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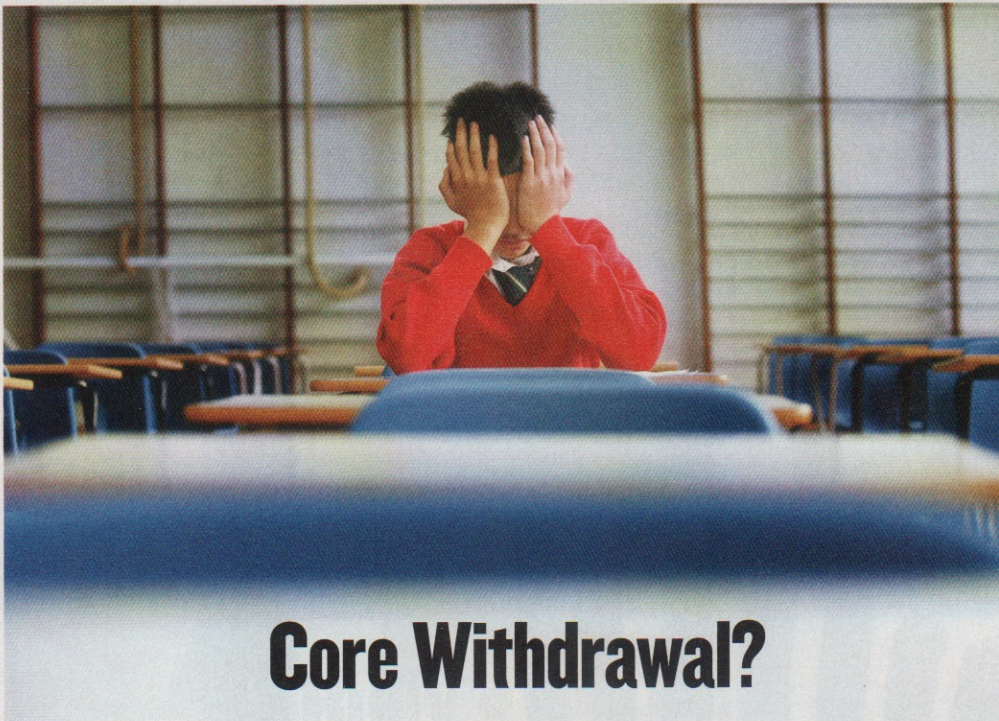
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Core Withdrawal?

Some states seem to be reconsidering their Common Core commitments. **NANCY MANN JACKSON**

ALABAMA'S MOVE in February to withdraw from both of the groups designing assessments for the Common Core, PARCC and Smarter Balanced, raised red flags across the country. Alabama's pullout echoed Utah's, which withdrew from Smarter Balanced last year. And in Indiana, former education commissioner Tony Bennett was denied reelection last November, largely due to his support for the new Core standards.

Leaders on both sides of the issue expect that these cracks in state support for the standards may grow.

"We will see more states reconsider their position to implement the Common Core, especially as the costs of adoption and the process of training teachers become clearer," says Michael Horn, cofounder and executive director of Innosight

Institute, a nonpartisan think tank. "The issue of online assessments might also cause some states to reconsider their position."

In Alabama, pulling out of the national testing consortia doesn't mean the state is abandoning the Common Core. The state's department of education "has decided to go in another direction," says Gloria Turner, director of assessments and accountability. "We are currently implementing the Alabama

'A splintering will occur, with multiple outcomes, but we'll see most states adopt the Core.'

—Michael Horn, cofounder, Innosight Institute

College- and Career-Ready Standards, which include the Common Core standards and Alabama-specific standards."

Horn expects we'll see "a handful of states fully exit the Common Core in the months ahead for a variety of reasons, which may include anti-testing fears and a fear of nationalizing education." Opponents of the standards have recently focused their lobbying and public relations efforts in Colorado, Idaho, and Indiana.

Full-scale adoption may not happen anytime soon, but advocates say that even partial adoption is movement in a positive direction.

"I think a splintering will occur, with multiple outcomes," Horn says, "but most states will adopt the Core with traditional testing and follow the lead from the consortia of assessment designers. This would still be an improvement from where we've been."

DISCOVERING COMMON GROUND

Among the growing group of activists pushing back against the Core, many come from opposite ends of the political spectrum and find themselves in the same camp for the first time. Here are three areas of common ground.

1. "TOP-DOWN" ADOPTION

"On both the right and left, some oppose the top-down, elitist way in which the new standards were adopted," says Bob Schaeffer, public education director at FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing. "The initial wave of acceptance was fueled by a strong promotional campaign coupled with federal government incentives. To prevent rollback, proponents will have to show that the Core is somehow different than the previous remedies for the nation's educational problems."

2. TESTING OVERLOAD

The Common Core involves competency-based, or on-demand, testing, which proponents say will build more accountability into the system and give a truer picture of students' actual learning. Opponents say more testing is not the answer. "Many new tests will be required without an appreciable improvement.... The two consortiums designing Common Core tests must demonstrate the increase in the number of exams ... will improve school quality, not further undermine it," Schaeffer says.

3. INCOMPLETE RESOURCES

Some opponents may not disagree with the fundamental reasoning behind Common Core adoption. But they say their states or districts lack the necessary resources to meet the Core's rapid implementation schedule, including developing the new teaching materials and tests and the infrastructure to support them.