

## *Untried and Untrue: Common Core's Mechanization of Education*

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### **Abstract**

In 2013, according to National Public Radio, two-thirds of Americans had not heard of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). A year later, 80% knew about it, and 60% were opposed. The confluence between Big Business and Big Government support for CCSSI has fed growing opposition from parents and teachers across the political spectrum. While much debate concerns the standards' contents, this paper focuses on the mendacity used to justify CCSSI and the cronies pushing it.

Supporters claim CCSSI is state-led, internationally benchmarked, and based on the latest research, but it is not. In July 2009, \$4.35 billion in federal funding was made available to recession-shocked states through the Race to the Top program. States had to adopt CCSSI and join one of two approved testing consortia to participate. Before standards had even been written, 46 states and Washington, D.C. agreed to join. As of May 2014, only 26 states and D.C. remained in the program. Advocates say CCSSI is state-led and voluntary; critics say federal funding is bribery and intimidation.

Additionally, opponents worry about centralization and the collection of real-time data on students and teachers. Mandatory curriculum, textbooks, lesson plans, and Core-aligned tests remove teachers from heretofore-key elements of education. To many, the use of cameras and biofeedback devices on students to obtain fine-grained data is Orwellian. Critics fear such monitoring of classrooms will transform education from an art into an exercise in industrial-style Taylorism. We can do better.

Key words: Common Core, education reform, national testing, public education

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*[T]he species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed...Above...stands an immense and tutelary power... That power...would be like the authority of a parent if...its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood... [T]he supreme power...covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate...Such a power...does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd. — Tocqueville, 1840/1990, pp. 318-19*

*In the states which are ideologically self-conscious...the process of education is combined with agitation and regulation, so that the entire population lives under conditions approximating the psychological side of war...Education and propaganda merge into everlasting indoctrination...Education is to psychological warfare what a glacier is to an avalanche. The mind is to be in both cases captured, but the speed and techniques differ. — Linebarger, 1948/1954, p. 32*

No one familiar with government boondoggles is surprised to find misrepresentation, misdirection, and mendacity circling the public trough. Indeed, they are hallmarks of special interest projects that grant substantial benefits to a chosen few by imposing small costs on the many. We are inured to waste, fraud, and abuse in government programs ranging from defense contractors to daycare centers, from farm subsidies to Big Pharma. Usually, we remain willfully ignorant of the details of these sausage factories—we know something stinks but we disregard it because the stench does not follow us home. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is different because it directly affects our children. They spend every day with parents and teachers, so we cannot ignore the Core's negative effects as we might overlook other malfeasance. Parents do not want their children merely schooled, they want them educated and prepared for productive lives. Similarly, teachers do not strive to be assembly-line drones obeying crony consultants and bureaucrats who issue classroom edicts from afar; they want to use the reflective practice of teaching to help their students achieve their best. It is no shock, therefore, that parents and teachers rebel when faced with daily evidence that their children's needs are being sacrificed to an unaccountable Leviathan that empowers itself while reducing students to cogs in a machine. This paper traces the CCSSI's history, its Big Business/Big Government roots, the roles played by key organizations and people, and the ways in which data are misused to justify the enterprise. It behooves parents, teachers, and citizens of all political stripes to band together to protect children from this misbegotten mess masquerading as school reform.

Before delving into the Core's background, the author gratefully acknowledges and highly recommends two books and one organization that readers will find invaluable. An inspection copy of the first book, *Common ground on Common Core: Voices from across the political spectrum expose the realities of the Common Core State Standards*, was sent to the author in May 2015, by its editor, Kirsten Lombard. It is an anthology of superb essays by education experts covering every facet of the CCSSI. The book is unavailable in Japan and this paper benefitted greatly from her generous help. The second book, *The educator and the oligarch: A teacher challenges The Gates Foundation*, is by Anthony Cody, a National Board-certified science teacher

and self-described social activist from Oakland, California. He is the author of Education Week's "Living in Dialogue" blog, which featured his public debate with the Gates Foundation starting in 2012, much of it reprinted in his book. Finally, the Pioneer Institute is a privately funded Boston-based think tank devoted to non-partisan analysis of quality of life issues in Massachusetts. Since 2009, it has led the fight against Common Core's effort to seize control of K-12 education, publishing a scholarly series of white papers, many of which are cited below.

