

Evaluating Common Core

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Are Uniform Standards a Silver Bullet for Education Reform?

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Abstract

This article examines the Common Core State Standards Initiative and provides a policy analysis of issues concerning its implementation as a policy initiative to achieve education reform in the U.S. Aside from highlighting developments concerning this policy initiative, it examines the origins of this movement toward adopting common core state standards and political implications of the education policy. The article assesses what are the advantages, disadvantages, and pitfalls concerning prospects for change that could result from the implementation of common core state standards, and examines the policy as it relates to theories of action or change. Specifically, as it concerns theories of action or change, it will focus upon how this education policy is supposed to improve student learning along with its prospects for success. The hypothesis proposed here is that this policy initiative as a reform will not result in improving student achievement. For one, there is clearly a flaw in the underlying rationale that uniform standards are needed to improve education in U.S. schools. Further, there is no clear evidence that raising standards will result in increased student learning. In addition, the common core initiative lacks a convincing research base to support this perspective which could in turn undermine support for implementation of the policy. Finally, research shows a weak or nonexistent relationship between common core standards and high test scores.

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Introduction

This article examines the Common Core State Standards Initiative and issues concerning its implementation as a policy initiative to achieve education reform in the U.S. The Obama administration was a proponent for a set of education standards developed with the goal of making all high school graduates in the U.S. prepared for college entry or careers. In order to reach this goal, the administration pressured states to incorporate content standards referred to as the common core and developed by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (NGA/CCSSO). In fact, the administration proposed that federal Title 1 aid be withheld from states that do not adopt these or comparable standards.

Aside from highlighting developments under the Obama administration and the policy's status in the current political climate, the article examines the origins of this movement toward adopting common core state standards and political implications of the education policy. It assesses what are the advantages, disadvantages, and pitfalls concerning prospects for change that could result from the implementation of common core state standards, and examines the policy as it relates to theories of action or change. Specifically, as it concerns theories of action or change, it will focus upon how this education policy aims to improve student learning along with its prospects for success. It is clear that there is an underlying flaw in the rationale that common core or uniform standards are necessary to improve education in American schools. For one, there is no compelling or clear evidence that raising standards will ultimately result in enhanced student learning. Further, there is no convincing or solid research base associated with common core to support this perspective. This could in turn undermine support for the policy's implementation. Aside from a limited research base, some of the existing research indicates that there is a weak or nonexistent correlation between common core standards and high test scores.

Common Core State Standards:

Origins of the Movement and the Rationale for Uniformity of Standards

The origin of the Common Core State Standards Initiative is linked to a critical meeting in April of 2009 when the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (NGA/CCSSO) met in Chicago, Illinois to undertake efforts to propose more uniform standards for U.S. education (Mathis, 2010). During this period, representatives from 41 states along with NGA/CCSSO officials met and

proposed to draft a set of uniform or common education standards for American schools (Mathis, 2010). A private contractor company known as Achieve, Inc. was commissioned by NGA/CCSSO to develop a set of new common core standards for U.S. schools in the areas of both mathematics and reading (McNeil, 2009). In fact, the project to develop new common core standards was basically fast-tracked for Achieve, Inc. to have a clearly articulated set of grade-by-grade standards by the end of 2009 (McNeil, 2009).

Aside from the federal funding, the Gates Foundation also contributed significantly to the effort to create new common core state standards for U.S. schools. The foundation not only bankrolled the development of the standards, but also built vital political support across the country, and persuaded state governments to make systemic and costly changes. The Gates Foundation essentially provided the money and structure for states to work together on common standards in a way that avoided collusion between states' rights and national interests that had a tendency to undercut previous efforts (Layton, 2014). It provided financing across the political spectrum to teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association (NEA), and business organizations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Layton, 2014). Despite previous conflicts, these groups became vocal supporters of the standards. Further, financing was channeled to policy groups on both the left and right to scholars of varying political persuasions who advocated for common core state standards. For example, liberals at the Center for American Progress and conservatives associated with the American Legislative Exchange Council who often were on opposite ends of the policy spectrum accepted funds from the Gates Foundation and were on common ground with common core standards (Layton, 2014).

