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The Common Core Steamroller

Schools around the nation continue to roll out Common Core, but many are experiencing complications. Some parents are surprised by the new national standards and many teachers are ill prepared. There is confusion surrounding curriculum. Funding hurdles abound. Parents' questions are not being answered and opposition continues to grow. Common Core proponents are left trying to defend the implementation of untested, unproven standards that seek to make education a one-size-fits-all national reality. Michelle Malkin says, "When parents and educators in dozens of states started challenging the privacy intrusions posed by and the constitutional, cost, quality, and validity of Common Core, its architects went on the attack." (*National Review*, 10-17-13)

Opposition from the Left

Although the news media and Common Core proponents claim that opposition to the standards comes uniquely from Tea Party sources, across the nation parents with left, center, and right political leanings are joining together to oppose Common Core. They are bonding over concern for their children's education. One left-leaning group with about 25,000 members, The Bad Ass Teachers Association (BAT), is against Common Core because they believe it overemphasizes standardized testing. BAT founder and Fordham University professor Mark Naison says, "The liberal critique of Common Core is that this is a huge profit-making enterprise that costs school districts a tremendous amount of money, and pushes out the things kids love about school, like art and music." (*Miami Herald*, 8-24-13)

Common Core is dependent on standardized national testing. Whether the state chooses a test from SBAC, PARCC, or AIR, it will test the same standards.

Flawed Curriculum

Every issue of *Education Week* showcases a multitude of ads promoting "Common Core aligned" products, and the same is true of other education-related media. But school districts don't have enough employees qualified to determine what "Common Core aligned" actually means, which products are Common Core aligned and which are not, let alone which are best. "A multibillion-dollar industry of competing vendors is promoting a dizzying array of new products — textbooks, curriculum, teacher-training workshops, software, laptops, iPads, nonfiction kid magazines, games, even Lego blocks," and competing for educa-

tion dollars. (*Los Angeles Daily News*, 10-15-13)

A kindergarten teacher and a man who graduated from Oxford University as an 18-year-old were among many adults stumped by a Common Core kindergarten vocabulary exercise in New York City. Kindergarten students were to "draw" vocabulary words, including "responsibility" and "distance," in a workbook. The child is to interpret the word by making it into a drawing. Previously having listened to a reading of the classic children's book *Make Way for Ducklings* was intended somehow to help with the process. One teacher, noting that the students were to put their drawings in a two-inch-by-four-inch box, said, "[Kindergartners] can't make anything in that small little space. That to me is a setup for failure." Adults were given much more space, but still didn't fare well. A New York Department of Education spokesman defended the Pearson-created curriculum, saying it is "100% optional." 90% of schools have adopted the suggested workbooks. (*New York Daily News*, 10-18-13) Child development specialists have noted that much of Common Core is not developmentally appropriate.

Common Core is a Money Pit

Theodor Rebarber of Accountability Works estimates that national implementation of Common Core could cost as much as \$15.8 billion. The Pioneer Institute estimates it will cost \$16 billion over seven years. The cost is about four times the federal government's "carrot" Race to the Top funds, which were awarded to only a handful of states. The Pioneer Institute Executive Director said, "With state and local taxpayers footing 90% of the bill for K-12 public education, the federal government's push to get states to adopt national standards and tests amounts to one big unfunded mandate." (2-22-12)

The director of Murfreesboro, TN City Schools told the city council that they should approve her request for iPads for kindergartners and 1st-graders and laptop computers for students in grades two through six. This meant \$5.2 million in bonds to upgrade technology needed to "help prepare our children for future entry into the workforce and for future state online assessments," according to the city education director. (*Fox News*, 9-18-13) Common Core tests that will be administered using a computer mean that every student needs either a computer or a tablet with a keyboard.

Wanted: Professional Development

Authors of a study of English language arts Common Core standards found that teachers will need "substantially more professional development around the Common Core, not just in understanding what the new standards

(See *Common Core Steamroller*, page 4)

How Much Is That iPad in the Window?

