



## SOUTHERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

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### Background

In June 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) announced an initiative led by 46 states,\* the District of Columbia, and two U.S. territories aimed at developing and adopting a Common Core set of learning standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and math for grades K-12. The Common Core State Standards (Common Core) Initiative, co-chaired and championed by then-Governor of Georgia Sonny Perdue and Governor of Delaware Jack Markell,<sup>1</sup> was a state-led attempt to establish evidence-based and internationally benchmarked learning standards that would steer public schools toward creating college- and career-ready students able to succeed in the increasingly competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace.<sup>2</sup> One of the primary objectives of the effort was to create a common learning standard for every student in the United States so that schools, governments, industries, employers and research organizations could measure educational achievement nationally, rather than across a patchwork of 50 different sets of rules, guidelines and regulations. This, in turn, would ensure that students would be able to compete and succeed on a national and international level as a part of the educational system and, eventually, as members of the American workforce, regardless of their locality. In theory, these common standards also would al-

\* Alaska, Missouri, South Carolina and Texas opted not to participate in the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

low students who move frequently, such as children of military parents, to continue learning the same concepts and materials as children of less mobile families. Essentially, Common Core, as developed by NGA and CCSSO, was established to create consistency and clarity for student performance expectations and economies of scale for instructional materials,<sup>3</sup> while maintaining local autonomy over curriculum, school administration, teacher performance reviews and nearly all other activities not directly related to student outcomes.

In July 2010, the Washington, D.C.-based Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which had been examining state learning standards since 1997, released a landmark study evaluating and comparing Common Core to the contemporary standards used by states. The report found that Common Core was more challenging than the various learning standards used by 33 states, with the math standards surpassing those of 39 states and the ELA standards surpassing those of 37 states. California, Indiana, and the District of Columbia were found to have learning standards superior to Common Core, and the standards of 11 states were found to be roughly equivalent in clarity and rigor. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the findings of the Fordham Institute study for SLC member states.<sup>4</sup>

By March 2012, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and two U.S. territories had adopted both the Common Core

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P.O. Box 98129 | Atlanta, Georgia 30359

ph: 404/633-1866 | fx: 404/633-4896 | [www.slcatlanta.org](http://www.slcatlanta.org)

State Standards for ELA and mathematics.<sup>5,†</sup> Through that commitment, these jurisdictions agreed to have Common Core account for at least 85 percent of their educational standards, while reserving the option to supplement Common Core with 15 percent in additional standards, selected by the state or territory. At the time, 30 states decided to adopt Common Core as a complete slate; four adopted the entire set of standards but left open the possibility of supplementation; and 11 states added to Common Core up to the agreed upon 15 percent.

### Where we are today

Since its beginning as a state-based initiative for universal learning standards, Common Core has become highly debated. Many critics of Common Core see the standards as a federal intrusion into state and local affairs, noting that the federal Race to the Top<sup>‡,6</sup> grant contest encouraged states

