in the order of introduction and suggested techniques especially in the early grades. Again, I believe they are general enough to allow teachers flexibility in the classroom. Here is an example of a first grade math standard:

Represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction.

1. Use addition and subtraction within 20 to solve word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions, e.g., by using objects, drawings, and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.
2. Solve word problems that call for addition of three whole numbers whose sum is less than or equal to 20, e.g., by using objects, drawings, and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.

As you can see this standard involving word problems is clear regarding what the student should be able to perform, but I don’t believe it imposes on a teacher’s freedom to teach in the manner that best fits the students. Here is another math standard from first grade that I am including because I believe it and other ones like it are responsible for a large amount of the parent math confusion. This is also from first grade.

Add and subtract within 20.

1. Relate counting to addition and subtraction (e.g., by counting on 2 to add 2).
2. Add and subtract within 20, demonstrating fluency for addition and subtraction within 10. Use strategies such as counting on; making ten (e.g., $8 + 6 = 8 + 2 + 4 = 10 + 4 = 14$); decomposing a number leading to a ten (e.g., $13 - 4 = 13 - 3 - 1 = 10 - 1 = 9$); using the relationship between addition and subtraction (e.g., knowing that $8 + 4 = 12$, one knows $12 - 8 = 4$); and creating equivalent but easier or known sums (e.g., adding $6 + 7$ by creating the known equivalent $6 + 6 + 1 = 12 + 1 = 13$).

Certainly these could be called uncommon, strange, or new techniques. I will leave it up to math teachers to determine their validity. It is important for everyone to realize that there is nothing in this standard that will prevent a good teacher from producing students who are proficient with these “tricks” and are also proficient at doing basic arithmetic in their heads “the old way.” I believe with time our math teachers will be able to do just that.

I have heard significant numbers of teachers and parents concerned that the standards in the lower grade levels are not “developmentally appropriate” meaning they don’t conform to generally accepted and well established stages of child development. I was unable to find any reliable information addressing this issue that was not written from a clearly-pro or clearly-against viewpoint. I have vaguely familiarized myself with traditional theories on development such as Bloom’s Taxonomy but this only reinforced to me that I have no expertise in that field and I need to be trusting what our classroom teachers are saying. It seems to me that with every passing day I hear more and more teachers expressing their concerns. There are no test schools or student groups to use as examples, nor are there long-term studies that I can point to reassure myself that there is proof CCSS is developmentally appropriate. I think it is fair to say this issue is “disputed” and it is also fair to say that it highlights the fears of many people (including me) that we may be participating in a 50 million student experiment.

OTHER COMMON CORE RUMORS ADDRESSED

At this time, as far as I have been able to determine, ELA and Math are the only two subject groups with Common Core standards adopted in Louisiana. Presumably the state and individual school districts still have a generous level of freedom regarding the other subject groups such as physical sciences, biology, history, social sciences, arts, music, etc. There are numerous rumors circulating especially among CCSS detractors regarding questionable content required by the standards and important content omitted from them. For the completeness of this document I feel compelled to address a few of the more prominent ones and share the research I have done.

I have been unable to find any wording in the ELA standards preventing the study of any particular literary work (such as alleged limiting of references to the founding fathers, American roles in the world wars, etc.) It is also my impression from extensive reading of the actual standards that there is no offensive required reading (such as age-inappropriate fiction) that local school boards do not have the ability to reject and replace. The **Calcasieu Parish School Board (CPSB)** has rejected and replaced ELA reading materials this year in more than one instance. I am confident that as things stand now our principals, administrators, and school board have and will use the authority to keep controversial reading content out of our classrooms. If we work cooperatively with our teachers and principals I don’t believe we will hear “we have to read that, it’s in common core” as an excuse from them. Current accepted, proposed, and removed reading materials can be seen on the CPSB website here:

<http://www.cpsb.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&ModuleInstanceID=12&ViewID=047E6BE3-6D87-4130-8424-D8E4E9ED6C2A&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=6098&PageID=1>

There are repeated rumors of Common Core math being incomprehensible, over-complicating basic arithmetic, allowing $2+2=5$, or $3 \times 4=11$, etc. There is nothing that I can find in the math standards themselves that could be related (even figuratively) as $2+2=5$. There is a significant emphasis on concepts such as place value, explaining solution methods, and the relationship of written numbers to objects and groups of objects. Combined with a lessor emphasis on arithmetic memorization in the earlier grades this shift is likely what is responsible for the confusion of parents.

