

Testimony to the Arkansas Legislature
Hearing on Common Core Education Standards
July 22, 2013
By Joy Pullmann

Thank you for the invitation to speak today. My name is Joy Pullmann. I am a mother of three children and an education research fellow at The Heartland Institute, a state-focused, nationwide think tank. Heartland's mission is to research and promote ideas that empower people. I speak for myself and not the Institute, as we believe in intellectual freedom and rarely take institutional positions. Today, I will discuss Common Core national education standards, and their effects on taxpayers, schools, and children.

Any public policy discussion often consumes itself on "How do we get there," rather than, "Where are we going?" Common Core's proponents are very clear about their goals. The Arkansas Department of Education's Common Core website says Common Core aims to prepare children for "success in college and the workforce."¹ The introduction to the Common Core standards includes the goal we hear most often: "College and career readiness."² This, says the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers national testing group known as PARCC, which Arkansas has joined, is their "one fundamental goal."³

Now, what parent, business leader, or lawmaker does not want children to graduate from high school ready to join the workforce? This is important. But it is not the only goal of a public education, and by making it so, Common Core transforms public education's broader civic purpose into narrow, technical skills training. In fact, Arkansas' own constitution lays out a much better, and higher purpose: "Intelligence and virtue being the safeguards of liberty and the bulwark of a free and good government, the State shall ever maintain a general, suitable and efficient system of free public schools..."⁴ Nowhere does it mention the economy or employee skill training. Arkansas has free schools because it cannot survive unless run by a free people.

The wonderful thing about this is when children are educated for self-government, not mere "college and career readiness," they also grow exceptionally well suited for employment and other private and public responsibilities such as parenting and public office. As one of your state treasures, University of Arkansas professor Jay Greene said recently, "One of the perverse things of this narrow focus on work-related skills is that it will privilege existing employers over future employers... They don't even know what skills they're going to need from their workers yet. So rather than saying the real point of school is to prepare kids for jobs, the real point is to prepare them to be good human beings."⁵ History shows us that conceiving of education as job prep, as we have increasingly begun to do, means the children thrust through such a system come out

¹ <http://www.commoncorearkansas.org/why/>

² "Introduction to the Common Core State Standards," National Governors Association and Chief Council of State School Officers, June 2, 2010: <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/ccssi-introduction.pdf>.

³ DATE, p. 34.

⁴ Arkansas Constitution, Article 14, Section 1, 1874: <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/Summary/ArkansasConstitution1874.pdf>.

⁵ Jay Greene presentation to the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, July 12, 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jI9vthY4oE8>.

unreliable workers and ill-informed citizens. Just refer to the work of the late James Q. Wilson to find that social science teaches us the same: Educating a child's intellect and character for citizenship, as if he is a human being and not a robot, also educates him to be a productive worker.⁶ The young man or woman who has studied classic literature, can evaluate a scientific study, has the self-discipline to persevere through difficult math classes early, understands the rights and duties of a U.S. citizen, and so forth, is well-prepared for college and a career—but that's not all. And this is why public education exists at all. If businesses want technical schools and job-seekers want specialized training that largely benefits just them, they should not demand that taxpayers fund it, as this does not serve a constitutionally-granted civic purpose.

Several people following me have far more experience on whether Common Core, even with its narrow goals, will provide children quality academics, so I will let them explain specifically how it will not. Next, I will discuss the ways in which the creation and implementation of Common Core has been and continues to insult a free people beyond its shrunken aspirations.

Common Core will affect nearly everything about Arkansas education. It demands new textbooks and learning materials, new tests, teacher retraining, teacher prep overhaul, and new technology and infrastructure because Common Core national tests must be online-only by 2017-2018. Despite this drastic influence, Arkansas legislators, who are expected to appropriate money for all these changes, had no opportunity to review Common Core or conduct a cost analysis for how much more money hard-working taxpayers must sacrifice from their pockets to pay for the dreams of Washington, DC-based bureaucrats. An estimate by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, funded by Common Core's main financial backer, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, puts the costs at between \$38 for the "bare bones" approach and \$153 million for the "business as usual" approach, and pegs current spending on such projects in Arkansas at \$47.5 million.⁷ An independent estimate from the consulting firm AccountabilityWorks puts Arkansas' phase-in costs at approximately \$240 million over seven years.⁸

Proponents of Common Core insist on calling the project "state-led," but most state legislators and the public never heard of it until two years after executive agencies had already signed the papers. The organizations that created Common Core are funded largely by the federal government, but also by private foundations, and big businesses.⁹ They are private trade associations with no authority over states. Unlike the legislatures and boards of education, they make their non-binding decisions in private, and do not publish the names of people present or the positions they've taken during discussions. While 135 people were listed as Common Core

⁶ See his book, *Moral Sense*, or a brief overview of his thought here: "Moral Sense and Social Science," John J. Dilulio, Jr., *Claremont Review of Books*, Vol. XII, No. 4, fall 2012, p. 65: http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.2021/article_detail.asp.