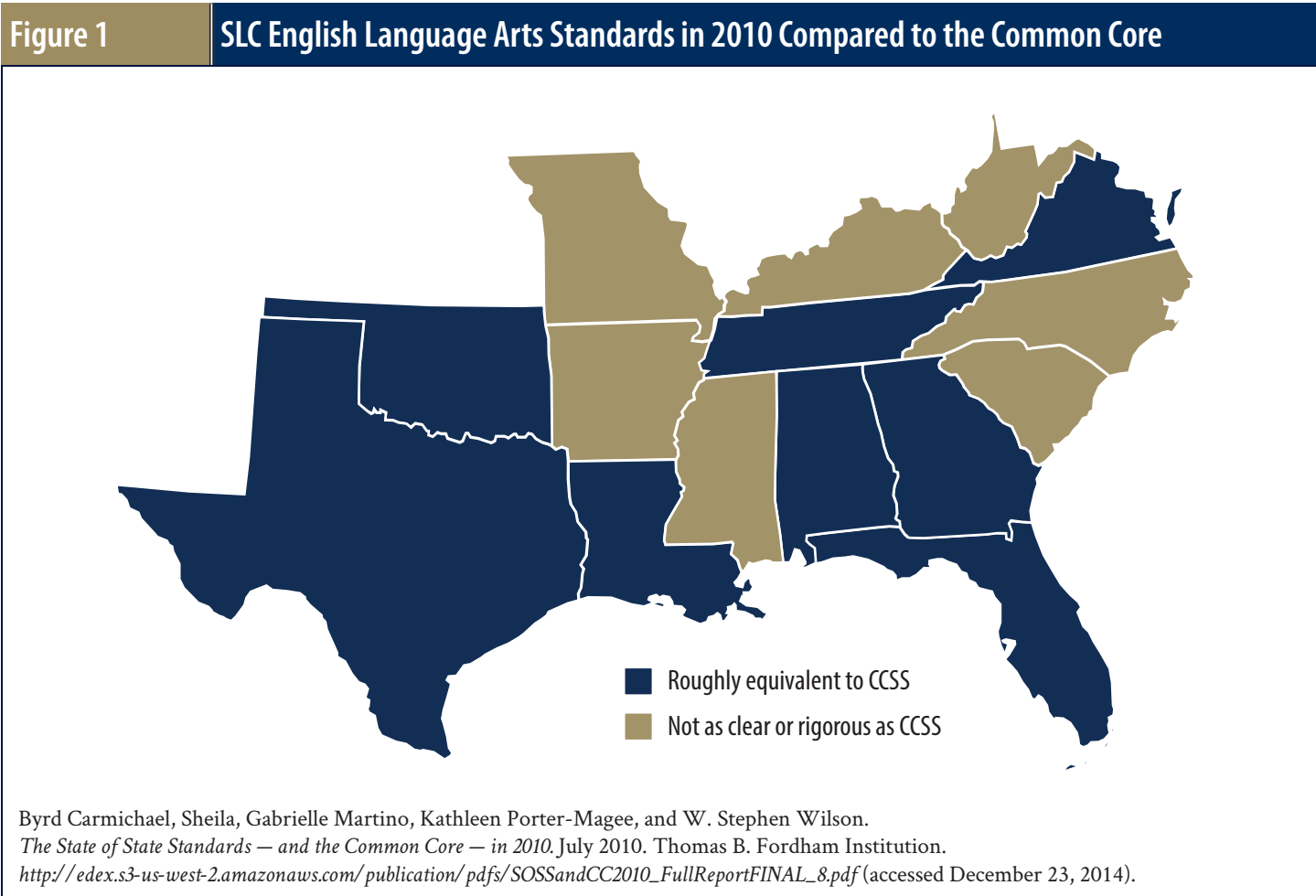
<sup>†</sup> Minnesota chose only to adopt Common Core for ELA.

<sup>‡</sup> Race to the Top was a component of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 that created a \$4.35 billion competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states for developing education innovations and reforms for achieving significant

to adopt college- and career-readiness standards, such as Common Core, while the U.S. Department of Education predicated waivers from the mandates under No Child Left Behind on the adoption or maintenance of college- and career-readiness standards. For both programs, states were not required to adopt Common Core per se, but the standards did offer a simple solution to increasing individual state competitiveness for federal grant awards and avoiding sanctions, respectively.

Although the majority of states continue to stay their course, Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina reversed their implementation of Common Core, and government officials in several others states have called for a reversal or delay in implementation. This *SLC Regional Resource* provides SLC member states information regarding the

improvement in student outcomes; closing achievement gaps; improving high school graduation rates; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas: 1) adopting college- and career-readiness standards, 2) building data systems that measure student growth and success, 3) increasing teachers and principal effectiveness, and 4) turning around the lowest-achieving schools.



status and recent legislative developments related to the standards, as of December 26, 2014. Notably, although the two primary testing consortiums associated with Common Core, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, are intrinsically tied to the debate over Common Core, for the sake of brevity, the focus remains with educational standards of SLC member states, rather than a comprehensive discussion that includes the testing apparatus for those standards. In that vein, events relating to student testing during the study period, such as the recent recommendations of the Virginia Standards of Learning Innovation Committee, are not detailed.

