

BACKGROUND

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No Exit, No Voice: The Design of Common Core

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Abstract

Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* provides valuable conceptual tools for analyzing the design of the Common Core national curriculum content standards. Hirschman points out that the two basic responses to deteriorating services are "exit" and "voice," where exit means turning to a different provider or leaving the territory, while voice means political participation. By trying to block exit and deny voice, the designers of Common Core and the policymakers who put it in place have caused blowback: A large parent-, teacher-, and community-based movement has arisen, as organized parents are—in what Hirschman called an "intimate fusion of exit and voice"—pressing for repeal of Common Core and the national tests that support it.

One of the most influential and most cited books in social science in the past 50 years is economist Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*.¹

Hirschman's book discusses how individuals respond to a situation in which the services on which they rely are deteriorating. As such, *Exit* provides valuable conceptual tools for analyzing the design of the Common Core national curriculum content standards.

Hirschman points out that the two basic responses to deteriorating services are "exit" and "voice," where exit means turning to a different provider or leaving the territory, while voice means political participation.²

The Importance of Exit and Voice

In America, political participation plays an important role. America is a constitutional republic, where power rests with the consent

KEY POINTS

- One of the most influential and most cited books in social science in the past 50 years is economist Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. Hirschman's book discusses how individuals respond to a situation in which the services on which they rely are deteriorating.
- As such, *Exit* provides valuable conceptual tools for analyzing the design of the Common Core national curriculum content standards.
- By trying to block "exit" and deny "voice," the designers of Common Core and the policymakers who put it in place have caused blowback.
- A large parent-, teacher-, and community-based movement has arisen, as organized parents are pressing for repeal of Common Core and the national tests that support it.

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of the governed and elections elevate individuals to public office and where elections also function as way of legitimating the political system.³ We as men and women on the street see that participatory democracy and deliberative democracy are lovely in theory, but are also often dirty in practice.

Social scientists tell us about Arrow's Theorem and the impossibility of non-dictatorially lining up voters' preferences.⁴ They tell us about agenda-setting and log-rolling. There are entrenched special interests, "concentrated benefits and dispersed costs," and influential, established elites. Social

scientists also affirm that it is quite difficult to organize opposition to the current state of affairs when the uninvolved can take a "free ride" and reap the public benefits, if any, that organizers might gain.⁵ Nonetheless, we value our political freedom.

Likewise, in our culture, we have quite a few symbolic examples of the importance of exit. We have the story of the Exodus of the ancient Hebrews from the bondage of pharaonic Egypt.⁶ We had the Pilgrims and other religious refugees who left the Old World for the New.⁷ We had pioneers who left the Atlantic Coast for the frontier.⁸ We had the farmers and industrial

1. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
2. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, pp. 4-5 and 15-6, and Albert O. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing: Economics to Politics and Beyond* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 231 and 246. Compare Hirschman with Oliver P. Williams: "There are essentially two options for those who wish to apply a location strategy to change their access within the urban complex. They can move or they can change the characteristics of the place they presently occupy," in *Metropolitan Political Analysis* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1971), p. 29, cited in Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 231.
3. Hirschman writes: "It is possible to conjecture that a more fundamental reason for the antagonism to 'formal' democracy was hostility born of the feeling that the resolute opponents of the existing social and political order had been tricked into a poor bargain: the vote was a mess of pottage for which they had inadvertently bartered away their birthright, Lockean or otherwise.... [T]he vote delegitimizes more direct, intense and 'expressive' forms of political action that are more effective and more satisfying." Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 117.
4. Kenneth L. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1951).
5. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 41; Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, pp. 211 and 215; Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements*, chap. 5; Albert O. Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic," in his *A Propensity to Self-Subversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 34; and Mancur Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). Political theorist Brian Barry points out that the ideological spirit of a political crusade or movement has historically been able to overcome problems of free riding. Barry, "Review Article: 'Exit, Voice, and Loyalty,'" *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 4 (January 1974), p. 93.
6. Michael Walzer, the democratic socialist political theorist, describes the Hebrews in pharaonic Egypt as "state slaves" (like, Walzer says, the helots in ancient Sparta). He acknowledges that the ancient Hebrews were "victims...of the state, the absolute monarchy of the pharaohs.... Egyptian bondage was the bondage of a people to the arbitrary power of the state.... In Egypt, slavery was a kind of political rule." Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 25-26 and 30. On the importance of the "exit"-option concept of separation to the story of Exodus, see Aaron Wildavsky, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1984), pp. 77-81. Wildavsky also pointed to the importance of the "exit" option after the death of Solomon: "Only the ability of the northern tribes to secede prevented further abuse at the hands of Solomon's successors." Wildavsky, p. 237 (n. 34).
7. See Bernard Bailyn, *The Barbarous Years: The Peopling of British North America: The Conflict of Civilizations, 1600-1675* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), pp. 321-416; Rosalind J. Beiler, "Dissenting Religious Communication Networks and European Migration, 1660-1710," in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, eds., *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 210-236; Nick Bunker, *Making Haste from Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims and their World, a New History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), pp. 164-201 (centrality of concept of separation) and 21-231 (reasons for leaving the Netherlands); Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs, *Strangers and Pilgrims, Travellers and Sojourners: Leiden and the Foundations of Plymouth Plantation* (Plymouth, MA: General Society of Mayflower Descendants, 2009), pp. 154 (guild membership for citizens of Leiden only), 234-248 (centrality of concept of separation), and 461-626 (reasons for leaving the Netherlands); Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Story of the "Old Colony" of New Plymouth, 1620-1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 4-5, 8 (treasonable illegality of separation from Church of England), 8 (centrality of concept of separation), 9-10 (illegality of emigration from England to the Netherlands), 10 (restricted guild membership in Leiden), and 14 (religious utopian reasons for leaving the Netherlands); Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 3 (reasons for the separatist Plymouth Pilgrims leaving England), 5-6, and 11-14 (reasons for the Massachusetts-Bay Puritans leaving England); and Arlin M. Adams and Charles J. Emmerich, *A Nation Dedicated to Religious Liberty: The Constitutional Heritage of the Religion Clauses* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 4-5.
8. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 226, and Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic," p. 13. See also Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. and trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), I 2.9, pp. 268-271, and Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).

workers who came from Europe and Asia through Ellis Island in New York harbor and Angel Island in San Francisco in the 19th century and the early 20th century.⁹ Hirschman says that this mass migration from Europe to the New World was an instance of exit being used as “an avenue of self-defense” for the “voiceless.”¹⁰ We have blacks who moved North before and after slavery ended.¹¹ We have escapees, refugees, and exiles from national socialism and communism.¹²

As Hirschman himself noted, political scientist Samuel E. Finer wrote a superb essay which pointed out that the absolutist states of 17th-century and 18th-century Europe were “obsessed by the demon of exit” and how to prevent it.¹³

America itself has long been a place of refuge and the prospect of losing skilled and productive citizens to America has long been recognized as something of a check on despotic or predatory governments elsewhere. Hirschman himself quotes the overly optimistic French Enlightenment-era economist Turgot:

The asylum which [the American republic] opens to the oppressed of all nations must console the earth. The ease with which it will now be possible to take advantage of this situation, and thus

to escape from the consequences of a bad government will oblige the European governments to be just and enlightened.¹⁴

The modern-era “brain drain” into the United States is just the most recent manifestation of that effect.

Exit usually has lower costs than voice for the individual. But here we should add the limiting case: Exit can have high costs when individuals are loyal to institutions—thus the third component in Hirschman’s trio of “exit,” “voice,” and “loyalty.”¹⁵

With exit, you can (at less cost than the long slog of politics entails) turn to a different provider or move to a different place (sometimes quite nearby, sometimes afar). Such a move is sometimes called “voting with your feet.”

“Loyalty” can be strong in politics, but it can also be lost.¹⁶ Think of the American Revolution and the breaking away of the United States from the British Empire.

America’s History of Local Engagement in the Public School System

In the 1830s, when Alexis de Tocqueville visited America from France, he found Americans

9. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, pp. 225–226. See also Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1973).

10. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 243.

11. For a discussion of the “exit” option for slaves of running away and the costs for slaveholders of policing to prevent runaways, the costs of recapturing fugitive slaves, and the effect of these costs on the viability of African American slavery, see Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Open Court, 2014). See also David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 130–40; Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850–1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). On opposition to fugitive-slave rendition in the antebellum North, see Thomas D. Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780–1861* (Baltimore, MD: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 1974). On the self-emancipation of slaves through the “exit” option of running away to the area behind Union lines after the Emancipation Proclamation, see Ira Berlin, “Who Freed the Slaves: Emancipation and Its Meaning,” in David W. Blight and Brooks R. Simpson, eds., *Union and Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997). On efforts to block the “exit”-option geographical mobility of job-seeking African Americans after emancipation, see David E. Bernstein, *Only One Place of Redress: African Americans, Labor Regulations, and the Courts from Reconstruction to the New Deal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). On the Great Migration, see Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), and Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010).

12. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 261, and Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic,” pp. 9–44.

13. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, pp. 246 (n. 2) and 253, and Samuel E. Finer, “State-Building, State Boundaries and Border Control: An Essay on Certain Aspects of the First Phase of State-Building in Western Europe, Considered in the Light of Rokkan-Hirschman Model,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 13 (August–October 1974), pp. 79–126.

14. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 255 (n. 22).

15. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, pp. 16, 39–40, and 77–79, and Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 214.

16. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, pp. 82–83.

intensely loyal to, and participating in, their public schools. These Americans saw the public schools as extensions of their families and neighborhoods. They viewed public schools—even though public schools in those days were usually fee-charging—as akin to voluntarily supported charities and as part of what Tocqueville then, and social scientists today, call “civil society.”¹⁷ The public in those days saw public schools as something quite separate from distant political elites in faraway state and federal capitals.

Describing 19th-century American society, Tocqueville spoke of township school committees that were deeply rooted in their local communities.¹⁸ In those days, state control of local public education took the form of an annual report sent by the township committee to the state capital.¹⁹ The state could require that there be public schools, but the local township built the school, paid for it, and directed it.²⁰ There was no national control.

Large sums (much of it taxed from laborers and farmers) were spent by these school committees, and their efforts reflected, Tocqueville thought, a widespread American desire to provide basic schooling as a route to opportunity and advancement. He admired the fact that in self-activating America one might easily chance upon farmers who had not waited for official permission from above but were putting aside their plows “to deliberate upon the project of a public school.”²¹

Tocqueville feared that if ever Americans neglected their participation in associations or

local government entities like school committees, the tendency would be toward a loss of liberty and surrender to what Tocqueville called the “mild despotism.”²²

The Perils of Centralization of Information

In *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville*, Roger Boesche, a noted Alexis de Tocqueville scholar, writes about the perils of “centralization of information.” Boesche says that, according to Tocqueville, once centralization of information is “entrenched,” once a democratic nation relies on a few sources for information, then “freedom of opinion” becomes “illusory.” For Tocqueville, this problem is peculiar to democratic regimes, and perhaps their greatest challenge.

Under these centralized conditions, opinion does not develop freely, but is “hierarchically formed.” “Centralized sources tend to give everyone the same opinion.”²³ Among Tocqueville’s greatest fears for democracy was conformity of thought of its citizens. Tocqueville was thinking specifically of a nationalization of the newspaper industry, but his insight applies to education as well.

Today, many years after Tocqueville, public sentiment about the public schools still retains much of the feeling of “loyalty” that people had in Tocqueville’s day, and the current passion for local control is fueled by that feeling. Yet, increasingly, parents and taxpayers view the public schools as an

17. Tocqueville, pp. II Notice, 399; II 2.5, 489. See also Harvey C. Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 25; James T. Schleifer, *The Chicago Companion to Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 108; Roger Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny: From Plato to Arendt* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 206; and Williamson M. Evers, “Obama Should Heed Tocqueville on Schools,” *Education Next*, October 20, 2011, <http://educationnext.org/obama-should-heed-tocqueville-on-schools/> (accessed May 11, 2015).

18. Tocqueville, I 1.5, p. 60.

19. Tocqueville, pp. I 1.5, 69 (n. 20) and I 1.5, 78 (n. 40).

20. Tocqueville, I 1.5, p. 63.

21. Tocqueville, I 1.5, p. 60.

22. Tocqueville, II 4.6, pp. 662–665; Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 41 and 77–80; Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom*, Background ed. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010), pp. 173–175; Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, pp. 201–236; and Ralph Raico, *The Place of Religion in the Liberal Philosophy of Constant, Tocqueville, and Lord Acton* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1970), p. 67.