In assessing the foundation's investment in creating, implementing and promoting common core state standards, it is clear that it essentially underestimated the basic level of resources and support necessary for America's public education systems to be properly equipped to actually implement the standards (Strauss, 2016). Moreover, the foundation missed an early opportunity to engage teachers, parents, and communities so that the benefits of the standards could take affect from the beginning (Strauss, 2016).

It is significant to note that during the period of development and implementation of common core standards, states faced financial difficulties. Despite facing these financial challenges, states still made concerted efforts to implement common core standards (CEP, 2012). Even though they faced limited funding and budget cuts, many states engaged in long-term planning for implementation of common core standards. They revised and created aligned curriculum materials and adopted and imple-

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mented new assessments that were aligned to the new standards (CEP, 2012). Most of the states made a range of standards related changes to areas such as teacher professional development, preparation, induction, and evaluation (CEP, 2012). Further, many of these states carried out special initiatives to implement these new standards in their lowest-performing schools (CEP, 2012).

When one examines the issue of subject-matter standards, it becomes evident that the development of standards for academic subjects in U.S. schools had historically been the domain of area specialists within universities and schools. In contrast, workgroups associated with the corporation commissioned by NGA/CCSSO met privately to develop the new common core standards excluding many K-12 educators. Moreover, these workgroups associated with the corporation consisted largely of corporate employees, and employees affiliated with testing companies such as ACT and the College Board. In addition, employees of pro-accountability groups such as America's Choice, Student Achievement Partners, and the Stanford think tank known as the Hoover Institute were also involved in the process to draft new uniform standards for U.S. schools. This in turn led to complaints about exclusion from both practitioners and subject area experts. Some observers contend that this was because they wanted to draft a set of standards based on the best research as opposed to the opinions of just one organization (Cavanaugh, 2009). In fact, only one K-12 teacher was involved in developing the new common core state standards out of the more than 65 individuals who participated in the process (Cavanaugh, 2009). Further, the workgroups developing uniform standards were devoid of input from administrators.

There were confidential iterations of the standards between both developers and state departments of education. The initial public release of a draft for the common core state standards occurred on March 10, 2010 (Department of Education, 2010). The final set of recommendations for the new common core standards was released on June 2, 2010. As a result of efforts by the Obama administration, states that sought to be in contention for the second round of Race to the Top grants had to adopt the new standards by August 2, 2010 (Gerwertz, 2010). The guidelines established by the NGA/CCSSO proposed statewide adoption of the common core state standards if they desired to be a part of the Race to the Top initiative (Phillips & Wong, 2010). The Obama administration's use of federal dollars through Race to the Top to encourage states to adopt new and more rigorous standards in the midst of an economic downturn was a powerful incentive to encourage states to adopt the policy.

In terms of the rationale for the uniformity of state standards, the Obama administration held the view that a set of common core state standards for education in the U.S. was necessary for national economic

competitiveness in an increasingly global economy. The administration asserted in its Blueprint document on standards to the U.S. Congress that having uniform state standards in education is paramount in reaching the objective of having all American children achieve academically regardless of their socio-economic background (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). A critical component of the federal approach is basically aligning common core standards with both curriculum and assessments. In the Obama administration's Blueprint document on standards to the U.S. Congress, the set of uniform standards is required to be high in the sense that the federal goal is for all American students to be career or college-ready. This is significant as it is in direct contrast to the standards movement of the 1970s which only required students to achieve minimum basic skills. Further, the National Governors' Association and Council of Chief State School Officers contended that having a set of common core state standards for U.S. schools is necessary for our nation to achieve greater international competitiveness (National Governors' Association, 2009).