⁷ "Putting a Price Tag on the Common Core: How Much Will Smart Implementation Cost?" Patrick Murphy and Elliot Regenstein, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, May 2012: P. 5: <http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2012/20120530-Putting-A-Price-Tag-on-the-Common-Core/20120530-Putting-a-Price-Tag-on-the-Common-Core-FINAL.pdf>.

⁸ "National Cost of Aligning States and Localities to the Common Core Standards," AccountabilityWorks, February 2, 2012: <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/national-cost-of-aligning-states-and-localities-to-the-common-core-standards/>.

⁹ "'State-Led' Common Core Pushed by Federally Funded Nonprofit," Joy Pullmann, *School Reform News*, April 24, 2013: <http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2013/04/24/state-led-common-core-pushed-federally-funded-nonprofit>.

contributors, including three from Arkansas,¹⁰ people who sat on those committees told me they had no power over the outcome. The five people who did were the standards' lead writers, who have never been K-12 teachers, and are not from Arkansas.

If we again refer to the Arkansas constitution, Section 14 says, "The supervision of public schools, and the execution of the laws regulating the same, shall be vested in and confided to, such officers as may be provided for by the General Assembly,"¹¹ not some enterprising nongovernmental organizations, or even the governor, state commissioner of education, or board of education president. Through Common Core, these people have already contractually submitted state sovereignty to these nongovernmental organizations and the federal government. The memorandum of agreement Gov. Mike Beebe, Commissioner Tom Kimbrell, and board President Naccaman Williams signed with the national Common Core testing consortia PARCC in 2010 says Arkansas "will conduct periodic reviews of its State laws, regulations, and policies to identify any barriers to implementing the proposed assessment system and address any such barriers prior to full implementation..."¹² In the agreement, Arkansas also "consents to be bound by every statement and assurance in the [Race to the Top] grant application."¹³ We'll discuss that in just a second, because there are some rather exciting things in that grant application and subsequent contracts between PARCC and the federal government.

Common Core supporters frequently insist it is about "standards, not curriculum." This is not true, according to Common Core's own documents. The memorandum of understanding governors and state superintendents signed that kicked off Common Core envisions the project as standards *plus common assessments*.¹⁴ Those assessments feed into PARCC's national database currently under construction, which receives data from state databases and feeds data into state systems in a two-way connection, according to PARCC's agreement with the federal government.¹⁵ So while Common Core supporters would have you believe Common Core is separate from testing and data collection, the three are inseparable, and by design.

What do national tests mean for Arkansas children and teachers? PARCC plans to administer four tests throughout the school year in order to keep teachers marching closely to national orders, according to its Race to the Top grant application.¹⁶ Its first three tests aim to "model the kinds of activities and assignments that teachers should incorporate into their classrooms throughout the year."¹⁷ PARCC is creating not just tests, but also curriculum frameworks for

¹⁰ "Common Core Standards Initiative K-12 Standards Development Teams," National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, November 10, 2009: <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/2010COMMONCOREK12TEAM.PDF>.

¹¹ Arkansas Constitution, Article 14, Section 4, 1874: <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/Summary/ArkansasConstitution1874.pdf>.

¹² Arkansas Memorandum of Understanding for Race to the Top Comprehensive Assessment Systems Grant, June 3, 2010, p. 14 and 15: <http://www.fldoe.org/parcc/pdf/MOUArkansas.pdf>.

¹³ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁴ "Common Core Standards Memorandum of Agreement," National Governors Association and Chief Council of State School Officers, May 8, 2009: http://www.freedomkentucky.org/images/c/c6/2009_CCSS_Commitment_MOA_from_Open_Recs_Request.pdf.

¹⁵ Race to the Top Assessment Program Application for New Grants, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, June 6, 2010, P. 725: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/rtta2010parcc.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 39.

teachers to use in lesson planning.¹⁸ The data that results from their tests should be used to “hold school professionals accountable” and help schools “make much better-informed personnel decisions,” PARCC believes.¹⁹ At the same time, however, PARCC has not yet described what data it will collect about children and teachers.²⁰ These activities represent quite a bit of leverage that PARCC, not Arkansans, now holds over what happens in Arkansas classrooms, and when.