From a state known for earthquakes comes shaking (or a shakedown) of a different sort due to the technology demands of Common Core. Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest in the nation, has botched the rollout of a \$1 billion project to provide iPad tablets for every student. The urgency to get technology into the hands of students is driven by the need for access to Common Core curriculum and to take the online Common Core tests, required in California schools next school year.

The Los Angeles Unified School District began a program with Apple Computer to provide "iPads-for-all." But the tablets are more expensive than originally anticipated because the deal with Apple relied on a volume discount, complicated by the phased rollout planned by LAUSD. A tablet originally expected to cost \$678 will actually cost \$770. LAUSD officials originally said keyboards were not essential with the iPads, but the new state standardized tests will require them, at a cost of about \$38 million beyond the original budget. Stations in classrooms used to recharge the tablets were originally budgeted at \$2.6 million for the first phase of iPads but have been revised to cost \$3.2 million.

The iPads are more expensive than those purchased at stores because they come preloaded with software from the

publishing giant Pearson, a proponent of Common Core. The Pearson curriculum on the tablets is Common Core aligned.

Many students quickly found ways to subvert (hack) the security software, giving them access to Facebook, as well as open access to other prohibited internet sites. Schools were not given clear rules concerning whether students could take tablets home. Parents were not told whether they would be held liable for damage to the iPads. As a result, several schools collected all tablets from students for an indefinite period of time only days after they handed them out. At other schools students are no longer allowed to take them home, greatly diminishing their usefulness. (*Los Angeles Times*, 8-28-13, 9-25-13, 10-4-13)

In the latest development, it has been reported that "the district will lose access to content updates, software upgrades, and technical support from Pearson after just three years," according to *Education Week* (10-25-13).

"It's an astonishing success," the individual ultimately responsible for the technology rollout, School Supt. John Deasy told the *Los Angeles Times* on October 1, just as the chaos began to get noticed. But now his job is in jeopardy as the program comes under scrutiny. Surely all the questions should have been asked and answered before the \$1 billion expenditure was ever approved.



Cursive Handwriting's Benefits

Emphasis on teaching cursive writing has been on the decline since the 1990s. At least 41 states do not require handwriting instruction. (*USA Today*, 8-12-13) Since the advent of Common Core, with its required keyboard instruction instead of handwriting, along with the increased pressure for teachers to teach what will be on national standardized tests, most expect writing to all but disappear from public school classrooms. Along with it goes an important process for children.

Handwriting engages the brain in important ways that selecting letters on a keyboard does not. Research continues to show that the hand-brain relationship is important for children and adults. The sequential strokes required to form letters and words activates regions of the brain involved in "thinking, language, and working memory." "It seems there is something really important about manually manipulating and drawing out two-dimensional things we see all the time," according to an Indiana University psychology and neu-

rosience researcher. Researchers used MRIs to see that "practice helps with learning letters and shapes, can improve idea composition and expression, and may aid fine motor-skill development." (*Wall Street Journal*, 10-5-10)

According to Judy Willis, M.D., a neurologist and educator who is an authority on brain research and learning:

The neural activity or mental manipulation that transforms formulas, procedures, graphs, and statistical analyses into words represents the brain's recognition of patterns. When this is also done in writing, the facts, procedures, and observations are processed symbolically in the writing process — giving the memory another storage modality and truly illuminating the patterns for the brain to follow as it adds new learning to existing concept networks. (*Edutopia.org*, 7-11-11)

The benefits of handwriting also help to alleviate emotional and environmental

(See *Cursive Handwriting*, page 4)



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EDUCATION BRIEFS

Janet Napolitano will earn a base salary of \$570,000 as president of the University of California's ten-campus system, although she has no prior academic experience. Now earning nearly triple what she made as Secretary of Homeland Security in the Obama administration, she was also given a \$142,500 relocation allowance and an annual vehicle allowance of almost \$9,000. (*National Review*, 7-18-13)