## Alabama

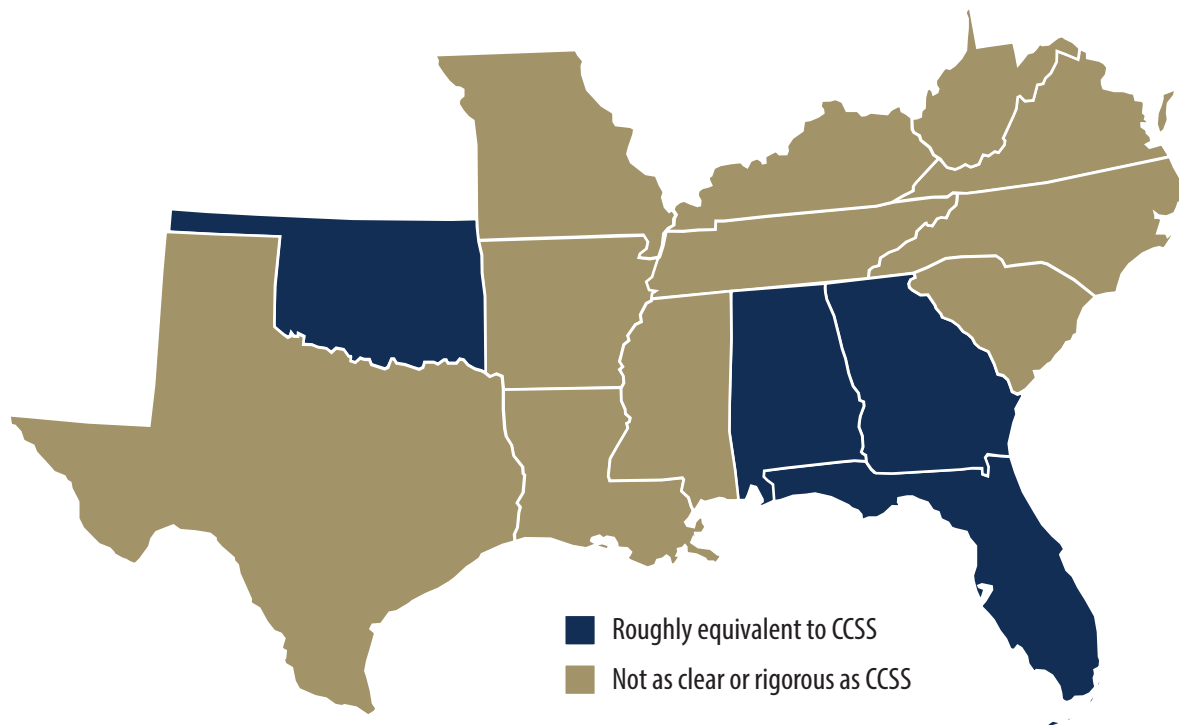
On May 14, 2009, the Board of Education passed a resolution approving the state's participation in NGA and CCSSO efforts to develop Common Core<sup>7</sup> and, on November 18, 2010, the Board officially adopted Common Core.<sup>8</sup> On November 20, 2011, after a year of review-

ing the needs of Alabama students, the Board adopted Common Core along with a set of additional state-specific standards, collectively referred to as the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (CCRS) for Mathematics and English Language Arts. Along with the resolution to pass CCRS, the Board resolved that it alone held the sole authority to adopt academic standards for Alabama students, regardless of any and all federal, state, or local government activities.<sup>9</sup> On November 14, 2013, the Board rescinded Alabama's participation in the consortium of states collaborating with NGA and CCSSO toward a Common Core. In lieu of adopting Common Core, the Board fully committed Alabama to CCRS, and reiterated the sole dominion of the state of Alabama over its educational standards.<sup>10</sup>

Schools in Alabama began transitioning to the math curriculum of CCRS during the 2012-13 school year, and to the ELA standards during the 2013-14 school year.<sup>11</sup> Bills introduced during Alabama's 2013 and 2014 legislative sessions to repeal Common Core all failed to pass.<sup>12,13</sup>

Figure 2

### SLC Math Standards in 2010 Compared to the Common Core



Byrd Carmichael, Sheila, Gabrielle Martino, Kathleen Porter-Magee, and W. Stephen Wilson.  
*The State of State Standards — and the Common Core — in 2010*. July 2010. Thomas B. Fordham Institution.  
[http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/SOSSandCC2010\\_FullReportFINAL\\_8.pdf](http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/SOSSandCC2010_FullReportFINAL_8.pdf) (accessed December 23, 2014).

