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## Smart Money? Philanthropic and Federal Funding for the Common Core

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**Abstract:** The Common Core State Standards Initiative seeks to prepare all students to graduate high school without remedial needs, to improve transparency across states' accountability systems, and to foster efficiencies in the development and distribution of educational resources. The reform was adopted in more than 40 states and has been described as state-led. We examined federal and philanthropic funding for the reform through a conceptual lens of resource dependence theory. Our document analyses surfaced eight pathways along which funding for the Common Core traveled into, through, and around the public education system. We consider clusters of pathways according to their purposes and the consequences of such clustering for the reform. We conclude by discussing benefits derived from this funding for different types of entities that grant and receive it.

**Keywords:** Education policy; education reform, educational philanthropy, Common Core

### **¿Dinero inteligente? Financiamiento federal y filantrópico para el Common Core**

**Resumen:** El Common Core intenta preparar cada estudiante para que se gradúen sin necesidad de clases remediales; para mejorar la transparencia a de los sistemas de responsabilidad través de estados; y para promover la eficaz en el desarrollo y distribución de recursos educativos. Se ha adoptada esta reforma en más de 40 estados y se ha descrito como dirigida por el estado. Los investigadores examinaron el financiamiento federal y filantrópico para la reforma por medio de un prisma conceptual basado en la teoría de dependencia de recursos. Este documento analiza ocho vías a través de las cuales el Common Core se transportó en, por y alrededor del sistema público de educación. Los investigadores consideran racimos de vías de acuerdo con sus propósitos y consecuencias para la reforma. Se concluye con una discusión de los beneficios derivados de este financiamiento para diferentes tipos de entidades que lo otorgan y lo reciben.

**Palabras-clave:** Política educativa; reforma educativa; filantropía educativa; Common Core

### **Dinheiro esperto? O finacimento federal e filantrópico para o Common Core**

**Resumo:** O Common Core tenta preparar todos os estudantes para se formar, para melhorar a transparência dos sistemas de responsabilidade entre os estados, e promover o desenvolvimento efetivo e distribuição de recursos educacionais. Esta reforma foi aprovada em mais de 40 estados e tem sido descrito como dirigido pelo estado. Os pesquisadores examinaram o financiamento federal e filantrópico para o reforma através de um prisma conceitual baseado na teoria de dependência de recursos. Este artigo analisa oito maneiras em que o Common Core foi transportado em e ao redor do sistema de educação pública. Os investigadores consideram maneiras aglomerados de acordo com os seus fins e as implicações para a reforma. Conclui-se com uma discussão sobre os benefícios deste financiamento para diferentes tipos de entidades que dá-lo e recebê-lo.

**Palavras-chave:** Política educativa; reforma educativa; filantropia educativa; Common Core

## **Introduction**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (“Common Core”) is a standards-based reform introduced to the public in June 2009. Its mathematics and English language arts standards, released in June 2010, have been adopted by more than 40 states and the District of Columbia. A diverse set of policy, education, business, civic, and military organizations regard the Common Core’s “fewer, clearer, higher standards” as necessary, if not sufficient, to meet the reform’s central goal: enabling all students to graduate “college and career ready” and to compete in a global economy (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Statements of Support, n.d.).

The Common Core’s proponents launched the reform in a policy window created by Congress’ lengthy inability to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This left in place the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), under which states established their own, often-inadequate, academic standards, tests, and performance standards (or cut scores) (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008; Stecher, Vernez, & Steinberg, 2010). The Common Core’s advocates asserted NCLB should be superseded by a system of common standards, assessments, and performance standards. Doing so would increase transparency across states’ accountability systems. It would also foster economies of scale in testing, professional development, instructional materials, and other resources required for implementing the standards in disparate schools (Rothman, 2011).

Whether the Common Core could spur universal college and career preparation, transparency, and economies of scale was uncertain given the performance of prior standards-based reforms (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008; Loveless, 2012). What was clear was that substantial sums would be spent on developing, advocating for, and implementing the new reform. In July 2009, the U.S. Department of Education incentivized the reform's adoption through its \$4.35 billion Race to the Top Competition, which weighed states' grant applications against criteria including common standards and common assessments. Several prominent philanthropic foundations, particularly the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, explicitly backed the reform (Dillon, 2009; Rothman, 2011).

Our research examined how money has been used by philanthropic foundations and the federal government to advance the Common Core. What types of organizations or entities (e.g., school districts, curriculum developers, test developers) have received funding? What consequences for the reform itself might follow from this funding? What benefits have been derived for organizations that grant and receive funding?

The article is organized into six parts: First, we provide background to situate the study within the contexts of standards-based reform and education reform funding. Second, we present the study's conceptual framework, resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Third, we describe our methods, data, and data analyses. Fourth, we present our findings, which identify four philanthropic and four federal pathways of funding, the pathways' purposes, and the types of organizations that have been funded. Fifth, in the discussion, we cluster pathways according to their purposes and explore consequences of this clustering for the reform. Finally, we consider the benefits derived from this funding for the different types of entities that grant and receive it.

## **Background**

### **Standards-Based Reforms**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a standards-based reform (SBR) intended to provide the U.S. education system with a set of rigorous national standards (Rothman, 2011). Standards-based reforms seek to increase achievement and equity by aligning academic content standards with curriculum, instruction, assessment, and other resources (O'Day & Smith, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991). Assessment results are supposed to provide feedback to improve teaching and learning and are typically used for accountability purposes (Linn, 2000), whose political salience has grown over time (Elmore, Abelman, & Fuhrman, 1996; Mehta, 2013).

Variants of SBR have been employed by individual states since the early 1980s. The ongoing use of SBR as a policy tool is understandable. SBR exerts powerful influences throughout the U.S. education system (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008; Natriello & Pallas, 2001), whose loosely coupled structure typically renders it slow and difficult to change (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Weick, 1978).

Federal efforts to promote national education goals and standards emerged during the presidential administrations of G.H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. These were stymied by disputes over whether to pair standards and goals for academic achievement (or outputs) with "opportunity-to-learn-" (or input) standards and by concerns about federal overreach (Vinovskis, 2009). Federally required SBR gained traction under NCLB (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008; Mehta, 2013). NCLB mandated that each state develop its own academic standards and tests, and use test scores in an accountability system that assigned specific, stepwise consequences to schools and districts.

While some studies of SBRs have been supportive (e.g., Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; see Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008), many others find SBR generates distortions in teaching, learning, and accountability (e.g., Beardsley, Berliner, & Rideau, 2010; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Davidson, Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2013; Koretz, 2008; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez-Heilig, 2008; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2007). Policymakers' arguments that such reforms will improve achievement and reduce inequities are not well supported by research. In the decade after NCLB's 2002 enactment, fourth and eighth graders' NAEP scores showed some improvements, but these are hard to attribute to SBR (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). From 2013 to 2015, most NAEP scores for fourth and eighth graders declined. On NAEP's long-term trend assessments, 17-year-olds' average achievement and achievement gaps between racial and ethnic groups remained largely unchanged in the decade after NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). U.S. students' scores on PISA – which assess 15-year-olds' performance in math, science, and reading – are unchanged since 2000, but their rankings have dropped relative to other nations (Heitin, 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, n.d.).

The Common Core's advocates asserted the new reform would increase achievement and reduce achievement gaps, because it was designed to correct for its predecessors' flaws (Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler, 2014; Loveless, 2016; Rothman, 2011). Specifically, the Common Core was intended to replace states' variable, and often low, academic standards. It was also intended to enable comparisons in the performance of students, schools, and districts across states through the use of standards-aligned tests. The tests were to be developed by two assessment consortia, the Partnership for the Advancement of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced and administered on digital devices. This would give educators quicker access to feedback they could use to improve instruction (Baron & Linn, 2013).

Per McDonnell and Weatherford (2013), the Common Core's proponents gleaned from past efforts at nation-wide SBR both policy lessons, which informed how they designed the reform, and political lessons, which informed how they advocated for it. As a result, the Common Core's proponents "engaged allies from across the political spectrum and from a wide range of educational policy interests" (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013, p. 489). Both the Common Core's design and advocacy required funding.