Refer back a page to the math standards and read the document itself for a clearer picture. Again I will leave it up to educators to debate the pros and cons of this new math teaching style. No doubt there are terrible examples of curriculum circulating the internet, perhaps even some somewhere that allow $2+2=5$ as a correct answer, but I believe they are just that, examples of terrible curriculum, not in the standards anywhere that I can find.

There are also rumors that the CCSS initiative will secretly bring large-scale data collection into our classrooms. I feel confident in saying this rumor is actually completely true. Refer back to the RTTT requirement for “development of statewide longitudinal data systems” and also the PARCC co-operative operating document in the coming pages. The U.S. DoE clearly is intending to collect large amounts of personally identifiable information on our students. This is for the supposed purposes of education research and teacher and school accountability. Repeated data breaches and excessive misuse in recent history prove that regardless of intentions, anywhere data like this is collected it is virtually guaranteed to be abused.

There is one extremely concerning document circulating the internet that I am forced to mention because of the seriousness of the accusations regarding it. This is a link to what appears to be a common core related sex-education standard. Note that this is not from any official CCSS site.

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B50W2Y7Vse75Q0pZQWhNN2JhZ1E/edit?pli=1>

I have been unable to verify the validity or source of this document. I have not seen anything to indicate any intention of its use in Louisiana. My best guess is that this is a special interest group trying to make their publication seem to be a part of common core in order to increase its publicity. I am only including it because it (along with an associated, equally offensive supporting text: Its Perfectly Normal) is the source of many only-slightly-educated objections to CCSS adoption. Obviously a nationally developed sex-education curriculum that requires the teaching of sexual reproduction and sexual orientation to fifth graders is highly offensive to many people. Its simple existence is a frightening enlightenment to the risks of losing control of the content in our classrooms, but **for now I feel confident that there is nothing like this in anything Louisiana has adopted.** If this type of thing is happening in other states, it just reinforces the need to maintain local control over curriculum. Louisiana teachers currently are following the existing Grade Level Expectations standards for subjects outside ELA and math. The GLE standards are available on the Louisiana Believes website here:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/academic-standards>

Of particular note to me on this page were the standards for U.S and World History, Civics, Free Enterprise, and Health. For concerns about what our children will be taught in these areas, this is the place to look. If these standards are replaced by the state in the future we should endeavor to make sure any changes reflect our local values.

Moving away from rumor and back to evidence, I believe it is generally accepted that the rapid adoption of the ELA and Math standards in Louisiana was primarily due to the RTTT criteria to “develop and adopt common standards” and in December of 2010 Louisiana received \$17 million in RTTT grant funding. I also can state with confidence that the deployment of the new ELA and Math curriculums is considered extremely rushed. The rushed deployment and emphasis on deadlines is indicative to me that the driving forces behind CCSS adoption may not be entirely focused on our students’ best interests.

ASSESSMENTS AND PARCC

The standards themselves are the first part of the Common Core debate. The next part is assessments. The RTTT criteria to “develop and implement common high-quality assessments” prompted several states to form what we now know as the **Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)** testing consortium. PARCC describes itself as a coalition of states “working together to develop a set of assessments that measure whether students are on track to be successful in college and their careers.” In September of 2010, just over a year after the CCSS initiative began, PARCC was awarded a federal grant of \$186 million. Currently this grant covers the entire operating budget of PARCC. As a condition of its acceptance of that grant PARCC was subject to the **Cooperative Agreement between the U.S. Department of Education and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers**. This mandatory cooperative agreement contains the following disturbing language: (selected passages, taken verbatim, emphasis added)

In accordance with 34 CFR 75.200(b)(4), this award is a cooperative agreement because the **Secretary of Education (Secretary) has determined that substantial communication, coordination, and involvement between the U.S. Department of Education (Department or ED) and the recipient is necessary to carry out a successful project**. Consistent with 34 CFR 75.234(b), the terms and conditions identified in this cooperative agreement set out the explicit character and extent of the anticipated collaboration between ED and the award recipient.