## **History**

The CCSSI officially began in 2009, but its pedigree is much longer. Fundamental transformation of American society via centralized control of education has been a dream since 1893 when progressives rejected the report of the Committee of Ten that recommended all students receive a high-quality liberal education. The committee assumed that: "1) rigorous study disciplines the mind; 2) this benefits all students; and 3) studying the cultural, scientific, and religious heritage of the nation adds value to the society and uplifts the community as a whole" (Sower, 2010, p. 9). Progressives preferred instead a differentiated curriculum whereby elite students would be prepared as the vanguard of the people while everyone else received vocational training. From 1910-1950, academic courses were cut 60% as "life-adjustment" classes increased "ten-fold" (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992, p. 108). Education fads like whole language instruction and invented spelling faded in and out of fashion. In 1989 and 2000, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) introduced "reform math" principles that failed disastrously "after lowering outcomes in every state that attempted" to implement them (Phelps & Milgram, 2014, p. 8). California adopted NCTM standards in 1992. "By 1996 the resulting problems had become so acute that a rebellion led by parents and the state's high tech industries forced the state to create new standards" (Phelps & Milgram, 2014, p. 8). Also in 1996, the National Governors Association (NGA) "and a roster of business leaders founded Achieve, Inc...in order to raise academic standards" (Vander Hart, 2014, p. 4). In 2001, President George W. Bush and Senator Ted Kennedy oversaw passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. "It mandated high-stakes testing and greater teacher accountability, but resulted instead in states lowering standards...[and] cheating scandals involving teachers" (Sower, 2014, p. 5). CCSSI was supposed to cure all that.

In 2007, the Gates Foundation and the Eli Broad Foundation contributed \$60 million to the 2008 political election cycle to promote "uniform American standards" (Vander Hart, 2014, p. 6). Also in 2007, two Chicago business partners, David Coleman and Jason Zimba, founded Student Achievement Partners (SAP) for the express purpose of developing national standards (Schneider, 2013). In 2008, the director of NGA's Educational Policy Division, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, created a bipartisan taskforce of governors, educators, and CEOs to suggest changes in math and science education. The Ur-document for CCSSI was the taskforce report. After it was issued, the NGA, the Council of Chief State Schools Officers (CCSSO), and Achieve, Inc. "came together to make sure the goals of the report became reality" (Bidwell, 2014). These groups joined with SAP and for the next two years met behind closed doors writing what would later be foisted on the public as new Common Core standards for math (CCMS) and English language arts (ELA). Vander Hart (2014) writes that from 2008-2013, Achieve, SAP, NGA, and CCSSO "accepted more than \$149.7 million from the Gates Foundation alone" (p. 6).

The Huffington Post reports that after developing the standards “with help from the Gates Foundation, they received a new, powerful...boost in 2009. That year, the Obama administration incentivized...standards with [\$4.35 billion] in its Race to the Top [RttT] competition, and recession-stunned states signed on to the Core” (Resmovits, 2013). To receive federal funds, states had to agree to adopt CCSSI and join one of two assessment consortia: the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), or the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). By June 2009, 46 states and Washington, D.C., had agreed to join. Not only had they not seen the standards they agreed to, the group ostensibly charged with writing them had yet to be named. On July 1, the Standards Development Work Group (SDWG) was formed. While names were initially kept secret, it turned out its 29 members included no K-12 teachers, “14 reps [sic] from testing companies...10 reps from Common Core groups (Achieve Inc., Student Achievement Partners), 2 reps from a textbook company...2 educational consultants, and 1 professor” (McQueen, 2014, p. 50). Among its members were the owners of SAP: Coleman (a lead ELA author) and Zimba (a lead CCMS author). The public was unaware that these people had already spent two years together secretly planning the standards.