23. Roger Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 178, and Tocqueville, II 2.3, pp. 176–178 and II 2.6, pp. 494–495. See also Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, pp. 220–221 and 234; Jack Lively, *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 145–148; Robert A. Nisbet, “Many Tocquevilles,” *The American Scholar*, Vol. 46 (Winter 1977), pp. 66–67; and Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), pp. 129–131. On Tocqueville’s criticism of administrative centralization in general, see James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pt. 4; John Marini, “Centralized Administration and the ‘New Despotism,’” in Ken Masugi, ed., *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991), pp. 255–286; and Lively, pp. 127–182.

unresponsive, declining bureaucracy carrying out edicts from distant capitals.²⁴ In sum, regarding the public schools, we as members of the public are faced with the situation that Hirschman addressed: We are dealing with a poorly performing institution—an institution that is supplying services which are perceived to be disintegrating.

The Monopoly Problem

A social scientist like Hirschman would point out that we can make use of exit or voice or a combination of them to respond to the deteriorating situation in a declining institution, namely widespread ineffective instruction in the public schools. In this time of perceived inadequacy, Common Core came to the fore—precisely at a time when social scientists say that civically active individuals care much more than they usually do about exit, voice, and loyalty.

But the Common Core designers have taken the existing bureaucracy and increased its centralization and uniformity. By creating the Common Core national curriculum content standards, behind closed doors, the designers have increased the alienation of the public from schools as institutions worthy of loyalty. The general public had no voice in creating or adopting Common Core.²⁵

In times of a deteriorating public service, however, there is another approach: offering better exit options. In the case of schools, this would mean greater availability of parental choice. The choice dynamic would lead to rejuvenation of schools, greater inventiveness of education providers, and better service options for parents and children. But

the strategy of the Common Core's proponents is suppression of an important exit option; it is to create an almost inescapable national cartel.²⁶

This design of no-exit, no-voice is not that unusual historically. Often clampdowns on exit and voice that are orchestrated by governments occur together. Hirschman observes that since exit and voice are basic and complementary components of constitutional liberty, we should not be surprised that “on the whole” they have been “enlarged or restricted jointly.”²⁷

People will seek out exit and voice even when there are restrictions—and sometimes governments will allow such efforts and sometimes they will not. For example, people will choose to exit even when there are government-sponsored monopolies (when there is not full government control of substitutes). In fact, the intellectual spark which led to the writing of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* was Hirschman's puzzling over the government-owned railroads in Nigeria. Hirschman recognized that although these government enterprises delivered poor service, they would go on functioning (supported by funds from the taxpayer), even if some customers moved from shipping by public rail to shipping on private trucks.²⁸

Indeed, Hirschman himself recognized that the American public schools were not particularly different from the Nigerian government's railways. Public schools are likewise—because of government support—able to survive even when they are losing pupils.

This monopoly problem in public school education was precisely why economist Milton Friedman

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24. Neal McCluskey, *Feds in the Classroom* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), and Michael S. Joyce and William A. Schambra, “A New Civic Life” in Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 1996), p. 17. On the perils of ruling from distant capitals, even if it be granted that such rule is more administratively efficient, see Tocqueville, I 1.5, p. 88. See also Robert A. Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers: Community and Conflict in Western Thought* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1973), p. 427; James W. Caesar, “Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual,” in Ken Masugi, *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, pp. 311–315; and Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 24.
 25. Joy Pullmann, “Five People Wrote ‘State-Led’ Common Core,” The Heartland Institute, June 7, 2013, <http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2013/06/07/five-people-wrote-state-led-common-core> (accessed May 11, 2015), and Sandra Stotsky, “Common Core's Invalid Validation Committee,” paper presented at a conference at University of Notre Dame, September 9, 2013, <http://www.uaedreform.org/downloads/2013/11/common-cores-invalid-validation-committee.pdf> (accessed May 11, 2015).
 26. Lenore T. Ealy, “Common Core: A Tocquevillean Education or Cartel Federalism?” *The Freeman*, May 14, 2013, <http://fee.org/freeman/detail/common-core-a-tocquevillean-education-or-cartel-federalism> (accessed May 11, 2015).
 27. Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic,” pp. 14 and 25.
 28. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, pp. vii and 44–46. For a criticism of Hirschman's analysis of the Nigerian railway situation, see Gordon Tullock, review of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, *Journal of Finance*, Vol. 25 (December 1970), pp. 1194–1195. Hirschman eventually revised his prediction that exit from public schools via opportunity scholarships would attenuate “voice.” He then speculated that the availability of opportunity scholarships would enhance parents' sense of power and would lead them to exercise their “voice” with less inhibition than before. Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic,” p. 14.

called for opportunity scholarships (also known as vouchers) to create a powerful exit option.²⁹ But even in the absence of opportunity scholarships and charter schools, we had some exit options in the past because of competitive federalism.³⁰