- A. RECIPIENT’S RESPONSIBILITIES: In addition to carrying out the tasks and activities described in the recipient’s application, as indicated in the Scope of Work section of this agreement, the recipient will:
1. Perform tasks identified in Article I of this agreement.
 2. Provide updated, detailed work plans and budgets for all major activities identified in the recipient’s application.
 3. **Actively participate in any meetings and telephone conferences with ED staff** to discuss (a) progress of the project, (b) potential dissemination of resulting non-proprietary products and lessons learned, (c) plans for subsequent years of the project, and (d) other relevant information, including applicable technical assistance activities conducted or facilitated by ED or its designees, including periodic expert reviews, and collaboration with the other RTTA recipient.
 4. **Be responsive to requests from ED for information about the status of the project**, project implementation and updated plans, outcomes, any problems anticipated or encountered, and future plans for the assessment system, including by providing such information in writing when requested.
 5. **Comply with, and where applicable coordinate with the ED staff** to fulfill, the program requirements established in the RTTA Notice Inviting Applications and the conditions on the grant award, as well as to this agreement, including, but not limited to working with the Department to **develop a strategy to make student-level data that results from the assessment system available on an ongoing basis for research**, including for prospective linking, validity, and program improvement studies; subject to applicable privacy laws.

The entire cooperative agreement is available from the U.S. DoE here:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/parcc-cooperative-agreement.pdf>

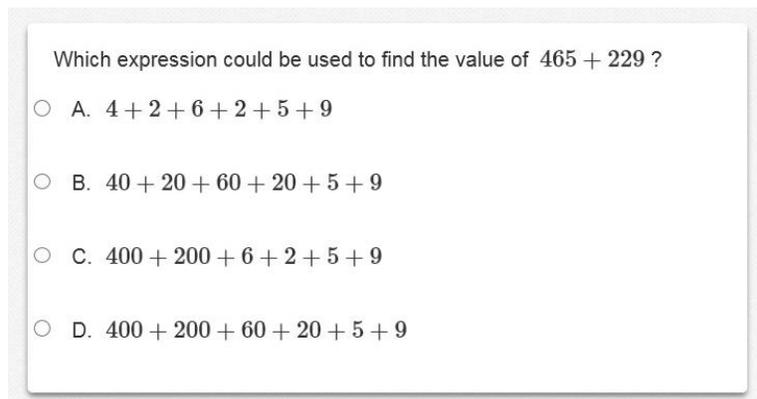
I believe that with this cooperative agreement the United States Department of Education has clearly overstepped the boundaries to its authority defined in US Code Title 20. I believe this is a definitive indication of the US DoE attempting to use its control over the flow of money to do what it is prohibited from doing legally; controlling the states’ academic standards and assessments, and by extension, curriculums.

It also inarguably subjects the PARCC to a disturbing requirement to collect “student-level data” and make it available to the federal government for study. The states participating in PARCC have essentially delegated their control over one of the most important aspects of the education process: standardized testing, to an organization which is extremely subject to federal oversight and operated entirely on federal funding. I also have come to believe that PARCC testing, in association with Common Core aligned materials, will be used to directly detect and eventually control what goes on in our classrooms. Consider this statement made by Laura Slover, the President of PARCC and posted on the official PARCC website:

<http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-states-reduce-no-items-elaliteracy-portion-test>

High quality assessments go hand-in-hand with high quality instruction based on high quality standards, you cannot have one without the other. The PARCC states see quality assessments as a *part* of instruction, not a *break* from instruction. The PARCC assessment system is a new way of testing that reduces time spent on ‘test prep,’ because the only way to prepare for these more sophisticated assessments is through good teaching and learning all year long,

“Teaching to the test” is a well-known phenomenon in education. It is essentially a realization of the fact that the more standardized testing is emphasized the more teachers will be tempted (or required) to focus their efforts on the exact material tested. This effect is magnified with the high-stakes testing requirements and scores-driven nature of the CCSS initiative, to the point where the testing can literally drive the teaching. I have personally reviewed many PARCC sample test questions and (while admittedly this is only a personal opinion) it appeared to me that some of the math and ELA questions for the lower grades (third and fourth) are extremely narrowly focused on the particular way a student was taught. I have concerns that if students are not taught from a very specific curriculum, the questions may make little sense to them. Take for example this PARCC sample question: (taken verbatim, PARCC sample test, Math, third grade)

A screenshot of a PARCC sample math question. The question asks for an expression that can be used to find the value of $465 + 229$. There are four multiple-choice options: A. $4 + 2 + 6 + 2 + 5 + 9$, B. $40 + 20 + 60 + 20 + 5 + 9$, C. $400 + 200 + 6 + 2 + 5 + 9$, and D. $400 + 200 + 60 + 20 + 5 + 9$. Each option is preceded by a radio button.