On July 21, 2009, Gates addressed the National Conference of State Legislatures giving the clearest description yet of CCSSI. Groups he funds intend to: 1) establish a national curriculum; 2) increase high-stakes national testing; and 3) establish control of students and teachers through a massive data collection scheme. According to the Gates Foundation website, he said:

We’ll know we’ve succeeded when the curriculum and the tests are aligned to these standards. Secretary [of Education] Arne Duncan recently announced that \$350 million of the stimulus package will be used to create just these kinds of tests — next-generation assessments aligned to the common core. When the tests are aligned to the common standards, the curriculum will line up as well — and that will unleash powerful market forces in the service of better teaching. For the first time, there will be a large base of customers eager to buy products that can help every kid learn and every teacher get better...Common standards define what the students need to learn; robust data systems tell us whether they’re learning it — and they tell us a whole lot more than that...The stimulus package contains funding for longitudinal data systems; I hope you will use this funding to support systems that track student performance from early childhood education through high school and college and into the workplace...All states and districts should collect common data on teachers and students. We need to define the data in a standardized way, we need to collect all of it for all of our students...Of course, if you do build this system and get this data, you may have to deal with people who don’t want you to use it. (Gates, 2009)

In August 2009, a 29-member validation committee (VC) was named to assure the pedagogical integrity of the standards. The VC included Dr. James Milgram and Dr. Sandra Stotsky. Trouble started when they actually checked the standards rather than rubberstamping them. In a scathing piece (*How did charlatans ever get to design national English language arts standards, and why would we listen to them?*) Stotsky (2014a) details her efforts to correct the shoddy work of lead ELA writers David Coleman and Susan Pimentel, neither of whom had ever “taught reading or English in K-12 or at the college level” (p. 103). “One example of...dubious pedagogy is...Coleman’s advice to teachers to ask students to read historical documents

‘cold’...on the grounds that such a practice ‘levels the playing field’” (Stotsky, 2014a, p. 122). Milgram, the only Ph.D. mathematician on the VC, had similar problems with the reform math in CCMS. The first professional educators to see the standards were appalled. When final standards were released in August 2010, Milgram, Stotsky, and three other VC members refused to sign off. Their detailed critiques of the standards were ignored by Gates, SDWG, and NGA/CCSSO. These groups’ refusal to respond even to their own VC should give pause to all concerned. Milgram & Wurman (2014) write, “The VC’s report does not mention that five out of its twenty-nine members—two of them the only content-experts to sit on the VC—were not ready to sign off on the Common Core standards” (p. 76). Things have continued downhill as one state after another has withdrawn. By May 2014, just 26 states and Washington, D.C. remained in the testing consortia (Gewertz & Ujifusa, 2014). We turn next to six people intimately involved in the process.

### **The good, the bad, and the ugly**

Dr. Sandra Stotsky, professor of education *emerita* at Arkansas University (Lombard, 2014, p. xxi), was the sole ELA subject-matter expert appointed to the VC. As Senior Associate Commissioner at the Massachusetts DOE (1999-2003), she developed the literature-heavy curriculum that is credited with Massachusetts’ first-place ranking in national reading scores. Massachusetts outperformed all European and many Asian countries in the 2012 PISA reading tests (Sailer, 2013). In August 2010, Stotsky joined four other members of the VC in refusing to sign off on the Common Core standards. As a member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (2006-2010) she grilled Jason Zimba on the CCMS (see below). Since severing ties with CCSSI she has been a vocal critic of the ELA standards writing that, “Common Core’s architects have inaccurately and without warrant applied...percentages for passage types on its reading tests to the English and reading curriculum, misleading teachers, administrators, and test developers, alike” (Bauerlein & Stotsky, 2012, p. 1). Furthermore, “Common Core makes repeated claims that its standards (presumably including the 50/50 division of literary and informational reading) are research-based. But we can find no research cited in its own document to support its organizational framework for reading” (Bauerlein & Stotsky, 2012, p. 25).

Dr. James Milgram, professor of mathematics *emeritus* at Stanford University, served on NASA’s Advisory Board and was the only mathematician on the VC (Lombard, 2014, pp. xviii-xix). An outspoken CCMS critic, he testified before the Texas legislature that, “by the end of fifth grade the material being covered...is more than a year behind most high achieving countries...By the end of seventh grade Core Standards are roughly two years behind” (Prof., 2011). Furthermore, Zimba “had never written K-12 standards before or studied the standards of high-achieving countries” (Phelps & Milgram, 2014, p. 11). In August 2010, he, Stotsky, and three others refused to approve the standards. Milgram & Stotsky (2013) state that they refused to sign off on the standards because, despite repeated assurances to the contrary, the standards are neither rigorous nor do what they purport to do (p. 4).