While many states analyze test scores or do regular audits to find cheating, the Minnesota Department of Education "relies on school districts to police themselves." This year there have been only 159 "test security notices" submitted from the 333 MN school districts. "According to a recent report by the U.S. Office of Government Accountability, 38 states conduct statistical analysis of test scores to scope out potential cheating by students or teachers." (*Hechinger Report*, 10-14-13)

The average age of active National Education Association union leaders, those who are representatives at their school, attend conventions, or hold a leadership position is 51 years, according to a survey conducted at the August NEA convention. Those under the age of 35 made up just 10% of convention attendees. This means the union is aging and younger people are not becoming active in great enough numbers. Along with a decline in overall membership this does not bode well for the future of NEA. (*Education Intelligence Agency*, 10-28-13)

Michelle Rhee, former chancellor of D.C. public schools, founder and CEO of Students First, receives an annual salary of about \$300,000. Rhee aimed to raise \$1 billion in the organization's first year, but Students First fundraising from August 2011 through July 2012 amounted to about \$28.5 million. During that time the organization spent \$3.6 million on political activities, funding state candidates and organizations that promote school reforms "that include merit pay, better teacher evaluation, and tenure reform." (*Politico*, 7-2-13)

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Web site: <http://www.eagleforum.org>
E-mail: education@eagleforum.org

New Standards for Social Studies Have Zero Content

In September, the National Council for the Social Studies released "The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History." The 110-page "C3 Framework" took three years to develop, with the help of 15 social-studies-related organizations. These 15 organizations are said to be from the areas of civics, history, geography, economics, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and law-related education. According to the document:

Work on the C3 Framework began in 2010 with the development of an initial conceptual guidance document written by individuals from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Social Studies Assessment, Curriculum, and Instruction state collaborative and by representatives from the professional associations.

The professional organizations include the American Bar Association, the Council for Economic Education, the National Council for History Education, and the National Geographic Society. The 16 framework writers "were selected in consultation with the participating professional associations." The lead writer is a University of Kentucky professor, who was assisted by 15 other college professors.

The National Council for the Social Studies published the C3 Framework document and claims they "solicited feedback from stakeholders on drafts at regular intervals." Six editorial committee members are referred to as "state

collaborative members" and teachers, and are from six separate states, but it is unclear how many of them are K-12 classroom teachers.

One thing is certain: the C3 Framework was written by a committee and it shows.

Standards by Committee

The social studies standards introduction states that "the C3 Framework . . . is intended to serve as a frame for organizing curricular content, rather than a prescription for the specific content to be taught." Exemplifying the maxim that a camel is a horse designed by a committee, the C3 Framework is confusing, overly complicated, and fails to include any content whatsoever. Since the originators say that states will need to infuse their own content into the framework, some may wonder why anyone bothered to spend the time and money to create C3. Admittedly, it is better to have no content than to teach students the misconstrued content advocated by Howard Zinn. (See *FOCUS* by Dr. David Bobb in this issue.)

Education Week justifies the lack of content, saying that given the "political delicacy of specifying social studies content, the framework's authors steer clear of subject-matter content."

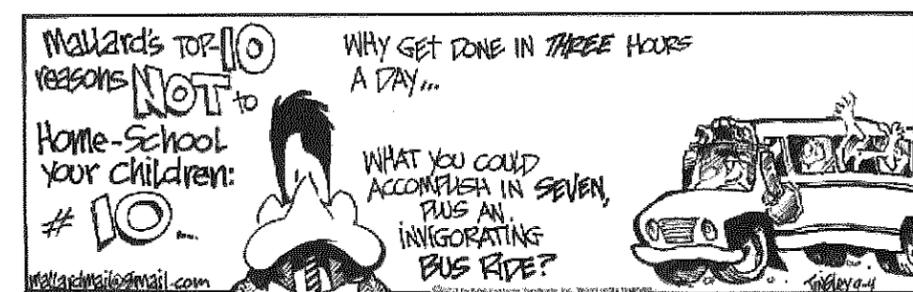
The newspaper suggests that the C3 Framework document is to be used "to craft an overarching set of guidelines that states can use as they write more detailed expectations for students." (*Education Week*, 9-25-13)