Which expression could be used to find the value of $465 + 229$?

A. $4 + 2 + 6 + 2 + 5 + 9$

B. $40 + 20 + 60 + 20 + 5 + 9$

C. $400 + 200 + 6 + 2 + 5 + 9$

D. $400 + 200 + 60 + 20 + 5 + 9$

A student who was proficient at the traditional addition algorithm and could easily add $465+229=694$ but wasn't taught the common core technique of breaking the numbers down into 100s and 10s could potentially be confused by this question. It's not invalid math, or intentionally misleading, but the question is not about whether or not the student can do the math, it is about what was he taught in his classroom. For the higher grade levels (eighth, ninth, and tenth) it seems to me that the questions are not all that different from the standardized tests I took in school, with the exception of the significant technological changes. Currently, sample PARCC test questions are available for review by anyone at PARCC website:

<http://practice.parcctestnav.com/#>

What is changing drastically in the years since NCLB and now RTTT is the unprecedented emphasis on these standardized tests. There are already weeks of school taken up by testing in high schools in particular and the original PARCC design called for four standardized tests throughout the year (presumably replacing LEAP and EOC but in addition to AP, ACT/SAT, PLAN, etc.) This has since been reduced to two additional mandatory tests and two optional tests. From extensive research and teacher input I believe I can say with confidence that the recent move to more and more excessive high-stakes testing is not considered a positive reform by any of our educators. More testing means more control over activities in class, less time for actual instruction, and more stress for students, teachers and administrators.

An ideal standardized test would be capable of verifying student achievement while allowing teachers the flexibility they need in the classroom. It would only be a small part of the student progress evaluation system. It would be developed as locally as possible to allow for maximum input from educators and parents. It would also be general enough to encourage publisher diversity among satisfactory curriculums to allow local school boards to select textbook sets that reflect the values, desires, and motivations of the parents in their districts.

Having discussed the first two points of debate (standards and assessments) I will now move on to the final and most important piece: curriculum.

CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOK SELECTION AND ADOPTION

State and local school boards have well established, elaborate processes for the selection and approval of the textbooks that will be used in classrooms. These processes are to ensure adequate input from teacher and parent groups and transparency of the selection criteria to the public. In Louisiana, textbook adoption is governed by **Louisiana Administrative Code: Title 28, Part XXXIII.**

<http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/LAC/lac28.htm>

This procedure manual gives the **State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (SBESE)** the responsibility to prescribe, adopt, control and supervise the distribution and use of free school books and other materials of instruction in elementary, secondary, special, post-secondary and vocational-technical schools across the state of Louisiana. It contains the following introductory paragraph: (emphasis added)

It is hoped that the policies and procedures contained in this bulletin will **help local school districts** to provide textbooks that will have a significant, positive impact on student achievement, student attitudes and behaviors, and on the interactions in the learning environment for students of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and areas of interest. Any interested citizen may request his or her name be placed on the mailing list for textbook adoption information.

This procedure manual laid out in the State Administrative Code is nearly 100 pages long. SBESE's authority in this area exists to **help local school districts** in selecting curriculum, and to ensure that all the local school districts provide students with quality curriculums that meet state and national standards. I also believe that the extensive nature of the procedure is to prevent abuses by SBESE that infringe on the rights of local school boards or the rights of parents to provide informed support. I don't see how it is fathomable that this would imply that it is appropriate for SBESE to inform local districts that there is only a single recommended textbook set.

In the 2012 Louisiana state textbook review cycle the first round of textbooks influenced by CCSS were submitted for review. Textbook sets were submitted by at least six publishers in one or both of the common core disciplines of ELA and Math. These publishers included well-known names in education like Houghton Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, Pearson, etc. The normal next step would be for SBESE to approve adoption of some or all of the textbook sets, and each local school board would select, from the adopted set, a particular curriculum to use in its classrooms. In November of the 2012 review cycle SBESE and Superintendent John White were poised to reject every single textbook set, citing “lack of alignment with PARCC” as the primary factor. John White is quoted in Education Week as saying:

They don't consistently reflect the level of work we see in the PARCC prototypes.