Many advocates for uniform state standards in education argue that large variations in state assessments and levels of proficiency can hinder effective and efficient reform (Phillips and Wong, 2010). Those supporters of uniform state standards suggest that common core state standards will allow broad-based sharing of what works within and across schools, districts, and states. The idea here is that common core state standards will increase efficiency. Further, proponents of uniform state standards point to the fact that with a common curriculum, students can change schools without having the continuity of their educational studies interrupted (Richardson, 2010).

Those who oppose the movement towards common core state standards for U.S. schools tend to focus upon two major concerns. First, they argue that top-down, high-stakes standards will diminish the rich variety of experiences in the classroom. Moreover, they contend that a one-size-fits-all model of education is not ideal for every child. They also have concerns that the adoption of common core state standards may limit teaching to just testable information and stifle knowledge, flexibility, and creativity" so vital to quality educational experiences. Second, opponents of common core state standards fear an intensification of the punitive policies associated with accountability that could occur if uniform standards are adopted. However, it is important to note that high-stakes standards and punitive policies are dependent on state policymakers.

Policy Issues Concerning the Uniform Standards Movement and Political Implications

The central argument most often used by those who are proponents

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of common core state standards is that uniformity in standards is critical to enhancing America's international competitiveness. There are several assumptions made by supporters of common core standards that are the basis for this argument or viewpoint. First, supporters of uniformity in standards for education assume that high quality state standards will lead to U.S. students achieving higher test scores. Second, they assume that high quality national standards will lead to higher scores on tests for international comparisons. Third, supporters of common core standards assume that the shortcoming of the American educational system hinders the nation from being more competitive globally. Finally, they assume that a set of quality common core state standards will help the nation meet the workforce needs of the economy. However, there is limited evidence to support many of these assumptions.

An important policy issue concerning the common core state standards movement is whether or not adopting uniform standards for U.S. schools will improve, harm, or have no effect at all on student learning. In fact, many observers suggest that this is the most important policy issue concerning the movement toward instituting common core standards. It is important to note that while the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law was conducive to state standards, it was also accompanied by additional mandates for testing, sanctions, and interventions. This in turn made it difficult to assess the effects of one of these various elements. Some education policy researchers argue that there is still no clear evidence that standards-based accountability systems are especially effective. Moreover, some of these scholars contend that any beneficial effects on students' average test scores are quite minimal, and there appear to be negative effects on the achievement gap, graduation, and dropout rates (Strauss, 2014).

In terms of the political dynamics surrounding the process, the movement for common core state standards may best be understood as an extension of President George H.W. Bush's education proposals. In 1989, President Bush along with leaders from the National Business Roundtable set forth critical components of a high quality education system that incorporated standards, assessments, and accountability. In 1994, President Clinton signed *Goals 2000* into law which provided states with grants to adopt content standards. However, *Goals 2000* created a political backlash by conservatives against the growing influence of the federal government over education. There was also concern expressed pertaining to the content and goals of the standards.

There are clearly policy and political implications concerning the movement toward adopting common core state standards for U.S. schools. The federal government has traditionally had a limited role in the area of education. In fact, the responsibility for education is delegated to the states within their respective individual constitutions. Regardless as to

whether it is characterized as a political, policy, or legal concern, some citizens question whether it is appropriate for the federal government to make a strong demand on states to adopt common standards. However, it is important to consider that it may be voluntary but not if federal aid becomes contingent on states' adoption of them. In addition, there are certainly some implementation issues and other obstacles or challenges that may serve to undermine efforts to initiate common core standards. Whether or not a common core standards system can be implemented with valid assessments is a critical issue as well as securing adequate funding of special programs to assist students in reaching these new standards.

Common Core State Standards and Implementation Issues: Potential Challenges for Implementation of the Policy

When one examines the landscape concerning the education policy of common core state standards, it becomes clear that there are a number of implementation issues and obstacles that could potentially hinder the overall success of the effort to institute common core standards. The issue of policy implementation can create some practical problems that must be resolved if the effort to institute common core standards is to be a success. Some scholars within the field of education policy argue that in the case of common core state standards, there is substantial overlap between policy issues and implementation obstacles.

