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## Gates Won't Let Common Core Die

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the largest private foundation in the world and the chief private funder of Common Core standards, released a letter on May 23, 2016. It says the foundation aims to continue promoting Common Core, stating, "Our learning journey in U.S. education is far from over, but we're in it for the long haul."

Addressing the Common Core standards initiative, which many see as unsuccessful, Dr. Susan Desmond-Hellmann, who has been the CEO of the Gates Foundation for two years, says: "Deep and deliberate engagement is essential to success. Rigorous standards and high expectations are meaningless if teachers aren't equipped to help students meet them." She continues:

However, we're facing the fact that it is a real struggle to make system-wide change. Unfortunately, our foundation underestimated the level of resources and support required for our public education systems to be well-equipped to implement the standards. . . . This has been a challenging lesson for us to absorb, but we take it to heart.

In the letter, Desmond-Hellmann comes very close to blaming teachers for the failure of Common Core.

The money continues to flow from the Gates Foundation to support Common Core, although some might call it life support. In January of 2016, the Gates Foundation gave the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) a grant of over \$15 million, designated as "general operating support" for the K-12 organization. CCSSO is one of the two owners of the copyrighted Common Core standards, the other being another Washington, D.C. lobbying organization, the National Governors Association.

When NAEP, the Nation's Report Card, revealed that 2015 average 12th-grade math scores have dropped and reading scores have remained unchanged, CCSSO issued a press release that says: "All states are committed to making sure every child graduates from high school prepared for college, careers, and life. The most recent results from the Nation's Report Card in 12th grade show we still have a lot of work to do before accomplishing this goal." In other words, Common Core hasn't helped at all.

Although Common Core has demonstrably failed, as will any top-down, one-size-fits-all gimmick to control American education, it will be many years before states, and apparently the Gates Foundation (and others who are making money off implementation), stop promoting the failed concept. The Gates Foundation won't admit that they mistakenly dabbled in things they know nothing about.

But the real tragedy befalls the school-

children who miss out on a rich and vital education because of interfering bureaucrats and know nothing do-gooders. (*Washington Post*, 6-7-14) ([GatesFoundation.org](http://GatesFoundation.org))

### Keep Your Chickens

*The Washington Post* reports, "In the fall of 2014, Bill Gates gave a nearly hour-long interview at Harvard University in which he said, 'It would be great if our education stuff worked, but that we won't know for probably a decade.'" (6-2-16) He appears to believe using students as experimental guinea pigs is acceptable.

*Fortune* magazine reports that the Gates Foundation recently tried to donate tens of thousands of chickens to Bolivia, to "alleviate poverty." The nation declined the gift, which was seen as "offensive" and "condescending." In the past ten years, Bolivia's "economy has grown three times its size, with millions of people joining the middle class, and it is expected to grow again this year by 3.8%." In the past six years, chicken production there increased from 147 million to 194 million units. The Bolivian minister of land and rural development responded, "Respectfully, [Gates] should stop talking about Bolivia, and once he knows more, apologize to us." (6-16-16)

When Gates knows more, he should apologize to millions of U.S. schoolchildren, their parents, and their teachers.



## SETRA Should Remain Stalled

School administrators suspended a five-year-old Colorado girl from kindergarten for a day when she brought a clear plastic bubble gun to school. The Brighton, Colorado zero-tolerance policy prohibits "carrying, using, actively displaying or threatening with the use of a firearm facsimile that could reasonably be mistaken for an actual firearm on district property." The child's mother got a call to pick her up from Southeast Elementary School and was told that the infraction will be on her daughter's permanent record. The mother is worried that "it's always going to be lingering there in her school file." (*Washington Post*, 5-19-16)

Recent years have seen a precipitous increase in the amount of data collected and stored on all students in public schools. The information about them includes any disciplinary actions. Parents often aren't allowed access to the records and wouldn't know if errors are included.

In the case of the Brighton, Colorado kindergarten student, her record could indicate she brought a weapon to school, although it was really a \$5 toy. Her parents might not know and wouldn't be able to make any correction or notation. It is their right to make certain that their daughter's records re-

flect that the "gun" in question was a toy bubble gun.