Also, he says:

What we want is a very strong set of tasks that are anchoring these units in a way teachers can be confident that when they assess their students, they're assessing them on a rubric similar to the one that PARCC will be using,

The board eventually approved two series for Math and three for ELA. The textbook review documents are still available from the Louisiana Believes website linked below. See in particular page 5 of the review document, the Houghton Mifflin GO Math! Louisiana review for a good example of the review process. This document can be viewed here:

www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/curricular-resources/2012-2013-lde-textbook-review.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Whether you agree with the outcome or not, they do appear to show extensive research and documentation by SBESE. The sets rejected have clear indications of where SBESE considers them deficient, and the sets accepted for adoption have concerns and weaknesses listed alongside their justification for adoption.

I believe these documents also indicate SBESE and John White's intention to base textbook adoption on alignment with PARCC prototypes. In the latest textbook adoption cycle once again many publishers submitted textbook sets for review. This time SBESE has only adopted a single textbook set each for ELA and Math as what they refer to as Tier 1 Instructional Material. These are **Eureka Math** for math, and **ELA Core Knowledge – Skill Strands** for ELA. These sets received unqualified praise across all categories by SBESE. Again the review documents are available on the Louisiana Believes website:

www.louisianabelieves.com/academics/instructional-materials-review/curricular-resources-annotated-reviews

Again I agree they indicate extensive research by SBESE, but again I believe they indicate that (for good or ill) the textbooks that are being adopted are being adopted based solely on how closely they align to the upcoming PARCC test.

In March of 2013 the **Calcasieu Parish School Board's Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Committee** convened and voted to recommend adoption of the single Tier 1 curriculum approved by SBESE. In April of 2013 the CPSB convened and approved the recommendation of the C&I Committee. There is no record in the minutes of the voting breakdown. As of the writing of this document I have been unable to determine from minutes of these meetings how much flexibility and freedom the C&I committee had in making this determination. Here is an excerpt from the CPSB policy manual regarding textbook selection: (most of the manual is available for reference on the CPSB website listed below)

<http://www2.cpsb.org/System/policies/CAPS/CalcasieuCAPS.htm>

PROCEDURES

1. Establishment of Timelines:

a. September

- i. Textbooks being considered for adoption by the State Department of Education will be on display at the Calcasieu Parish School Board Book Depository. The public will be notified through the local media.
- ii. A local adoption committee will be chosen to consider those books adopted at the state level.

b. Committee Selection:

- i. The local adoption committee will be composed of a minimum of thirteen (13) members: one administrator; five parents selected by geographical area -- 2 from West Calcasieu, 2 from East Calcasieu, and 1 from the Central Lake Charles area one special education representative; and 6 classroom teachers with equitable representation reflective of the student constituency. The composition of the committee may be expanded, depending on the subject area being adopted.
- ii. Committee members are to receive special training in textbook selection criteria, voting procedures, and integrity of interaction with publishers. This will be done by the curriculum supervisor responsible for the adoption.

By doing extensive personal research and reviewing CPSB documents I have determined to the best of my ability that this process was not adhered to in the curriculum selection cycle that resulted in the adoption of Eureka Math and ELA Core Knowledge. I believe this to have been an unfortunate mistake in judgment by the district administrative staff and the current school board. I also understand from my experiences in decision making roles that the situation is never as simple as it seems, nor the paths as clear as they seem looking back. Mr. Bruchhaus and his team have earned my confidence and I have no desire to engage in second guessing of decisions they have already made and cannot change. At this point I trust that they have done what they believe is best for our children in what is obviously a very difficult situation. The situation now is that we as a state and parish have allowed SBESE to force a curriculum upon us while also allowing SBESE to delegate the choice of that curriculum (through PARCC) to the federal government.