### **Education Reform Funding from Philanthropies and the Federal Government**

Private philanthropic foundations and the federal government each contribute a small percentage of all dollars spent annually on K-12 public education. Nevertheless, as we describe in this section, they have used this funding to exercise considerable influence over public education policy, particularly after the enactment of NCLB (Greene, 2015; Reckhow, 2015). We also note how private foundations and the federal government have coordinated their efforts to advance the Common Core.

**Philanthropic dollars.** There is neither a single scholarly definition of philanthropy nor a clearly defined set of motives or methods of giving that distinguish between what is or isn't philanthropy. Definitions have changed over time, and different scholars have defined philanthropy in terms of how it has been practiced (Sulek, 2010). For this article, we view philanthropy in terms of the practice of giving money to any entity (e.g., public, private, for-profit, nonprofit) by private, IRS-designated charitable organizations to foster change in public education through the adoption of the Common Core. In this article, these organizations are called philanthropies or private foundations.

Philanthropic giving to education, some \$1.82 billion in 2011, has risen markedly since 2000, but it still accounts for less than one-half of one percent of all K-12 funding (Foundation Center, Foundation Stats, n.d.; Greene, 2015; Reckhow, 2015). Public education may be more tractable to private foundations' policy directions when, as now, policymakers increasingly see private sector solutions as normative (Mehta, 2013), and the public increasingly sees government as a problem (Pew Research Center, 2013). Moreover, philanthropies' strategically used sums may be especially powerful during economic recessions, the context in which the Common Core was unveiled in 2009.

Although private foundations' efforts to reform education are not new (Cuban, 2015; Colvin, 2005; Lagemann, 1992; Zunz, 2012), in recent decades, prominent philanthropies across the social and political spectrum have been more active in advancing policy agendas (Confessore, 2011; Greene, 2005, 2015; Ravitch, 2013; Reckhow, 2013, 2015; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). Private foundations' wealth enables them to influence public policy through strategic, leveraged giving rather than through electoral politics and democratic participation (Cuban, 2015; Mehta & Teles, 2011; Schmitt, 2015). Moreover, since the early 2000s, these foundations have increasingly coordinated their giving to extend their leverage over particular policies, including market-based reforms, SBRs such as the Common Core, and accountability schemes that rely on test scores (Reckhow, 2015; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014).

Private foundations have gained greater influence in public policy partly through "jurisdictional challengers" (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014, p. 186). These are unelected political actors from the philanthropic world, or well supported by it, who form alliances with government at the state or federal level (Mehta & Teles, 2011; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). An example of jurisdictional challengers is the appointment of staffers from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to top federal policy positions under Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (Brill, 2011; Dillon, 2009; Mehta & Teles, 2011). This alliance between philanthropic and government sectors was furthered by waivers from ethics rules issued by the Obama administration to allow the new federal appointees to continue conferring with their former employer, the Gates Foundation (Dillon, 2009).

Cuban (2015) maintains that efforts to move education policy away from local authorities and consolidate it at state and federal levels did not begin with private foundations' recent endeavors but rather with the federal government's 1965 ESEA legislation. However, the "muscular philanthropy" these foundations are now exercising has increased such policy consolidation (Cuban, 2015, p. 5). Therefore, private foundations' growing influence on public education clearly merits attention by policy researchers. Yet, researchers' need for grants has a chilling effect on such scholarship (Colvin, 2005; Hess, 2005). Moreover, because philanthropies are not required to disclose the purpose of their giving – only amounts and recipients – it can be difficult to know how philanthropic dollars are being used (Greene, 2005; Hess, 2005; Reckhow, 2013). Nevertheless, exploring philanthropic funding of public education can surface the types of entities that have been funded and whether funding is concentrated or disbursed across different entities. This information alongside other documentation can enable insights into the purposes of philanthropic giving and, in turn, further public understanding of how education reforms may be launched with little public input.

**Federal funding.** At the time the Common Core was being advanced, federal dollars accounted for 12.3% of all public elementary and secondary education revenues (Cornman, Keaton, & Glander, 2013). However, for decades before the new reform, the federal government has exercised outsized influence on K-12 education by using funding as policy inducements that act like mandates. For example, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, schools and universities could be eligible for federal funding only if they rejected discrimination on the basis of race, color,

or national origin. Federal funding, unlike private foundations', thus gains additional leverage from the government's power to enforce compliance with the mandates that accompany federal dollars.

Federal funding in the form of inducement-cum-mandates has been used extensively to promote states' adoption of standards-based reform. Notably, No Child Left Behind made federal funding contingent on states' adoption of standards, annual psychometric testing of student achievement, public reporting of disaggregated test results, and the use of scores to assign specific consequences to schools and districts (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The federal government also used this funding approach in its Race to the Top Competition (RTTT). Of the \$4.35 billion allocated by the federal government for RTTT, states could submit applications to compete for \$4 billion. States' applications were scored against criteria that encompassed SBR, and that embraced the Common Core in particular. Points were given to applications that incorporated "standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace," "developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments," and using measures of student growth in state accountability systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, Appendix B: Scoring Rubric ([Corrected])), which Common Core aligned tests were intended to enable. Joanne Weiss, a former Gates Foundation officer then serving as Secretary Duncan's chief of staff, said, "States that have created conditions for reform will have the best chance of winning grants worth hundreds of millions of dollars..." (Weiss, 2009).

To complement this federal inducement, the Gates Foundation funded McKinsey & Co. and several other prominent, for-profit consulting firms to help states prepare their RTTT applications (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009; Dillon, 2009). To receive such funding, states had to commit to an eight-point checklist to demonstrate their compliance with the foundation's educational priorities (Dillon, 2009; Layton, 2014). The first three checklist items specified states' commitment to the Common Core (Phillips, 2009).

Nineteen states – most of which were aided by Gates-supported consulting firms – ultimately won RTTT awards (U.S. Department of Education, Race to the Top Annual Performance Report, n.d.). However, to better their chances of winning in the RTTT competition, nearly all states adopted the Common Core (U.S. Department of Education, Programs, Race to the Top, n.d., States' Applications, Scores and Comments for Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3, n.d.; Weiss, 2013).

In a related competitive-funding endeavor, the federal government allocated \$520 million to its Race to the Top District program (RTT-D) to incentivize school districts to implement "college and career ready" standards or graduation requirements (U.S. Department of Education, Programs, Race to the Top District [RTT-D], n.d.). Hundreds of districts applied for RTT-D funds in the 2012 and 2013 competitions. The Department of Education awarded grants to 21 districts or consortia of districts (U.S. Department of Education, Programs Race to the Top District [RTT-D], n.d.). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also provided support to prepare RTT-D applications (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, What We Do, n.d.).

Nearly all the states and districts that received federal dollars through RTTT and RTT-D awards incurred obligations to secure Common Core-aligned curriculum, professional development, interim and summative assessments, computers for digitally delivered assessments, data systems, and other materials. To acquire these, states and districts engaged with a range of for-profit vendors and non-profit entities. The distribution of this federal funding to states, districts, and, in turn, to non-profits and for-profits merits examination, particularly given the limited influence SBRs have had on student achievement or achievement gaps (e.g., Loveless, 2012, 2016; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). If such policy funding does not enable public education to generate higher or more equitable student achievement, what types of entities do benefit and what benefits do they derive?

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study draws on resource dependence theory (RDT) for its conceptual framework. (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). RDT holds that organizations' activities and outcomes depend on "the contexts in which the organization is embedded" (Pfeffer & Salancik, p. 39). Those contexts, and organizations' relationships within them are both sources of uncertainty. Organizations seek to reduce these uncertainties by influencing both other organizations and the contexts in which they and other organizations are embedded. Thereby, they can conduct their activities with greater predictability.

