

NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
*of* SCHOLARS

31 May 2022

Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan  
State Commissioner of Education  
PO Box 500  
100 Riverview Plaza  
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Dr. Allen-McMillan,

In 2010, the Obama administration's U.S. Department of Education launched its Race to the Top initiative aimed at persuading the states to adopt the nationalizing Common Core State Standards and accompanying national tests. New Jersey was among the 41 states that in response did indeed adopt the Common Core.

Common Core was promoted as advancing academic standards without federal imposition and without violating the rights of states to choose their own paths for public schools. After twelve years, it is clear that by almost every measure, the Common Core is a failed experiment.

Between 2011 and 2019, the scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (the "nation's report card") for fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders have declined across two thirds of the states that adopted Common Core. The academic decline among even the highest-performing states, including Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New Hampshire, has been devastating. Twelve states have formally withdrawn from the coalitions created to manage and sustain the program. In addition, Indiana, Arizona, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and now Florida repealed it.

One of the two national testing consortia established to measure Common Core has collapsed, while the other has lost most of its member states. Even Bill Gates, whose foundation spent more than \$400 million to advance the Common Core, now publicly admits it has been a failure. Numerous other observers have offered careful and detailed accounts of how the Common Core failed.<sup>1</sup>

I am sure that the New Jersey Department of Education has heard from many teachers, parents, and other members of the public who have over the years called for an end to this educational folly. Extracting a state educational system from such a far-reaching commitment, however, is not easy. Large investments in textbooks, teacher training, and other parts of the Common Core make it difficult to walk away.

But the time has certainly come to call this venture to a close. If schools have found particular pieces of the English Language Arts or the Mathematics Common Core useful, the Board by all means should

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Tom Loveless, *Between the State and the Schoolhouse Understanding the Failure of Common Core*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Education Press, 2021

And Sandra Stotsky's review of Loveless's book, *Independent Review*. Vol, 26, No. 1. Summer 2021.

keep them. But the framework itself should go. It is an educational albatross. The New Jersey Department of Education would best serve the children, parents, and teachers of the state by moving on.

I write this as president of the National Association of Scholars (NAS). NAS is a network of mostly U.S. scholars and citizens united by our commitment to academic freedom, disinterested scholarship, and excellence in higher education. As part of our mission, we support rigorous and effective education that prepares K-12 students for college. (For further information, please see [www.nas.org](http://www.nas.org).)

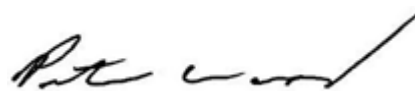
In the early days of Common Core, my organization critiqued it and advised against its adoption. I edited and wrote the introduction to a hefty volume of essays by experts who examined the Common Core in detail, *Drilling through the Core: Why Common Core is Bad for America*. I also co-authored a short book, *Common Core, Yea and Nay*, and participated in public debates on the topics. This is only to say that NAS isn't coming to this subject new. Our primary mission is higher education reform, but we were drawn into the K-12 arena because the Common Core threatened the preparation of students for college.

NAS is returning to subject believing that our earlier critiques have been vindicated but also because we have become deeply involved in other K-12 curricular matters, including the Next Generation Science Standards and the debates over history instruction and civics. I am the author of *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project*, and NAS is the organizer of the Civics Alliance, which advocates for improvements in the way civics is taught in American schools. (For further information, please see [www.civicsalliance.org](http://www.civicsalliance.org).)

All of this bears on the Common Core, which played a significant part in undercutting traditional academic standards. Its emphasis on K-12 education as mere workforce development and teaching "critical reasoning" and "cold reading" outside any context of well-supported facts and background knowledge often leaves students with no reliable map of why any one subject matters more than another. The architects of the Common Core meant well in promoting active thinking over passive learning, but they failed to anticipate that students need meaningful substance too. The Common Core State Standards proved very weak in this area.

And for those reasons, it is time to put the Common Core to rest. No doubt some good came from this experiment. No one is advocating a return to stultifying old forms of instruction. Rather, the Common Core itself has become just as stultifying. All of the states that remain ensnared in it need to free themselves in order to discover better ways to promote high quality instruction in well-functioning schools.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Wood".

Peter Wood  
President  
National Association of Scholars