A bill to increase already intrusive data collection is currently stalled in Congress. The Senate passed the Strengthening Education Through Research Act (SETRA) by unanimous consent last December. This reauthorization of funding for education research and data collection by the Institute for Education Sciences was expected to sail through the Congress, just like the (fairly disastrous) ESSA law passed last December.

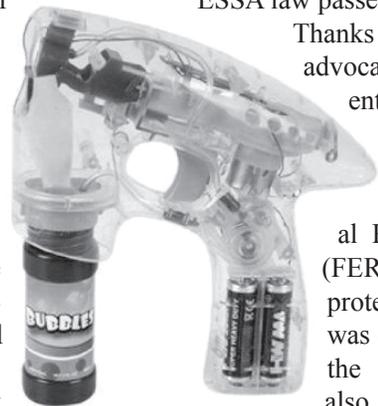
Thanks to outspoken privacy advocates and concerned parents, SETRA (HR-5) is not moving through the House. A revision of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which formerly protected student privacy but was drastically weakened by the Obama administration, also seems to be going nowhere. (*Education Week*, 5-16-16)

A summary of FERPA law at the Department of Education website says, "Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record." The next sentence says, "However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions. . . ." In recent years, at far too many schools, those conditions for exceptions essentially amount to: "We will give student records to anyone we wish, for whatever reason we choose." The Department of Education states that parents have a right to review student records and can try to get them corrected when errors occur. But in practice, that often isn't the case.

Jane Robbins and Emmett McGroarty, senior fellows at the American Principles Project, warn that a November of 2015 congressional hearing "revealed that the U.S. Department of Education's data security is essentially nonexistent." Their concern over SETRA is heightened by the bill's call for social and emotional testing, which amounts to "analyzing every child's psyche," and then keeping that data on file. (*Townhall.com*, 4-15-16)

Until FERPA is strengthened and security measures are improved, SETRA should remain stalled. The social and emotional testing and data collection increases that are currently included in SETRA should be eliminated.

Until parents are given control over data collected about their children, given full access to their children's records, and unless schools can better control who sees the data, no student data law should be passed by any governmental entity.



## Teachers Unions Win

This spring, two court cases that might have reined in some of the power of teachers unions failed to do so.

When Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died unexpectedly, the *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* case was destined to fail. On March 29, 2016, the Supreme Court ruled: "The judgment is affirmed by an equally divided Court." Since there was no majority on either side, the case was essentially sent back down to lower courts and nothing changed. (*SCOTUSblog.com*, 3-29-16)

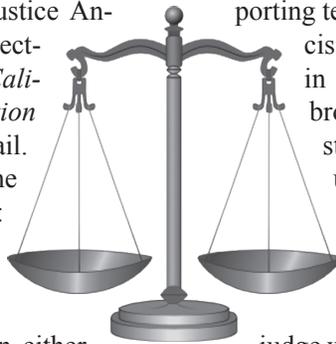
Mrs. Friedrichs and the other plaintiff California teachers hoped to stop being forced to pay union fees that support political candidates and stances with which they don't agree. Teachers may not be any more liberal than the general population, but teachers unions lean far left, support radical ideas, align with radical organizations, and almost exclusively offer financial support to Democrat candidates for office and to leftist causes. Although the California Teachers Association (CTA) claims to be bipartisan, in California's 2014 political races, the CTA union supported 100

Democrats, and two Republicans. (*Orange County Register*, 10-28-14)

A separate case also resulted in supporting teachers unions. In a 2014 decision, a California judge ruled in *Vergara v. California*, a case brought by nine high school students, that reliance on tenure and seniority deprives students of a quality education. Five California tenure and seniority statutes were struck down by that judge who ruled that teachers union tenure and seniority are concepts that allow teachers to remain in classrooms regardless of performance and to hold a position that might be better given to a different teacher doing a better job of educating students.

But on April 14, 2016, a three-judge panel stuck down the previous decision.

*Vergara* is expected to be appealed to the California Supreme Court. Representatives of the student plaintiffs say that "the mountain of evidence we put on at trial proved — beyond any reasonable dispute — that the irrational, arbitrary and abominable laws at issue in this case shackle school districts and impose severe and irreparable harm on students."



