Common core is failing our education system

I feel very connected to the issue of national testing and standards. I went to public school K-8 and private school 9-12 so I was able to see the issue and how classroom learning can go on both sides. My audience is Betsy DeVos. My research went well, there were a lot of topics on the issue so I didn't have a hard time finding a plethora of information from both sides. It took a while to find some really good articles though. My purpose is to try and get a state centered hand in standards and testing and to repeal Common Core. My only constraints are a series of mental health issues that popped up last year, (which is why I am writing my quest essay on that) but it isn't an excuse, just some background I suppose. I feel as if it isn't my best work, but I feel that way a lot because I have never really enjoyed my writing or been able to get into the process. My peer editors were Leo and Nils and they were both helpful to me. I was able to also get a lot of help at the writing center.

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Common Core is Failing Our Education System

In 2001, when the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, emphasis on standardized testing took the spotlight. No Child Left Behind and its successor, Common Core, created the phrase " teaching to test". It implies that educators in K-12 classes are no longer trying to foster learning and critical thinking, but instead making sure their students are able to pass a test, deemed by the nation to be comprehensive of the knowledge they

should have. Its intentions may have been to help keep students on a path to success but instead has only hindered the ability of students, myself included, as a whole. I, along with many other millennials, experienced the impact of these standards firsthand. Luckily, from early childhood my family and friends gave me the opportunity grow and develop my mind outside the classroom. I was pushed to excel in all aspects whether it be math, social studies, or art. It is something I deeply cherish and respect, but had it not been for these outside influences I wouldn't be where I am today. Going to public elementary and middle school and later a private high school allowed me to gain insight into the toll the creation of a national standard took on my education. The focus of my early education with standardized testing was heavily influenced by teachers focused on making sure we were prepared solely for the test given to each student at the end of the year. Classes were mundane and cookie cutter, no matter the topic. They all seemed to be teaching similar material in a similar fashion, with no room for students who fell behind. It was as if those who didn't succeed in class were further behind each year, with no way out.

My idea of education and classroom dynamic changed when I switched to private high school. There were no national standards imposed on us, no standardized tests to take at the end of the year, and room for individuality when it came to your own education. The school decided where the bar of achievement, for every student, was to be set and helped achieve it by focusing on strengths and weaknesses on a case by case basis, truly allowing us to grow. Those students who were left behind in elementary and middle school were no longer left in a hole impossible to dig out of. These

experiences allowed me to see that Common Core is detrimental to the education of students for a plethora of reasons, but primarily because of the students who are behind are in a rut, which is hard to dig out of. Instead, if we repeal Common Core while replacing it with more effective state and locally created standards then we would allow students from all situations and backgrounds to learn and be involved in their own education.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) took away funding from certain programs that had been federally supported and introduced standardized testing for most grades K-12, the scores of these tests to be made public all the way from school to state. Those same scores often determined not only how students were performing based on the standards, but also if instructors and staff would hold their jobs at the end of the year. Although this wasn't the first step towards standardized testing it is arguably the first major stepping stone towards what we have today, Common Core. Common Core can be viewed as a refinement of the NCLB. Common Core takes the issues of unclear and differing standards and boils it down to allow schools to understand where improvement can be made. It sounds great on paper, but in actuality faces many of the same problems NCLB created. It takes the local control and understanding out of the equation and punishes under-performing schools that aren't able to teach the material effectively due to socio-economic issues in communities across the nation. (Bidwell) " In the Sacramento region, 30 percent of economically disadvantaged students met English standards on the latest Common Core tests, compared with 63 percent of wealthier students. About 23 percent of economically disadvantaged students met math standards, compared with 53 percent of

wealthier students." (Lambert) Nancy DeVos, I urge you to repeal Common Core, which as you state on your website you are " not a supporter-period". Instead of repealing with no replacement, instead, find a new system in which the state governments gain control while the federal system is still involved. You would allow communities to nurture students on an individual level so that they can develop the skills and the mental ability they need to think critically instead of the " teaching to the test" that Common Core still holds.

The article, " The Common Core Brake Job And The Need For A National Standards Discussion" by Alan Singer, states that Common Core as a whole is failing the nation's students by its inability to prepare and teach students in an effective way. Although Singer states that he is an opponent of Common Core, there needs to be an education curriculum in place. Common Core was muddled with corporations and individuals who wanted to profit from education instead of creating, and later refining, a system that would be adopted by 45 of the states. There must be more done before a new system is made to truly try to understand how a child's mind develops and how to create goals that cater towards it. Singer advocates that during his time teaching he was able to learn that " Teaching means engaging student interest, not handing out scripted activity sheets with text selected by highly paid consultants using computer algorithms." He believes teaching is successful when you are truthful and cater towards the real level of your students so that you can challenge them more and they can become invested in their education, not just a score on a test.

