

Who benefits from the “Common Core” curriculum in US schools?

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Major corporations such as Pearson, McGraw Hill and Apple are cashing in on the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) curriculum in public schools. This is occurring as states around the US gut their education budgets.

CCSS, which is being rolled out nationwide this year and next, establishes curricular standards across all states. Purporting to focus on “real world” knowledge, it institutes a testing regime that will begin when students are as young as five years old to determine whether they are “college or career ready.” As with the Obama administration’s Race to the Top program, CCSS will be used to accelerate the closure of “failing” public schools and expand the number of for-profit charter institutions.

In California, where per pupil spending has fallen to 49th in the nation, Governor Jerry Brown recently announced that the budget would include \$1.25 billion for school materials, training and testing for the Common Core.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, which has laid off more than 4,600 staff since 2008, also recently awarded Apple a \$30 million technology contract to supply iPads pre-loaded with Pearson’s Common Core course system to all students by 2014.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has used \$12.9 million in federal funds to award contracts to the Core Knowledge Foundation, Expeditionary Learning and Common Core Incorporated. Meanwhile, New York City alone has closed more than 164 so-called poorly performing public schools since 2008, while greatly expanding the number of charter schools.

Pearson PLC, a British multinational company headquartered in London, England, is the largest education company and book publisher in the world. Pearson Ed—the American subsidiary of Pearson PLC—wrote the curriculum and testing materials for the CCSS. The company stands to make billions of dollars

selling these products to school districts across the United States.

Pearson’s new board chairman is Glen Moreno, an investment banker and former head of UK Financial Investments (UKFI), the company set up in 2008 by the British government to manage the funds used to bail out the banking industry. Moreno was brought onto the board of Pearson because of his hedge fund and investment banking expertise.

According to industry insider Alison Carnwath of the hedge fund Man Group, Moreno is under pressure to further boost Pearson’s share price in order to meet the demands of large shareholders for increasing profits.

In February of this year, Pearson reported unaudited financial results of £6.1 billion for the 2012 fiscal year, including a 2 percent increase in revenues for their North American operations. This occurred despite the fact that US education publishing revenues fell by 10 percent for the industry as a whole and American school district budgets were once again slashed to the bone.

Alongside the development of the CCSS, which is supported by the country’s two main labor unions for educators, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), states across the country are increasingly linking teacher evaluations to the test-based performance of students. Thus, the implementation this coming year of the CCSS, which utilizes standardized exams to assess student learning, increases the probability that teachers will lose their positions if students perform poorly.

The CCSS furthers a process begun in 2002 with the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which mandated testing in all 50 states. According to the Pew Center on the States, annual state spending on standardized tests rose from \$423 million before NCLB to \$1.1 billion by 2008. This has continued under the Obama administration’s Race to the Top, which

has tied federal funding for schools even more closely to test-based performance standards.

Under the current administration's education policy, "failing" schools compete for School Improvement Grants (SIG) of up to \$2 million a year. In return schools have to agree to choose one of four "school improvement" models—"turnaround," "restart," "close/consolidation," or "transformation."

Under the "transformation" model, schools are required to replace the principal and make other broad changes, such as rewarding staff that increase student test scores and institute comprehensive instructional reform, and removing those who do not. According to the Department of Education, the "restart" model requires the district to "close the school and restart it under the management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an educational management organization (EMO)."

The EMO is turning the dismantling of education into the new "growth" industry. EMOs can run charter schools, offer teacher professional development and other services for "school improvement."

Two such EMOs are Editure and JBHM. Jonathan Grayer, founder of JBHM's parent company Weld North, was named in 2005 to the Commission on the Future of Higher Education while he was CEO of Kaplan, a large educational testing and tutoring corporation. Under Grayer, Kaplan grew into a for-profit education corporation with over \$2.3 billion in revenues.

Last September Weld North announced that it had attained a "leadership position" in what it describes as a "\$3.6 billion education, school improvement services and professional development market."

As more schools are found to be "failing" due to the implementation of the CCSS and in need of these "improvement services and professional development," even more money will be offered up by the government to provide consulting services for K-12 schools.



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