# EDUCATION BRIEFS

**A Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics article reported results of a study of language development, which affects reading and academic success.**

The controlled experiment observed parents at play with infants from 1 month to 16 months of age, while either engaged with traditional toys and books, or electronic toys. When researchers counted and analyzed child vocalizations and adult verbal responses, they concluded, "Play with electronic toys is associated with decreased quantity and quality of language input compared with play with books or traditional toys." The researchers say that "in order to promote early language development, play with electronic toys should be discouraged." (*JAMA Pediatrics*, 2-2016)

**The U.S. took first place in the 56th International Mathematical Olympiad held last July in Thailand.** The American team coach says, "The bench of American teens who can do world-class math is significantly wider and stronger than it used to be." The March of 2016 *Atlantic* magazine reports, "You wouldn't see it in most classrooms, you wouldn't know it by looking at slumping national test-score averages, but a cadre of American teenagers are reaching world-class heights in math — more of them, more regularly than ever before." Sadly, the *Atlantic* article found that these students who excel in math "are being produced by a new pedagogical ecosystem — almost entirely extra-curricular," and not in schools.

**University of Virginia student Otto Warmbier arranged a five-day trip to North Korea through a travel agency on his way to Hong Kong, where he was going to take a finance course.** But after the 21-year-old removed a sign from a hotel hallway on the last day of his January trip, he received a show trial, was convicted of a "hostile act," and sentenced to 15 years hard labor. He's being held in an undisclosed location in the totalitarian nation. (*Washington Post*, 3-31-16)

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## Woodstock Better Than the Kentucky Derby?

In 2015, twenty student protestors hurled accusations of racism at students attending a Dartmouth College sorority party celebrating the Kentucky Derby. After a kerfuffle of hurt feelings and meetings with campus activists, the sorority changed the theme of the 2016 spring party from the horserace to Woodstock, the music festival held in a New York field in August of 1969. Woodstock attracted an estimated crowd of 400,000. It was a notorious three-day sex and drug fest, so ill-planned that it lacked even basic facilities, like toilets.

Dartmouth's Kappa Delta Epsilon sorority leadership said, "We realized that if anyone on campus felt uncomfortable or upset with the theme, then we obviously shouldn't have it." A *National Review* writer comments:

Wait . . . she sees it as obvious that if even a single person somewhere on campus will be upset about the theme of a party, the whole thing should be changed? Sorry, but that's not 'obviously' the right thing to do — it's 'obviously' ridiculous. (4-8-16)

And what about Dartmouth parents who might prefer the Derby theme of fancy clothes and silly hats? They might feel "uncomfortable or upset" about a Woodstock theme that celebrates rampant drug use and promiscuous sex. Dartmouth parents pay about \$50,000 in annual tuition to send a child to the New Hampshire college; add room, board, and fees and the total is almost \$70,000 a year.

There's also the issue of erroneous historical context and factual error. According to a student reporter, the problem the activists have with the Kentucky Derby theme is that it is "overtly racist and recreating an Antebellum South atmosphere on the Ivy League campus." The party also was described as "related to pre-war southern culture."

A sorority vice president said that "after speaking to last year's protestors and other individuals in the Afro-American Society, the sorority decided to change its theme because of its 'racial connotations.'" (*Washington Times*, 4-9-16)

A paucity of history classes could be the real culprit. The Kentucky Derby is not antebellum. Even if students

aren't required to take an actual American History course, they could have checked [historynet.com](http://historynet.com) on their cell-phones to find out that "the Antebellum Period in American history is generally considered to be the period before the Civil War."

Then they could have used the power of the internet to discover, "The Kentucky Derby is the longest running sporting event in the United States, dating back to 1875." ([KentuckyDerby.com](http://KentuckyDerby.com)) The Civil War ended in 1865, ten years before the first Kentucky Derby race took place.