Arkansas’ relationship with PARCC not only grants PARCC extensive power over its classrooms, but grants the federal government more power, as well. In the first place, PARCC’s only sponsor is the federal government, and in return for our money executive branch agencies have gained even more direct power over all the states involved. This federal control was anticipated and even requested from the very beginning of the Common Core project. The project’s initial memorandums of understanding between itself and states envisions “an appropriate federal role” that includes funding, incentives, revised federal laws, and oversight.²¹

The U.S. Department of Education has appointed a technical review panel to analyze, down to the very test questions, what Common Core tests will contain and how they will be formatted.²² This doesn’t sound like local or state control to me. Additionally, PARCC has committed to the federal government that it will “provide timely and complete access to any and all data collected at the State level to [the U.S. Department of Education]” and any agencies or organizations the feds designate.²³ So Arkansas, and every other PARCC state, will create a two-way highway between their databases and PARCC’s national database that collects unspecified student information, and PARCC has agreed that the federal government, through an activist executive agency, shall have full policing power over and access to those highways. In 2012 the U.S. Department of Education granted itself and every government agency, including schools, the right to share children’s information with any individual or organization they please, without informing parents,²⁴ who are the legal guardians of their children and usually must give consent for things as trivial as field trips or aspirin.

What sort of student information may traffic on these Common Core highways? Arkansas’ student databases are linked up with several other state databases, including those of state departments of health, workforce training, higher education, and human services.²⁵ These databases contain highly personal information such as physical, emotional, and health problems, down to details like Body Mass Index and family income.²⁶ In addition, Arkansas is currently

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 40.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 234.

²¹ “Common Core Standards Memorandum of Agreement,” National Governors Association and Chief Council of State School Officers, May 8, 2009: http://www.freedomkentucky.org/images/c/c6/2009_CCSS_Commitment_MOA_from_Open_Reccs_Request.pdf.

²² See <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/performance.html>.

²³ Cooperative Agreement Between the U.S. Department of Education and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of [sic] College and Careers, January 7, 2011, p. 10: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/parcc-cooperative-agreement.pdf>.

²⁴ “Controlling Education from the Top,” Emmett McGroarty and Jane Robbins, Pioneer Institute/American Principles Project, May 2012: pioneerinstitute.org/download/controlling-education-from-the-top/.

²⁵ Arkansas Application for Grants under the Statewide Longitudinal Data System Recovery Act Grants, November 9, 2009, p. 4 and 8: <https://nces.ed.gov/Programs/SLDS/pdf/Arkansas2009-ARRA.pdf>.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

aligning its student databases to the National Education Data Model,²⁷ which holds some 416 datapoints on each person inside it, including family religion, bus stop times, and whether the individual is registered to vote.²⁸ Although Arkansas and PARCC pledge to use student identification numbers, researchers have known from the 90s that this is not a secure way to make records anonymous. Back then, using just seven datapoints such as age and race, researchers reattached student records to their names with 86 percent accuracy.²⁹ With more information, such as Arkansas databases now provide, that accuracy rate goes up 100 percent, which is why researcher Richard Innes calls it “digital DNA.”

There is no reason that the federal government, or anyone it chooses to designate, should know every child’s religion, family income, and health problems. Those are family and local concerns. The economic reality called the information problem and the social principle called subsidiarity both explain why decision-making should be relegated to the lowest possible level, because local people understand the context of their own situations and can thus make better, more tailored decisions about them. Small communities also directly reap the consequences of their actions, giving them bigger incentives to choose well. If this project is state-led, states have led themselves, and their citizens, into subservience. They have written blank checks, payable by the taxpayers and their children, to unelected bureaucrats inside unaccountable Washington DC nonprofits and the federal government, despite an utter lack of constitutional or statutory authority for any of these arrangements. If the people constructing and approving such systems had been educated for citizenship, they would not have sold our freedoms this way.

Because of this, I urge you to repeal and replace Common Core with an education system that once again acknowledges parents’ right and responsibility to direct and cultivate their children. You can start by leaving them free to actually govern themselves.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 18.

²⁸ National Education Data Model, National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/forum/datamodel/>.

²⁹ “Impact of Exclusion Rates on NAEP 1994 to 1998 Grade 4 Reading Gains in Kentucky,” Laress Weiss, National Center for Education Statistics, September 27, 1999, Table 2: https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/commissioner/remarks99/9_27_99pt2.asp#table2.