Bill Gates, Microsoft founder and the richest man in America, has been the driving force behind Common Core. In addition to the \$147.9 million he gave NGA, CCSSO, SAP, and Achieve, Inc. from 2008-2013 (Vander Hart, 2014, p. 6), he funds a host of other government agencies and NGOs that advocate for Common Core. Many of these entities are engaged in research “in a post hoc attempt to validate Common

Core's standards" (Stotsky, 2014b, p. 66). Others, like inBloom, a now defunct database company, "sprang from the earth and blossomed into multimillion dollar non-profits with Gates funding" (Cody, 2014, p. 8). Self-described progressive and humanistic educator Jack Hassard (2014) analyzed the public records of the Gates Foundation and concluded that Gates has spent at least \$2.3 billion promoting CCSSI. Schneider (2013), Cody (2014), and McQueen (2014) corroborate his findings. Gates recently appealed to educators to help sell parents on Common Core, explaining to teachers in the audience that standardizing education is like standardizing electrical outlets (Layton, 2014). To Gates it probably is, and therein lies the problem.

Arne Duncan, the soon-to-retire U.S. Secretary of Education, oversaw the RttT program that funded states in return for their agreement to accept CCSSI sight unseen. He repeatedly broke promises to involve teachers in writing usable standards (Cody, 2014, p. 51), and has disparaged Common Core critics as racists (Strauss, 2013). Before moving to Washington he was the CEO of Chicago Public Schools (CPS). In that capacity he contracted with Coleman and Zimba's Grow Network (see below). Rich and powerful as Gates may be, CCSSI could not have been implemented without the help of the U.S. DOE. Despite claims by supporters that CCSSI was voluntary and state-led, Joanne Weiss, who served as Duncan's chief of staff and led the RttT program from the start, recently revealed that the U.S. DOE "forced alignment among...education leaders in each participating state" (Berry, 2015).

David Coleman, a well-connected businessman with no teaching experience, was a lead architect of the ELA standards on the SDWG. Prior to writing standards for subjects he has never taught, he and Jason Zimba founded the Grow Network, which profited from cozy deals with Arne Duncan's CPS. In 2004, they sold their business to McGraw Hill, which continues the lucrative contracts. It sells copyrighted materials including "lesson plans, and curriculum resources...identical to those now being used with Common Core" (Clark, 2013). In 2007, Coleman and Zimba founded SAP, a Gates-funded enterprise that "has no work other than CCSS" (Schneider, 2013). He has since become president of College Board where, in accordance with Bill Gates' plans, he oversees revision of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) bringing it into line with the Core. These changes in the SAT are crucial since methods embedded in the standards would be codified in tests for college admission. Changing the admissions tests effectively forces schools to change their curricula. Phelps & Milgram (2014) write, "the greatest harm to higher education may accrue from the alignment of the SAT to Common Core's high school standards, converting the SAT from an adaptable test predictive of college work to an inflexible retrospective test aligned to and locking in a low level of [reform] mathematics" (p. 5). Scholars like Phelps, Milgram, and Stotsky differ sharply with Coleman, whose curdling views verge on incoherence. On November 29, 2012, a few weeks after becoming head of College Board, Coleman spoke at the Brookings Institution. According to the Brookings website (2012), Coleman explained: "assessment is an extremely powerful signal for instruction, but you've got to own it. You've got to cut the [expletive] when you're like, ooh we wrote this test and all these people are doing test preparation. They shouldn't test preparation. They should look at the standards. I mean, is it a—like [expletive] you, like no. I hate that disingenuousness. If you put something on an assessment, in my view, you are ethically obligated to take responsibility that kids will practice it 100 times. So when I look over an instrument like SAT, I want to say to myself is it worth it. Is this work worth doing?" Put that way, one suspects not.

