

THE ROLE OF THE COMMON CORE IN THE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS OF 2014

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After the Spring 2014 primaries, the Common Core State Standards were viewed as a political hot potato. As former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee said, “the Common Core has become toxic, I think it’s radioactive...It has become an incredibly controversial topic on both the left and the right.”¹ Even so, the Common Core turned out to play a role in some of the governor’s races in November 2014.

In this analysis of candidate positions and the role of the Common Core across the 36 gubernatorial races of 2014, CPRE researchers Bobbi Newman, Jonathan Supovitz and Ariel Smith used campaign websites, debate transcripts, State of the State addresses, Twitter accounts, and candidate interviews, to identify the positions of 62 of the 81 candidates (including 3rd party representatives). Our findings show that support for, and opposition to, the Common Core was mostly evenly split, mostly across party lines. Arguments in support of the Common Core tended to emphasize economic benefits, while opposition emphasized federal intrusion and the importance of local control. In a few races, the Common Core became a substantial issue.

Politically, we are a generation away from the original adopters of the Common Core.

While state boards and legislatures are the official bodies who adopted the Standards in 46 states in 2010 and after, the governors were tied to the Standards by the fact that the National Governor’s Association was one of their central sponsors. However, four years later, only five of the Governors who signed on to the Common Core after 2010 are still in the governorship (Otter R-ID; Quinn D-IL; LePage R-ME; Kasich R-OH; and Mead R-WY). Of these states, only Maine’s Paul LePage (R) has recently stopped endorsing the Common Core.

Support of and opposition to the Common Core was evenly split.

Of the 81 candidates running in the 36 elections (including 3rd party candidates), 35 supported the Standards, 33 opposed the Standards, and for 13 we could find no public position on the Standards.

Positions on the Common Core generally followed party lines, but there were several exceptions.

- ◇ Republicans: 22 opponents, 10 supporters, 4 with no position
- ◇ Democrats: 4 opponents, 22 supporters, 8 with no position
- ◇ Third parties: 7 opponents, 3 supporters, 1 with no position
- ◇ In six states, both major party candidates supported the Common Core: GA, ID, MI, OH, RI, WY
- ◇ In five states, both major party candidates opposed the Common Core: MN², OK, PA, SC, TX³

Candidates opposed to the Common Core focused on their opposition to the federal government, while proponents emphasized economic benefits.

As the table below demonstrates, opponents of the Common Core emphasized their dislike of federal intrusion into education and their desire for control in developing their own state standards. Typical responses from opponents included statements like these:

- ◇ “It [education] is a state function, and the standards to educate our children should be based on state and local standards that are set by Alabama local school boards and parents and not by the federal government or a consortium of state.”⁴ (Bentley, R-AL)

- ◇ “The Common Core and other one-size fits all federal approaches to education must be ended in Colorado.”⁵ (Beauprez, R-CO)
- ◇ “We need to get away from the top down model of Common Core.”⁶ (Wolf, PA-D)

By contrast, supporters of the Common Core emphasized economic arguments and the increased rigor of the new Standards.

- ◇ “We need to have content standards. We need standards that are rigorous. We need our students to learn English and math, and we also need them to learn how to think independently and solve problems in real world situations. These were the goals of those who wrote, evaluated, and adopted the CCSS, and I support those goals.”⁷ (Daugaard, R-SD)
- ◇ “The high standards that have been set were set by experts across the country, not in Washington...These are people who understand educational standards, and they’re high standards,” he said. “To meet those high standards, the school boards have locally designed the curriculum. ... If it wasn’t working that way, I wouldn’t be for these standards.”⁸ (Kasich, R-OH)
- ◇ “Common Core is an opportunity, if implemented correctly, to make sure our young people are ready for the workplace or college. Students will have the critical thinking skills needed to compete with students in any state or any country.”⁹ (Burke, D-WI)

	Number of candidates mentioning this theme
Arguments Opposing Common Core	
Common Core are inappropriate federal role in education	15
Want their own standards	12
More centralized system reduces the local control	4
Testing too dominant	2
Arguments Supporting Common Core	
Common Core will help prepare students for future jobs, higher education, make U.S. globally competitive	8
Common Core are more rigorous than previous standards	8
Are focusing on implementation	7
Common Core are internationally benchmarked	2

Noise makes news: Third party candidates used the Common Core issue to rouse their base.

