

COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN THE NEWS

By Burton Roehr, Chair of LWVCA
Education Committee

What is your opinion about the Common Core Standards (CCSS), the relatively new program to improve student learning in our schools? Are you aware that there is movement to get the Standards repealed in states where they've been adopted and implemented? In 2013, our Ohio House removed \$10 million in funds originally pegged for Common Core technology from its budget proposal and a bill was introduced to repeal the program completely. During the same period, Indiana's legislature voted to halt the state's move toward the Common Core and Michigan's House voted to ban the use of general funds for the program (source: *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 29, 2013; *Columbus Dispatch*, Aug. 1, 2013). This year the debate has been taken up by the Kentucky Legislature.

According to Ms. Kelly Kohls, founder and president of the Ohio School Boards Leadership Council, the Republican National Committee passed a resolution opposing the Common Core Standards, and the Hamilton County GOP is meeting to discuss the repeal of the program because of federal overreach (source: *Enquirer*, Feb. 23, 2014).

More information about the CCSS may be found in a series of Voter articles in the February, March and April 2013 editions. Please refer to those articles to refresh your memory of why they were put into place, who developed them, and what they hope to accomplish at lwcincinnati.org/newsletter.html.

What has changed in the last several years? What issues have led to these reversals in the states?

Recent Arguments For and Against the Common Core Standards

Against: The CCSS are an intrusion by the federal government into what states must teach in their public schools. It is the prerogative of each state to determine what will be taught in its public schools,

and this program removes the control from the local community. While adoption/implementation of the standards is voluntary, incentives from the federal government make adoption obligatory.

For: The CCSS were developed when the

frequent feedback on whether the students are grasping the material and where there may be a lack of understanding. Remediation can then be instituted to ensure that the student(s) may continue to progress.



National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers agreed to the concept of a uniform set of standards. Since 2010, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS. The federal government's role has been to provide incentives in the form of grants to states to help them implement the standards if they choose to adopt them. The states, moreover, determine the curricula for teaching the standards. The federal government has not decreed that any state must adopt the standards, but any state that wished to compete for Race to the Top funding grants had to adopt the CCSS. Additionally, if a state wished to apply for a waiver from some of the requirements of No Child Left Behind, that state had to implement the CCSS.

Against: It's being pushed by textbook publishers and others who stand to make a lot of money from the changes.

For: While producers of educational material will profit from sales of their material to school districts, that's not a reason to avoid the CCSS.

Against: This approach is based on frequent testing, which has not been vetted and leads to "teaching to the test."

For: It is true that the testing segment of the CCSS is still in development and trial and will not be available until the 2014-15 school year. However, the idea behind the testing is that teachers will be able to gain

Because the assessments that are coordinated with the material have not been available, other older testing tools have been used to determine student progress. The result has caused confusion, antipathy to any testing, and general complaints about the CCSS.

Against: Implementing the CCSS is expensive and districts may not be able to afford it. The program requires new texts and study materials as well as increased use of computers by the students.

For: The goal of CCSS is to teach students to analyze data critically and develop thinking skills as opposed to memorization and rote learning. We cannot afford not to implement these standards, as these are the skills young people need in the 21st century for careers and college. The tests are predicted to be given on computers, which will be a problem for some districts, but proponents point out that computer skills are critically needed if students are to succeed in today's environment.

Local districts have implemented the CCSS and seem to be pleased with what they are designed to do. Until the planned assessments are put in place, they are "making do" with the tools available to them now. It will be interesting to see what judgments will be passed when the standards and their proper assessments are in place and operating as designed.