Dr. Jason Zimba, a former college physics teacher with no K-12 math teaching experience, was a lead architect of CCMS on the SDWG. He is currently Coleman’s business partner in SAP, and profited handsomely from the sale of their Grow Network. Milgram & Stotsky (2013) write that in 2010, Stotsky questioned Zimba before the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. He testified, “the concept of college readiness [in the standards] is minimal and focuses on non-selective colleges” (p. 2). Zimba said, “We have agreement...that the minimally college-ready student is a student who has passed Algebra II” (Milgram & Stotsky, 2013, p. 4-5). Stotsky asked if that was enough and he stated, “Well, for the colleges most kids go to, but not for the colleges most parents aspire to.” Stotsky: ““Not for STEM? Not for international competitiveness?” Zimba... ‘Not only not for STEM, it’s also not for selective colleges...whether you are going to be an engineer or not, you’d better have precalculus’...Stotsky [objected] to this minimalist definition [in]... standards labeled as making students college-ready” (Milgram & Stotsky, 2013, p. 5).

**Abusing data: Lies, damn lies, statistics, and surveillance**

CCSSI boosters like Gates, Duncan, Coleman, and Zimba justify wresting control of American schools away from state and local authorities by misrepresenting data. Arne Duncan has cited the results of the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as evidence of the need to nationalize schools through the RtT program. Tienken (2014) writes, “Duncan advanced three empirically unsupported claims: (1) the results from over sixty nations and cities are comparable; (2) those results accurately describe the quality of the U.S. education system...and (3) the results relate directly to the economic strength and future of countries who took the PISA” (pp. 31-2). In order to explain why Duncan is wrong we must first look at how statistics can be manipulated to create confusion, starting with Simpson’s Paradox. Simpson’s Paradox is when the average scores of two groups seem to show that one group performs better than another when, in fact, the opposite is true if the data is disaggregated (i.e., analyzed by subset). Table-1 shows a simple example. Ms. Smith and Ms. Brown teach 100 polka-dotted and striped children, but the sizes of the subsets in each class differ. Overall, Ms. Smith’s average class score is 6.5, and Ms. Brown’s is 5.4, giving the illusion that children would be better off with Ms. Smith.

Table 1: Simpson’s Paradox

Subset Group	Polka-dotted children	Polka-dotted avg. score	Polka-dotted total points	Striped children	Striped avg. score	Striped total points	Total points (avg. score)
Ms. Smith	90	7	630	10	2	20	650 (6.5)
Ms. Brown	10	9	90	90	5	450	540 (5.4)

However, upon closer inspection we see that Ms. Brown’s 10 polka-dotted children outscore their friends in Ms. Smith’s class by two points. The case of striped children is even more dramatic: those in Ms. Brown’s class perform two-and-a-half times better than the striped children in Ms. Smith’s class. The difference in average group scores is a function of the different sizes of the subsets within each group. Contrary to the impression created by average class scores, whether your child is polka-dotted or

striped she would be much better off in Ms. Brown’s class than in Ms. Smith’s. This is why it is called Simpson’s Paradox rather than Simpson’s Blindingly Obvious Conclusion. Terwilliger & Schield (2004) wryly note, “All Simpson’s reversals are ‘journalistically significant.’” Duncan and journalists are not alone in their error—the author, mea culpa, has also used PISA statistics to knock American education. This is more than a theoretical problem. The OECD, which oversees the PISA tests, cautions members to beware of using the results to draw conclusions about education systems and policy, but the warning is widely ignored. Critics like to point out that American students do only slightly better than average on PISA tests, which is true as far as it goes. Table-2 shows selected 2012 PISA reading scores grouped by top, middle, and bottom scores. East Asian students lead the pack, followed by Western countries, with South America and Southeast Asia bringing up the rear. Alarming, the U.S. ranks in the middle, somewhere between Kazakhstan and Shanghai, China.

