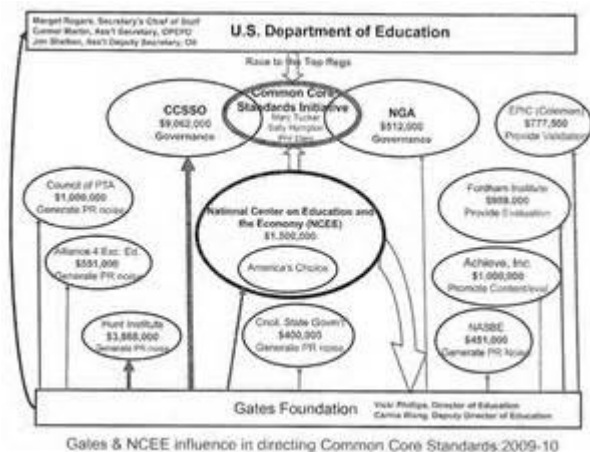


# Teachers, teachers unions and the “Common Core”: This is a test

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- 1. More rigorous academic standards required by the new national curriculum, Common Core Curriculum Standards (CCSS) and its high-tech national test PARCC controlled by Pearson will alter employment for US students by making them “college and career ready.”**
- 2. The Common Core Curriculum Standards are a “state-led” initiative.**
- 3. Elected officials of both teachers unions endorsed CCSS and PARCC at the direction of members, after informed debate.**

**Answers:**

**1. False**

As this 3 minute video explains, Common Core proponents argue it levels the playing field for jobs. It implies but does not say that we need the Common Core because of historic inequality in education linked to race. If students are “college and career ready” they will find well-paying jobs, or as the US Department of Education phrased its goal in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act, “The goal for America’s educational system is clear... Every student should have meaningful opportunities to choose from upon graduation from high school.” Schooling is “the one true path out of poverty” (Arne Duncan).

This assumption obviates the state’s role in ending poverty through economic policy, for example by outlawing poverty-level wages, currently maintained by a minimum wage that sustains a class of working poor, and by creating well-paying jobs that support a sustainable economy. The diminishing number of well-paid jobs sentences the vast majority of working people to a lifetime of economic insecurity. Yet labor, what remains of it, including teachers unions, has failed to take on the underlying rationale for the Common Core, which pushes vocational training into kindergarten. PARCC, the profitable (for Pearson) test that ties student achievement and teacher evaluation to the new standards is losing support, mostly because of Right wing opposition to the federal government’s usurpation of what is held in the Constitution to be the right of the state, controlling education.

Schooling is not and cannot be the “one true path out of poverty” for the vast majority of children because our economy consigns millions to unemployment and work that pays poverty wages. Yet it is also the case that public education in the US has historically reproduced social inequality. Teachers unions and progressives ought to answer the “one true path out of poverty” claim by demanding 1. the government create high-paying jobs that support a sustainable economy AND 2. address factors we know from empirical scholarship contribute to unequal outcomes in schooling, such as segregation, organizational practices within schools such as tracking, disciplinary practices, and because of taken-for-granted assumptions about students’ “ability.

## **2. False**

Mercedes Schneider, a researcher who teaches school in New Orleans, documents in a blog how CCSS was developed, tracing its funding to Bill Gates.

“It is important to those promoting CCSS that the public believes the idea that CCSS is “state-led.” The CCSS website reports as much and names two organizations as “coordinating” the “state-led” CCSS: The National Governors Association (NGA), and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Interestingly, the CCSS website makes no mention of CCSS “architect” David Coleman... Nevertheless, if one reviews this 2009 NGA news release on those principally involved in CCSS development, one views a listing of 29 individuals associated with Student Achievement Partners, ACT, College Board, and Achieve. In truth, only 2 out of 29 members are not affiliated with an education company.

CCSS as “state-led” is fiction. “

## **3. False**

AFT and NEA officers have recently called for a moratorium in implementing CCSS and PARCC, reversing their initial support. Both unions accepted funding from Gates to implement CCSS. Typical of those who hold power that is seldom checked, national officials have not explained their about-face as being correction of an error on their part. The problem is not just implementation of the curriculum and the test, as the unions now charge but rather of the premises. Mercedes Schneider nails the problem with AFT and NEA’s call for delaying implementation.

If your information about education and CCSS has come from the NY Times, AFT and NEA publications and social media, or even progressive magazines, like Mother Jones, it’s likely you didn’t understand why so many teachers and parents are angry about CCSS and PARCC. While Right-wing opposition has garnered a great deal of attention, there’s been almost no discussion of the dangers of CCSS, the way it pushes down academics to kindergarten (forget about play); the way it identifies a “core” that excludes civics (examination of the duties of citizens in a democracy) in social studies; the way it marginalizes the experience of literature and the arts; the way it undercuts teachers’ ability to give students choices in what and how they learn.

I see many calls on social media for the AFT and NEA national officers to reverse themselves and reject CCSS and PARCC. In response the unions point to polls that support their position. But polls should not decide an issue on which teachers’ jobs, students’ lives, and control of our society’s future depend. We need vigorous, informed debate throughout the union – not just state and national conventions. In the locals!! The debate should be followed by a referendum: “Should our union endorse and help implement the CCSS as tested by PARCC?”

In my presentation at the The Center for the Study of Work, Labor and Democracy at UC Santa Barbara April 25 I’ll explain why progressives have to argue for jobs as well as acknowledging

the historic inequalities in education that our opponents exploit for their own ends. My remarks will be published in a bit if you miss the conference.

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