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# The war on our academic standards

America's downfall doesn't begin with the "low-information voter." It starts with the no-knowledge student.

For decades, collectivist agitators in our schools have chipped away at academic excellence in the name of fairness, diversity and social justice. "Progressive" reformers denounced Western civilization requirements, the Founding Fathers and the Great Books as racist. They attacked traditional grammar classes as irrelevant in modern life. They deemed ability grouping of students (tracking) bad for self-esteem. They replaced time-tested rote techniques and standard algorithms with fuzzy math, inventive spelling and multicultural claptrap.

Under President Obama, these top-down malformers — empowered by Washington education bureaucrats and backed by misguided liberal philanthropists led by billionaire Bill Gates — are now presiding over a radical makeover of your children's school curriculum. It's being done in the name of federal "Common Core" standards that do anything but raise achievement standards.

Common Core was enabled by Obama's federal stimulus law and his Department of Education's "Race to the Top" gimmickry.

In practice, Common Core's dubious "college- and career"-ready standards undermine local control of education, usurp state autonomy over curricular materials, and foist untested, mediocre and incoherent pedagogical theories on America's schoolchildren.

Over the next several weeks and months, I'll use this column space to expose who's behind this disastrous scheme in D.C. backrooms. I'll tell you who's fighting it in grassroots tea party and parental revolts across the country from Massachusetts to Indiana, Texas, Georgia and Utah. And most importantly, I'll explain how this unprecedented federal meddling is corrupting our children's classrooms and textbooks.

There's no better illustration of Common Core's duplicitous talk of higher standards than to start with its math "reforms." While Common Core promoters assert their standards are "internationally benchmarked," independent members of the expert panel in charge of validating the standards refute the claim. Panel member Dr. Sandra Stotsky of the University of Arkansas reported, "No material was ever provided to the Validation Committee or to the public on the specific college readiness expectations of other leading nations in mathematics" or other subjects.

Under Common Core, as the American Principles Project and Pioneer Institute point out, algebra I instruction is pushed to ninth grade, instead of eighth grade, as commonly taught. Division is postponed from fifth to sixth grade. Prime factorization, common denominators, conversions of fractions and decimals, and algebraic manipulation are de-emphasized or eschewed. Traditional Euclidean geometry is replaced with an experimental approach that had not been previously pilot-tested in the United States.

Common Core is rotten to the core. The corruption of math education is just the beginning.

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