Table 2: 2012 PISA Reading Scores (OECD average 496) (Sailer, 2013)

Top scores		Middle scores		Bottom scores	
Shanghai-China	570	Australia	512	U.A.E.	442
Hong Kong-China	545	Macao-China	509	Chile	441
Singapore	542	Vietnam	508	Costa Rica	441
Japan	538	Germany	508	Thailand	441
Korea, Rep. of	536	France	505	Uruguay	411
Finland	524	Norway	504	Brazil	410
Chinese Taipei	523	United Kingdom	499	Colombia	403
Ireland	523	<b>U.S.</b>	<b>498</b>	Malaysia	398
Canada	523	Spain	488	Indonesia	396
Poland	518	Portugal	488	Argentina	396
New Zealand	512	Russian Fed.	475	Kazakhstan	393

However, as in the case of Ms. Brown’s much maligned class, the story is different when group totals are disaggregated by subgroups (Table-3). Sailer (2013) examined scores by ethnicity with interesting results.

Table 3: 2012 PISA Reading Scores by Ethnicity (Sailer, 2013)

Asian		European		Hispanic & other	
Shanghai-China	570	Finland	524	<b>Florida (all races)</b>	492
<b>Asian-American</b>	<b>550</b>	Ireland	523	Spain	488
Hong Kong-China	545	Canada	523	Portugal	488
Singapore	542	<b>Conn. (all races)</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>Hispanic U.S.</b>	478
Japan	538	<b>White U.S.</b>	<b>519</b>	Russian Fed.	475
Korea, Rep. of	536	Poland	518	<b>Black U.S.</b>	443
<b>Mass. (all races)</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>Multiracial U.S.</b>	<b>517</b>	U.A.E.	442
Chinese Taipei	523	New Zealand	512	Chile	441
Macao-China	509	Australia	512	Costa Rica	441
Vietnam	508	Germany	508	Uruguay	411
Thailand	441	France	505	Brazil	410
Malaysia	398	Norway	504	Colombia	403
Indonesia	396	United Kingdom	499	Argentina	396
Kazakhstan	393	<b>U.S. (all races)</b>	498	Peru	384

In this deeper analysis of scores, Asian-American students are second only to those in Shanghai. Tellingly, Massachusetts’ students of all races outperform many Asian and all European students. Keep in mind that Sandra Stotsky, dissident member of the VC and the leading critic of the Core’s faulty and fatuous ELA standards, designed the

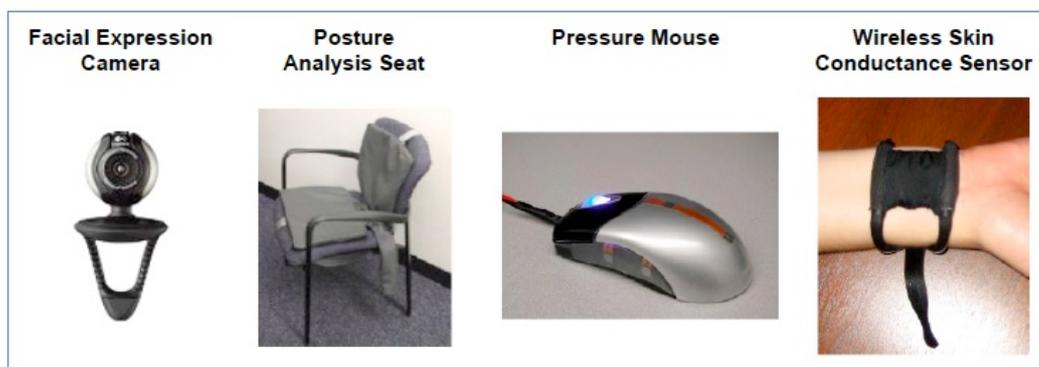
Massachusetts' literature-heavy reading curriculum. White students in the U.S. trail Finland, but by a statistically insignificant five points. Hispanic and black students outperform all of South America, and compare favorably to Spain and Portugal. This casts the efforts to turn American schools inside out in a new light.

Bad as Core supporters' abuse of existing data may be, it pales in comparison to their plans to gather, store, and use still more information. In addition to data on American children and their families, teachers will be monitored and their evaluations based on student test scores using an industrial-style Value Added Model (Cody, 2014, p. 25). Remember Gates' 2009 speech to legislators. He said he and the federal government are building a system to control the standards, tests, and curriculum used by every child in the country. Whoever controls the standards will command a surveillance network harvesting student data from preschool into the workplace. He warned lawmakers they might have to "deal with" people who do not trust the government or businesses with information on their children and families. Implicit in his scheme is the elimination of existing protections in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) that require parents' permission before any data is collected, stored, or used. The National Center for Education Statistics has helpfully gutted FERPA by ruling parental consent is required only for studies funded directly by the U.S. DOE (McGroarty et al., 2014, p. 27). Private companies may mine data as they please.