Civics, Economics, Geography, and History

The sections of the C3 are: Economics (The Global Economy); Civics; Ge-

(See *Social Studies*, page 4)

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



Obama Fails Geography

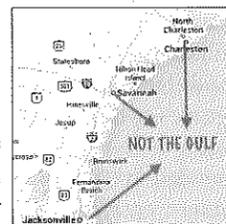
Apparently President Obama's geography knowledge is not as good as it should be. He's made several errors of late, but the most glaring happened on the Tonight Show. Obama said: "If we don't deepen our ports all along the Gulf — places like Charleston, South Carolina, or Savannah, Georgia, or Jacksonville, Florida — if we don't do that, these ships are going to go someplace else and we'll lose jobs."

Charleston, Savannah, and Jacksonville are not located on the Gulf of Mexico. The chief executive's geographical misstep is troubling, but the move by the Associated Press to cover up his mistake is downright frightening.

The Associated Press (AP) has

admitted inserting text into the Obama quote in an effort to cover his error. The AP inserted an "interpretive phrase" making Obama's quote confusing, but no longer technically wrong: "If we don't deepen our ports all along the Gulf — (and in places like Charleston, South Carolina, or Savannah, Georgia, or Jacksonville, Florida — if we don't do that, these ships are going to go someplace else and we'll lose jobs."

The AP has not offered an apology for adding text. Some may wonder why the AP felt the need to help the President.



Book of the Month



The School Revolution: A New Answer for Our Broken Education System, by Ron Paul, Grand Central Publishing, 2013, \$23.00.

Ron Paul is a homeschool advocate who offers an offbeat answer to the ubiquitous question faced by homeschoolers, "What about social skills?" He suggests that parents respond, "You mean like turning down drug dealers politely?" Some of what children learn at today's public schools goes against parents' worldview, and is in the end harmful.

In *The School Revolution*, the former Texas Congressman and Presidential candidate applies his libertarian viewpoint to education issues. Personal responsibility is a theme for both parents and students; students who do not graduate as self-reliant citizens have been failed by their parents and by whichever education system they've attended.

Dr. Paul laments parents' failure to recognize that public education, although convenient and cheap, is often substandard. He says, "To the extent that any society substitutes a source of authority over education other than the family, it departs from liberty."

Claiming that education is a debate over ethics, Paul says that "tax-funded educators" often believe children are under the authority of the state, and better off there than under the influence of their parents. Paul notes the hostility of schools, from kindergarten through college, toward Christianity and capitalism. He says their emphasis on the social justice agenda of "global warming, poverty, multiculturalism, and gender politics" causes learning about such things as Western civilization and the U.S. Constitution to fall between the cracks.

Using the premise that a monopoly hurts customers, the author uses the example of the Post Office as a direction in which education is headed. Once there was only the U.S. Mail, then others offered the customer better options. Paul supports "creation of cost-effective private educational systems in the private sector," as well as homeschool options.

Paul's overall outlook for traditional education is bleak. He is not encouraged by attempts at reform.

Alternatives already in place that Paul finds promising include online education from sources like edX.org, Coursera.org, the Khan Academy, and the University of Phoenix. He will also offer his own online curriculum for students who are self-starters. Paul believes online alternatives and the "free market [are] going to foreclose on tax-funded schools," unless government intervention, the education bureaucracy, and unions halt progress.

Dr. Paul concludes, "The most effective way to reform the tax-funded schools is for dedicated parents to remove their children from those schools."

THE
**SCHOOL
REVOLUTION**
A New Answer for Our
Broken Education System
RON PAUL

FOCUS: National Civics, History Tests to Disappear

This article was originally published on July 25, 2013 at Heartland.org and in Human Events. It is reprinted with permission.

by Haley Stauss

The National Assessment of Educational Progress exams in civics, U.S. history, and geography have been indefinitely postponed for fourth and twelfth graders. The Obama administration says this is due to a \$6.8 million sequestration budget cut. The three exams will be replaced by a single, new test: Technology and Engineering Literacy.