Some of the strongest statements about the Common Core came from third party candidates trying to leverage the issue to raise attention and rally their base. For example, Adrian Wyllie the Libertarian candidate for Governor in Florida exclaimed, “The Common Core absolutely needs to be stopped and reversed.”¹⁰ Howie Hawkins of the Green Party in New York stated, “My position is we need to opt-out of Common Core because it’s dumbing down education.”¹¹ Joe Visconti, the Tea Party Candidate in Connecticut flatly stated, “Common Core is dead on arrival if I’m your governor.”¹² Andrew Hunt of Georgia’s Libertarian Party proclaimed that there “should be no Common Core unless a school elects it.”¹³

In the states that received Race to the Top (RTTT) funding from the federal government, several incumbents distanced themselves from the Common Core

In New York, Andrew Cuomo has been on the defensive about Common Core. “I had nothing to do with Common Core. Common Core is established by the Board of Regents, which is established by the legislature,” he said in a recent debate. The backlash against teacher accountability and high stakes testing, both prominent features that RTTT has attached to standards implementation, has made the Common Core a particularly volatile issue in the Empire State. Republican Rob Astorino used education as the primary issue in his campaign, calling for the repeal of

the Common Core standards. Astorino gathered thousands of petition signatures to add, “Stop Common Core” as a third party on November’s ballot, which enabled Astorino to get Independents and Democrats to vote for him without voting “Republican.”^{14 15}

In Tennessee, popular incumbent Bill Haslam recently announced that the state will call for a review of the Common Core State Standards. And at an October 23rd education event in Tennessee, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Governor Haslam noticeably avoided using the official name of the Common Core during their speeches.¹⁶ In Georgia, Governor Nathan Deal offered a strong defense of the state’s adoption of the Common Core in the Spring,¹⁷ only to call for a sweeping review of the Common Core guidelines four months later and ask the State Board of Education to “formally un-adopt” part of the program.¹⁸

Outcomes

Please see next page for a summary of 2014 candidates and their positions on the Common Core. Underlining indicates incumbent, shading indicates winner.

No winner announced for Vermont.

Post-election standings on the Common Core

- ◇ Republicans: 12 opponents, 9 supporters, 3 with no position
- ◇ Democrats: 2 opponents, 8 supporters
- ◇ Independent: 1 with no position

Endnotes

- 1 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/22/mike-huckabee-common-core_n_5700829.html
- 2 Democratic Farmer-Labor Party candidate and a Republican candidate were the major parties in the MN race.
- 3 Texas did not adopt the Common Core.
- 4 http://blog.al.com/birmingham-news-commentary/2010/11/our_view_common_core_state_sta.html
- 5 <http://www.bobbeauprez.com/blog/our-children-deserve-a-great-not-a-common-education>
- 6 <http://wesa.fm/post/education-focus-pa-governor-debate>
- 7 <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/2014/1403TheGovernorsSpeak.pdf>
- 8 <http://www.toledoblade.com/Politics/2014/10/12/Kasich-touts-education-policies-at-Lorain-Co-campaign-stop.html#1KysyE0KmdexvtUH.99>
- 9 <http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/news/270808651.html>
- 10 <http://wylieforgovernor.com/issues-2/education/>
- 11 <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/albany/2014/10/8554431/hawkins-ditch-common-core-and-statewide-standards>
- 12 <http://www.courant.com/politics/capitol-watch/hc-malloy-visconti-square-off-in-debate-20141023-story.html#page=1>
- 13 http://www.reddit.com/r/Georgia/comments/2cq26/im_andrew_hunt_libertarian_candidate_for_governor/
- 14 <http://www.stopcommoncoreballotny.com/>
- 15 <http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/nys-senate-dems-seeking-injunction-gop-candidates-running-stop-common-core-ballot-line-blog-entry-1.1990214>
- 16 <http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/education/2014/10/28/arne-duncan-bill-haslam-talk-achievement-common-core/18079127/>
- 17 <http://www.ajc.com/weblogs/political-insider/2013/jun/25/nathan-deal-addresses-common-core-rift-gop/>
- 18 <http://www.ajc.com/news/news/state-regional-govt-politics/deal-orders-review-of-common-core/nZYbc/>

