



**National
Urban League**

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National Urban League Endorses Common Core State Standards – Here's Why: Part One

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"You can't allow 15,000 school boards to home bake their own little standards subject to their own political pressures and think we are going to have international competitiveness. We have to at least have some bare minimum core standards if our young people are going to compete." Congressional Black Caucus member, Rep. Bobby Scott

There is a quiet – yet increasingly disruptive – revolution underway in American education. Since 2010, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense have adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in their [schools](#). This represents an historic opportunity to raise academic standards and better prepare students for college and good [jobs](#). If implemented effectively, CCSS will help bridge the achievement gap by leveling the playing field so that all students, regardless of race, geography or income, have an equal shot at gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century global economy. The National Urban League and a broad cross-section of civil rights, public policy, business and education leaders are in full support. But while a majority of states are implementing these new and more rigorous standards in English Language Arts and Math, CCSS remains a mystery to many parents and students, giving its critics an open lane to spread misinformation and undermine progress. Today's column represents the first of three - and possibly more – that I am writing to help clear up the confusion and set the record straight.

First, let's clarify exactly what CCSS is and what it is not. The Common Core Standards were developed by Governors and chief state school officers from both sides of the aisle who brought together teachers, parents, school administrators and education experts to write them. Despite what some of its critics claim, CCSS is not a top-down, "Big Brother," federal program. The states determined that these standards were necessary to improve outcomes for students, and 90% of the states within our union have decided that they are critical to better prepare our country's students for the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow.

Second, we are talking about academic standards, not a standardized curriculum. Common Core standards establish what students need to learn at each grade level, but they do not

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dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will [continue](#) to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms, ideally utilizing the state standards to create even more engaging and educational approaches and content.

In order to move us forward, it was determined that the Common Core State Standards must be:

- Aligned with expectations for college and career success
- Clear and consistent across all states
- Inclusive of content-based knowledge and high-order reasoning skills
- An improvement upon current state standards and standards of top-performing nations
- Reality-based for effective use in the classroom
- Evidence and research-based

Finally, it must be said that CCSS can only be successful if it is equitably and similarly implemented in a high-quality manner. Given that excellence and equity are inseparable, states, districts, teachers and principals must have the resources and supports necessary to fully realize the promise of Common Core State Standards.

The National Urban League will continue to join parents, educators, as well as civic and business leaders, in insisting that implementation is resourced equitably and responsibly. However, it is neither fair nor accurate to assert that the Common Core State Standards are a failure because of recent implementation challenges – for any innovation requires adjustments on its path to success. We do not need to figure out new standards; we need to figure out how to implement these effectively and equitably. Our children our counting on us, and we must get this right – for them, their future and our nation.

We have long advocated a leveling of the playing field in education and the injection of additional quality as we do so. It does not serve our nation or our future when some children are systemically less prepared than others, nor does it serve our nation to have this issue tossed onto a political battlefield where it becomes a casualty of partisanship and deliberate misinformation. Instead this moment should be an opportunity for education stakeholders – parents, students, teachers, policymakers and reformers alike – to build a common agenda towards our shared goal of better educating the nation's children and youth. It is our belief that by raising and developing better standards for everyone, CCSS can pave the way to a 21st century American educated citizenry and workforce that is second to none.

In an upcoming column, we will talk more about CCSS – dispelling more of the myths and misinformation about the standards and focusing on the equity in education that we can build through a system of higher standards and stronger schools for all of our children.

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