### **Organizational Interdependence**

Uncertainty stemming from other organizations arises because organizations cannot conduct their activities in isolation but are instead "interdependent" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 39). For example, a school district is interdependent with its school board, state education department, teacher organizations, and companies that provide technology and other resources. Non-profits may be interdependent with government tax authorities, philanthropies, client groups, and media outlets that bring attention to the organization's good work.

To reduce the uncertainties attending interdependence, organizations engage in "social control processes" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 40). These serve to coordinate with, influence, and/or modify the organizations with which they interact (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Several conditions make it more likely that an organization will be influenced by other organizations' attempts at social control. Among these is whether the target organization gets resources from the influencing organization; whether the resource is critical to the target organization's operation; whether the influencing organization controls the resource or access to it, and whether the target organization wants to survive. Under such conditions, a target organization may become "resource dependent" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 52). It then accords substantial importance in its decision making to the influencing organization.

Furthermore, it is possible for an organization or coordinated group of organizations to exercise social control over an entire sector's organizations. This opportunity for social control increases when that sector is "regulated by a single agency or governed by a single law" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 51). For example, the Federal Aviation Administration can influence all airlines. Similarly, as the federal government's role in public education has grown, so has its ability to influence public education. Notably, under NCLB, the federal government compelled all states to adopt standards-aligned testing and a set of escalating consequences for schools and districts.

### **Organizational Contexts**

Alongside the efforts to limit uncertainty from interdependence, organizations strive to reduce uncertainties from their surrounding contexts. Organizations can reduce uncertainties by "responding to demands implied by the context," (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 107). Thus, as government regulation has grown, so have organizations' efforts to create favorable contexts for themselves by influencing "the larger social system and its government" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 189). When these efforts succeed, they may generate financial subsidies or market protections to advance the organizations' work (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Among the means organizations use to influence government and their social context are accessing policymakers, lobbying, and marketing (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Access to policymakers

can occur when government hires from industry or vice versa. Such hiring can simultaneously address uncertainties arising from organizational interdependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

The formation and advance of the Common Core was facilitated by Department of Education hires from organizations favoring standards-based reforms and market-based approaches. Among these were Joanne Weiss, previously both a Gates Foundation officer and head of the New Schools Venture Fund, and Jon Schnur, former head of New Leaders for New Schools and a former presidential policy adviser. Schnur was a key architect of Race to the Top (Brill, 2010).

Although private foundations are restricted from lobbying, they can and do use marketing and public relations campaigns to influence public opinion (Schmitt, 2015). For example, philanthropies favoring the Common Core have made grants intended to amplify support for the reform across a range of political and social contexts (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013; Molnar, 2014; Ujifusa, 2013), which we illustrate in our findings.

Lobbying, marketing, and public relations campaigns serve organizations' need to be perceived as legitimate. Such perceptions enable organizations to garner support from the external contexts in which they operate. Since those contexts are continually changing, organizations regularly strive to convince others that their work is "just and worthy" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 195) and tethered to the surrounding contexts' norms, values, and beliefs (Oliver, 1990; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Particularly important for legitimacy are the norms, values, and beliefs of higher-status organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1990).

Via efforts to manage interdependence and reduce contextual uncertainty, federal, state, and local agencies responsible for public education have adopted the technical-rational nostrums that characterize higher-status business entities and their offshoots in venture philanthropy. Salient among these are metrics, big data, data analytics, measurable growth, digital delivery, competition, and incentives (see Barone & DeBray, 2011; Cuban, 2015; Greene, 2005, 2013; Hess, 2015; Mehta, 2013; Reckhow, 2014; Scott, 2009). For example, Race to the Top, the federal initiative that spurred the Common Core's adoption across the nation, was organized as a competition, rather than as an effort to address inequality as was characteristic of many prior federal education initiatives (see Ravitch, 2013). Moreover, governors in states that submitted RTTT applications did so in part to advance their own administrations' legitimacy with the electorate (Nicholson-Crotty & Staley, 2012).

That organizations seek to influence other organizations and to shape their environments in their own favor, and that they may do so in ways that coordinate and concentrate their influence, are all to be expected. The issue then is not so much these exercises of, and responses to, influence, but "whose interests are being served" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 51, citing Perrow, 1972). To understand whose interests are being served by the Common Core – that is, what kinds of entities benefit – our research examined how the federal government and private foundations have used money to influence other organizations' involvement in the reform and the reform's social and political contexts.

## Methods

The following research questions guided this investigation: How has money been used by private foundations and the federal government to advance the Common Core? What kinds of entities (e.g., school districts, curriculum developers, testing entities) have been funded to advance the reform? What consequences for the reform itself might follow from these funding allocations? What sorts of benefits have been derived by different kinds of entities that grant and receive funding?



To address these questions, we undertook a qualitative study that relied on documentary evidence. While documents may be a source of “social facts” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 56) and have been used to shed light on policy intent (see Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein, & Prine, 2015), they require analysis and interpretation. To build credibility in our interpretation, our methods entailed triangulation of documents from multiple sources (Maxwell, 2005). We relied on documents from both grantees and grantors, and when additional information was needed to understand a grant’s purpose or recipient, we drew on secondary sources such as press releases, news articles, and websites from recipient organizations. As described below, our research team employed discussion, moderation, review, and confirmation to obtain consensus in developing and applying codes (Saldana, 2009). Our coding was structured around grant characteristics, including grantor, grantee, amount, and purpose (See Greene, 2005). Our interpretation was guided by a pragmatic perspective, specifically that actions, such as giving and receiving funding, are intermediaries between ideas and changes in the environment (Dewey, 1931). Our work primarily tracks funding awards. While such awards may not always accord with actual expenditures reported on IRS forms (Reckhow, 2013), they nevertheless reflect foundations’ and the federal government’s priorities for the Common Core reform. In accord with resource dependence theory, such awards represent efforts to influence the reform’s contexts and entities within it.

## **Data Sources**

We collected data for this study from five sources: (1) 309 announcements of grants awarded by private foundations in support of the Common Core reform between 2008 and June 15, 2014. These include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the GE Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, the Joyce Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and the Noyce Foundation;<sup>1</sup> (2) grant applications from the 19 states that received Race to the Top awards from the U.S. Department of Education during Phases 1-3 (2010-2013); (3) grant applications from the 21 school districts and district consortia that received federal Race to the Top District awards in its two competitions in 2012 and 2013; (4) two Assessment Program applications and award letters sent to the two Common Core testing consortia funded under the federal Race to the Top Program, and (5) 16 federal Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) grant award summaries for projects involving the Common Core between 2011 and June 15, 2014.

## **Data Analysis**

Philanthropies’ publicly posted descriptions of funded projects were examined for evidence of support for the Common Core’s development, advocacy, or implementation. For each of the 309 grants intended to support the Common Core, we identified the amount of the grant and the type of grantee, such as school district, state, non-profit entity, or for-profit organization. The latter two grantee categories were confirmed using information from the Foundation Center and Internal Revenue Service. Two researchers (Kornhaber and Barkauskas) discussed each of the grants’ purposes and thereby developed a set of purpose codes. For example, we created codes for grants

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<sup>1</sup> This is a conservative listing of private foundations and grants. If we could not identify the purpose of a grant, then we did not include it. If we could not ascertain a foundation’s actual involvement, it was not included. For example, despite many hours examining online sources about the Broad Foundation and efforts to contact the foundation itself (which went unanswered), we were unable to determine with certainty what involvement the Broad Foundation had with the Common Core. Therefore, it is not included in our data.

given to non-school entities to develop or provide resources aligned to the Common Core, assistance to school districts or states for implementation, and advocacy for the reform itself. To supplement the private foundations' brief descriptions about grantees and grant purposes, we drew on information about the grants from public reporting of the awards by states, districts, recipient organizations, and news media. We worked together over a period of three weeks and used these documents to assign purpose codes to each grant, to moderate discrepancies in coding, and ultimately to arrive at complete agreement on all coding for all grants.