This might sound like 1984 hysteria but for the words of government officials who bolster Gates' vision. The U.S. DOE's Office of Educational Technology issued a report in February 2013 titled "Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." The report focuses on how fine-grained data can be gathered from students, stored, processed, and used. The report reads:

[M]easurement may focus on sequences of behaviors, emotions, physiological reactions, and/or thoughts that unfold over time during learning, extracting indicators of persistence and giving up. New technologies using educational data mining and 'affective computing' (the study and development of systems and devices that can recognize, interpret, process, and simulate aspects of human affect) are beginning to focus on 'micro-level' moment-by-moment data...to provide feedback to adapt learning tasks. (p. ix)

The technical implements to read kids' minds are shown on page 44 of the report:



The report goes on to say, "Ed Dieterle and Ash Vasudeva of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation point out that researchers such as Jon Gabrieli and Richard Davidson are beginning to use multiple methods to explore how specific brain activity is correlated to other cognitive affective indicators that *are* practical to measure in

school settings” (p. 45, italics in original). The authors briefly mention ethics in a section titled, “Ethical Considerations for New Types of Personal Data”:

As new forms of measurement emerge and new types of personal data become available, the field must also deal with critical ethical considerations. Of course, privacy is...a concern, especially when leveraging data available in the ‘cloud’ that users may or may not be aware is being mined. However, another emergent concern is the consequences of using new types of personal data in new ways. Learners and educators have the potential to get forms of feedback about their behaviors, emotions, physiological responses, and cognitive processes that have never been available before. Measurement developers must carefully consider the impacts of releasing such data, sometimes of a sensitive nature. (p. 48)

A search of this 126-page report finds the word “ethical” used just four times including in the title of the above section and the table of contents. On the other hand, the authors are expansive about the data they seek on teachers, students and their families including their “beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, values, and ways of perceiving oneself” (p. 77). These are not simply the idle musings of some rich but irrelevant eccentric and his tech-savvy minions. Echoing the concerns of McGroarty et al., Cody (2014) describes a Gates-funded \$498,055 research project at “Clemson University...to measure engagement physiologically with Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) bracelets...in schools with students and teachers” (p. 110). He cites another \$621,265 grant from Gates to the “National Center on Time and Learning...[using] Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging and [GSR]” (Cody, 2014, p. 110). Similar efforts are underway to devise ever-sharper instruments with the encouragement of bureaucrats and researchers who see a bright future aboard Gates’ gravy train. Alas, their search for higher technology is not tempered by deeper wisdom. All this begs the question of how far technicians, educators, oligarchs, and state-sponsored cronies are willing to go. Leaving aside the manifest pedagogical concerns, on what planet are we to find men and women virtuous enough to be trusted with this much data and power?

## **Conclusion**

*He thought of the telescreen with its never-sleeping ear. They could spy upon you day and night, but if you kept your head you could still outwit them. With all their cleverness they had never mastered the secret of finding out what another human being was thinking. — Orwell, 1949, p. 363*

One can almost hear the elliptical “yet.” Neither Bill Gates nor the scientists at the Office of Educational Technology would seem out of place in Orwell’s Ministry of Truth. It is easy enough to dismiss Coleman and Zimba as predictable, garden-variety crony capitalists. But Gates, Duncan, the U.S. DOE, and politicians of both political parties who continue to push Common Core remind us that evil is indeed banal. They epitomize a dark part of the human psyche that has always plagued civil society: the demiurge seeking power over others to dominate and to rule. Plato’s Republic had its Guardians, Bentham his Panopticon, and the Nazis and Soviets their secret police. Their spirits stalk us today, posing as philanthropists and civic-minded helpers. To say we can do better is an epic understatement. Knowing all this, God help us if we go along with them.

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