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COUNCIL FOR A BETTER LOUISIANA

Louisiana Should Stay the Course with Common Core Education Standards

**CABL Commentary
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The Common Core State Standards Initiative for public education isn't exactly a burning issue in Louisiana right now, but out there in the political blogosphere it's becoming one of the biggest lightning rod topics that you probably don't know anything about. Particularly in conservative political circles, Common Core is arousing feisty, sometimes name-calling debates that are becoming a distraction to efforts for serious education reform.

So what, you ask, is the Common Core and why should you care about it in the first place? In a nutshell, the Common Core effort was initiated by the National Governors Association in 2008. It is a voluntary effort originated by the states to develop a common group of education standards for public schools.

The standards describe just what it is that students should know and be able to do at various stages of their educational development. To date, more than 40 states have already adopted the standards including Louisiana, which was one of the first states to get on board. Schools across the state will be teaching to those standards this coming school year and students will be tested on them beginning in 2014-2015.

Doesn't sound too controversial, does it? And, in fact, it wasn't controversial until somewhat recently when "stop the Common Core" movements began popping up in a number of states, including Louisiana. The concerns expressed run the gamut from legitimate to alarmist to absurd. But basically, the biggest drumbeat against the Common Core has been that it represents the beginning of national control over public education.

It doesn't. The idea was originated by the states, developed by the states and the states maintain absolute control over their standards and everything related to them. Just as states opt into the Common Core they can opt out of it. Yes, the federal government has provided incentives through grants for states to join the Common Core, but there is no requirement that they do so and, indeed, some have not.

All of which puts into some context Governor Bobby Jindal's recent remarks at the RedState gathering, an annual conservative conference held this year in New Orleans.

When asked about his position on the Common Core he replied, "We will resist any attempt ... to impose a national curriculum." It didn't really answer the question directly, but the governor said nothing about opposing the Common Core and skirted the opportunity to do so when pressed by a conference participant. Thank goodness.

All of this matters because Louisiana needs to stick to the Common Core in the face of mounting politically-charged pressures to pull back. Interestingly, those pressures are coming mostly from within conservative, Republican circles, though even there opinions are sharply divided. The Republican National Committee recently passed a resolution opposing the Common Core as "an inappropriate overreach to standardize and control the education of our children," and some states are abandoning parts of the program. Conservative think tanks like Heartland, Cato and the Heritage Foundation are also leading the charge against the Common Core standards.

At the same time the conservative Fordham Institute has been a champion of the Common Core as have New Jersey Governor Chris Christy and former governors Jeb Bush, Mike Huckabee and Mitch Daniels. In fact, Bush's [Foundation for Excellence in Education](#) does a good job of debunking a lot of the myths surrounding the Common Core. So does the website [Conservatives for Higher Standards](#) which lists Gov. Jindal as a supporter.

Louisiana needs the Common Core standards and CABL hopes the governor and BESE will maintain their support. These standards are good for students, they're more rigorous than our current standards and they will do a better job of helping prepare our citizens for college or a career. We should continue to implement the standards methodically and with deliberation, being careful not to overload teachers or students. And we should be mindful of the legitimate concerns involving data collecting and student privacy.

But we need to avoid being distracted by political rants about "diabolical" plans to destroy our country and the end of state sovereignty as we know it. If we stay the course and teach our kids to higher standards like the Common Core, things ought to work out just fine.