For the federal RTTT program, we examined applications from the 19 states that won RTTT awards (U.S. Department of Education, Programs, Race to the Top Fund, n.d.). Two of us (Kornhaber and Griffith) then reviewed the applications that responded to RTTT's call for college- and-career ready standards by adopting the Common Core. We began with the RTTT budget narratives, then read the main texts, and then appendices related to funding. Any amounts specified in these texts that were allocated to support the Common Core's implementation were recorded alongside their purpose. These included funds to secure aligned resources from non-profit or for-profit entities. States' applications varied widely (e.g. they ranged in length from 100 to 653 pages, not including appendices) as did the degree of detail regarding planned expenditures. From the amounts specified in the budget narratives, main texts, and appendices, we estimated that the percentage of RTTT money that grantees planned to use for the Common Core ranged from 9% to 37% with the majority of estimates clustering near the low end of this range. Ultimately, we allowed that 14% of the total RTTT funding from states that had adopted the Common Core might be used to support the Common Core's implementation. This accorded with the 14% of the RTTT scores that could be awarded to applications that incorporated state adoption of common standards.<sup>2</sup> Our estimates are similar to those in a study of 10 RTTT applications by Kolbe and Rice (2012).

(3) For the analysis of the RTT-D applications, Kornhaber and Griffith initially used the same approach taken for the RTTT applications. RTT-D applications also varied widely in length and specificity about intended expenditures. However, our analysis of districts' applications surfaced much greater variability, with our estimates ranging from 2% to 68% of RTT-D awardees' budgets designated for implementing the Common Core. To explore this variation, we contacted all 21 RTT-D grant recipients by both email and ordinary U.S. mail to request their estimates of the percentage of their RTT-D award that was being used to implement the Common Core. The responding six districts' estimates ranged from zero (from a district within a state that had not adopted the Common Core) to 100%. The district superintendent who provided the latter estimate explained that "transformational systems work is needed to truly implement the Common Core." Thus, there was no clear relationship between respondents' estimates and the 19% of the RTT-D scoring system linked to preparing students for college and career. Ultimately, we relied on the estimates from our own document reviews, taking the midrange of the percentages to estimate that 33% of overall funding from RTT-D grantees that had adopted the Common Core was being used to support the reform's implementation.

(4) For IES, one researcher (Griffith) used a keyword search of the IES grants and contracts database to identify IES-funded projects on the Common Core. This search yielded 16 projects as of June 15, 2014. For each, the award amount, type of grantee (e.g., college/university, non-profit, for-profit) and the purpose of the grant (e.g., research, development of aligned resources) were identified. This work was reviewed and confirmed by a second researcher (Kornhaber).

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<sup>2</sup> The RTTT scoring system specified that up to 70 of 500 points could be awarded for state applicants' use of common standards, participation in developing high quality assessments, implementing such assessments, and transitioning to such standards and assessments (Department of Education, Race to the Top Technical Review, n.d. from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/tier1-technical-review.pdf>)

(5) For the two Common Core testing consortia, PARCC and Smarter Balanced, one investigator (Griffith) gathered budget figures from the RTTT Assessment Program award letters and final budget summary tables that each consortium received. These showed the amounts received by each consortia and purposes for which the funds were to be spent. This work was reviewed and confirmed by a second researcher (Kornhaber). Funds were allocated for purposes such as governance, assessment design and development, technology, and project management (U.S. Department of Education, 2013a; U.S. Department of Education, 2013b). These were publicly reported on the Department of Education’s website (U.S. Department of Education, Programs, Race to the Top Assessment Program, n.d).

## **Limitations**

Our analyses focused on the funding sources for the Common Core, the purposes for which these funds were awarded, and the types of organizations (e.g., school districts, curriculum developers, testing entities) that received them. The amounts that travel from funders to recipients along each funding pathway are estimates. Because we sought to be conservative in crediting philanthropic and federal dollars for the Common Core, we may have underestimated amounts spent to advance the reform.

In addition, some estimates are more certain than others, because grantors’ and grant recipients’ documentation varies greatly in specificity. For example, it is clear how much money has gone directly from the federal government to the two testing consortia to develop tests aligned to the Common Core standards. In contrast, despite substantial review of RTTT and RTT-D applications and triangulating sources of information about grant awards, it is less clear what percentage of the federal RTTT and RTT-D awards states and districts intended to allocate to the reform’s implementation. Nevertheless, as noted above, our estimated ranges and the overall percentage of RTTT budgets for the Common Core are similar to those obtained by Kolbe and Rice (2012) for “standards and assessments” in ten RTTT states. We have found no studies that estimated these percentages across RTT-D applications. Regarding philanthropic support for the Common Core, we believe our estimates of funding to direct recipients are reasonable, because we relied on multiple sources for the grants, and our estimates accord with findings about funding for research and for public schools from recent studies of venture philanthropy (see Greene, 2015; Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014).

Existing documentation allowed us to understand the kinds of entities that received direct and indirect (or downstream) funding in each pathway. In the text, we have illustrated these kinds of entities in different pathways with examples of individual recipients. We have also provided tables that list individual organizations that have received the greatest support from private foundations in terms of number of grants (Table 1) and dollars awarded (Table 2) and noted which of these have also received federal funding. However, existing documentation does not allow us to trace all the indirect recipients of Common Core funding. Both modest and more substantial amounts have been designated in RTTT and RTT-D budgets for unspecified indirect recipients.<sup>3</sup> Research into each pathway would help shed light on downstream beneficiaries of Common Core funding from both

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Springdale Arkansas’ RTT-D budget provided \$56,000 to equip the offices of eight Springdale teachers to provide professional development, but it did not specify the for-profit vendors of the teachers’ computers and office furniture (Springdale School District, 2013, p. 187). Maryland’s RTTT budget included \$500,000 for an unspecified vendor of online modules to be used in conjunction with the results of Common Core formative assessments (Maryland Race to the Top Application, 2010, p. 461).

philanthropies and the federal government. It would also illuminate the extent to which funding may have pooled around particular downstream recipients.

### Findings

We identified eight funding pathways along which philanthropic and federal money for the Common Core traveled to direct and downstream funding recipients. Below, we first describe the four pathways that initiated with philanthropic dollars and their purposes and then the four pathways that began with federal funding.

#### Philanthropic Pathways of Funding for the Common Core

Philanthropic dollars for the Common Core took four pathways. The pathways served different explicit purposes, indicated by their pathway names (see Figure 1). We estimated philanthropies provided \$330 million through 309 grants awarded to varied types of organizations between 2008 and June 15, 2014.