## Arkansas

The Board of Education adopted Common Core on July 12, 2010.<sup>14</sup> The standards were gradually implemented; Common Core was used only in K-2 during the 2011-12 school year, K-8 in 2012-13, and fully utilized in K-12 beginning in the 2013-14 school year.<sup>15</sup>

## Florida

On July 27, 2010, the Board of Education unanimously approved the adoption of Common Core.<sup>16</sup> Within a few months, the Department of Education also recommended that Common Core would be implemented as a clean slate, with no additional state standards, beginning during the 2011-12 school year, and fully integrated by the 2014-15 school year.<sup>17</sup> On September 23, 2014, Governor Rick Scott called on the Department of Education to hold public hearings addressing Common Core.<sup>18</sup> Following these meetings, the Department supplemented the standards with calculus, cursive writing and a small number of other criteria and, along with these enhancements, rebranded them as the Florida Standards.<sup>19</sup> On May 12, 2014, Governor Scott signed into law a bill that struck all references to Common Core from state law and,<sup>20</sup> shortly thereafter, declared that “The Florida State Standard is now 100 percent a Florida educational standard [and] Common Core is out.”<sup>21</sup>

## Georgia

On July 8, 2010, the Board of Education adopted an augmented version of Common Core, which it called Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). The CCGPS were first implemented during the 2012-13 school year.<sup>22</sup> On May 15, 2013, Governor Nathan Deal clarified by executive order that “no educational standards shall be imposed on Georgia by the federal government.”<sup>23</sup> In August 2013, the governor ordered the Board of Education to review CCGPS; eliminate a series of Common Core suggested readings and exercises for ELA, history, social studies, science and technical subjects; and develop a new social studies curriculum.<sup>24</sup> As of August 13, 2014, the Department of Education was still conducting the review, and did not have a projected completion date.<sup>25</sup>

## Kentucky

In 2009, Senate Bill 1 was signed into law, directing the Department of Education and the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education to collaborate on a set of new ed-

ucational standards that could compete with national and international benchmarks.<sup>26</sup> Shortly thereafter, in June 2009, Governor Steve Beshear and the Department entered into an agreement with NGA and CCSSO to collaborate on the development of a national Common Core.

With its February 2010 adoption of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards, the commonwealth of Kentucky holds the distinction of being the first state to adopt Common Core. The Kentucky Core Academic Standards have been in use since the 2011-12 school year. More recently, on August 25, 2014, in response to the controversy surrounding the standards, Education Commissioner Terry Holliday called for public review and potential alteration of the standards.<sup>27</sup> A bill to discontinue Common Core in Kentucky has been filed for the 2015 legislative session.<sup>28</sup>

## Louisiana

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) officially adopted Common Core on July 1, 2010, with widespread support. Opposition to Common Core in the Legislature began on May 7, 2013, with the introduction of a resolution to abandon the standards. However, proponents for the standards successfully struck the resolution from chamber records.<sup>29</sup>

On June 18, 2014, months after reversing his support of Common Core, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal issued an executive order directing the Department of Education to suspend the purchase of student assessments from PARCC and notifying NGA and CCSSO that Louisiana was terminating its participation in the Common Core State Standards Initiative.<sup>30</sup> On July 21, 2014, a group of 17 state legislators filed a lawsuit alleging that BESE did not provide adequate public notice regarding the adoption of Common Core and, therefore, the agreement is null and void.<sup>31</sup> The following day, a group of parents and teachers filed a lawsuit against Governor Jindal, alleging that he had illegally interfered with state education administration, a power granted to the Legislature and BESE under the state’s constitution.<sup>32</sup> On July 29, 2014, BESE joined the lawsuit against Governor Jindal.<sup>33</sup> Concurrently, the Jindal Administration countersued BESE, claiming the Board inappropriately divested its constitutional authority to PARCC.<sup>34</sup> On August 6, Governor Jindal amended his countersuit, asserting that Common Core represents a federal takeover of school curriculums.<sup>35</sup>

