



TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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Robert Scott
Commissioner

November 25, 2009

The Honorable John Cornyn
United States Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Cornyn:

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding recent efforts by the U. S. Department of Education (USDE) to adopt a national curriculum and testing system in the United States. This effort can be seen as a step toward a federal takeover of the nation's public schools.

As you are likely aware, a number of entities that develop and market education assessments and materials and several non-profits have banded together in an effort they have named the "Common Core Standards Initiative." I believe that the true intention of this effort is to establish one set of national education standards and national tests across the country. Originally sold to states as voluntary, states have now been told that participation in national standards and national testing would be required as a condition of receiving federal discretionary grant funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) administered by the USDE. The effort has now become a cornerstone of the Administration's education policy through the USDE's prioritization of adoption of national standards and aligned national tests in receiving federal funds. The Secretary of Education has already reserved \$650 million of ARRA funds for the production of these national tests.

In short, because Texas has chosen to preserve its sovereign authority to determine what is appropriate for Texas children to learn in its public schools, the state is now placed at a serious disadvantage in competing for its share of ARRA discretionary funding. Billed by Secretary Duncan as the "Race to the Top," (RTTT) it appears that the USDE is placing its desire for a federal takeover of public education above the interests of the 4.7 million schoolchildren in the state of Texas by setting two different starting lines – one for nearly every other state in the country and one for Texas.

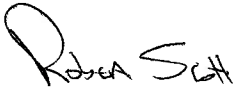
Texas has consistently maintained that states should retain their authority to determine the curriculum and testing requirements for their students. The elected Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) sets the standards Texas students are supposed to meet for each subject taught in the public school system. Texas law requires the direct participation of educators, parents, business and industry representatives, and employers in the development of the standards. Through this process, Texas has recently adopted college-ready math, English language arts, and science standards and will soon complete work on the social studies standards. The state has purchased new textbooks, created targeted professional development for our teachers, and developed new assessments aligned with these new standards. Joining the national standards and national testing movement would require Texas taxpayers to re-spend at least \$3 billion.

If the USDE has its way, Texas' process, along with every other state that has a similar process, will be negated. With the release of the RTTT application, it is clear that the first step toward nationalization of our schools has been put into place. I do not believe that the requirements will end with the RTTT; I believe that USDE will utilize the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to further the administration's federal takeover of public schools, including withholding billions of dollars from our disadvantaged and special education students.

Ronald Reagan once said, "I believe a case can be made that the decline in the quality of public school education began when federal aid to education became federal interference in education." Having the federal government use Washington-based special interest groups and vendors as proxy for the USDE in setting national curriculum standards and then using ARRA federal discretionary funds to develop national tests for every child in the nation represents unprecedented intrusiveness by the federal government into the personal lives of our children and their families.

I encourage and invite you to stand with me against national curriculum standards and national tests. The authority to determine what students in our public schools should learn properly resides with states, local school boards and parents. The federal government should not be engaging in activity that seeks to undermine our ability to determine what will be taught in our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Robert Scott
Commissioner of Education