



## Citizens Need to Educate Themselves on Common Core Standards

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The Gallup research organization is pretty direct about it. “With 45 states on the brink of one of the most ambitious education initiatives in our lifetime, Americans...aren’t convinced rigorous new education standards will help.” At least that’s among the findings of a new Gallup opinion survey gauging the public’s views about education in the United States. On the face of it, that’s almost mind boggling.

Among the specific findings:

- Just slightly more than one-third of Americans have heard of the Common Core.
- Many of those who have say — erroneously — that the federal government is insisting that all states adopt the standards and that there is a plan to create standards in all academic areas.
- Only four of 10 who say they are knowledgeable about the standards believe they can help make education in the United States more competitive globally.
- A majority say the standards will make the U.S. less competitive or have no effect.

Really? Higher standards will make the United States less competitive? Now contrast that with the words of Rex Tillerson, the CEO of ExxonMobil, who wrote a recent op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*.

“As a nation we must unite in recognizing the mounting evidence that the U.S. is falling behind international competitors in producing students ready for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs. We have an opportunity to reverse this trend, but it will take setting the right priorities. That starts with establishing high standards. It means leaders from government and business, and parents need to defend the Common Core State Standards (which) are increasingly under attack from across the political spectrum.”

Clearly, there’s a disconnect here that needs to be fixed. On the one hand it’s not terribly surprising that most people aren’t that familiar with the Common Core. That’s because most people don’t spend a lot of time thinking about education standards. They leave that to others. And when you talk about academic standards, discussions can quickly get somewhat esoteric. But actually, there are only a few things people really need to know:

- Standards represent what it is students need to know and be able to do at specific grade levels. They should be able to read and comprehend these types of books, answer questions and understand these types of documents and successfully work these kinds of math problems. That's it.
- Standards vary by state. Some are high, some are low. Louisiana's are generally low compared to where we need to be. By our standards 77% of fourth graders are considered to be reading at or above grade level. The national NAEP assessment puts that number at only 23%. Louisiana has an urgent need to raise our standards to ensure that our students become more competitive.
- The Common Core raises standards in a way that is not dictated by the federal government, puts us in line with other states across the country and gives teachers and school districts tremendous flexibility to develop their own curricula and teaching strategies.

Of course, the first question is, if that's what the Common Core does, why is it coming under political attack? The answer is a little complicated, but it boils down to a couple of things. One is that there is a lot of misunderstanding among certain groups about what it does and doesn't do. The issue has been muddied by unfounded political rhetoric from certain quarters like this statement from a blog on the website of a group called Freedom Works: "Tillerson's endorsement of Common Core is yet another example of the big business establishment joining ranks with big government to expand centralized control of our lives." That's a little far-fetched, but it's typical of a lot of the talk that's buzzing around out there.

The other thing is that some of those on the opposite side of the political fence, such as unions and those who generally oppose reform, are jumping on the anti-Common Core bandwagon as a way to water down reforms and maintain what they see as a less threatening status quo.

All of this is most unfortunate. Gallup is right, the move to raise education standards is a big and important initiative in our country and our state. We as citizens need to more fully understand what's going on. For CABL's part, we support the Common Core and will work to share information about the need to raise our standards with citizens and business leaders across the state.

As part of that, we recommend this publication, [Common Core State Standards 101](#), as a good place to get started. It's an easy-to-understand primer published by the national Alliance for Education Excellence. In just over ten pages, it tells the history of the Common Core, explains what it is (and what it isn't), looks at the very real challenges in implementing it and answers frequently asked questions.

Raising standards in public education is a critical issue for our state. With the need for more knowledge driving virtually every aspect of our economy today, our students need to be educationally competitive with their peers in other states and around the world. The Common Core State Standards are just one tool for doing that, but it's an important tool that we should not toss out of the toolbox. As Rex Tillerson says, "the Common Core needs support now more than ever if America is going to reduce its education decline and prepare its young people to compete in today's dynamic global economy."

Should we want anything less than that for our kids?