

Common Core Debate Continues As Governors Meet In Nashville

By Administrator

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Reviled by staunch conservatives, the common education standards designed to improve schools and student competitiveness are being modified by some Republican governors, who are pushing back against what they call the federal government's intrusion into the classroom.

The Common Core standards were not on the formal agenda during a three-day meeting of the National Governors Association that ended Sunday, relegated to hallway discussions and closed-door meetings among governors and their staffs. The standards and even the words, "Common Core," have "become, in a sense, radioactive," said Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad, a Republican whose state voluntarily adopted the standards in 2010.

"We want Iowa Common Core standards that meet the needs of our kids," Branstad said, echoing an intensifying sentiment from tea party leaders who describe the education plan as an attempt by the federal government to take over local education.

There was little controversy when the bipartisan governors association in 2009 helped develop the common education standards aimed at improving schools and students' competitiveness across the nation. The standards were quickly adopted by 44 states.

But conservative activists who hold outsized influence in Republican politics aggressively condemned Common Core, and lawmakers in 27 states this year have proposed either delaying or revoking Common Core. The issue has forced many ambitious Republicans who previously had few concerns to distance themselves from the standards and the issue has begun to shape the early stages of the 2016 presidential race.

Wisconsin's Republican Gov. Scott Walker, a potential 2016 candidate among the governors gathered in Nashville, said he has proposed a measure to adopt Wisconsin-specific education standards that are tougher than what the state adopted under Common Core in 2010.

"My problem with Common Core is I don't want people outside Wisconsin telling us what our standards should be," Walker said.

Indiana Gov. Mike Pence was the first to sign legislation revoking Common Core in April and fellow potential Republican presidential hopeful Gov. Bobby Jindal of Louisiana signed a series of executive orders blocking the use of tests tied to the standards, a move that outraged his

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state's own education superintendent.

Republican governors in Oklahoma and South Carolina, an early presidential primary state, have signed measures aimed at repealing the standards.

Other Republicans, including former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, have defended the standards as integral to improving student performance and maintaining American competitiveness around the globe.

Democratic Gov. Peter Shumlin, of Vermont, called the conservative critics "crazy";

"The fact that the tea party sees that as a conspiracy is a symptom of their larger problems," said Shumlin, who leads the Democratic Governors Association.

Common Core is a set of English and math standards that spell out what students should know and when. The standards for elementary math have confounded some parents by departing from some traditional methods to emphasize that kids understand how numbers relate to each other. Comedian Louis C.K. captured some of that frustration when he took to Twitter earlier this year to vent about his kids' convoluted homework under Common Core, writing that his daughters went from loving math to crying about it.

There are vocal critics on left as well. Teachers' groups that typically back Democrats have complained that the standards rely too heavily on student test scores, which in turn are used to evaluate teacher performance.

In New Jersey, where Republican Gov. Chris Christie has been a major advocate of tougher accountability measures for teachers, Democratic lawmakers have sought to delay linking evaluations to testing related to the standards.

Christie said he plans to issue an executive order on the issue this week, though he declined

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to elaborate. Christie, a potential GOP presidential contender, said the public skepticism about Common Core can be traced to a general distrust of the federal government.

He said voters "given the lack of confidence they have in government in Washington and that type of centralization, want their governors" to figure out solutions that work for their states.

Some governors attending the weekend conference said they were surprised to find the resistance to the standards.

"It's important for us governors to keep remembering the history of this, and the fact that this was not and continues to not be about a federal takeover," said Delaware Gov. Jack Markell, a Democrat.

Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval of Nevada stressed that the majority of the states are still in the process of implementing the new standards and it's the responsibility of governors and education officials to remind people that the curriculums will be designed locally.

"Nothing comes without a bit of controversy, but at the end of the day people realize it's in the best interest of the children of the state," he said.