NOW THAT WE HAVE SEEN COMMON CORE

Whether as a result of the drastically different materials, questionable motives, inflexible and poor curriculum choices, or disastrous implementation, the reality is that now that we have a set of CCSS textbooks in our classrooms public opinion has quickly started to sour. The extent to which the public is now opposed to its continued use is debatable; but more important than that is the leadership response during this changing of the political weather. It is interesting what has happened now that citizens, legislatures, and governors all over the country have started to ask tough questions about CCSS and local control of education. What was once proclaimed a voluntary cooperative program organized by states has quickly become an inescapable national monstrosity that even the Governor of our state cannot control. Governor Jindal is on record as saying he has become aware PARCC is an instrument to institute federal control of our schools and enforce a "national curriculum." As of September 2014 the governor is involved in lawsuits with the Louisiana and U.S. Departments of Education. Some argue that this is a political maneuver to rally conservative support for Jindal on the national stage. That may or may not be true, but what is not arguable is that **unelected bureaucrats** Arnie Duncan and John White are doubling down on CCSS against the will of the elected executive office of the State.

Superintendent White has falsely stated that Eureka Math is an LSU-developed product to play down the “national curriculum” concerns, and stated that CCSS and PARCC are “the law” to attempt to dismiss Governor Jindal’s actions. Even a small amount of investigation will quickly determine Eureka Math is a Washington D.C. product developed for the New York State Department of Education. This is the mission statement from Common Core, Inc., the producers of Eureka Math. This is taken in its entirety with no omissions or misdirection from the official website.

<http://commoncore.org/>

We are a Washington, D.C. based non-profit 501(c)3 organization that seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their circumstance, receive a content-rich education in the full range of the liberal arts and sciences, including English, mathematics, history, the arts, science, and foreign languages.

Here is one more passage from the commoncore.org website, an astonishing paragraph from the Read More link on the Eureka Math page.

The research and development upon which *Eureka Math* is based was made possible through a partnership with the New York State Education Department, for whom this work was originally created. Their expert review team, including renowned mathematicians who helped write the CCSS, progressions, and the much-touted “Publisher’s Criteria,” strengthened an already rigorous development process. We are proud to now provide *Eureka Math*, an extended version of that work, to teachers both within and beyond New York.

This is the textbook set that is allegedly LSU-developed and is now in our elementary schools. Read in this screenshot how the state education department describes Eureka Math in the final page of a webinar about transitioning Louisiana to CCSS: (available online here)

<http://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/webinars/transition-plan-summary-2013.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

- **Curriculum.** The state will produce a Louisiana Curriculum Guidebook for English Language Arts and Math in grades Kindergarten through 12 that will include learning standards, a recommended sequence of skills to be taught, recommended units to present, and recommended materials to use in the classroom. The state will also recommend math curricula, including LSU-developed Eureka Math, along with English reading materials.

If this is really about education and not politics or money, and it really is not a national curriculum, then why is there a need to make it seem as though a textbook set developed in Washington D.C. for New York schools was actually a product of a Louisiana university? What need is there for deception if the state and local school boards are able to freely choose this as the best product?

White’s statement about the law does not fare any better against scrutiny. It is beginning to appear that White and SBESE may have broken state law by using a pre-existing “sole source” contract with a vendor named **Data Recognition Corp** (DRC) to fund the PARCC testing when there is no way DRC is a “sole source” provider for PARCC and in fact Pearson has been awarded the new contract for testing. As of the writing of this document this is still a developing matter with facts that are far from clear. I don’t claim to know the truth on this new accusation, but it does add to the concerns about whether we the people of Louisiana and Calcasieu Parish have any real choice at all.

It also draws even more attention to the fact that John White, a Washington D.C. born New York University educated unelected bureaucrat, (who is not a certified teacher, principal, or superintendent in Louisiana) is the single most influential person in our state level education decisions.

SUMMARY

What we have learned thus far is the following:

- Over the past 50 years congress has been steadily increasing the legal federal involvement in education, but with each reauthorization, strong protective wording is used to keep federal intrusion out of instruction, standards, assessments, and curriculum.
- In 2001 The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) first connected federal funding to standardized testing.
- In 2009 The Obama Administration and U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Secretary Arne Duncan announced the Race to the Top (RTTT) Grant Program, which they created with funding from The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.
- The U.S. DoE has used federal RTTT funding to entice states to develop and adopt a common set of national academic standards.
- The CCSS are adopted by most states, Louisiana included, but they are untested and poorly understood by most of the public.
- The U.S. DoE has used federal RTTT funding in combination with NCLB waivers to drive states to join testing consortiums, i.e. Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balance.
- The U.S. DoE took control of PARCC by requiring a cooperative agreement in exchange for funding.
- Louisiana DoE Superintendent John White indicated his plan to align Louisiana curriculum to “PARCC Prototypes.”
- The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (SBESE) has continually narrowed down the list of available curriculums to the point where there is now only one, the perfectly PARCC aligned set.
- The textbook set Eureka Math adopted by the SBESE is (by its own declaration, in conflict with claims made by SBESE and John White) produced for the New York Department of Education by a Washington D.C. based non-profit named Common Core, Inc.
- CPSB has adopted Eureka Math and ELA Core Knowledge, the only Tier 1 curriculum approved by SBESE.