Derby party protestors in 2015 used a bullhorn and chanted, "What is Derby? It's the face of genocide," and, "What is Derby? It's the face of police brutality." These seem to be irrational statements. Not only did protestors get the historical facts wrong, but what possible connection would the Derby or the party-going students have? Note that there are no reports of any activities or attitudes exhibited at



the sorority party that could be considered racist. Maybe the real issue is that some activists don't approve of celebrating events that take place south of the Mason-Dix-

on line.

The Student Assembly president-elect who "is a gay, black student who holds left-of-center positions," attended the 2015 Derby party, and dared to confront and question protestors. He later apologized. (What would any college-campus event be without the inevitable apology after someone's feelings got hurt?) A petition was launched to oust president-elect Frank Cunningham; one student said, "Frank's behavior was incredibly disrespectful and shameful especially considering he is a black man himself and the protestors are protesting for people who look like him." In his apology, Cunningham said, "As a minority queer student myself, I would never want my actions to make an individual feel silenced on this campus." ([TheCollegeFix.com](http://TheCollegeFix.com), 5-8-15)

No one can be silenced on campus, unless it is a conservative voice. Or possibly a southern voice. Then all bets are off and it's a different horse race.

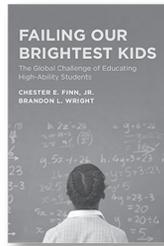
## MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



## Book of the Month



**Failing Our Brightest Kids: The Global Challenge of Educating High-Ability Students**, Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Brandon L. Wright, Harvard Education Press, 2015, \$32



Most schools ignore high-ability students. What used to be called gifted education has all but disappeared from public schools. The authors of this book say that the nation is "preoccupied with equalizing opportunity." Careful attention is not given to educating the most intellectually capable students. To identify, track, or group them is often considered "archaic and unfair."

"Regardless of subject, U.S. schools are doing a lamentable job of producing high achievers," according to Finn and Wright. They examined the Nation's Report Card (NAEP) scores in Math, Reading, and Science among 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-graders. They found, "Since 1996 there has been no point when U.S. students in any of the grades tested, in any of these subjects, recorded more than nine Advanced scorers for every hundred test takers."

Certainly a greater percentage of the population is capable of excelling than is currently doing so. The authors point out that if special education or disabled students were failing to get the services they need, "all hell would break loose." Yet for exceptional kids, "there's no powerful organized constituency, and no legal basis by which parents can push on behalf of their child."

There's a canard that smart students will succeed despite the fact that no one pays any attention to their needs, but that's often not the case. When schools fail to stimulate intellectually talented students, they often tune out, give up, or even drop out.

The authors examined U.S. and worldwide programs to find what works. The best solution is entirely separate schools for high ability students; next best are pull out programs; and last comes differentiated learning, which falls squarely on teachers already stretched thin dealing with lack of discipline, the all-encompassing focus on raising up the lowest achievers, and focus on standardized test scores.

Can the system be fixed? The authors say, "We surely have it within us to also push upward at the top — and to bounce more children into that territory."

They offer ten hopeful steps that include prizing excellence, doing universal screenings, instituting progress based on mastery, allowing acceleration, and hiring staff knowledgeable about high-ability learners.

While their suggestions are laudable, realistic readers might remain discouraged. In the current climate where social justice, fairness, and equity trumps excellence in most instances, parents of highly capable children might be wise to remove them from government schools.

# FOCUS: Common Core: What Lies Ahead?

## 'Higher standards was code for lower standards'

by Peter Wood

*This is a condensed version of a speech Dr. Wood gave at the Heartland Institute on April 6, 2016, originally titled "Drilling Through the Core." Adapted and reprinted with permission.*

The Common Core by common consent is dead. But, as anyone who has watched a zombie movie knows, dead things can hurt us. Even in the real world. Discredited economic theories can come shambling back, like Bernie Sanders socialism, twenty-five years after the Soviet Union was finally and unceremoniously buried.

A dead idea or a dead policy isn't always dead and gone. Sometimes it stays around to be annoying. Or worse.

The dead sometimes take the living with them. In some cases that may be all for the better, but sometimes it is genuinely tragic.

When Common Core was first conjured, it was meant as a rescue plan. Its first architects, David Coleman and Jason Zimba, presented it as a solution to what's called "the achievement gap," i.e. the disparity between the scores on standardized tests and other measures of academic achievement between Whites and Asians on one hand, and Blacks and Hispanics on the other hand.