"Without these tests, advocates for a richer civic education will not have any kind of test to use as leverage to get more civic education in the classrooms," said John Hale, associate director at the Center for Civic Education.

NAEP is a set of national tests of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders that track achievement on various subjects

over time. Researchers collect data for state-to-state comparisons in mathematics, reading, science, and writing. The other subjects only provide national statistics and are administered to fewer students. The tests provide basic information about students but do not automatically trigger consequences for teachers, students, and schools.

Students have historically performed extremely poorly on these three tests. In 2010, the last administration of the history test, students performed worse on it than on any other NAEP test. That year, less than half of eighth-graders knew the purpose of the Bill of Rights, and only 1 in 10 could pick a definition of the system of checks and balance on the civics exam.



Science vs. Humanities

Since most civic education is taught to first-semester high school seniors, Hale said, not testing in twelfth grade creates a major gap of information.

"Is it possible to have a responsible citizenry if we don't teach them civics, history, and the humanities?" said Gary Nash, a professor of history education at the University of California Los Angeles. Postponing the exams, typically administered every four years, does not mean classroom education in the humanities will be cut. But the cuts indirectly say we can do without civics and U.S. history, Nash said.

Trading the humanities tests for technology tests is necessary to measure "the competitiveness of U.S. students in

a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-focused world," said David Driscoll, chair of the NAEP Governing Board, in a statement. "The [Technology and Engineering Literacy] assessment, along with the existing NAEP science and mathematics assessments, will help the nation know if we are making progress in the areas of STEM education."

Nash agrees the U.S. needs more engineers and scientists: "But what are they without humanities under their belt?" he said.

Excellence in one area flows into others

A summer report from the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences explained the need for these subjects this way: "The humanities and social sciences provide an intellectual framework and context for understanding and thriving in a changing world. When we study these subjects, we learn not only what but how and why."

Nash pointed out that Franklin High School in the Los Angeles Unified School district is 94 percent Latino, and many families are immigrants. Without changing anything in science and math, the school began to emphasize humanities. The scores in science and math improved, testing almost on par with students in Beverly Hills. "It's about increasing their passion for learning," he says. Furthermore, giving students a context for learning helps them learn more.

Masters of Our Government

Students must be prepared "to think for themselves as independent citizens," said Hale. "Civics and government is as generative as math; we are not born as great democratic citizens. We aren't born knowing why everyone should have the right to political speech, even if it is intolerant speech."

Consider the current events of the last few weeks, he said: the Supreme Court rulings on marriage and the Voting Rights Act, the National Security Administration's data collection, and Congress debating immigration and student loan rates.

"Our leaders make decisions every day based on interpretations on the proper role of government; we have no way of knowing if these [decisions] are good or bad," Hale continued. "We are supposed to be masters of our government, not servants of it."

Cutting the civics tests indicates the government's priorities, and priorities affect curriculum, Nash noted. He suggested danger for a country that must govern itself if children do not learn how.

Haley Stauss is a Legislative and Executive Associate at Knudsen & Associates, a California-based lobbying firm. Haley has interned with California Senator Dianne Feinstein, California Assemblymember Nathan Fletcher, and at several international non-profits.

Howard Zinn and the Art of Anti-Americanism

This article originally appeared in The Wall Street Journal on August 12, 2013 and is reprinted with permission of the author.

by David J. Bobb

Upon the death of the Marxist-inspired historian Howard Zinn in 2010, eulogies rang out from coast to coast calling him a heroic champion of the unsung masses. In Indiana, then-Gov. Mitch Daniels refused to join the chorus and instead sent emails to his staff wondering if the historian's "execrable" books were being force-fed to Hoosier students. The recent revelation of these emails provoked an angry backlash.

High-school teachers within Zinn's vast network of admirers blogged their disapproval of the governor's heresy, and leading professional organizations of historians denounced the supposed threat to academic freedom. At Purdue University, where Mr. Daniels now serves as president, 90 faculty members hailed Zinn as a strong scholarly voice for the powerless and cast the former governor as an enemy of free thought.

