

March 22, 2013

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
President

Michael J. Petrilli
Executive Vice President

Terrence R. Ryan
Vice President for
Ohio Programs & Policy

Amber M. Winkler
Vice President for Research

Tom Luna
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Idaho Department of Education
650 West State Street
Boise, ID 83720

Dear Superintendent Luna:

TRUSTEES

David P. Driscoll
Chester E. Finn, Jr.
Thomas A. Holton
Michael W. Kelly
Craig Kennedy
Rod Paige
David H. Ponzit
Caprice Young

TRUSTEES EMERITUS

Chester E. Finn (1918-2007)
Bruce Kovner
Bruno V. Manno
Diane Ravitch

As you know, I am the Executive Vice President of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a right-of-center education policy think tank in Washington, D.C. We promote education reforms of all stripes, with a particular focus on school choice and standards-based reform. I was honored to serve with you in the George W. Bush Administration, and our president, Chester Finn, served in the Reagan Administration. I am writing to urge you to stay the course with the Common Core standards.

Idaho's previous standards, especially in English, were significantly weaker than the Common Core. In our most recent review of state standards, in 2010, the Gem State earned a B in math and a mediocre C in English. Your math standards, though decent, suffered from a lack of clarity and rigor. And your English standards, which superficially treated many important English components, were unclear and repetitive in ways that made the progression of rigor hard to detect. In comparison, the Common Core standards earned an A-minus in math and a B-plus in English. Idaho raised the bar when it adopted the Common Core, and you would be unwise to lower it again, for two big reasons.

First, you have already invested time and money into implementing the new standards. They have momentum. Calling for a do-over would waste the millions of man hours already invested—and potentially cost the state of Idaho more money than proceeding with the Common Core. And Common Core implementation is not as expensive as some opponents have tried to argue. We at Fordham implemented a cost estimate and concluded that states can actually save money depending on how they implement the standards.

Second, if Idaho decides to opt out of the Common Core, you will be opting your teachers and students out of an opportunity to participate in the incredible

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wave of innovation that these standards are unleashing. It would be like sticking to a rotary phone while the whole world moves to smart phones and tablets. This innovation is the product of a huge amount of investment from other states, private foundations, and private companies, which has produced Common Core-aligned textbooks, e-books, professional development, and more. This innovation will open up a world of choices for students and families, and it will be aligned to the Common Core, not separate state standards.

As with all public policy decisions, there are trade-offs and risks associated with adopting the Common Core. To be sure, you had decent math standards in place before the Common Core came along. And by all means, the federal government has been heavy handed with this reform and deserves to be chastened. These standards started out as state standards, and they need to remain state standards. But don't let your frustration with President Obama lead you to lash out at the children of Idaho. The Common Core is the smartest path forward. That should be the only consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Petrilli", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael J. Petrilli

Executive Vice President