Competitive Federalism

Competitive federalism is horizontal competition among jurisdictions.³¹ We know that it works in education at the inter-district level. Economist Caroline Hoxby studied metropolitan areas with many school districts (like Boston) versus metropolitan areas contained within one large district (like Miami or Los Angeles). She found that student performance is better in areas with competing multiple districts, where parents at the same income level can move—at the margin—from one locality to another nearby, in search of a better education for their children.³²

We have seen competitive federalism work in education at the inter-state level. Back in the 1950s, Mississippi and North Carolina were at the same low level. Over the years, North Carolina tried a number of educational experiments and moved well ahead of Mississippi. We have likewise seen Massachusetts move up

over the years from mediocre to stellar. (Though under Common Core, Massachusetts is sinking back again.)³³

A goal, however, of those who promote Common Core is to suppress competitive federalism. Common Core's curriculum guidelines and its rules are the governing rules of a cartel. The goal of Common Core's designers and proponents has been curricular uniformity, as opposed to having a variety of state and local curriculums.

They and their federal facilitators wanted a cartel that would override competitive federalism and shut down the curriculum alternatives that federalism would allow. The new Common Core-aligned national tests, whose development was supported with federal funds, are to police the cartel. All long-lasting cartels must have a mechanism for policing and punishing those seen as "shirkers" and "chiselers," in other words, those who want to escape the cartel's strictures or who prefer increased flexibility.

The College Board is now led by David Coleman, one of Common Core's chief architects, and is being used to corral Catholic schools, other private schools, and homeschooling parents into the cartel.³⁴ The proponents of Common Core have now

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29. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 16, and Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 211. See also Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," in Robert A. Solo, ed., *Economics and the Public Interest* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 123-144, and Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), chap. 6. See also John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990).
 30. Michael Greve, *The Upside-Down Constitution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Thomas R. Dye, *American Federalism: Competition Among Governments* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990); and George Thomas, *The Madisonian Constitution* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). For an analysis of Common Core in terms of competitive federalism, see Williamson M. Evers, "Against the Common Core," *Defining Ideas*, September 4, 2014, <http://www.hoover.org/research/against-common-core> (accessed May 11, 2015).
 31. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 211; Charles M. Tiebout, "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditure," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 64 (October 1956), pp. 416-424; and George J. Stigler, "The Tenable Range of Functions of Local Government," in Joint Economic Committee, *Federal Expenditure Policy for Economic Growth and Stability* (Washington DC: Joint Economic Committee, 1957), pp. 213-219.
 32. Caroline M. Hoxby, "Does Competition among Public Schools Benefit Students and Taxpayers?" *American Economic Review*, Vol. 90 (2000), pp. 1209-1238. See also Richard E. Wagner and Warren E. Weber, "Competition, Monopoly and the Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas," *Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol. 18 (December 1975), pp. 661-684.
 33. Jim Stergios and Charles Chieppo, "Massachusetts Does It Better: How Washington Is Undermining the Bay State's High Education Standards," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2010; James Stergios, Charles Chieppo, and Jamie T. Gass, "The Massachusetts Exception," *The City Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer 2012); and Charles Chieppo and Jamie Gass, "Report: Worse than Stagnant," *Telegram & Gazette* (Worcester, MA), December 11, 2014.
 34. Tamar Lewin, "Backer of Common Core School Curriculum Is Chosen to Lead College Board," *The New York Times*, May 16, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/16/education/david-coleman-to-lead-college-board.html?_r=0 (accessed May 11, 2015); Jason Tomassini, "New College Board President to Seek Common Core-SAT Link," *Education Week*, May 16, 2012, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/marketplacek12/2012/05/new_college_board_president_has_common_core_background.html (accessed May 11, 2015); Brittany Corona, "Common Core: Homeschoolers Face New Questions on College Admissions," *The Daily Signal*, June 23, 2013, <http://dailysignal.com/2013/06/23/common-cores-nationalizing-tentacles-sat-act-and-ged-alignment/>; and Cardinal Newman Society, "10 Facts Every Catholic Should Know About the Common Core," *The Renewal Report*, Summer 2014, <http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.org/Portals/0/Mail/Renewal%20Report/pdf%20for%20web%20FinFi.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2015). See also Emmett McGoarty and Jane Robbins, "Saving the Uncommon Core of Catholic Education," *Crisis Magazine*, May 17, 2013, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2013/saving-the-uncommon-core-of-catholic-education> (accessed May 20, 2015), and Gerard V. Bradley, letter to Catholic Bishops on Common Core, October 16, 2013, <http://heartland.org/policy-documents/letter-catholic-bishops-common-core> (accessed May 12, 2015).