CONCLUSION

I believe I have shown in the last 15 pages that while Common Core is not the arch enemy some people have portrayed it to be, whether everyone realizes it or not we do have an ideological battle to fight. If we are going to prevail it is imperative that we find common ground upon which we can all stand and fight together. I appreciate you reading this far. Now please allow me a little more of your time so that I may explain where I believe that common ground is. This is the conclusion of my paper. Based on the facts stated above, what follows are my opinions and my passion. I hope that this will satisfy everyone's insistence that they know where I stand, and even if you disagree I hope that you will still trust me to research, listen, and do the right thing on your behalf as a member of our local school board.

This is where I stand on Common Core:

I, for one, trust our teachers to teach. We must not shackle them with so much testing responsibility and paperwork that they lose the motivation to do the very thing our students need most. I believe we are in real danger of allowing the federal government to reduce human children to test scores and database entries, and reduce teachers to book-readers and standardized-test-givers without the flexibility to actually teach each student as an individual person with individual needs. Calcasieu Parish students are different than students in Washington D.C. or New York City or Los Angeles. They deserve to be treated like individuals.

Even more importantly, parents in Calcasieu Parish are different than parents in other parts of the country. The common values that the people in Southwest Louisiana hold dear must be present in our schools in addition to our homes so that they can be effectively passed on to our children. We are proud to be Americans. We believe ours is the greatest nation on the Earth. We respect and understand hard work and sacrifice. We believe in the possibilities provided by free enterprise. We feel compelled by our American spirit to accomplish great things. We take pride in our uniqueness as individuals and hold our privacy and independence in the highest respect. We believe freedom of religion doesn't mean freedom from religion. Most importantly, we as Americans, perhaps uniquely in the world, know that we control our government, it does not control us. We are the defenders of individual liberty in the free world and if we don't raise up a generation of children who understand the privilege and responsibility of carrying that banner, then we will be standing idly by while our national leaders usher in the slow decline of the greatest nation on Earth towards eventual irrelevancy.

I question whether these values that define us are equally prevalent throughout the United States. I question whether a textbook developed in Washington D.C. for New York students is relevant in Southwest Louisiana. I question whether we can maintain our identity and pass it on to our children with so much influence from outside our parish and outside our state. I question why we have tolerated an education overhaul that has proven so disastrous it can only have been orchestrated by big government. I am disappointed we have come to this point. I apologize it has taken me this long to get involved. I now consider myself educated. I am now even more confident than before that Common Core really is more complicated than just "for" or "against."

I believe there is a need for rigorous, nationally consistent, clear standards in elementary and secondary education. I believe Louisiana's adoption of the Common Core State Standards in ELA and Math is a tolerable decision that meets that need, at least in that it is a workable starting point. I am convinced however that the national CCSS initiative has fallen victim to the current federal administration's desire to control everything, and the combined greed of testing, publishing, and technology companies, and charter school organizations. I believe Race to the Top has begun and will continue to silently insert data-mining and charter organizations into our education system.

Further, I believe the PARCC testing consortium is under direct control of the U.S. Department of Education and represents an immediate threat to our local autonomy. It will be used in a federal power grab to erode states' rights and circumvent state and local laws protecting our classrooms. We must fight it with every tool at our disposal. I firmly believe now that we are in the midst of the defining ideological battle of our time.