An activist historian relentlessly critical of alleged American imperialism, Zinn managed during his lifetime to build an impressive empire devoted to the spread of his ideas. Even after his death, a sprawling network of advocacy and educational groups has grown, giving his Marxist and self-described "utopian" vision a wider audience than ever before.

Zinn's most influential work, *A People's History of the United States*, was published in 1980 with an initial print run of 4,000 copies. His story line appealed to young and old alike, with the unshaded good-guy, bad-guy narrative capturing youthful imaginations, and his spirited takedown of "the Man" remind-

ing middle-aged hippies of happier days. Hollywood's love for Zinn and a movie tribute to his work has made him even more mainstream. As his acolytes have climbed the rungs of power, still seeking revolution, *A People's History* has increased in popularity. To date, it has sold 2.2 million volumes, with more than half of those sales in the past decade.

In Zinn's telling, America is synonymous with brute domination that goes back to Christopher Columbus. "The American system," he writes in *A People's History*, is "the most ingenious system of control in world history." The founding fathers were self-serving elitists defined by "guns and greed."

For Americans stuck in impoverished communities and failing schools, Zinn's devotion to history as a "political act" can seem appealing. He names villains (capitalists), condemns their misdeeds, and calls for action to redistribute wealth so that, eventually, all of the following material goods will be "free — to everyone: food, housing, health care, education, transportation." The study of history, Zinn taught, demands this sort of social justice.

Schools with social-justice instruction that draw explicitly on Zinn are becoming more common. From the Social Justice Academy outside of San Francisco to the four campuses of the Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy, in Washington, D.C., social-justice academies relate their mission mainly in terms of ideological activism. At UCLA's Social Justice Academy, a program for high-school juniors, the goal is that students will "develop skills to take action that disrupts social justice injustices."

While social-justice instruction may

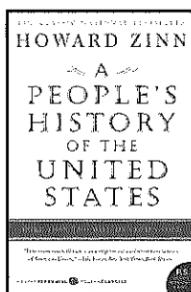
sound to some like it might be suited to conflict resolution, in practice it can end up creating more discord than it resolves.

Several years ago, the Ann Arbor, Mich., public schools faced complaints from the parents of minority students that the American history curriculum was alienating their children. At a meeting of the district's social-studies department chairs, the superintendent thought that he had discovered the cure for the divisions plaguing the school system. Holding up a copy of *A People's History*, he asked, "How many of you have heard of Howard Zinn?" The chairwoman of the social studies department at the district's largest school responded, "Oh, we're already using that."

Zinn's arguments tend to divide, not unite, embitter rather than heal. The patron saint of Occupy Wall Street, Zinn left behind a legacy of prepackaged answers for every problem — a methodology that progressive historian Michael Kazin characterized as "better suited to a conspiracy-monger's website than to a work of scholarship."

Yet despite the lack of hard evidence in three-plus decades that using *A People's History* produces positive classroom results, a number of well-coordinated groups recently have been set up to train teachers in the art of Zinn. Founded five years ago out of a partnership between Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change, the Zinn Education Project offers more than 100 lesson plans and teachers' guides to Zinn's books, among a variety of other materials, including "Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development." Already, the project claims to have en-

(See Howard Zinn, page 4)



Common Core Steamroller (Cont. from page 1)

include and how they differ from states' old standards, but also to fill the gaps in instructional strategies that will be needed for students to write well." (*Education Week*, 10-10-13) Researcher published their findings in *School Psychology Review* after analyzing Common Core writing standards, along with those of Texas and Virginia, two states that did not adopt the new standards.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction claims that "theoretically" teachers over the past three years have had 60-80 hours of Common Core training, which a \$400 million federal "Race to the Top" grant helped fund. But NC Lt. Gov. Dan Forest, who is a member of the state Board of Education and a Common Core opponent, says teachers are struggling with Common Core. Forest says some teachers "say they are not prepared for this. The only information they are getting is from Twitter and Facebook chat rooms." Forest continued, "I am unclear how education with a national one-size-fits-all standard will serve our students well and allow our parents the ability to be engaged in educational decisions." (*Fayetteville Observer*, 10-20-13)