A particular issue of concern relates to the content of standards and the formal comments from professional organizations. For example, there have been some disagreements over standards for areas such as English and mathematics. Many of the most important educational professional associations such as the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National School Boards Association have generally been quite supportive of the initiative to adopt common core state standards for U.S. schools. However, they made their support conditional on both the provision of professional development and adequate resources.

Further, teacher organizations particularly requested more time be devoted to careful development and to assure the common core standards are broader than just the area of mathematics and reading (National Education Association, 2009). They also expressed support for maintaining the role of educators on local levels (National Education Association, 2009). However, it has been the English and mathematics teachers associations that have focused most intently upon the content of the draft standards.

Some groups such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathemat-

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ics (NCTM) have complemented efforts by the NGA/CCSSO to develop standards, but prefer their own work. A major concern of the NCTM is that the NGA/CCSSO math standards are not properly articulated from one grade to the next. In addition, NCTM contends that there is a lack of focus on mathematical understanding and very little attention devoted to technology, statistics, and data analysis. They also suggest the area of fractions receives too much attention and the group is concerned overall that the NGA/CCSSO standards are inadequate.

In contrast, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) was essentially more cautious in their stance on the NGA/CCSSO standards. In its committee review, the organization expressed a number of concerns pertaining to the NGA/CCSSO standards. For one, the NCTE suggested that the NGA/CCSSO common core standards were too narrow and prescriptive and that there was a deficiency in grade-to-grade articulation. The NCTE also had concerns that the NGA/CCSSO standards would relegate the curriculum for U.S. schools to merely what could be measured on a standardized test because of its focus on lower-order rote learning rather than higher-order thinking and applications.

Aside from the difficulty that is clearly implied by the common core standards requirement that every American high school graduate be college and career ready, another challenge will be determining the difficulty of the required tests and where to actually set passing scores. These are critical decisions because they will most definitely affect the percentage of students, teachers, and schools labeled as proficient. This issue has the potential to become quite political because if the standards are unrealistically high, this could be detrimental to potentially low-scoring students, the national economy, and society (Warren & Grodsky, 2009).

Another issue of overall concern pertains to the validity and reliability of test scores that will be used for high-stakes assessment. Many observers contend that adequately measuring students' higher-order skills which was the objective of the Obama administration and the NGA/CCSSO could prove considerably more problematic for state-wide testing programs. For example, attempting to score more open-ended responses on tests measuring students' problem-solving skills could clearly represent some critical challenges. While it is true that tested knowledge tends to be linear, sequential, and hierarchical to meet growth-score requirements, this is not easily achieved once students move beyond elementary school level mathematics and reading. Moreover, attempting to assess or measure the growth of students' higher-order skills through standardized tests is a psychometric issue that could also result in problems related to both measurement and cost (Linn, 2005).

Finally, the lack of adequate funding could prove to be a challenge in terms of the implementation of common core state standards as a national

education policy. Those who actively support the effort for common core standards argue that the new policy will create mechanisms for all children to have high and equal educational opportunities. However, some education policy scholars argue that this assertion by proponents of the policy should be considered in light of experiences with the NCLB law. In the case of the NCLB law, the initiative has been quite underfunded. In fact, there are studies indicating that economically deprived children require some 20% to 40% more funds per pupil than more advantaged students (Mathis, 2010). Moreover, economically disadvantaged students receive fewer resources than more advantaged students even when funds such as Title 1 from the federal and state governments are taken into account. In a similar vein as what has occurred with the NCLB law, the common core state standards initiative could possibly result in obligations that are underfunded at various government levels. In addition, if the initiative proves to be successful in improving schools, more financial resources will be needed to keep them at that improved level.