That original purpose is now largely forgotten. The early supporters of Common Core realized that to sell it to the general public they needed a broader marketing campaign. Ultimately they seized the idea that the Common Core would make all students "college and career ready," a phrase deserving a grave marker.

### Low Standards End Achievement Gap

How was Common Core supposed to cure the Achievement Gap? The answer, if you don't already know it, will surely come as a surprise. Coleman and Zimba proposed that the way to eliminate the achievement gap was to set the standards so low that everyone could meet them. They announced this in a 2007 white paper for the Carnegie Corporation of New York titled "Math and Science Standards That Are Fewer, Clearer, Higher to Raise Achievement at All Levels."

"Fewer, Clearer, Higher" doesn't sound much like "lower, lower, lower." So what gives? The title was an early example of what became a hallmark of Common-Core speak: using words to mean their opposite. It is worth seeing just how Coleman and Zimba accomplished this trapeze act.

**Part 1.** They decided on what they called "pragmatic analysis," which meant — don't bother teaching any math that ordinary people won't use in their eventual jobs.

**Part 2.** The standards should be chosen — I quote — to "dramatically" raise "the number and diversity of students performing at the highest levels." So content shouldn't be determined by the

intrinsic importance of the material but by how well it wipes away evidence of demographic disparities.

**Part 3.** Coleman and Zimba decided that the word "higher" in "higher standards" would refer *not* to the intellectual content of the standards but the percentage of people who passed them. Since to raise the percentage of those who passed required lowering the standards, "higher standards" was code for lower standards.

Now if you understand this, you understand most of what you need to understand about Common Core. The mysteries fall away. Sunlight floods in. Common Core was never intended to raise standards. It was from the get-go a plan to establish a nationwide floor that would also be a ceiling. It was anti-excellence wrapped in the gift wrap of excellence.

Of course the history of that gift-wrapping is important, as is the detailed working out of exactly what went into the standards. Common Core provided two streams of standards, in mathematics and in English Language Arts. It went through a prolonged period of development with the involvement of hundreds of supposed experts. It grew not one but two giant bureaucracies of its own. And it became enmeshed in state and national politics.

### Rejecting Academic Failure

Let's first return to the casket. I started by saying that Common Core is dead. How did it die? It died of parental opposition, teacher opposition, political defection, and perhaps most importantly, flat-out academic failure.

The academic failure is the most telling. Remember that Common Core was sold to the American public as something that would make high school graduates "college and career ready." The designers of Common Core thought they could game this by measuring their success on their own custom-made scales. They forgot about the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which provides an independent check. NAEP tests randomly selected fourth- and eighth- graders across the country and examines their performance on reading and mathematics.

In March, the liberal Brookings Institution released a study of how NAEP scores line up with the states that went all-in with Common Core, "strong implementers" in Brookings-speak, and contrasted those states that were "medium implementers" and non-adopters. There is plenty of data. 46 states initially went into Common Core. Three have pulled out — Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. A few others have made some ad hoc changes in their versions of Common Core.

What Brookings found is "no evidence that Common Core has made much of a difference during a six-year period of stagnant NAEP scores." There is, as Brookings also notes, some moderately good news in that finding. Common Core appears not to be the

general cause of NAEP stagnation. Even states that didn't adopt it stagnated.

Let me pause on that for the moment, because the larger context really does matter. The nation has spent billions so far on developing and implementing Common Core. One result of that "investment" is no measurable improvement in NAEP scores. States that spent nothing on Common Core got the same results.

But that does point to the question of why NAEP scores have slumped across the board. What has happened during those six years of Common Core implementation that would weigh against academic performance? I don't want to give a flip answer. Surely the real answer involves a combination of social and cultural changes. The top of the list of what erodes the performance of children in schools is single-parent families, followed closely by other forms of family dysfunction. Both of these are closely connected with financial insecurity. Also, students struggling with English as a second language do not do as well. Increase single-parent families, family dysfunction, financial insecurity, and immigration, and poor school performance will follow as a certainty. Add to this the increasing tax on students' attention from social media and the increasing use of schools as a way of promoting ideological conformity, and the picture is not bright.