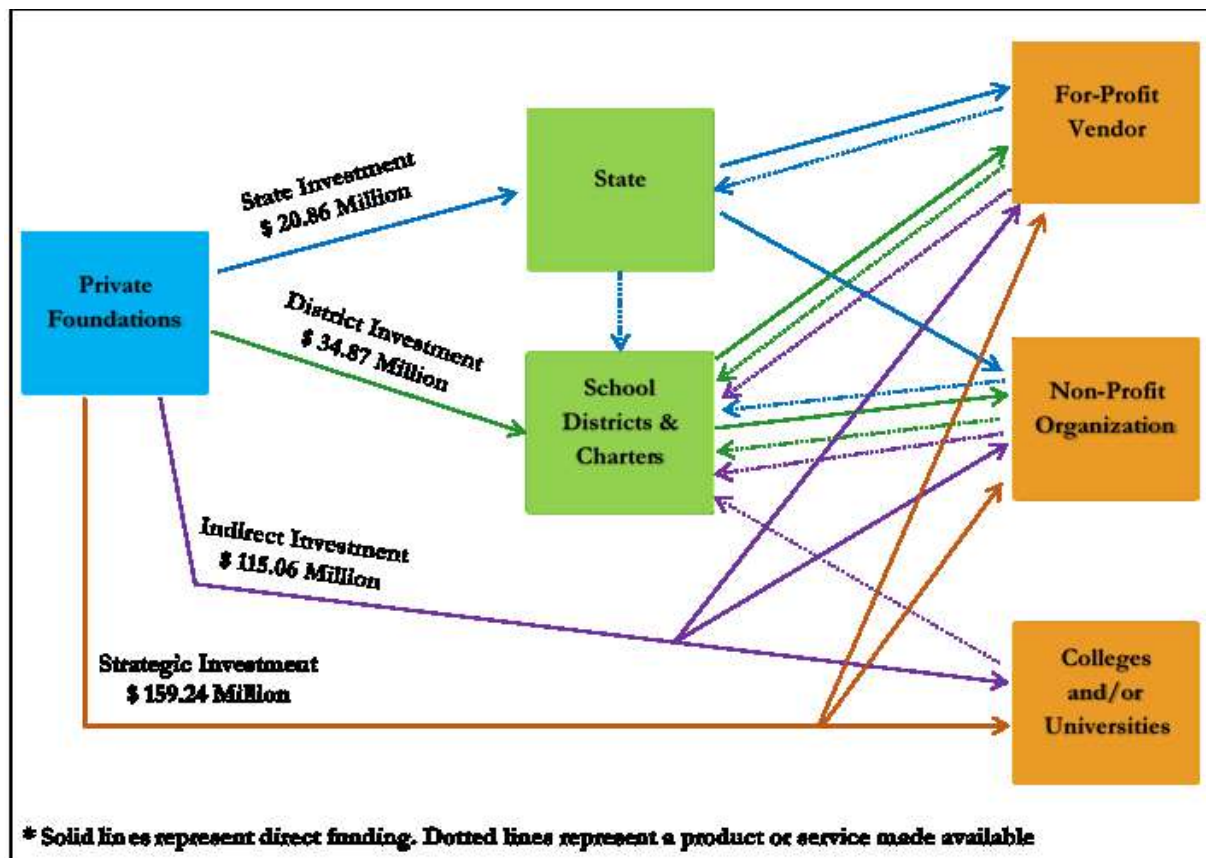


Figure 1. Pathways of Common Core Funding from Philanthropies

The dollar amounts of individual foundation grants ranged widely. The smallest was a \$10,000 grant from the Gates Foundation to the Rodel Charitable Trust for a report on RTTT implementation in Tennessee and Delaware. The largest was \$10.3 million awarded by the Gates Foundation to the New Venture Fund to support “implementation of the Common Core State

Standards and related assessments through comprehensive and targeted communications and advocacy in key states and the District of Columbia” (Gates Foundation, How We Work, n.d. [a]). The average grant was \$1.07 million. We noted variations in entities funded, purposes, and amounts, and also the targeting of some organizations with repeated grants (Table 1) or particularly large grants (Table 2).

Table 1

*Top Direct Recipients of Philanthropic Funding to Support Common Core: Recipients of Five or More Grants*

Recipient	Grantor (# of grants)	Amount	Pathway
<i>Council of Chief State School Officers</i> Grants Received: 13 TOTAL: \$35,130,042	Gates Foundation (7)	\$29,769,828	Strategic
	Carnegie Corporation (2)	\$1,932,100	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (2)	\$1,025,000	Strategic
	Helmsley (1)	\$2,203,114	Strategic
	Lumina (1)	\$200,000	Strategic
<i>New Venture Fund</i> Grants Received: 11 TOTAL: \$18,218,189	Gates Foundation (5)	\$16,068,189	Strategic
	Carnegie Corporation (1)	\$200,000	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (2)	\$600,000	Strategic
	Helmsley Charitable Trust (1)	\$1,000,000	Strategic
	Lumina Foundation (2)	\$350,000	Strategic
<i>Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors</i> Grants Received: 10 TOTAL: \$12,855,043	Gates Foundation (2)	\$7,118,652	Strategic
	Lumina Foundation (3)	\$1,369,000	Strategic
	Helmsley Charitable Trust (1)	\$502,391	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (3)	\$3,365,000	Strategic
	Carnegie Corporation (1)	\$500,000	Strategic
<i>Council of the Great City Schools</i> Grants Received: 6 TOTAL: \$8,125,942	Gates Foundation (2)	\$4,455,494	Indirect
	Gates Foundation (3)	\$3,170,448	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (1)	\$500,000	Indirect
<i>NGA Center for Best Practices</i> Grants Received: 6 TOTAL: \$3,061,151	Gates Foundation (3)	\$2,386,151	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (2)	\$450,000	Strategic
	Lumina Foundation (1)	\$225,000	Strategic
<i>The Aspen Institute</i> Grants Received: 5 TOTAL: \$5,430,847	Gates Foundation (3)	\$3,382,120	Indirect
	Gates Foundation (1)	\$1,807,827	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (1)	\$240,900	Strategic
<i>Achieve</i> Grants Received: 5 TOTAL: \$4,213,300	Hewlett (1)	\$300,000	Indirect
	Hewlett (2)	\$1,500,000	Strategic
	Carnegie Corporation (1)	\$2,163,300	Strategic
	Lumina Foundation (1)	\$250,000	Strategic
<i>Thomas B. Fordham Institute</i> Grants Received: 5 TOTAL: \$3,587,116	Gates Foundation (4)	\$3,461,116	Strategic
	Hewlett (1)	\$126,000	Strategic

Table 2

*Top Direct Recipients of Philanthropic Funding to Support Common Core: Recipients of at least \$5 million*

Recipient	Grantor (# of grants)	Amount	Pathway
<i>Council of Chief State School Officers</i> Grants Received: 13 TOTAL: \$35,130,042	Gates Foundation (7)	\$29,769,828	Strategic
	Carnegie Corporation (2)	\$1,932,100	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (2)	\$1,025,000	Strategic
	Helmsley (1)	\$2,203,114	Strategic
	Lumina (1)	\$200,000	Strategic
<i>New Venture Fund</i> Grants Received: 11 TOTAL: \$18,218,189	Gates Foundation (5)	\$16,068,189	Strategic
	Carnegie Corporation (1)	\$200,000	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (2)	\$600,000	Strategic
	Helmsley Charitable Trust (1)	\$1,000,000	Strategic
	Lumina Foundation (2)	\$350,000	Strategic
<i>Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors</i> Grants Received: 10 TOTAL: \$12,855,043	Gates Foundation (2)	\$7,118,652	Strategic
	Lumina Foundation (3)	\$1,369,000	Strategic
	Helmsley Charitable Trust (1)	\$502,391	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (3)	\$3,365,000	Strategic
	Carnegie Corporation (1)	\$500,000	Strategic
<i>Colorado Legacy Foundation</i> Grants Received: 3 TOTAL: \$11,455,547	Gates Foundation (1)	\$4,853,605	Indirect
	Gates Foundation (2)	\$6,601,942	Strategic
<i>Kentucky Department of Education*</i> Grants Received: 2 TOTAL: \$10,125,227	Gates Foundation (2)	\$10,125,227	State
<i>James P. Hunt Institute</i> Grants Received: 4 TOTAL: \$10,011,882	Gates Foundation (2)	\$2,249,070	Indirect
	Gates Foundation (2)	\$7,762,812	Strategic
<i>Council of the Great City Schools</i> Grants Received: 6 TOTAL: \$8,125,942	Gates Foundation (2)	\$4,455,494	Indirect
	Gates Foundation (3)	\$3,170,448	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (1)	\$500,000	Indirect
<i>Louisiana Department of Education*</i> Grants Received: 1 TOTAL: \$7,351,708	Gates Foundation (1)	\$7,351,708	State
<i>Charter Fund, Inc.</i> Grants Received: 2 TOTAL: \$7,000,000	Gates Foundation (1)	\$4,000,000	Indirect
	Carnegie Corporation (1)	\$3,000,000	Strategic
<i>National Center for Civic Innovation</i> Grants Received: 1 TOTAL: \$5,718,700	Carnegie Corporation (1)	\$5,718,700	Strategic
<i>Khan Academy</i> Grants Received: 2 TOTAL: \$5,544,028	Gates Foundation (2)	\$5,544,028	Indirect
<i>The Aspen Institute</i> Grants Received: 5 TOTAL: \$5,430,847	Gates Foundation (3)	\$3,382,120	Indirect
	Gates Foundation (1)	\$1,807,827	Strategic
	Hewlett Foundation (1)	\$240,900	Strategic
<i>AFT Educational Foundation</i> Grants Received: 2 TOTAL: \$5,400,000	Gates Foundation (2)	\$5,400,000	Indirect

Note: \*Also received federal funding via Race to the Top awards.