TABLE | Summary of 2014 Candidates and Their Positions on the Common Core

State	Republican	CC Position	Democrat	CC Position	Other Party	CC Position
Alabama	Robert Bentley	Against	Parker Griffith	For		
Alaska	Sean Parnell	Against			Bill Walker (Independent)	No Position
Arizona	Doug Ducey	Against	Fred DuVal	For		
Arkansas	Asa Hutchinson	Against	Mike Ross	For		
California	Neel Kashkari	Unclear	Jerry Brown	For		
Colorado	Bob Beauprez	Against	John Hickenlooper	For		
Connecticut	Tom Foley	Against	Dan Malloy	For	Joe Visconti (Tea Party)	Against
Florida	Rick Scott	Against	Charlie Crist	For	Adrian Wyllie (Libertarian)	Against
Georgia	Nathan Deal	For, but distancing	Jason Carter	For	Andrew Hunt (Libertarian)	Against
Hawaii	Duke Aiona	Against	David Ige	For	Mufi Hannemann (Ind)	For
Idaho	Butch Otter	For	A.J. Balukoff	For		
Illinois	Bruce Rauner	No Position	Pat Quinn	No Position		
Iowa	Terry Branstad	Against	Jack Hatch	For	Jonathan Narcisse (Iowa Party)	Against
Kansas	Sam Brownback	No Position	Paul Davis	For		
Maine	Paul LePage	Against	Mike Michaud	No Position	Eliot Culter (Ind)	For
Maryland	Larry Hogan	Against	Anthony Brown	No Position		
Massachusetts	Charlie Baker	Against	Martha Coakley	For		
Michigan	Rick Snyder	For	Mark Schauer	For		
Minnesota	Jeff Johnson	Against	Mark Dayton	Against		
Nebraska	Pete Ricketts	No Position	Chuck Hassebrook	No Position		
Nevada	Brian Sandoval	For	Robert Goodman	No Position		
New Hampshire	Walt Havernstein	Against	Maggie Hassan	For		
New Mexico	Susana Martinez	For	Gary King	No Position		
New York	Rob Astorino	Against	Andrew Cuomo	For, but distancing	Howie Hawkins (Green)	Against
Ohio	John Kasich	For	Ed FitzGerald	For, but distancing		
Oklahoma	Mary Fallin	Against	Joe Dorman	Against		
Oregon	Dennis Richardson	Against	John Kitzhaber	For		
Pennsylvania	Tom Corbett	Against	Tom Wolf	Against		
Rhode Island	Allan Fung	For	Gina Raimondo	For		
South Carolina	Nikki Haley	Against	Vincent Sheheen	Against	Morgan Bruce Reeves (United Citizens) Steve French (Libertarian)	For Against
South Dakota	Dennis Daugaard	For	Susan Wismer	No Position		
Tennessee	Bill Haslam	For, but distancing	Charlie Brown	No Position		
Texas	Greg Abbott	Against	Wendy Davis	Against		
Vermont	Scott Milne	No Position	Peter Shumlin	For		
Wisconsin	Scott Walker	Against	Mary Burke	For		
Wyoming	Matt Mead	For	Pete Gosar	For		