

9. Does it matter that testing is being aligned with the Common Core?

Since March 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has stressed the need for a new kind of assessment test to “set a consistent, high bar for success nationwide.”¹ And indeed, states have flattened proficiency standards over the past 10 years attempting to fulfill the steep proficiency requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. Analysts at the Fordham Institute observed that students can get fewer than 50% of items correct and score “proficient.”² This has spurred the federal government to fund a set of nationalized tests that measure student progress through open-ended and research-based questions.³ Forty-two states are committed to administer these tests beginning in the fall of 2014.

After the states applied for Race to the Top grants and promised to implement common academic standards and assessments, Secretary Duncan announced that consortia of states boasting at least 15 members could receive part of \$362 million to craft standardized assessments based on the Common Core.⁴ To be considered, applicants had to submit assurances from each state in their consortium that they would:

1. adopt a common set of college- and career-ready standards “substantially identical across all States in a consortium” by December 31, 2011, and implement the standards by the 2014–15 school year;
2. administer the new assessments beginning in the 2014–15 school year; and
3. collect student achievement and growth data that “will be available on an ongoing basis for research, including for prospective linking . . . that can be used to determine whether individual students are college- and career-ready.”⁵

Two consortia—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers with 26 member states and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium with 31 member states—received \$170 million and \$160 million respectively from the Department of Education. Just as it had done with the Race to the Top Competition for individual states, the federal government successfully bound 45 states to the Common Core, nearly identical national assessments, and

¹ Arne Duncan, “Beyond the Bubble Tests: The Next Generation of Assessments,” Department of Education, September 2, 2010, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/beyond-bubble-tests-next-generation-assessments-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-state-l>.

² John Cronin et al., *The Proficiency Illusion* (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, October 2007), accessed June 11, 2013, http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2007/200710_theproficiencyillusion/Proficiency_Illusion_092707.pdf.

³ Arne Duncan, “Beyond the Bubble Tests,” <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/beyond-bubble-tests-next-generation-assessments-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-state-l>.

⁴ *Federal Register* 75 no.68 (April 9, 2010): 18171, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-04-09/pdf/2010-8176.pdf>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

newly expanded data systems.⁶ Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Indiana, Oklahoma, and Utah have since withdrawn from their respective consortia, but each of these states is still committed to administering standardized tests aligned to the Common Core.⁷ Kentucky and New York have developed their own assessment tests that align with the Common Core.⁸

Secretary Duncan has persistently emphasized that the new tests are “designed and developed by the States,” but the Department of Education quietly asserted even more authority over the assessments in March 2013 when it established a technical review board. The board has been charged with analyzing the consortia’s adherence to the Race to the Top requirements and “identifying how we [the Department of Education] can better partner with the consortia during this critical development phase.”⁹

The Department of Education’s continued emphasis on comparing students across state lines is clearly aimed at implementing a scheme of national standardized testing controlled, at least in a de facto fashion, by the federal government. In 2011, the National Governors Association offered national testing as a goal by encouraging “Governors and other state leaders [to] keep pressure on the two assessment consortia to build assessment systems that will allow comparability across

⁶ *Transition to High-Quality, College- and Career-Ready Assessments: Principles to Guide State Leadership and Federal Requirements* (Council of Chief State School Officials, May 23, 2013), accessed June 11, 2013, http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2013/CCSSO_State_Principles_on_Assessment_Transition_5-23-13.pdf.

⁷ Evelyn B. Stacey, “Alabama Exits National Common Core Tests,” Heartland Institute, February 13, 2013, accessed June 8, 2013, <http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2013/02/13/alabama-exits-national-common-core-tests/>; “Governor Rick Scott Announces Path Forward for High Education Standards,” Rick Scott 45th Governor of Florida, September 23, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.flgov.com/2013/09/23/governor-rick-scott-announces-path-forward-for-high-education-standards-decision-to-withdraw-from-parcc/>; “Georgia Withdrawing from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) Consortium,” July 22, 2013, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=123>; Indiana Governor Mike Pence, “Governor Pence Announces Intent to Withdraw Indiana as a Member from the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Governing Board,” news release, July 29, 2013, accessed August 16, 2013, http://www.in.gov/activecalendar/EventList.aspx?fromdate=7/29/2013&todate=7/29/2013&display=Day&type=public&eventid=115942&view=EventDetails&information_id=185774; Celia Llopis-Jepsen, “Kansas Opts to Create Its Own Common Core Tests,” *Topeka Capital Journal*, December 10, 2013, accessed December 13, 2013, <http://cjonline.com/news/2013-12-10/kansas-opts-create-its-own-common-core-tests/>; Andrea Eger, “Oklahoma to Drop Testing Consortium, Develop Own Tests, Barresi Says,” *Tulsa World*, July 2, 2013, accessed July 10, 2013, http://www.tulsaworld.com/article.aspx/Oklahoma_to_drop_testing_consortium_develop_own_tests/20130702_11_A1_CUTLIN399354; “Utah Withdraws from Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Developing Common Core Tests,” *Huffington Post*, August 7, 2012, accessed June 8, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/07/utah-withdraws-from-smart_n_1752261.html.

⁸ Chester E. Finn, Jr., “Will the Assessment Consortia Wither Away?” *Flypaper* (blog), Thomas B. Fordham Institute, April 18, 2013, accessed June 7, 2013, <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-weekly/2013/april-18/will-the-assessment-consortia-wither-away.html>.

⁹ “Performance—Race to the Top Technical Review,” U.S. Department of Education, March 2013, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/performance.html>; *Race to the Top Assessment Program: Technical Review Process* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, April 2013), accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/technical-review-process.pdf>.

states regardless of which consortia a state has joined.”¹⁰ Mandatory national testing would be detrimental to parental rights and educational freedom.

For information on the aligning of the SAT, the ACT, the GED, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to the Common Core, please see Topic Paper 7, “Will the Common Core impact homeschools and private schools?”

¹⁰ Tabitha Grossman, Ryan Reyna, and Stephanie Shipton, *Realizing the Potential: How Governors Can Lead Effective Implementation of the Common Core State Standards* (National Governors Association, 2011), 7, accessed June 8, 2013, <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1110CCSSIIMPLEMENTATIONGUIDE.PDF>.