Disastrous Implementation

Baltimore County Schools Superintendent Dallas Dance has admitted that Common Core implementation is a disaster in his district. Dance, who was at the center of the controversial arrest of a parent at a Common Core meeting in September, stated in a letter to teachers and administrators that he accepts blame for the problems encountered in the first month of school. Teachers only received computer access to the rewritten curriculum that adheres to Common Core standards a few days before school started. Dance stated that he "[felt] the high levels of anxiety throughout [the] organization." (*Baltimore Sun*, 9-20-13)

Opposition Temporarily Silenced

Common Core forums are back on the schedule for New York Education

Commissioner John King. At the first New York state PTA-arranged forum, parents became outraged when, after listening to King for an hour and a half, he began to encroach on the parents' comment time, which was limited to two minutes each. King canceled all future forums across in the state, stating that racial slurs were hurled at him and that the forum was coopted by "special interests." Numerous attendees, including other people of color, stated that no such thing occurred. Parents and legislators called for King's resignation. Democratic state Assemblyman Tom Abinanti accused King of having "closed off all meaningful conversation with parents, educators, administrators and elected officials." The state Board of Regents became involved and admitted that King should have allowed more time for public comment. King will now hold 16 forums across New York, including 4 that will be aired on Public Broadcast TV. But apparently at least some of the meetings will be "invitation only" and not open to the public. (EAG News, 10-18-13 & 10-21-13)

Too Little Too Late

Several state legislatures are investigating Common Core implementation and taking citizen concerns seriously. But many worry that opposition to Common Core has come too late to stop the forward motion. Others fear that it can't be stopped because states have already spent too much money on implementation.

Michelle Malkin commented about Common Core in the *National Review*:

We, [parents of school-age children], not the Obamas or the Bushes or the Gateses or educrats in Washington, D.C., are our children's primary educational providers. Control over our children begins and ends with us. It is not easy to stand up and challenge sovereignty-undermining, curriculum-usurping, privacy-sabotaging education orthodoxy, especially when it is furthered by a toxic alliance of big-government and big-business interests. (10-17-13)

Social Studies (Continued from page 2)

ography; and History.

"The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam in civics found that more than half of students scored 'below basic.' Most college graduates can't identify famous phrases from the Gettysburg Address or cite the protections of the Bill of Rights." (*Education Week*, 10-20-13) And as a nation, we seem to be giving up on ever educating these students in factual history, civics, and other social studies content. The Obama administration has eliminated the NAEP civics, history, and geography exam in favor of a "Technology and Engineering Literacy" test. (See *FOCUS* by Haley Stauss in this issue.)

Alignment with Common Core

While C3 Framework standards are not specifically Common Core, they align with Common Core and some states will choose to align further in the same way they chose to align with English, Math, and Science Common Core. The C3 standards were also instigated by some of the same people who guided Common Core, including the CCSSO.

According to C3 Framework CC English alignment, 2nd-grade students should be able "to evaluate a source by distinguishing between fact and opinion." Several child development specialists have criticized Common Core because what the standards ask is not developmentally possible at the ages students are required to accomplish certain goals.

In grades 9-12, Social Studies students adhering to alignment with Common Core English standards should be able to "Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims." In this example, some students may be developmentally able to accomplish the goal. But when so many have trouble with basic reading and reading comprehension it seems a lofty goal.

Collaboration Means Undue Influence

Collaboration among students is the norm for every section of the C3 framework. "Individually and with other students" begins each section. Experts cite problems with collaboration that would

Howard Zinn (Continued from page 3)

listed 20,000 teachers in its efforts.

Before Zinn launched his own teaching career, he became a member of the Communist Party in 1949 (according to FBI reports released three years ago), and worked in various front groups in New York City. Having started his academic career at Spelman College, Zinn spent the bulk of it at Boston University, where on the last day before his retirement in 1988 he led his students into the street to participate in a campus protest.