The idea of replacing Common Core with a different program is thought to be near impossible to supporters. The article, " How hard would it be to replace the Common Core with something better?" by Valerie Strauss, goes into detail about how changing the standards from Common Core to a different program would not just be possible, but beneficial. She adds a piece to her article by Sandra Stotsky, a professor of academic reform and previous commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Education. Massachusetts standards before Common Core had nothing in common with the program in place today. Yet, they were able to create such a strong education system of standards and teaching that " Almost all the students at the Advanced level and about 80 percent of the students at the Proficient level who had enrolled in four-year public colleges and universities in the Bay State in 2005 needed no remediation in mathematics or reading." (Stotsky).

Their programs, starting back in 1993, were based around bringing students of all backgrounds to the same level. They overhauled school funding and specifically put a majority of it towards districts with low-income children. The money was used to update textbooks, hire and train teachers, and create new classes among the many other aspects they were able to improve. " And with these changes, student test scores and graduation rates slowly improved. Today, the district says nearly 90 percent of its high school graduates go on to some form of post-secondary education — up from 70 percent before." (Carapezza) Stotsky believes that their programs and standards allowed minorities to excel and that Common Core does the exact opposite. In her experience, the standards they created were, in fact, easy to implement, contrary to opposing beliefs. Her closing suggestion is to ask

each Department of Education to send out an anonymous survey to English, math, and science teachers for information on how to revise the state's standards.

A more recent example is that Missouri recently replaced Common Core standards. The article " Missouri education officials replace Common Core standards" by Summer Ballentine explains the changes. The State Board of Education passed a new set of goals for K-12 in four areas. The areas covered are English, Math, Science, and Social Studies, the first two were already covered by Common Core but the last two are new additions. They want to have a more comprehensive education goal while allowing the local schools to plan how to reach them. (Ballentine) They are in the process of creating their own tests to match the learning goals set by the state. This initiative is similar to what Massachusetts did in their public school system to reach the level of proficiency and success they are known for today. Although, it differs slightly in that Missouri is taking what Common Core does and is trying to improve upon it, instead of scrapping the idea as a whole. This seems to be the best of both worlds, having a standard set of goals for the state as a whole while allowing schools to take control of how the students they teach will be able to reach said goals.

In Jennifer Marshall and Lindsey Burke's article " Why National Standards Won't Fix American Education: Misalignment of Power and Incentives" they go into great detail about the root issue behind national standards and testing. A misconception about national standards is the idea that national standards are necessary for parents to be able to gauge the performance of their child compared to others across the country. Found on the Common

Core State Standards Initiative's website, " the common core state standards will enable participating states to work together to make expectations clear to parents, teachers, and the general public." Their answer as to why national involvement is the better option fails to address why or how national standards and testing is improving the country. The information parents need is already available through programs such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Student and school performance is in existence, and has been since NCLB, but there can be a lack of transparency in some states. Marshall states " If access to information has been inadequate, that does not justify a national standards and testing regime. Rather, policies should insist on clear reporting of the essential data to parents and other taxpayers."

In the same article the authors created a list of what state policymakers should do. Strengthening state standards and tests would challenge students while also being able to have the control to raise the challenge as the years went on, like Massachusetts. Marshall believes " States with outstanding standards and tests have taken great pains to ensure proper and precise learning sequencing. This is appropriate at the state level, where teacher certification and other integrated factors of a quality education system are determined." Allowing states control of their standards would foster a better curriculum and higher achieving students, as seen by Massachusetts. Another initiative to be taken is state publishing of school test scores readily available to parents. This would enable transparency and accountability within the state so that schools would push towards the standards outlined by the state.

Common Core is failing our students, but if it were to be repealed and replaced with a state centered curriculum and testing we would prosper, not only as a nation, but as individuals. " Teaching the test" is detrimental to all students but it especially hurts those who don't have the initial drive, internal or external, and fall behind. The promise from my high school was that each and every one of us were to be ready for the daily rigor higher education fosters upon graduation. I firmly believe getting an education based around an individual set of standards, state-made and locally carried out, will help them reach goals they didn't think was possible, no matter the background they come from.

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