Common Core was sheer hype. Changing the "standards" for K-12 education was never, ever going to change the real level of performance of students.

### Less Literature, More Informational Texts

In the English Language Arts (ELA), we are watching the decline of instruction in literature and its replacement by non-fiction. Why does this matter? Research on reading skills runs against using non-fiction, or at best fails to support it. But Common Core insists that students learn best from treating everything as "informational texts." That is, even when students read literature, they are supposed to treat it as primarily "information." This is a bit like trying to squeeze propane gas out of an orange. There may be a way to do it, but you'd far better off trying to collect orange juice.

The Brookings Institution wondered whether schools in the states that "heavily implemented" the Common Core really went ahead with this switch, and sure enough they did. In the years since Common Core arrived, in both fourth-grade and eighth-grade, literature has dropped by ten percent or more, to be replaced by non-fiction texts. In the non-adopting states, the trend has been the opposite: more literature.

The practical answer to this is that reading literature is by far the single

biggest predictor of long-term academic success. Follow Ishmael on the voyage of the Pequod to the eventual port in Silicon Valley or Wall Street. Or learn

how to excel at BuzzFeed quizzes and maybe get a job working for the guy who read *Moby Dick*.

Literature matters for a lot of reasons. It teaches us how to read beyond the

literal text: to see analogies, to hear the unspoken, to tease out implications, and to comprehend the whole. Literature is where we learn how to see the forests, and not just the pine needles. The Common Core is taking us way into pine needle territory.

Common Core English Language Arts has other problems that have not yet, to my knowledge, been subject to rigorous review. It fragments texts; it fights against context and background knowledge; and it turns everything it touches into evidence.

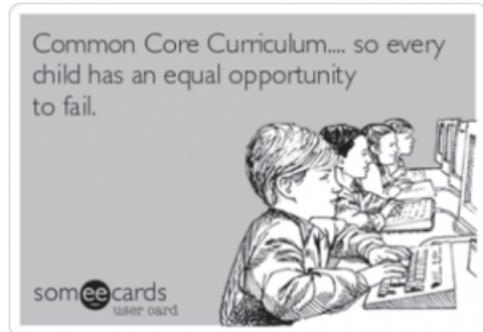
In Common Core-speak, the standards aim for "greater focus on fewer topics." Hear how nice that sounds? The Common Core has put a lot of work into smooth marketing of something you neither need nor want. It promises, for example, "coherence" in place of "a list of disconnected topics, tricks, and mnemonics." I take some umbrage with the idea that education used to be just a random jumble and that Common Core has solved the problem.

As with the deceptive attempt to call lower standards "higher standards," the translation of "greater focus on fewer topics" is something like this: Our students will know little, remember less, and never race ahead with mental shortcuts. They will instead plod dutifully ahead according to our method."

Very few students will sit still for such a stultifying education, and parents and teachers will — and already have — bridled against it too. In that sense, the Common Core's failure as a curriculum was built-in. There never was going to be a day when students would conform to it. Its educational ideals were unmoored from psychological and educational reality.

But that doesn't mean Common Core couldn't do damage. It has enormous opportunity costs for students. What they could have and should have learned they haven't because Common Core was in the way. My NAS colleague, Carol Iannone, examined the teacher's edition of a Prentice Hall 11<sup>th</sup>-grade literature textbook, *The American Experience, Common Core Edition*. She found five hundred or so readings and a "blizzard of sidebars and underbars and inserts and various sets of instructions and proposed questions, with proposed answer and assessment measures and writing assignments and preparation exercises

(See *Code For Lower Standards*, page 4)



## Code For Lower Standards *(Continued from page 3)*

and background information and thought experiments and group discussion ideas and further task suggestions, and more—all in different shapes and sizes and fonts and colors and groupings.”