Below we describe the pathways that initiate with foundation funding, presenting them in order of the estimated amounts that philanthropies have awarded to them. We illustrate these pathways with individual examples of grants to show variation in recipients and grant size.

**Strategic Investment Pathway.** The Strategic Investment Pathway was the largest route for philanthropic funding. Foundations awarded about \$159 million along this pathway to 191 organizations for the purpose of advancing the Common Core policy agenda.

Recipients included management and consulting groups. For example, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and the New Venture Fund, both non-profits, received some of the largest foundation grants. The latter received \$10.3 million for communications to influence the context for the reform in key jurisdictions (Gates Foundation, *How We Work*, n.d. [a]). In addition, for-profit consulting groups, including McKinsey, the Boston Consulting Group, and Booz Allen Hamilton received Gates Foundation grants to help prepare states' RTTT applications, which called in part for common standards, assessments and other supports aligned to the Common Core reform.

There were also "astroturfing" grants that might cultivate grassroots support among diverse constituencies.<sup>4</sup> For example, the Gates Foundation provided a \$25,000 grant to the Hillsborough (Florida) PTA to "enhance its parent advocacy training modules for Common Core State Standards (CCSS)" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *How We Work*, n.d. [b]). It also gave \$563,611 to the Military Child Education Coalition, "to support implementation of the Common Core State Standards by engaging military leaders and families" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *How We Work*, n.d. [c]).

Strategic Investment Pathway grants were awarded as well to organizations of governmental policymakers. For example, private foundations gave multiple grants to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the largest grant recipient in both number of grants (Table 1) and dollars (Table 2) to help spur states' adoption and implementation of the Common Core. The CCSSO and the National Governors Association (NGA), another recipient of multiple grants, served as official co-sponsors of the reform. Foundation grants were also awarded to the Education Commission of the States, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Business associations that received Strategic Investment Pathway grants include the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, the Florida Council of 100, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. The latter was awarded \$1.38 million from the Gates Foundation "to lead the effort to engage and educate state and local chambers to support Common Core State Standards" (The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *How We Work*, n.d. [d]). Among professional associations, the State Educational Technology Directors Association received \$150,000 from the Hewlett Foundation for "an enhanced and sustainable digital representation of the Common Core standards" (The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Grant Database, n.d.).

Policy groups across a broad spectrum of political leanings were also funded, among them the Center for American Progress, the Aspen Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute. Foundations awarded grants to organizations focused on education policy and education reform. Achieve was among the largest recipients and received multiple grants for standards-alignment and project management work (see Table 1). Others include the Alliance for Excellent Education, the

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<sup>4</sup> "Astroturfing" refers to efforts to simulate the appearance of grassroots support. It was applied to strategies used to advance the Common Core by an interview participant in a separate research study conducted by Kornhaber, Griffith, and Tyler (2014). The term was derived from a response by the late Senator Lloyd M. Bentsen (D-TX) to piles of mail he received from opponents of proposed legislation: "Anyone in Texas can tell the difference between grassroots and Astro Turf" (Grant, 2004, p. 34).

Education Trust, and the Fordham Institute. These have lent support to the reform through convenings, publications, evaluation work, and advocacy. For example, the Fordham Institute received over \$959,000 from the Gates Foundation “to review the common core standards and develop supportive materials” (The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, How We Work, n.d.[e]).

**Indirect Investment Pathway.** The Indirect Investment Pathway encompassed the \$115 million that philanthropies awarded to for-profits and varied non-profits to create products or services for educators to use in implementing the Common Core. Some resources were to be provided without charge to districts, schools, or educators. Others were to be sold.

Among for-profits, the Danielson Group received \$2,962,620 in 2013 from the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Trust to align its Framework for Teaching to the Common Core (Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, Our Grants, n.d.). The aligned framework was to be sold to districts. Filament Games received \$25,000 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for “Drafting Board,” an online writing game aligned to the Common Core, which was to be distributed without charge (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, How We Work, n.d.[f]).

The Indirect Investment Pathway also funded a heterogeneous group of nonprofits to support aligned professional development or curriculum. Among these were education reform groups (e.g., the Education Trust), policy organizations (e.g., Aspen Institute, Hunt Institute), entities that devise or deliver curriculum materials (e.g., Khan Academy, the National Writing Project), and professional associations. Among the latter was the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM), which received a \$175,890 grant from the Noyce Foundation to “create and develop professional development sessions” for math education coaches and specialists (The Noyce Foundation, 2011). The sessions were offered without cost in-person, archived online, and used Inside Mathematics, an online resource for aligning math curriculum to the Common Core. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) received a \$3 million grant from the Gates Foundation to develop Common Core tools and host conferences about the Common Core for teachers (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, How We Work, n.d.[g]). ASCD planned to provide some of these resources at no cost while others were to be sold. The American Federation of Teachers Education Foundation received \$1 million from the Gates Foundation to support teacher development around the Common Core (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, How We Work, n.d.[h]).

**District Investment Pathway.** In the District Investment Pathway, philanthropies disbursed \$34.8 million to school districts to implement the Common Core. Districts then redirected some of that funding to non-profits and for-profits to acquire reform-related products or services. For example, the Gates Foundation gave \$250,000 to Summit Public Schools, a charter operator in Redwood City, California, “to pursue cognitive assessments aligned to the Common Core” (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, How We Work, n.d.[i]). Summit then had its Cognitive Skills Rubric aligned to the Common Core by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2014).

Some District Investment Pathway funds have been redirected downstream to for-profits. For example, Indiana’s Region 8 Education Service Center received \$249,505 from the Gates Foundation to launch networks of teacher training to support the Common Core’s implementation (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, How We Work, n.d.[j]). Region 8 then contracted with the Michael Burns consulting firm to evaluate networking needs and challenges (Region 8 Education Service Center, Gates Project Training Network Growing, n.d.).



Philanthropic dollars in the District Investment Pathway have been concentrated in a few districts. We estimate that more than half of the \$34.8 million expended in this pathway has been given by the GE Foundation to seven school districts in which GE has long-term commitments.

**State Investment Pathway.** In the State Investment Pathway, private foundations allocated \$20.8 million to support states in their efforts to implement the Common Core. In turn, states redirected a portion of this money to for-profit vendors or non-profit entities. For example, in 2011 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded \$9.1 million to the Kentucky Department of Education to support the implementation of the Common Core standards, professional development, and teacher evaluation systems (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *How We Work*, n.d. [k]). The Kentucky Department of Education in turn contracted with the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC), a non-profit, and Reach Associates, a limited liability company, to support teachers' use of the Common Core literacy standards (Kentucky Department of Education, *Literacy Design Collaborative Teacher Institutes*, Reach Associates and the Kentucky Department of Education, n.d.).

In the State Investment Pathway, private foundations again concentrated their funding on a small group of recipients. Of the \$20.8 million that traveled along the State Investment Pathway, Gates grants totaling some \$10 million went to Kentucky. Louisiana received \$7.3 million. Approximately \$3.3 million was divided among Delaware, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

### **Federal Pathways of Funding for the Common Core**

Four additional pathways were funded with \$1.12 billion from the federal government. The pathways have different purposes, as indicated by their pathway names, and they target different kinds of recipients (see Figure 2).