Scholarly Perspectives on Policy Implementation

The implementation of common core state standards as a national education policy can also be assessed through the perspectives of several leading scholars in the area of policy implementation. In *The Rand Change Agent Study Revisited: Macro Perspectives and Micro Realities*, Milbrey W. McLaughlin's (1990) research highlights the significance of local factors in determining policy or project outcomes. In fact, McLaughlin (1990) finds that local factors as opposed to federal program guidelines or project methods were more determinative of these outcomes. McLaughlin (1990) notes that these local factors can surely change over periods of time and that top-down policies before they are implemented should be designed and integrated in ways that are conducive to local level conditions.

If one lends credence to McLaughlin's (1990) research findings, then there potentially could be some challenges ahead concerning the implementation of the common core state standards as a national education policy. For one, the manner in which the new common core standards were drafted with the virtual exclusion of any K-12 educators from local levels who are certainly more aware of local districts' educational needs runs counter to McLaughlin's findings. McLaughlin would suggest that based upon her findings, the common core state standards initiative would benefit from greater inclusion of K-12 educators' perspectives that are more aware of local districts' needs. In addition, McLaughlin would suggest that before implementation of the policy, common core standards should be designed to be conducive to the educational needs of local districts.

The manner in which the common core state standards came into

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fruition is also a direct contrast to the research findings concerning policy implementation by Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin (2007). In *Policy and Practice*, Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin (2007) argue that policy design should essentially rest with the needs of practitioners. This approach came to be known as the bottom-up perspective. Further, with this approach, practitioners use knowledge that policymakers do not have in order to modify policy (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007).

The development of common core standards as a national education policy is reflective of top-down approaches or strategies (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007). Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin (2007) would most likely be critical of this top down approach because K-12 practitioners were excluded from the design of the policy. They would view K-12 educators as practitioners who possess crucial knowledge about the educational curriculum that policymakers lack in order to develop or modify policy. In fact, at the same time when policy researchers were arguing that policy should be understood and developed from the bottom-up, federal and state governments were making concerted efforts to employ top down approaches (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007). In addition, the federal government began to turn away from shaping practice through the allocation and regulation of resources toward shaping practice by requiring outcomes.

Some scholars argue that common core state standards will inevitably lead to restrictive high-stakes, standardized testing similar to that associated with NCLB (Au, 2013). They hold the view that the authentic standards movement has been subverted by a high-stakes standardized test-based movement. Scholars in the field such as Wayne Au (2013) contend that these forms of standards and accountability have deviated from their original intent and have relied erroneously on the faulty measures provided by high-stakes, standardized tests. Moreover, Au (2013) and other scholars in the field note that socioeconomically disadvantaged children across race lines are seeing certain subjects such as art or physical education eliminated to focus on mathematics and literacy as well as test preparation.

The Politics of Common Core State Standards

A thorough assessment of common core state standards as an education policy reveals that despite being referred to as state standards, the common core state standards are really national standards (Mathis, 2010; Au, 2013). A careful evaluation of the policy reveals that these standards were originally developed with national standards as the primary goal (Au, 2013). In fact, the goal and referring to them as state standards was mainly a tactic or strategy to aid in negotiating the complicated politics of national standards and national curriculum (Au, 2013).

The movement towards common core state standards has generated a broad coalition of support from business leaders, politicians from both major political parties, and both of the nation's major teachers' unions (Au, 2013). In fact, the support for common core state standards is comparable to that of NCLB with the exception of two critical aspects. With the common core state standards unlike NCLB, the support of civil rights organizations and discourse around racial achievement gaps and inequality are notably absent (Au, 2013). There are also similarities in terms of the opposition generated against both policies (Au, 2013). For example, opponents of both education policies cited the need for local control, concerns or fears of a federal overreach with a possible national curriculum, fiscal efficiency, and parents' rights (Au, 2013).

As was the case with NCLB, a close examination of the political landscape concerning the policy reveals that the common core has caused a division or split amongst some political conservatives (Au, 2013). For instance, right wing extremists, populist libertarians, states' rights advocates, and Tea Party styled free market nationalists such as the Pioneer Institute, the American Principles Project, the Washington Policy Center, and the Goldwater Institute have taken a stand against the common core state standards movement due to years of federal control and critique of big government spending (Au, 2013). In 2013, some 10 states backtracked on their support of the common core state standards with conservative Republicans in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Alabama leading the effort to block the implementation of the policy in their respective states (Au, 2013).