On August 15, 2014, a Louisiana district court ruled that the standards could be implemented while the July 21 lawsuit by state legislators is pending.<sup>36</sup> Four days later, a state judicial court ruled that the Department of Education did have the authority to purchase student assessments aligned with Common Core, reversing the governor's June 18 executive order.<sup>37</sup> Following these developments, Governor Jindal brought suit against the federal government, charging that the administration coerced states into adopting Common Core. On November 6, 2014, he joined the lawsuit filed by Louisiana state legislators against BESE. As of November 20, 2014, all lawsuits remain unresolved, and a federal judge has requested additional documentation from Governor Jindal and the U.S. Department of Education to determine if the suit by the governor is valid.<sup>38</sup> State Superintendent John White continues to promote and implement Common Core throughout the state,<sup>39</sup> and a majority of the Legislature has not shown signs of reversing their support of the standards.<sup>40</sup>

## Mississippi

In August 2010, after a two-month comment period, the Board of Education adopted Common Core<sup>41</sup> and set the schedule for full implementation by the 2014-15 school year. On December 16, 2013, Governor Phil Bryant issued an executive order decreeing that Mississippi, and not the federal government, holds the sole authority over state educational standards.<sup>42</sup> In early December 2014, Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves indicated that he had changed his position on Common Core and noted that he now opposes the implementation of the standards.<sup>43</sup> The Department of Education countered the remarks of the lieutenant governor by re-emphasizing the importance of staying the course with college- and career-ready standards, given the "millions of dollars [already] invested by local school districts for textbooks, curriculum materials, and professional development."<sup>44</sup> Bills to review or repeal Common Core introduced during legislative sessions through 2014 have failed.<sup>45</sup>

## Missouri

On June 15, 2010, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted Common Core, scheduling for full implementation by the 2014-15 school year.<sup>46</sup> On July 14, 2014, Governor Jay Nixon signed into law House Bill 1490, which abolishes Common Core by the 2016-17 school year and replaces them with new standards that will be developed by work groups comprised of stakeholders in

educational quality and residents of Missouri.<sup>47</sup> As of October 27, 2014, eight work groups had been assembled, each with a mandate to make recommendations on K-12 educational standards to the Board of Education by October 1, 2015. The Board is not required to adopt standards recommended by the work groups, and the recommendations are not required to omit Common Core.<sup>48</sup>

## North Carolina

On June 3, 2010, the Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction adopted Common Core, and the standards were fully implemented by the 2012-13 school year.<sup>49</sup> On July 22, 2014, Governor Pat McCrory signed into law Senate Bill 812, ordering the Board to conduct a comprehensive review of Common Core. The Bill also created an Academic Standards Review Commission, charged with conducting additional review of Common Core and making recommendations for improvements to the standards as adopted in North Carolina. The Commission must report to the Board of Education and the General Assembly by December 31, 2015, at the latest.<sup>50</sup> The governor has been supportive of Common Core for the state, and clarified that he signed the Bill "because it does not change any of North Carolina's education standards, [but] does initiate a much-needed, comprehensive and thorough review of standards, [and] no standards will change without the approval of the Board of Education."<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest has criticized Common Core as the reason for state schools' low grades on a new scoring system.<sup>52</sup>

As of December 17, 2014, after thorough investigation into Common Core, the Commission had turned its focus on increasing flexibility, providing clarity, and identifying developmentally inappropriate standards.<sup>53</sup> North Carolina continues to use Common Core during the standards review process. According to State Superintendent June Atkinson, North Carolina has spent \$66 million to train teachers on the standards.<sup>54</sup>

## Oklahoma

On June 24, 2010, the Board of Education officially adopted Common Core, and the measure was approved by then-Governor Brad Henry on July 6, 2010. The standards were scheduled to be implemented by the 2014-15 school year.<sup>55</sup>