established a clearinghouse for authorized teaching materials to try to close off one of the remaining avenues for escape.³⁵

The “Race to the Bottom” Myth

Central to the rhetoric and rationale used by the advocates of Common Core on education reform was the idea that state performance standards were already on a downward slide and that, without nationalization, standards would inexorably continue on a “race to the bottom.”³⁶ The name given to the Obama Administration’s signature school reform effort, the Race to the Top program, reflects this belief. The idea is that to prevent states from following the supposed natural dynamic of a “race to the bottom,” the federal government needs to step in and lead a “race to the top.”³⁷

The evidence, however, does not support the claim of a “race to the bottom.”³⁸ For policymakers, the logic of pursuing a race to the bottom does not make sense either. While providers of public education certainly face the temptation to do what might look like taking the easy way out by letting academic standards slip, there is also countervailing pressure in the direction of higher standards (especially, as long as there are competing standards in other states).

If policymakers and education officials let content standards slip, low standards will damage the state’s reputation for having a trained workforce. Such a drop in standards will even damage the policymakers’ own reputations.

In 2007, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute looked empirically at state performance standards over time

in a study called “The Proficiency Illusion.” The study showed that while states had a variety of performance standards (as would be expected in a federal system), the supposed race to the bottom was not happening.³⁹ The proponents of Common Core are wrong (or, sometimes, even intentionally misleading) in their claims that state performance standards were inevitably and everywhere on a downward slide.

Why is this important? Because a principal argument for national curriculum content standards is that without nationalization there will be a race to the bottom and that only national standards can reverse a supposedly already existing slide. But the facts suggest otherwise. This topples a principal argument for national standards.

To some extent with Common Core, federal officials have commandeered state curriculum content standards and tests and substituted national standards and tests; to some extent, some state officials embraced the national standards and testing cartel as a relief from political pressure within their state and a relief from competitive pressure from other states.

The scholarly literature in social science says that officials in sub-national governments may well seek centralization in order to impose homogeneity (at their level of government) and thus to tamp down interjurisdictional competition.⁴⁰

Richard A. Epstein and Mario Loyola write that as the distinction in law between local and national activities has eroded, federal and state officials have an incentive “to collude in blocking competition.”

35. Liana Heitin, “Common-Core Textbooks To Receive Online Ratings,” *EducationWeek*, August 20, 2014.

36. Cindy Brown and Elena Rocha, “The Case for National Standards, Accountability, and Fiscal Equity,” Center for American Progress, November 8, 2005, p. 1, and Maris A. Vinovskis, *From A Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind: National Education Goals and the Creation of Federal Education Policy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009), p. 219.

37. For critics of the supposed natural dynamic of a race to the bottom in policy fields other than education, see Jonathan H. Adler, “Interstate Competition and the Race to the Top,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (March 2, 2012), pp. 89 and 96-97; Scott R. Saleska and Kirsten H. Engel, “Facts Are Stubborn Things: An Empirical Reality Check in the Theoretical Debate Over the Race-to-the-Bottom in State Environmental Standard-Setting,” *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Vol. 8 (1998), pp. 55-86; and John Ferejohn and Barry R. Weingast, eds., *The New Federalism: Can The States Be Trusted?* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1997).

38. Adler, “Interstate Competition”; Saleska and Engel, “Facts Are Stubborn Things”; and Ferejohn and Weingast, *The New Federalism*.

39. See Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Michael J. Petrilli, foreword to John Cronin, Michael Dahlin, Deborah Adkins, and G. Gage Kingsbury, “The Proficiency Illusion,” Thomas B. Fordham Institute, October 2007, p. 4, <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/theproficiencyillusion.html> (accessed May 20, 2015). This study and a 2009 Fordham study, “The Accountability Illusion,” stressed that this variety of performance standards (that would be expected in a federal system) meant that a school that was deemed to be doing well in Mississippi would probably not be deemed to be doing well in Massachusetts. In 1997, the Clinton Administration made equivalent claims of a race to the bottom in its time. See John F. Jennings, *Why National Standards and Tests? Politics and the Quest for Better Schools* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), pp. 177-178.