I call on the CCSS detractors to continue to fight, but dig deeper and understand that what we need to be fighting is not "anything that says common or standards at the top of it" but rather the big government, big money, big data hijacking attempt that seeks to nationalize education curriculum while privatizing education implementation. We need to understand the difference between "standards," "assessments," and "curriculum." Problems with curriculum and procedures (while easy to see and attack) are only a symptom of the real problem: total loss of local control. We have a real opportunity to retake control of the curriculum and procedures, and I believe the assessment is not yet firmly entrenched. The standards themselves, while not perfect, have some merit, and they are already adopted by the state. The standards are supported by some of our local teachers just as much as the implementation is hated. They have made and continue to make great strides in our classrooms learning how to teach to these new standards. We must respect their efforts by exploring ways to fight at the state level without sabotaging the work our local teachers and staff are doing. Our teachers are capable of teaching to meet and exceed any realistic standards as long as they are given the time and support they need. We need only to free them from this disastrous implementation. We don't need to abolish national standards, we need to conquer them, take them over for ourselves, and wrestle them from the clutches of the federal government so that they can grow with the advantage of local influence and allow our students to excel and show their success to the rest of the country and the rest of the world. **If a realistic opportunity develops to completely free Calcasieu Parish from the current Common Core implementation I will not be afraid to stand up and take it,** but I fear we have already missed that opportunity. What is more likely is that we will have to focus our efforts on working within the system to change what we can still realistically change.

I call on CCSS supporters to realize that what you are supporting has become much bigger than just standards. I am not your enemy. I see clearly that the set of standards you support has some merit. Realize that it is what **should be**, not what it *is*, nor what *is coming*, that you support. Look back at the United States law protecting you from federal intrusion into education. Look back at the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, reserving for the states all powers not expressly given to the federal government. Do you feel like we have local control? The reality now is that we must fight in order to preserve the possibility of ever doing it right ourselves. You have to believe we can do it better. You must be able to see the corrupting influence of big government, big money, and big data. We can do better, but only if we have the ability to make decisions close to home with real input from the real people on the front line. If you truly have students' best interest in mind, I believe corporate and government greed have betrayed you.

MOVING FORWARD

In order to make a positive difference I believe these should be our **common goals**:

- **Read the standards.** Agree (admit) that the standards themselves are not perfect, but are tolerable, and are general enough to allow teachers (when freed from the national curriculum and excessive testing) to teach effectively. Allow our educators to do the best they can for the time being and support their efforts, realizing that standards change has to be made at the state level. Until we can change the law, we must work cooperatively with our principals and administrators to control reading content in the classrooms, and ensure children are being taught “traditional” reliable math skills in addition to new techniques.
- **Focus our efforts on realistic methods of defending local control.** Target testing and curriculum, avoiding attacking the standards as a primary strategy, avoiding wasting time on unrealistic possibilities such as “abandon common core even if it means giving up all federal funding” and certainly avoiding attacking each other. We are all on the same team, the sooner we realize that the sooner we can start to use the combined influence of 200,000 voices to create solutions at the state level.
- **Support the developing attempts to disconnect Louisiana from PARCC.** It is the most direct threat to our local autonomy and it is defeatable without destroying the work our teachers are doing. Even if you consider this “political” maneuvering by Governor Jindal, Brett Geymann, or anyone else, it is the right course. Our school board can then begin work on pressuring the state to replace PARCC with a less intrusive, less radical, more local testing option that is not entirely federally funded.
- **Elect a CPSB and state legislators in November** who will fight for local education autonomy, who will work to develop real solutions rather than just tell voters what they want to hear in order to gain votes, and who are involved, educated, and willing to sacrificially serve the public interest.
- **Pressure SBESE to give us a healthy selection of state approved curriculums** in ELA and Math to choose from, rather than the travesty of a single approved set. Replace Eureka Math and ELA Core Knowledge as quickly as financially possible with a curriculum selected by an extensive, local, teacher-driven, and parent-inclusive process.
- **Citizens:** be involved, hold our local school board accountable for education that reflects our values, and hold incumbents accountable for the votes they have already cast. Remember that our central office staff are local residents, our friends and neighbors, who have a difficult job to do. They will be judged according to the common core standards and must follow SBESE’s lead. They are not villains.
CPSB: hold the administrators accountable for following the policies that protect our local autonomy. Let them do their jobs and trust their judgment, but be the voice of the people to give them direction.

I am Eric Tarver, these are my opinions and my goals regarding Common Core, and regardless of which side you are on, I will represent you, the citizens of district 8, and all of Calcasieu Parish with integrity, sincerity, and wisdom as a member of the Calcasieu Parish School Board.