On December 4, 2013, current Governor Mary Fallin issued an executive order clarifying that Oklahoma is in

control of Oklahoma Academic Standards; that the federal government will have no input into Oklahoma Academic Standards; and that all student testing will be developed with input from Oklahoma residents.<sup>56</sup> On June 5, 2014, Governor Fallin signed House Bill 3399, directing the state to return to the Oklahoma educational standards (Priority Academic Student Skills, or PASS) used before the adoption of Common Core, and charging the Board of Education with developing new standards by 2016.<sup>57</sup> The Bill also required that the new standards and any revisions be subject to legislative review.<sup>58</sup>

Shortly after the repeal of Common Core in Oklahoma, the state lost its waiver for federal mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) because its colleges and universities could not validate that PASS prepared students for college- and career-readiness.<sup>59</sup> As such, the state was required to set aside approximately \$29 million of \$373 million in federal funds for state education to be used specifically toward tutoring, school choice, and professional development. With the reinstitution of federal NCLB requirements for student performance, schools in the state faced the threat of sudden staff reconfiguration or a state takeover.<sup>60,61</sup> On November 24, 2014, following Oklahoma's appeal of the federal decision to revoke its NCLB waiver, and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education determination that PASS was sufficient for college- and career-readiness, the U.S. Department of Education revived the waiver and restored state flexibility over spending of federal Title I funding.<sup>62</sup>

While the state has returned to the previous Oklahoma Academic Standards, some local school superintendents have come out against the repeal of Common Core, opposing reversion back to PASS, and are attempting to walk a fine line between following legislative directives and continuing a commitment to high standards. Several have noted that high standards "inevitably incorporate pieces of Common Core."<sup>63</sup>

## South Carolina

The Department of Education adopted Common Core on July 13, 2010, and full implementation was scheduled to be completed by the 2013-14 school year.<sup>64</sup> On May 30, 2013, Governor Nikki Haley signed into law an act mandating that educational standards adopted by the Board of Education must first be approved by the General Assembly; implementing a cyclical review of educational standards; and revoking Common Core, to be replaced with "new

college- and career-readiness state content standards" by the 2015-16 school year.<sup>65</sup>

Common Core will be used as the basis for instruction and assessments in South Carolina during the 2014-15 school year.<sup>66</sup> Former state Superintendent Mick Zais expressed optimism about the development of new standards, given increased publicity around the issue.<sup>67</sup> Although the rewrite process has been given a tight deadline of one year, Superintendent-elect Molly Spearman has stated the Department is "right on track" with the process.<sup>68</sup>

## Tennessee

In January 2010, the Tennessee General Assembly passed sweeping state educational reforms with the *First to the Top Act*. Among the many reforms realized through the new law, Tennessee created the most comprehensive Common Core teacher training in the nation, both in terms of the amount invested and the number of teachers trained. The state used these reforms to compete for federal funding during the Race to the Top grant competition and succeeded. With legislative support, and commitments by then-Governor Phil Bredesen, Education Commissioner Tim Webb, Board of Education Chair Fielding Rolston, and 136 local education agencies and local boards of education, the state received more than \$500 million in federal funding, which it utilized for subgrants to local education agencies (\$250 million); turning around poor-performing schools (\$77.8 million); teacher training (\$73.1 million); developing and implementing educational standards and assessments (\$44.1 million); science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs; and several other initiatives.<sup>69</sup>

The Board of Education unanimously adopted Common Core on July 30, 2010, and the standards were fully implemented during the 2013-14 school year.<sup>70</sup> In late September 2014, after steady support of Common Core, Governor Bill Haslam called for a "full vetting" of the standards.<sup>71</sup> On October 22, 2014, the governor announced a Tennessee educational standards review process that allows for public comment through a web-based portal and creates two review committees, each backed by three advisory teams, totaling a team of 42 Tennessee education policy experts, that will review the current math and ELA standards and submit recommendations to the Board of Education by the end of 2015.<sup>72</sup>

A bill introduced in 2015 legislative session would replace Common Core with state standards developed by a Ten-

nessee Standards Commission. Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey has expressed support for the Senate bill; similar legislation has been introduced in the House.<sup>73</sup> Speaker Beth Harwell has predicted that Tennessee likely will discontinue Common Core and implement new standards designed solely by the state.<sup>74</sup>