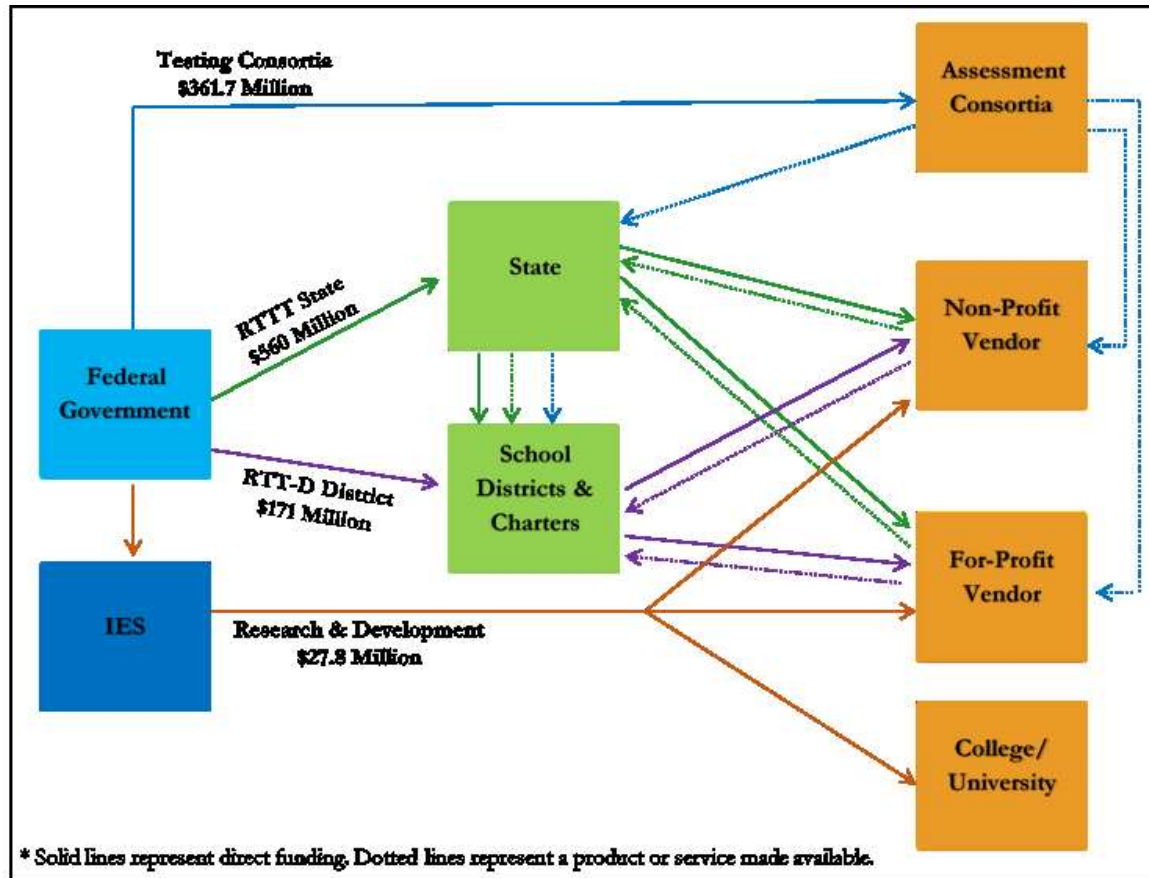


Figure 2.

Pathways of Common Core Funding from the Federal Government

Below we present the four federal pathways in the order of the estimated dollar amounts awarded to them. We illustrate these pathways with examples to show variation in the types of recipient organizations and grant size.

**Race to the Top State Pathway.** The Race to the Top State Pathway follows the \$560 million portion of the \$4 billion in federal RTTT funding awarded to states to implement the Common Core. Federal awards to states ranged from \$17 million (Illinois, Kentucky, and Louisiana) to \$700 million (Florida and New York). States reallocated a portion of that federal funding to non-profits and for-profits to obtain products and services for implementation. For example, New York State’s RTTT application allocated \$26 million to for-profits, such as the Public Consulting Group, ConnectEDU, CaseNex, eScholar, and NCS Pearson/Schoolnet, to develop a data portal system to support students’ college and career readiness. New York also contracted with the non-profit New York State Technology Enterprise Corporation to provide independent monitoring of the portal system’s development (New York State Department of Education, 2013).

**Testing Consortia Pathway.** The Testing Consortia Pathway consists of \$361.7 million federal dollars awarded under the RTTT program to the non-profit testing consortia, PARCC, and the Smarter Balanced. The assessment consortia redirected large portions of this money to for-profit and non-profit entities.

Downstream for-profit recipients in the Testing Consortia Pathway include providers of test development and data management. For example, McGraw-Hill Education CTB, a company with expertise in psychometric test development, obtained a contract for \$72.5 million from Smarter Balanced (Cavanaugh, 2014a). Both Smarter Balanced and PARCC awarded contracts totaling \$20 million for formative assessment, report development, and data management to Amplify Insight, then part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. (Cavanaugh, 2014a; Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia, 2013).

Downstream non-profits in the Testing Consortium Pathway include AIR (formerly American Institutes for Research), which received a \$20 million contract from Smarter Balanced for test-engine development, piloting, and test administration (Cavanaugh, 2014a; Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia, n.d.). PARCC's RTTT grant application allocated nearly \$16 million for Achieve to provide project management (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Career, 2010).

**Race to the Top District Pathway.** The Race to the Top District Pathway tracks funding used to advance the Common Core in school districts or district consortia that won RTT-D awards. Federal awards ranged from just under \$10 million (KIPP, Washington D.C.) to \$40 million (Green River Regional Education Cooperative, Bowling Green, Kentucky). Of the \$520 million allocated by the federal government for RTT-D, we estimated \$171 million was intended to implement the Common Core within school districts. In turn, districts intended to distribute portions of this funding to for-profits and non-profits to secure products and services for the reform's implementation. For example, the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC), an RTT-D grantee comprised of 17 districts, budgeted \$2 million to buy aligned math and literacy curriculum from WIN Learning, a for-profit company. KVEC also budgeted \$1.4 million to secure "evaluation and data analysis support and consulting related to continuous improvement" and faithful reform implementation from the non-profit RAND Corporation (Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative, 2013, p. 204).

**Research and Development Pathway.** Finally, the Research and Development Pathway entails \$27.8 million in federal funding allocated by the Institute of Education Sciences to support the Common Core. Much of this was awarded to universities and other non-profits. Lesser amounts went to for-profit vendors. For example, Vanderbilt University received a \$10 million IES grant to develop and evaluate interventions aligned with the Common Core to the improve reading and math achievement of students with disabilities. The non-profit SRI International received a grant of nearly \$3.5 million to conduct a randomized trial of its Common Core aligned math curriculum and math achievement. The for-profit Imagine Education was awarded \$900,000 by IES to develop a web-based math game aligned to the Common Core. As Figure 3 below illustrates, the Research and Development Pathway provided a modest amount – about 2% of the overall allocations for the reform – to examine how the Common Core might function.

