

# Four Bad Arguments Against Common Core

Alicia Burnette Whitley

As a high school English teacher, I am not a blind supporter of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). I do recognize that there are flaws inherent within any system of standardization. But some of the arguments I've heard are less than stellar.

Here are my favorites:

1. "*The Common Core Curriculum is...*" Stop right there. The Common Core isn't a curriculum but a set of standards. Wake County has its own curricula, and my course syllabus and pacing guides are my own. Furthermore, how I teach what I teach is up to me. I'm not required to teach specific texts -- the standards suggest teaching "Shakespeare as well as other authors." And whether teaching Macbeth or Hamlet, Common Core is only concerned that I help my students meet the standard.

*"Whatever. The Common Core Standards, then, force all teachers to teach a certain way."*

Again, I must disagree. In my experience, we have been encouraged to include more informational texts, which is cool, and we have worked with the county to develop performance based tasks as evaluation tools rather than multiple choice tests. Also cool. My students find these things difficult. They also find them rewarding.

*"Why will I need to know Hamlet in ten years?"*  
they ask.

"Um...because Hamlet is awesome and will help you appreciate literature and gain cultural literacy..." is usually my answer. "*Why will I need to know how to write a resume?*" or "*When will I ever use these strategies for understanding a political speech or argument?*" are not questions I get often.



2. and 3. "*The standards are dumbing down the kids*"/ "*The standards are too hard for the kids*"

According to [Glenn Beck's website](#), "Many teachers, educators, and parents believe Common Core is dumbing down America's children." At the same time, some find the standards too hard. In [a piece for WUNC](#), [Reema Khrais](#) featured parent [Andrea Dillon](#) who "says Common Core is not developmentally appropriate for her son. 'Just for an example, they're doing persuasive writing pieces in first-grade where he has to have an opening sentence, three supporting sentences and a closing argument for a text he's read, and he has to do that on his own – he's seven,' she said."

So which is it? Too simple or too difficult?

In the case of the first grade, the [writing standards stipulate that students have "guidance and support from adults"](#) while learning to write, not on their own. But specific standard arguments aside, this is not a Common Core problem. The fact that we have any

## Four Bad Arguments Against Common Core

standards at all necessarily means that some kids will find the standards “too easy” and some will find them “too hard.” That’s what happens when one creates a standard. It’s my job as a teacher to push the students who have surpassed the standards forward, and to work hard to bring the kids below standard up to par.

The point is that no “standard” is going to be just right for all of the kids all of the time. This is why we differentiate; we tailor assignments to meet students at their level. Getting rid of the Common Core State Standards would do nothing to solve this problem, mainly because North Carolina adopted the CCSS to replace our own - which were deemed too simple, “dumbed down”, and not adequate enough to prepare our students to compete nationally or globally. Speaking in support of the standards, the [NC Chamber, a nonpartisan voice for advocating businesses](#), calls them “high, globally competitive standards that North Carolina students will need to compete for the jobs of tomorrow.” [Choruses of NC leaders](#) have also voiced their support, something that didn’t happen with the old standards.

### 4. [“Getting rid of Common Core will help with the whole standardized testing situation.”](#)

[A great article by Rethinking Schools](#) condemns the Pearson Inc.-developed Common Core tests. It goes on to present a horror story of a testing situation, reporting that “Students reported feeling overstressed and underprepared—meeting the tests with shock, anger, tears, and anxiety. Administrators requested guidelines for handling tests students had vomited on. Teachers and principals complained about the disruptive nature of the testing process and many parents encouraged their children to opt out.” And [teachers, parents, and school boards](#) are [making the news for protesting](#) these ridiculous tests.

Pretty cool. I also hate the amount of high stakes testing that we are doing.

But...

NC had high stakes testing well before the CCSS showed up, and I venture to guess that repealing those standards won’t get rid of testing hereafter. It seems to me that the fight isn’t about the standards but about the testing. Perhaps there should not be so many standardized tests. Perhaps teachers shouldn’t spend so much time training students for these tests. Certainly these tests should not represent such high stakes in a student’s academic career. Definitely these tests should not be used as a sole indicator of a teacher’s effectiveness. Either way, the argument that equates the standards with the testing is overlooking North Carolina’s educational history since 1993 - well before Gates got into the education game.

In the end, I respect a healthy dialogue about standards and I’m proud to be part of a dynamic community that believes passionately in doing what is best for our students. I do not doubt many on all sides of the controversy are thinking of the children, but I cannot see what a complete repeal of the Common Core State Standards – which have taken tons of money and time to implement – is going to do to solve many of the issues raised by opponents. As the [Academic Standards Review Commission meets](#) to begin reviewing the standards, I urge them to leave behind fallacious arguments and to address the real issues behind these complaints that are facing our students and our state.