

Testing, testing

From the Editors in the [June 24, 2015](#) issue



Thinkstock

This has been the spring of discontent over standardized testing. Parents, activists, and educators have been working to dismantle the system of high-stakes testing under which federal funding and teacher evaluations are tied to student test results. Concerned by the number of hours devoted to testing, and by a system that encourages “teaching to the test,” thousands of parents have had their children opt out of taking some tests.

In Colorado, in the final minutes of the legislative session, legislators shaved 35 hours of testing from the school calendar. In seven other states, the use of legislated exams were either repealed or delayed. Sixty-eight percent of parents now say that high-stakes testing is not helping their children’s education.

Unfortunately, the legitimate resistance to an emphasis on standardized testing has been closely tied to resistance to the national educational standards called the Common Core. The Common Core has its roots in a 2008 commission of governors, educators, and business leaders who were worried that students in the United States were not receiving a world-class education. The commission, led by Arizona governor Janet Napolitano, realized that the United States was unlikely to develop a world-class system without some general agreement about standards.

The Common Core is a set of standards for learning in math and English. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core. Each content area has research-based standards that define what it means for a child to be at or

above grade level. The Common Core does not need to be punitive toward teachers, nor does it mandate a method of teaching—it simply creates goals for a curriculum. And there are many ways of measuring whether students are meeting the standards.

Opposition to the Common Core has focused mostly on standards for conceptual mathematics, which require, for example, that elementary students do more than memorize multiplication tables; they need to understand how numbers work and the process of reasoning that lies behind the right answer. Some politicians also complain about a “one size fits all” approach to education. Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal, for example, has compared the Common Core to Soviet-style “central planning.”

But without the Common Core, some states have been able to use curricula as ideological whipping posts or have turned away from adopting any standards. Before the Common Core, there was little agreement on what meaningful standards were. Nonexpert school boards were given the task of defining standards, which led to chaotic and distracting political battles and lots of avoidance of the challenge

While the Common Core will be used by some as a political wedge issue, it should be celebrated as the basis for long-needed reform. We should be thanking the educators who developed it and who are helping teachers implement it. With proper use, these standards could eventually lead to greater equality in education and give all children the education they need and deserve.