



Contact Jamie Gass at 617-723-2277 ext. 210 or jgass@pioneerinstitute.org

New Pioneer/Pacific Research Institute Report: Weak National Standards Basis for Weak National Tests

BOSTON/SAN FRANCISCO – A new report demonstrates that fundamental flaws within the Common Core State Standards Initiative’s push for national academic standards, especially the weak definition of college and career readiness, will result in sub-standard national assessments. [*The Emperor’s New Clothes: National Assessments Based on Weak “College and Career Readiness Standards”*](#) is the third in a series of analyses of the proposed standards and assessments by Pioneer Institute and Pacific Research Institute.

The CCSSI was formed in 2009 by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to develop K-12 mathematics and English language arts (ELA) standards that could be adopted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The effort has the explicit encouragement of the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). Near-final drafts are being made available to state departments of education and others this month.

“These proposed national standards are vague and lack the academic rigor of the standards in Massachusetts and a number of other states,” said Pioneer Institute Executive Director Jim Stergios. “The new report shows that these weak standards will result in weak assessments. After so much progress and the investment of billions of tax dollars, it amounts to snatching mediocrity from the jaws of excellence.”

State adoption of the CCSSI standards was originally going to be voluntary, but the Obama administration subsequently made adopting the national standards a criterion for receipt of federal “Race to the Top” grant funding. The administration has also floated the idea of making their adoption a condition for receipt of federal Title I education funding.

According to [*The Emperor’s New Clothes*](#), assessments should reflect the level of rigor the Common Core standards claim to offer and set the bar for college readiness at a level where students can justifiably be said to be prepared for coursework at least as demanding as freshman-level college courses. Common Core’s current draft standards are not specific enough to inform test developers or teachers of exactly what students should know at each grade level to be on a path to college-readiness by high school graduation. Since test developers are to begin their work soon, this should be a pressing concern.

“What is perhaps most outrageous is the way these standards and assessments are being rammed through without adequate public input or scrutiny,” said Lance Izumi, Koret Senior Fellow and Senior Director of Education Studies at the Pacific Research Institute. “We need transparency and careful review, not secrecy and state boards of education acting as rubber stamps.”

Given the inferior quality of Common Core’s current draft, it is not possible for test developers to design valid and reliable assessments in either math or ELA that ensure students gain the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and the workplace or promote access to rigorous courses.

States have formed several consortia for developing assessments. But while each takes a different approach, vague standards mean all are likely to develop testing that is more expensive and of lesser quality than the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the high-stakes testing established by the landmark 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act.

Massachusetts students led the country at all grade levels and all subjects tested the last three times the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as “the Nation’s Report Card,” was administered. It is the first time any state has ever achieved that feat.

In 2008, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study testing demonstrated that Massachusetts students are also globally competitive, tying for first in the world in eighth-grade science.

California’s alignment of its K-12 standards with admission to public higher education under the Early Assessment Program was enabled by California State University and the University of California system’s recognition of the rigor of the current California standards. It has been widely praised across the nation and by Obama administration officials.

[*The Emperor’s New Clothes*](#) seeks to offer recommendations to a range of entities before states adopt Common Core’s standards. They include:

- State boards of education and state legislatures
- Local school boards and district superintendents
- USDOE
- Congress
- CCSSI/The Common Core consortium



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