Ravitch: The best reason to oppose the Common Core Standards

by *Valerie Strauss*

The growing opposition to the Common Core State Standards does not all stem from the same criticisms or even from the same political wing.   Included in the anti-Core camp are conservatives, moderates and liberals who don't offer identical critiques of the initiative.   Some don't like it academically; some don't like it politically.

In this post, education historian and activist *Diane Ravitch*, the leader of the national movement that opposes corporate-influenced school reform, offers what she says is the most compelling reason to oppose the Common Core standards. This article below, appeared on her [Ravitch's] website.

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By Diane Ravitch

Across the nation, parents and educators are raising objections to the Common Core standards, and many states are reconsidering whether to abandon them as well as the federally funded tests that accompany them.   Education Secretary Arne Duncan, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Roundtable vocally support them, yet the *unease* continues and *pushback* remains intense.

Why so much controversy?

The complaints are coming from all sides: from Tea Party activists who worry about a federal takeover of education and from educators, parents, and progressives who believe that the Common Core will standardize instruction and eliminate creativity in their classrooms.

But there is a more compelling reason to object to the Common Core standards.

They were written in a manner that violates the nationally and international recognized process for writing standards. The process by which they were created was so fundamentally flawed that these "standards" should have *no* legitimacy.

Setting national academic standards is not something done in stealth by a small group of people, funded by one source, and imposed by the lure of a federal grant in a time of austerity.

There is a recognized protocol for writing standards, and the Common Core standards failed to comply with that protocol.

In the United States, the principles of standard-setting have been clearly spelled out by the **American National Standards Institute** (*ANSI*).

On its website *ANSI* describes how standards should be developed in every field:

> The American National Standards Institute "has served in its capacity as administrator and coordinator of the United States private sector voluntary standardization system for more than 90 years. Founded in 1918 by five engineering societies and three government agencies, the Institute remains a private, nonprofit membership organization supported by a diverse constituency of private and public sector organizations.

> "Throughout its history, ANSI has maintained as its primary goal the enhancement of global competitiveness of U.S. business and the American quality of life by promoting and facilitating voluntary consensus standards and conformity assessment systems and promoting their integrity. The Institute represents the interests of its nearly 1,000 company, organization, government agency, institutional and international members through its office in New York City, and its headquarters in Washington, D.C."

> ANSI's fundamental principles of standard-setting are transparency, balance, consensus, and due process, including a right to appeal by interested parties. According to ANSI, there are currently more than 10,000 American national standards, covering a broad range of activities.

> The Common Core standards were ***not*** written in conformity with the ANSI standard-setting process that is broadly recognized across every field of endeavor.

> If the Common Core standards applied to ANSI for recognition, they would be rejected because the process of writing the standards was so deeply flawed and did not adhere to the "*ANSI Essential Requirements."*

ANSI states:

> "Due process is the key to ensuring that ANSs are developed in an environment that is equitable, accessible and responsive to the requirements of various stakeholders. The open and fair ANS process ensures that all interested and affected parties have an opportunity to participate in a standard's development. It also serves and protects the public interest since standards developers accredited by ANSI must meet the Institute's requirements for openness, balance, consensus and other due process safeguards."

The Common Core standards cannot be considered standards when judged by the ANSI requirements. According to ANSI, the process of setting standards must be transparent, must involve all interested parties, must not be dominated by a single interest, and must include a process for appeal and revision.

The Common Core standards were not developed in a transparent manner. The standard-setting and writing of the standards included a significant number of people from the testing industry, but did **not** include a significant number of experienced teachers, subject-matter experts, and other educators from the outset, **nor** did it engage other informed and concerned interests, such as early childhood educators and educators of children with disabilities. There was **no** consensus process. The standards were written in 2009 and adopted in 2010 by 45 states and the District of Columbia as a condition of eligibility to compete for $4.3 billion in Race to the Top funding. The process was dominated from start to finish by the Gates Foundation, which funded the standard-setting process. There was **no** process for appeal or revision, and there is still **no** process for appeal or revision.

The reason to oppose the Common Core is **not** because of their content, some of which is good, some of which is problematic, some of which needs revision (but there is **no** process for appeal or revision).

The reason to oppose the Common Core standards is because they violate the well-established and internationally recognized process for setting standards in a way that is transparent, that recognizes the expertise of those who must implement them, that builds on the consensus of concerned parties, and that permits appeal and revision.

The reason that there is so much controversy and pushback now is that the Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education were in a hurry and decided to

ignore the nationally and internationally recognized rules for setting standards, and in doing so, sowed suspicion and distrust.   Process matters.

According to *ANSI*, here are the core principles for setting standards:

The U.S. standardization system is based on the following set of globally accepted principles for standards development:

* ***Transparency*** — Essential information regarding standardization activities is accessible to all interested parties.

* ***Openness*** – Participation is open to all affected interests.

* ***Impartiality*** – No one interest dominates the process or is favored over another.

* ***Effectiveness and Relevance*** – Standards are relevant and effectively respond to regulatory and market needs, as well as scientific and technological developments.

* ***Consensus*** – Decisions are reached through consensus among those affected.

* ***Performance-Based*** – Standards are performance based (specifying essential characteristics rather than detailed designs) where possible.

* ***Coherence*** – The process encourages coherence to avoid overlapping and conflicting standards.

* ***Due Process*** – Standards development accords with due process so that all views are considered and appeals are possible.

* ***Technical Assistance*** – Assistance is offered to developing countries in the formulation and application of standards.

In addition, U.S. interests strongly agree that the process should be:

* ***Flexible*** — Allowing the use of different methodologies to meet the needs of different technology and product sectors.

****Timely*** – So that purely administrative matters do not result in a failure to meet market expectations.

* ***Balanced*** — Among all affected interests.

The Common Core lacks most of these qualities — especially due process, consensus among interested groups, and the right of appeal — and so cannot be considered authoritative, nor should they be considered standards.   The process of creating national academic standards should be revised to accord with the essential and necessary procedural requirements of standard-setting as described by the **American National Standards Institute**.   National standards cannot be created *ex nihilo* without a transparent, open, participatory consensus process that allows for appeal and revision.

By Diane Ravitch

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