Common Core continues to be taught in Tennessee schools. However, during the 2014 session, the General Assembly passed a bill to delay the implementation of new student assessments until the 2015-16 academic year. As a result, teachers continue to teach Common Core, but will be evaluated (and receive merit salary increases) based on how their students perform on tests aligned with previous state standards, until the implementation of new tests in May 2016.<sup>75,76</sup>

## Texas

Texas was one of four states that opted not to adopt Common Core state standards released in June 2010. In 2013, the Texas Legislature passed, and the governor signed, the following prohibitions:

- » Adoption of national curriculum standards developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative;
- » Utilization of Common Core state standards to provide appropriate grade-level instruction;
- » Student assessments based on Common Core, except for advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) exams; and
- » Teacher appraisal processes that included student performance matrices measurable on a national level.<sup>77</sup>

A recent opinion by the Attorney General of Texas held that schools are allowed to teach Common Core when the standards overlap with state standards, but must refrain from any and all lessons that differ.<sup>78</sup> On September 17, 2014, the Board of Education amended its rules to clarify that teaching Common Core is prohibited for AP and IB courses as well.<sup>79</sup>

## Virginia

Virginia was one of four states that decided not to adopt Common Core State Standards released in June 2010, deciding instead to refine its own Standards of Learning (SOL). There have been recent developments with regard for student performance measures and assessments, but no significant changes have been made to SOL since 2010.<sup>80</sup>

## West Virginia

After some customization by the West Virginia Board of Education, Common Core was adopted on June 2, 2010, as West Virginia's Next Generation Content Standards.<sup>81</sup> The new standards were phased in gradually, with full implementation scheduled for the 2014-15 school year.<sup>82</sup> On December 16, 2014, a legislative hearing was held on Common Core by the Joint Standing Committee on Education. Efforts to pass legislation and resolutions in 2013 and 2014 to suspend Common Core implementation failed.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

A commitment to rigorous education standards making students of the Southern educational system competitive on national and international levels is critical for the region to continue as a global economic powerhouse. Meanwhile, a thorough review of what actually comprises rigorous and competitive educational standards always is a prudent approach. Since the debut of Common Core in 2010, states have had time to review the implications and particularities of the standards, and school funding, teacher training, and curriculums have aligned toward Common Core.

Given that several states already have implemented Common Core to its full extent, state policymakers seeking to repeal these standards should consider how to ensure their students remain regionally and internationally competitive. For example, when Indiana became the first state in the nation to repeal Common Core, the state did not risk losing its waiver for No Child Left Behind, because the standards adopted in lieu of Common Core emphasized college- and career-readiness. Moreover, Indiana was one of two states (plus the District of Columbia) identified by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute as having educational standards superior to Common Core. The number of states in a similarly advantageous position is very limited.

College- and career-readiness is the new standard for student excellence and the metric that current, growing and emerging industries now more routinely use in their hiring decisions. Regardless of the varying positions over Common Core, all stakeholders should keep in perspective that the future of the next generation in the ever-expanding 21<sup>st</sup> century global marketplace is at stake, and educational standards that prepare students for this environment should be the ultimate spoils of the victor.

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Southern Office of  
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### REGIONAL VIEW NATIONAL REACH

**T**his report was prepared by Policy Analyst Mikko Lindberg for the Education Committee of the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) of The Council of State Governments (CSG) under the chairmanship of Senator John R. Unger II of West Virginia. This report reflects the body of policy research made available to appointed and elected officials by the Southern Office.

The Southern Office of The Council of State Governments, located in Atlanta, Georgia, fosters and encourages intergovernmental cooperation among its 15 member states. In large measure, this is achieved through the ongoing work of the standing committees of its Southern Legislative Conference and supporting groups. Through member outreach in state capitols, policy research, international member delegations, staff exchange programs, meetings and fly-ins, staff sup-

port state policymakers and legislative staff in their work to build a stronger region.

Founded in 1947, the SLC is a member-driven organization and the largest of four regional legislative groups operating under CSG and comprises the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

The SLC's six standing committees provide a forum which allows policymakers to share knowledge in their area of expertise with colleagues from across the South. By working together within the SLC and participating on its committees, Southern state legislative leaders are able to speak in a distinctive, unified voice while addressing issues that affect their states and the entire region.