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Pioneer Calls for Investigation in Wake of Channel 5 Report on Chester's Travel

"Common Core" advocates paid for first-class travel, luxury resorts

BOSTON — Pioneer Institute is calling for a formal investigation by the Commonwealth's Inspector General and Attorney General in the wake of a [News Center 5](http://www.thebostonchannel.com/investigative/25854414/detail.html) (<http://www.thebostonchannel.com/investigative/25854414/detail.html>)

report revealing that two national organizations that strongly advocate national education standards paid for or subsidized 12 trips taken by state Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester prior to his recommendation that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopt the standards.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Achieve, Inc. paid most of Chester's travel expenses for trips to London, Arizona, Chicago and Washington, D.C., where both organizations are based. The trips included first-class travel and stays at a luxury resort. Governor Deval Patrick is a member of Achieve's board of directors.

Pam Wilmot, executive director of Common Cause Massachusetts, a non-partisan government watchdog group, told News Center 5 "The appearance that there might be a conflict when you accept free or discounted travel from a party, particularly if they have an interest in the outcome of a decision is certainly there."

The BESE voted to adopt the national English and math standards, known as "Common Core," in July.

When asked if he saw any problem with the organizations paying for his travel, Chester said "We're very careful when third parties pay for travel that it's not a third party that wants to do business in Massachusetts."

But when confronted with CCSSO and Achieve's advocacy for Common Core, Chester replied "They've been in favor of Common Core Standards, but we make our own decision. "I see no conflict," he later added.

In addition to Chester's travel, News Center 5 found that private interests paid for 22 additional trips by high-ranking Department of Elementary and Secondary Education officials in 2009.

Chester's wife and son joined him for a 10-day trip to China last spring. Although he paid for his family's trip with his own money, he received a discount from two vendors, one of which has contracts with school districts throughout Massachusetts.

"Commissioner Chester's acceptance of free travel from CCSSO and Achieve casts even more doubt on a process that already appeared as if its conclusion was inevitable," said Pioneer Institute Executive Director Jim Stergios. "The public trust demands that substantiv

allegations like these be thoroughly investigated."

Massachusetts' best-in-the-nation academic standards have resulted in state students leading the nation in every subject tested at every grade level the last three times the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the nation's report card, was administered. Unlike their counterparts in other states, Massachusetts students also scored among the best in the world on international math and science assessments.

Pioneer Institute conducted the only independent research comparing Massachusetts' standards to Common Core. Four comparative studies earlier this year, conducted by nationally recognized experts after each new draft of the Common Core standards was released, found them inferior to the Bay State's in both English and math.



[Pioneer Institute](#) is an independent, non-partisan, privately funded research organization that seeks to change the intellectual climate in the Commonwealth by supporting scholarship that tests market solutions against the conventional wisdom of more governmental involvement in Massachusetts public policy issues.