While liberal Democrats tend to be supporters of the common core state standards as was the case with NCLB initially, the policy initiative has also caused some rifts amongst left progressives (Au, 2013). While NCLB basically relied upon the rhetoric of achieving racial equity in terms of the existing achievement gap in order to gain support from liberals and progressives, those in authority have essentially made conditions in K-12 public education so challenging through the initiation of budget cuts, ossified state standards, and high-stakes tests based on standards that many progressives view the common core as an improvement over what has currently been occurring in American education (Au, 2013). Further, some view the common core as more constructivist in nature than previous state standards while focusing on developing higher-order skills (Au, 2013).

In the current political climate, there has been much opposition to common core standards as a viable education policy. The Trump administration has positioned itself strongly against the policy indicating that efforts at improving education should be localized. However, in contrast to the current administration's position, common core state standards were

developed by governors and state school superintendents and adopted at the state level. They were not created by the Obama administration or forced on states. At present, some 37 states and the District of Columbia have incorporated common core standards. However, in today's political climate and under the leadership of the current administration, political pressure has clearly played a role in some states reviewing and nominally replacing common core standards.

Common Core State Standards Related to Theories of Action or Change

The goals or objectives of the Common Core State Standards Initiative can be assessed through theories of action or change. Within the field of education policy, a theory of action or change can be used to help policymakers, policy practitioners, and academicians address specific questions or issues concerning the goals or objectives of particular policies (HFRP, 2010). For example, scholars within the field of education associated with the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) have developed theories of action and change to address questions concerning how to both develop and evaluate professional development opportunities for after school staff (HFRP, 2010). These theories of action and change are helpful in articulating policy approaches, defining their intended impact, and designing an evaluation strategy to measure the potential impact of the program or policy (HFRP, 2010). In fact, theories of action and change have been utilized within other fields outside of education such as sociology and social work to accomplish these same objectives (Bourdieu, 1998; Berglund, 1998).

In relation to the national education policy of common core state standards, it is useful to examine the policy through a theory of action to obtain a clear understanding of the policy's goals or objectives. The common core can be examined through a theory of policy change such as path dependence because of the high costs associated with implementing the policy and the difficulty in changing policies concerning standards given actors tendency to protect existing policies (Greener, 2002). A theory of action underlying the common core state standards initiative is reflected in its rationale for why standards are needed for U.S. schools. First, standards are necessary to increase the nation's economic competitiveness in an increasingly global economy (Mathis, 2010). When held to these standards, the belief or understanding is that the national competitiveness of the U.S. economy will increase (Mathis, 2010). Second, standards are necessary so that all American children regardless of background will eventually achieve at high levels (Mathis, 2010). As it relates to a theory of action, the understanding in this instance is that

if students are held to these common core standards, they will achieve or increase their educational output (Mathis, 2010). In short, examining the rationale for common core standards allows one to apply a theory of action or change that underlies the education policy.

**Common Core State Standards:
Do Benefits Outweigh Costs?**

In assessing common core standards, it becomes evident that any benefits associated with the policy do not outweigh costs. There are clearly both advantages and disadvantages associated with the policy. A particular advantage of the policy is that common core state standards may in fact hold some promise for bringing greater rigor and consistency to critical elements of education across various states and school districts. Proponents of the policy contend that this greater rigor and consistency will enhance student achievement and allow the U.S. to become more competitive internationally when compared educationally to other nations. However, one of the glaring disadvantages or shortcomings of the policy is that it is a potentially costly and complex initiative to fully implement that will take time to enact. Moreover, once implemented, the policy will affect many aspects of the nation's education system from areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to teacher policies and higher education.