What, pray tell, happened to standards that are “Fewer, Clearer, Higher?” What “fewer” actually means in Common Core-speak is that there would be fewer differences among the states, since in principle they would all have the same standards. But the number of standards themselves could be quite large, and the *interpretations* of those standards in the hands of busy publishers with a buck to turn could be enormous. What “clearer” means in Common Core-speak is everything taught could and should be pinned to an exact sub-sub-sub-standard. There should be no ambiguity about where any stray idea fits into the puzzle palace of Common Core. The whole thing might be a fantastic mistake, but at least we know how every detail contributes to the grand scheme.

The result of this kind of clarity is blinding obscurity.

For example, Herman Melville is found in the Prentice Hall textbook, but actually, students are reading eighteen pages of pre-digested *Moby Dick*, through the sieve of “pre-teaching” warm-ups and literary analysis concepts and reading strategy; graphic organizer transparencies; activating prior knowledge activities; reading strategy prompts; and whole armies of other pedagogical concepts.

The “jargon-laden schematization” as Carol Iannone puts it, comes in service to an approach to literature that chops everything into fine pieces and dissolves context. No student will come away realizing “This is why we read *Moby Dick*” or anything else.

But let’s judge the English Language Arts of Common Core by Common Core’s own standards. Is this sort of thing making students “college and career ready”? I know of no college where this destructive sampling of literature would have any value at all. Higher education is desperate for students who have the trained attention spans and independence of mind to read real books and to frame their own opinions. Students fed on a spoon-fed diet of fragments is exactly what they don’t want.

### Dumping Ideals, Values, and Tradition

So how did the Common Core hit on this formula? David Coleman and his colleagues wanted non-fiction informational texts to be front and center, and if states demanded literature be left in, the Common Core cogitators decided that literature would have to be stretched and chopped to fit the Procrustean bed of informational text.

But there is something more. Literature is one of the places in the K-12 curriculum where students come into possession of their own civilization. It is rich with ideals, values, tradition, and

imaginative aspiration: the very stuff that the Common Core wards off as dangerously privileged or even elitist. What education is really for is developing character. Without it, children learn nothing. Ideally, students develop as whole people: morally-grounded, thoughtful, self-disciplined, creative, hard-working, and mature. We seldom achieve all that but striving towards it gets us a lot closer than sitting back to see what happens.

### Slowing Down Math Learning

Common Core Mathematics Standards are troublesome too, just in different ways. The standards slow down the pace of math instruction. Before Common Core was in place, almost all the states reasonably expected students to master basic addition and subtraction by third grade; Common Core decided fourth grade would do. Same with the multiplication table. Long division was generally a fifth grade skill; Common Core defers it to sixth grade.

These changes may seem small in themselves, but they are large in cumulative effect. Common Core decided not to accelerate, but to move into the slow lane. Because math builds on itself, the slow-down in the early stages means more slowing down later on. Algebra gets kicked up to ninth grade and then Common Core tapers off. It has no room at all, for example, for the pre-calculus instruction that used to provide the bridge for students headed off to college.

What’s the harm? The harm is that, by not providing instruction to young people at the age in which they can absorb the knowledge, we preempt the whole possibility of their going further. We are effectively slamming the door shut for millions of children on possible careers in the sciences, engineering, and many technical fields where a solid foundation in math is crucial.

This thinning out of math instruction betrays two key promises made by the Common Core’s proponents: first, the one I have mentioned several times, that the Standards would make students “college and career ready.” Plainly they do the opposite in math. They ensure that students who attend schools that rely on Common Core will *not* be college ready. They may be career-ready if the career is operating an automated cash register at a fast-food restaurant, but that’s about it.

The other key promise is that the Standards would be “internationally benchmarked.”

Plainly, the Common Core has done nothing so far to nudge us upward in world rankings, let alone make us comparable to the best. So Common Core’s boast that it would set internationally benchmarked standards turned out to mean that, with the aid of binoculars, we can see that bench — on the back of a foreign truck — rapidly disappearing a few miles up the road.

Common Core defenders have their excuses. The “college ready” part turned

out to mean — as one of the Core’s architects eventually confessed — ready for *community* college. Students who have higher aspirations have to fend for themselves by seeking out tutors or extra-curricular supplementary classes.

Prosperous families will find work-arounds, but for everyone else, Common Core imposes a low ceiling on what their children will learn in school.