Today, Boston University hosts the Howard Zinn Memorial Lecture Series, and New York University (Zinn's undergraduate alma mater) proudly houses his academic papers. In 2004 Zinn was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Havana, an occasion he took to excoriate the lack of academic freedom in America. As recently as 2007, *A People's History* was even required reading at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy for a class on "Leaders in America."

Thanks in part to an endorsement from the character played by Matt Damon in 1997's "Good Will Hunting," Zinn's magnum opus has also turned into a multimedia juggernaut. Actor Ben Affleck (like Mr. Damon, a family friend of Zinn's), and musicians Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, Eddie Vedder, and John Legend all have publicly praised Zinn. A History Channel documentary produced by Mr.

Damon, "The People Speak," featured Hollywood A-listers Morgan Freeman, Viggo Mortensen, Kerry Washington, and others reading from Zinn's books. There are "People's Histories" on topics including the American Revolution, Civil War, Vietnam, and even science. Zinn die-hards can purchase a graphic novel, *A People's History of American Empire*, while kids can pick up a two-volume set, *A Young People's History of the United States* (wall chart sold separately).

In 2005, as a guest on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show," Zinn delivered his standard wholesale condemnation of America. Surprised by the unrelenting attack, host Jon Stewart gave the historian an opportunity to soften his criticism. "We have made some improvements," the comedian asked, "in our barbarity over three hundred years, I would say, no?" Zinn denied there was any improvement.

As classes resume again this fall, it is difficult not to think that despite the late historian's popularity, our students deserve better than the divisive pessimism of Howard Zinn.

Dr. Bobb is the director of the Hillsdale College Kirby Center for Constitutional Studies and Citizenship in Washington, D.C. He was the founding director of Hillsdale's Hoogland Center for Teacher Excellence, a national civic education program.

Cursive Handwriting (Continued from page 1)

pressures in the classroom. "A multisensory handwriting program relaxes the emotional brain to reduce stress levels in students and improve learning," according to experts. The author of *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* states:

Two generations ago, 95% of people

in America used handwriting. Today, most use keyboarding. Yet the skills of handwriting remain important. They are memory, focus, prediction, attention, sequencing, estimation, patience and creativity." (National Science & Math Initiative.org, 10-25-13)

be particularly troubling in an area such as social studies. Peer pressure to go along with the group can influence students to back away from their own opinions and what they may have learned at home in order to accommodate "group-think."

In aligning to the Common Core, the C3 states, "Inquiry in social studies is an inherently collaborative activity, and thus, Anchor Speaking and Listening Standard One is particularly relevant. . . ." Speaking and Listening Standard One calls on students to "prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively" (aligns with Common Core, NGA and CCSSO, 2010a, p. 22). The C3 Framework also "assumes a collaborative environment as students work through their inquiries. As students gather and evaluate sources for relevant information and determine credibility toward building claims with evidence, they should have multiple opportunities to practice civil, democratic discourse with diverse partners."

CCSSO Bowed Out Late

Although they were a chief instigator of the Social Studies standards, earlier this year the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) withdrew from the social studies standards proj-

ect, allegedly to focus on English and Math Common Core standards. According to their executive director, "CCSSO became uneasy with being perceived as helping to develop the social studies standards." (*Education Week*, 7-7-13) It seems the CCSSO wanted to distance themselves from the C3 Framework to increase the possibility of state acceptance since their collaboration with the controversial Common Core English Language Arts and Math standards is so widely known.

CCSSO's mark is all over the document, however; the links from Social Studies standards to Common Core English Language Arts are referred to in the C3 Framework by page numbers in what is called the "CCSSO and NGA document of 2010." The CCSSO and NGA (National Governors Association) are private trade organizations based in Washington, D.C. with no government oversight, and are unfettered by sunlight laws that would make their inner workings open to the public or available to the public by Freedom of Information requests.

Parents and interested parties can review the College, Career & Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards using the following link: <http://www.nccss.org/system/files/c3/C3-Framework-for-Social-Studies.pdf>