40. Richard B. McKenzie and Robert J. Staaf, “Revenue Sharing and Monopoly Government,” *Public Choice*, Vol. 33 (1978), pp. 93-97.

The effect can all too easily be—when state and federal education officials, for example, make use of this tempting ploy—“to eliminate the discipline” that programmatic and accountability competition would “impose on multiple governments.” That competition would have had a chance to work in a true federalist system “when each is confined to its distinct sphere of authority.” But if state and federal officials collude, they “replace” competition between the states (in this case, in educational offerings) with an “anti-competitive cartel.”⁴¹

Common Core Stymies Competition, Undermines Exit, and Silences Voice

Nationalizing standards and tests would, according to this analysis, eliminate them as differentiated school-reform instruments that could be used by states in competition over educational attainment among the states. Sonny Perdue (Governor of Georgia at the time Common Core was created) did not like comparisons of the low-performing students of his state with students in other states that had different standards from Georgia’s.⁴² He became the lead governor in bringing the National Governors Association (NGA) into the national standards effort.⁴³

(In 2013, the governors’ association acted in similar fashion to create a cartel of states in order to suppress competitive federalism and make online retailers collect taxes from out-of-state customers.⁴⁴)

Common Core undermines the “exit” option and undermines competitive federalism. Indeed, in part, it was designed to do so. It likewise evaded and negated the voice option during the adherence process—and continues to do so. The designers of Common Core wanted nationwide uniformity. States have to adhere to the Common Core in toto because of boilerplate memorandums of understanding. A few topics can be added, but none can be subtracted or moved to a different grade.

Thus, by design there is no way to cure the perceived substantive ills of Common Core—for example, some would say, “multiple strategies” arithmetic; using the “rigid motions” approach to solving problems of similar and congruent triangles; or too much “informational text” in English literature. States under Common Core are not allowed to take anything (no matter how flawed) out of the standards, and the national tests will test each topic in the full array of standards at the grade level at which that topic is listed.

41. Richard A. Epstein and Mario Loyola, “By the Roots,” *National Review*, July 30, 2012, pp. 15-17.

42. Perdue was governor of Georgia from 2003 to 2011. There were preliminary meetings on national standards beginning in 2006. The Common Core initiative was formally launched in 2009. The Common Core national standards themselves were released in 2010. The news conference announcing the release was held at Peachtree Ridge High School in Suwanee, Georgia, to give recognition to Perdue’s central role. He was, at the time, co-chair of the Center for Best Practices of the National Governors Association. The center developed the Common Core standards together with the Council of Chief State School Officers.

43. Dane Linn, “The Role of Governors,” in Frederick M. Hess and Michael Q. McShane, eds., *Common Core Meets Education Reform: What It All Means for Politics, Policy, and the Future of Schooling* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), p. 39. The Georgia Public Policy Foundation writes: “Common Core...brought at least 37 state standards into close alignment with Georgia. This critical mass means tests, textbooks and other instructional materials are now likely to be more closely aligned with Georgia’s standards.” See Georgia Public Policy Foundation, “Background and Analysis of the Common Core State Standards As They Relate to Georgia,” August 2013, p. 12. See also Bill Crane, “Sonny Perdue’s Non-Legacy,” *Georgia Trend*, January 2011, <http://www.georgiatrend.com/January-2011/Georgia-View-Sonny-Perdues-Non-Legacy/> (accessed May 20, 2015), and Reid Wilson, “The Republican Case for Common Core,” *GovBeat* (web log), *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2013/08/23/the-republican-case-for-common-core/> (accessed May 20, 2015). There were certainly other states that had lower curriculum content expectations than the 2004 Georgia Performance Standards. During 2009-2011, Georgia had the lowest expectations of student performance on state tests of any state in the country. Paul E. Peterson and Peter Kaplan, “Despite Common Core, States Still Lack Common Standards,” *Education Next*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 2013), p. 49, <http://educationnext.org/despite-common-core-states-still-lack-common-standards/> (accessed May 20, 2015).

44. Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, said, “The genius of America is to have the fifty states compete to provide the best government at the lowest cost. The NGA is fighting to establish a cartel in order to avoid competition which would lead to better, less expensive government.” Quoted in John Kartch, “In Push for Internet Sales Tax, NGA Accuses Its Chairman of Presiding Over a ‘Tax Haven,’” *Americans for Tax Reform*, April 26, 2013. Richard A. Epstein and Mario Loyola write: “Officials in regulation-heavy and tax-heavy states have an enormous incentive to collude with their fellows in other states to form coalitions...aimed at imposing a high level of regulation and taxation on everyone.... [Cooperative federalism] is biased in favor of producing the highest level of overall government control and economic extraction that is politically sustainable—exactly the opposite of the competitive federalism of the original Constitution.” *National Affairs*, No. 20 (Summer 2014), p. 16.

There is no feedback loop and no process to consider and put in place proposed changes.⁴⁵ Any proposed nationwide fixes would have to be negotiated between the NGA and the Council of Chief State School Officers jointly and each of the adhering states. Such a process is prohibitively difficult to put into practice. Therefore, frustrated constituents who have complaints about the merits of Common Core have no place to exercise their voice in a way that would lead to repair or—what Hirschman would call—“recuperation.” Instead, critics are driven to oppose the curriculum content of Common Core as a whole.⁴⁶

But as Lenore T. Ealy writes, “regardless of the merit” of the Common Core national standards, “it still matters...whether there are rights of exit.”⁴⁷ The policymakers of this malign utopia forgot a few things. They forgot that the desire for voice—the desire for political action—can become particularly intense when people are faced with the prospect of “nowhere to exit to.”⁴⁸ They forgot that hemming in parents and teachers would create a demand for political change, alternatives, and escape routes.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Alternatives to the national tests have arisen. Organized parents are pressing for repeal of Common Core and the dropping of the national tests that support it.

Some states are already rejecting the national tests. States are also struggling to escape the Common Core cartel itself. Parents are opting out of the Common Core tests. There has been what Hirschman calls an “intimate fusion of exit and voice.”⁵⁰

By trying to block exit and deny voice, the designers of Common Core and the policymakers who put it in place have caused blowback: A large parent-, teacher-, and community-based movement has arisen to oppose Common Core and its national tests.

Public response to the imposition of Common Core may bring about what Hirschman calls “a joint grave-digging act.” As of this writing, exit and voice are working hand in glove against Common Core. Perhaps, to use another of Hirschman’s metaphors, “exit” and “voice” will “explode jointly” and “bring down the whole edifice.”⁵¹

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45. Checker Finn and Michael J. Petrilli acknowledge this problem: “How will this Common Core effort be governed over the long term? Who will ‘own’ the standards ten or twenty years from now? Who will be responsible for updating them?... [T]he Common Core standards and forthcoming assessments are intended to alter what American schools teach and what children learn—and to do so in thousands of districts and millions of classrooms. How this is governed over the long haul matters a great deal. Yet...we find no suitable mechanism in place.... There are bound to be some glitches and inconsistencies in the Common Core standards and, even if there aren’t, they’ll need periodic updates. (David Conley calls the current standards “version 1.0.”)... Who will make these decisions?” Finn and Petrilli, “Now What?” pp. 2, 10 (emphasis in original), http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/Now%20What%20-%20Oct%202010_8.pdf (accessed May 20, 2015).
46. Compare Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic,” pp. 37 and 41.
47. Ealy, “Common Core: A Tocquevillean Education or Cartel Federalism?”
48. Hirschman writes: “[P]ower grows not only out of the ability to exit, but also out of voice and that voice will be wielded with special energy and dedication by those who have nowhere to exit to.” Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, p. 228. For application of this insight to communist countries’ emigration policies, see Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing*, pp. 226–227, and Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic.”
49. James Stergios, “We Now Have a Smart Exit Strategy from Common Core,” Pioneer Institute, August 27, 2014, <http://pioneerinstitute.org/news/we-now-have-a-smart-exit-strategy-from-common-core/> (accessed May 12, 2015), and Lindsey Burke, “A National Education Standards Exit Strategy for States,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 3437 (December 21, 2011), <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/12/a-national-education-standards-exit-strategy-for-states>. For a discussion of how (in general) states can push back against federal policies, see John Dinan, “How States Talk Back to Washington and Strengthen American Federalism,” Cato Institute *Policy Analysis* No. 744, December 3, 2013, <http://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/how-states-talk-back-washington-strengthen-american-federalism> (accessed May 12, 2015).
50. Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic,” p. 38.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 25 and 43. See also Luca Meldolesi, *Discovering the Possible: The Surprising World of Albert O. Hirschman* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 318.