Math instruction goes astray in other ways too. It is infamous with parents for imposing tediously complicated forms of computation on children in primary school. The computations “work” in the limited sense of providing right answers (most of the time) but they also deliberately drive a wedge between parent and child, since very few parents can crack the code.

Common Core math standards also diverge from parental understanding in more subtle ways. For reasons known only to the Common Core’s architects — who have never had to explain why — they emphasized simple visual models such as number lines in grades one to six. Less easily visualized mathematical concepts such as multiplication and division with negative numbers get put off to later — in this case, seventh grade. Common Core promotes a way to teach geometry that has been tried once or twice before, notably in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, where the experiment was deemed a failure and discarded. Why it should be imposed on nearly the whole United States all at once through the Common Core is a mystery.

### On Its Way Out, Unloved by All

The question is, “What kind of people do we want our children to become?” The answer, to the extent it can be inferred from the Standards, is that the Common Core aims to make children into well-organized utility-maximizers — people who do not waste time contemplating hard problems or dreaming big dreams, but who have a ready means to cut things down to the size they already know how to handle.

Common Core is, to be sure, on its way out. It is unloved by parents, teachers, and the public as a whole. What lies ahead will be partly repair and partly restoration.

To simplify the story, I’ve said nothing about how Common Core demoted other subjects, including history. I haven’t explained how it traveled from a pet project of some state governors to being one of President Obama’s signature projects. I’ve said nothing about the dubious Constitutional standing of Common Core. I’ve passed over the ruckus on data mining. I’ve left the disastrous roll-out of the tests by the two multi-state testing consortia fall by the wayside. I’ve passed over in silence the duplicity that characterized parts of the Common Core movement, and the self-delusion of advocates.

The project sprawls in more directions than I can cover in a short talk, but it probably doesn’t matter. Because the Common Core truly is dead. No state that doesn’t already have it will adopt it at this point, and nearly every state that has adopted it is trying to figure out how to exit at the lowest possible political and

financial cost. Major supporters — governors, foundations, think-tanks — have bailed. Some ruefully. “If only . . .” they say, “if only we had done this or that . . .”

Of course, every movement has its die-hard partisans. No doubt there are some Common Core-idians who imagine a resurrection. But dead is dead.

And the real questions we are confronted with now are like those that follow other disasters, like an earthquake or a hurricane. How will we clean up? Who will pay for it? What comes next? America has invested so much in Common Core that we can’t easily get out. The investments include very large amounts spent on textbooks, computers to support Common Core tests, and teacher training.

There are also poignant questions for parents who have the choice of waiting out the bad years ahead by moving their children out of public school or staying put knowing that they will have to work extra hard at home to compensate for Common Core’s poor delivery of essential knowledge and its mis-channeling of children’s intellectual development. I don’t have an easy answer to those questions. I am personally focused on mitigating the upstream damage to higher education, which is going to be considerable. And one of the battles at hand is fighting the continuing effort of the College Board under David Coleman’s stewardship, to institutionalize as much of the Common Core as possible through the SATs and Advanced Placement exams.

Let me say a last word about the other Davids in the fight against Common Core. This was an enormously well-funded and politically wired effort to capture American schools — in effect to wrest power from parents, local school districts, and the states, and to transfer it to private testing consortia, publishers, and the federal government. It failed because of persistent parents, some brave teachers, and a handful of small institutes and grassroots activists. The Pioneer Institute that published *Drilling Through the Core* and many other papers; the Heartland Institute that stayed on the story; the American Principles Project; the Eagle Forum; and many others are the Davids I speak of. The Goliath of Common Core lies on the ground today because of what they did.

If any good comes from this sorry episode in misguided reform of our schools, it will be this proof that we can successfully stop the follies pushed on us by schemers who do not have the best interests of our children or our communities at heart.

*National Association of Scholars President Peter Wood was compelled to speak out about Common Core when he recognized the disastrous impact it would have at colleges and universities. He recently edited Drilling Through the Core, an analysis of Common Core. The National Association of Scholars (NAS.org) is committed to academic freedom, unbiased scholarship, and excellence in American higher education.*