Another drawback of the policy is the level of resources needed for its implementation by respective states when so many of them face financial challenges. State efforts to assist districts with the implementation of the policy will most certainly be affected by states' financial climate. Further, these financial challenges states face could result in funding problems that could delay plans to actually implement the policy. In fact, when one examines the history of common core state standards, many of the initial implementations of the policy occurred at a time where local, state, and federal budgets were actually expected to decrease.

An additional shortcoming of common core standards is that rather than enhance student academic achievement, the policy has exacerbated the dropout and graduation rates in states that have implemented the standards. The nonprofit Carnegie Corporation of New York, which supported the common core state standards, published a report in 2013 indicating how the policy would affect graduation and dropout rates. This report revealed that a six-year dropout rate would increase from a 15% to 30% dropout rate by 2020 unless there was a major change in learning environments (Strauss, 2014). It also indicated that the four-year graduation rate would drop from 75% to 53% (Strauss, 2014).

Conclusions:

Insights and Recommendations Concerning Policy Implementation

While the Common Core State Standards Initiative is an admirable effort to improve elementary and secondary school education in the U.S., there are a number of critical problems with the national education policy. Aside from the benefits of the policy not outweighing costs, some of the inherent problems with the policy relate to its underlying rationale for why it is believed uniform standards are a necessity for American schools. There is clearly a flaw in the underlying rationale that uniform standards are needed to improve education in American schools.

The Obama administration and others who supported the movement for common core standards argued that raising standards for U.S. schools would result in increased student learning. Many proponents of the policy initiative view it as a mechanism of social justice to aid in addressing educational inequities so that all U.S. children regardless of racial or socio-economic background will achieve at high levels. However, this particular assumption that is at the foundation of the rationale for standards is problematic because there really is no clear evidence that simply raising standards will result in increased student learning (Mathis, 2010). In all actuality, there is evidence that common core standards have exacerbated both graduation and dropout rates in states that have adopted the policy (Strauss, 2014). This evidence supports the hypothesis that common core as a policy initiative will not result in improvements in student achievement. The common core state standards initiative lacks a convincing research base to substantiate or support this viewpoint. In fact, this is one of the most critical issues facing the movement for common core state standards. The lack of a convincing research base to support its assumptions as to why uniform standards are needed could undermine support for implementation of the policy and make it difficult to garner additional support for the movement. However, linking federal funds for states to their adoption of the common core standards as the Obama administration did could serve as a powerful incentive for states. This seems quite unlikely in the current political climate where the Trump administration views common core as an unnecessary federal encroachment on the area of education where they feel policy efforts should be more localized. The greater likelihood under the current administration's leadership is for political pressure to play a significant role in states opting to review and nominally replace common core.

As is the case with the assumption that standards will increase student learning, there is a problem with supporters' assumptions that having uniform standards for U.S. schools will increase the nation's inter-

national economic competitiveness. In fact, many scholars suggest that the international economic competitiveness argument supporters of the policy often use is poorly grounded. The results of some research indicate that there is a weak or nonexistent relationship between common core state standards and high test scores. Further, as it relates to international achievement measures, it is critical to note that it is not intended as a curriculum which is different from some other countries.

Moreover, there are some observers concerned with the state of the current K-12 educational system in the U.S. who suggest that it is not enough to just have high standards and to make them uniform across respective states. Many of them place their emphasis on additional resources. They believe that vital economic, programmatic, and social support is needed for the nation's most economically disadvantaged students as well as crucial professional development for teachers. This support for socio-economically disadvantaged students will become even more critical in light of the fact that states which have adopted common core have experienced negative effects on the achievement gap and dropout rates. Further, the common core standards emphasize preparing students for college and careers, but there is nothing in the standards that teaches citizenship and helps students develop a sense of social and civic pride (Wraga, 2010). This is clearly important for not only maintaining a vibrant democracy but also successfully addressing some of the goals of a social justice agenda such as eradicating inequities in American K-12 education and the existing racial achievement gap.

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