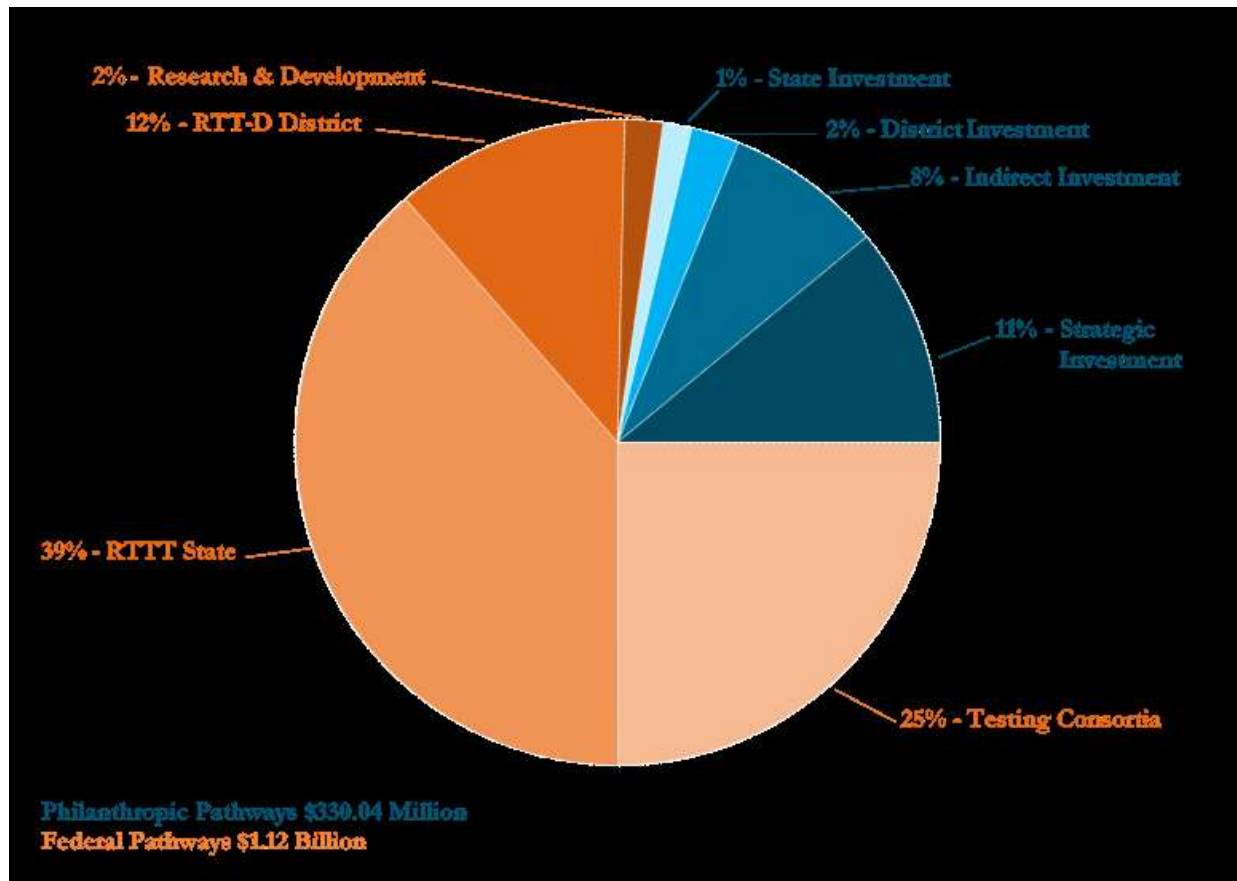


Figure 3. Percentage of Common Core Funding per Pathway

## Discussion

Our findings illuminated eight funding pathways of funding for the Common Core reform, the pathways' purposes, and types of funding recipients. In this section, we discuss clusters of funding pathways according to their purposes, and the flow of dollars into, through, and around public school systems. Through the lens of resource dependence theory, we note how these funding patterns reflect efforts by philanthropies and the federal government to reduce uncertainty for the reform from the wider political and social context or other organizations operating within it. We also discuss the implications of these funding patterns for the Common Core.

### Direct Funding for Alignment

Two pathways, Indirect Investment and Testing Consortia, directly funded diverse types of organizations to align curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessments to the Common Core standards. Such alignment is fundamental to the theory of systemic, standards-based reform (O'Day & Smith, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991).

We estimate that 8% of funding for the reform has gone directly via the Indirect Investment Pathway to for-profit vendors and an array of non-profits, including universities, professional

associations, content specialists, and education reform and policy groups, to provide aligned curriculum, instruction, and professional development. Approximately 25% of all funding was directed to PARCC and Smarter Balanced via the Testing Consortia Pathway. The dollars to support aligned assessments versus aligned curriculum, instruction, and professional development underscore the centrality of the technical-rational nostrums (e.g., metrics, big data, measurable growth) valued by the philanthropic and federal champions of this reform. Investments in testing and accountability systems are also promising approaches to social control under RDT, since such systems are known to influence school and districts (e.g., Beardsley, Berliner, & Rideau, 2010; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Koretz, 2008; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez-Heilig, 2008).

One consequence of the relative funding for aligned testing over aligned curriculum, instruction, and professional development may be that educators will lack necessary resources to implement the Common Core. In turn, this may fuel concerns that the Common Core is just another ‘test-driven’ reform (Burriss, 2014) rather than an effort to create rich learning experiences. Complaints about the cart of testing being rolled out before the horse of instructional and curriculum supports have helped spark resistance to the testing that is integral to the Common Core reform. Despite substantial sums dedicated to marketing and public relations for the reform, such complaints have gained considerable media attention (Kornhaber, 2015; Strauss, 2015; Taylor & Rich, 2015).

### **Direct Funding for States**

Two pathways, the philanthropic State Investment Pathway and the federal RTTT State Pathway, directly fund state departments of education, a necessary component of a reform policy its proponents describe as national (Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler, 2014; Rothman, 2011). We estimate that 40% of funding for the Common Core was awarded to 18 states and the District of Columbia. Almost all this funding came from the RTTT competition. In terms of RDT, these funding pathways speak primarily to the wielding of a critical resource, money, to influence states rendered resource dependent following the Great Recession of 2008-2009.

One consequence of the federal government’s forward charge into common standards and common assessments has been a political backlash against federal overreach, particularly among political conservatives (Kurtz, 2013). In addition to its political consequences, funding of states’ education agencies was nevertheless inadequate on three counts. First, federal RTTT funding for state departments of education would be unlikely to enable ground-level improvements. State education departments rarely have the capacity to support improvements in teaching (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009). Moreover, RTTT may further constrain state agencies’ capacity to support the implementation of the Common Core by requiring them to coordinate with numerous new external entities that were also funded to advance the reform (Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein, & Prine, 2015). Finally, even if RTTT spurred unprecedented capacity-building at the state level, fewer than half the states were funded. Thus, the reform would be unlikely to spur college and career readiness across all states.

### **Direct Funding for Districts**

We estimate that 14% of all funding for the reform was allocated directly to school districts. The District Investment Pathway awarded two percent of overall funding for the reform from private foundations to districts. The RTT-D District Pathway directed an additional 12% of all funding from the federal government to districts (see Figure 3). The RTT-D Pathway supported 66 regular school districts within Common Core states and KIPP in Washington, D.C. These represent

less than 0.5% of the roughly 14,000 U.S. school districts. Philanthropies directly funded only 57 public school districts and eight charter entities via the District Investment Pathway.<sup>5</sup> Under RDT, these limited allocations indicate that influence over districts could be obtained through other investments. For example, the RTTT and Testing Consortia Pathways could broadly influence districts, by altering state policies to favor the Common Core standards and aligned tests.

Our finding that few districts received philanthropic funds for the Common Core accords with recent research that shows foundation support for K-12 education is largely not expended on traditional public schools or districts (Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). However, one consequence of such funding may be that the vast majority of districts, in which the work of the Common Core's universal college and career preparation must ultimately occur, will lack the resources and training needed to implement the reform.

### **Direct Funding for Research**

The federal Research and Development Pathway provided \$27.8 million in direct funding to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) primarily for research. The Strategic Investment and Indirect Investment Pathways funded a handful of grants that included an applied research component to advance the reform or its implementation. For example, the Carnegie Corporation gave a \$1.24 million grant to the Council of Chief State School Officers for “research and technical assistance which lays the foundation for the Common Core adoption process in states” (Carnegie Corporation of New, n.d.).

Across all pathways, just over two percent of all funding for the Common Core has gone directly to support research. Much of it, like the \$1.24 million grant from Carnegie noted above, was intended to further the Common Core, rather than investigate it. This stance, together with the small amount of funding in this pathway, supports Greene's claim that contemporary reform advocates feel little need to examine their policy preferences (Greene, 2015). Under RDT, organizations' efforts to influence other organizations and their social and policy contexts primarily entail the exercise of power (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005), not inquiries into that exercise.

One consequence for the reform of such limited research funding is that important questions about the Common Core may go largely unasked or unanswered. For example, how does this reform translate into better and more equitable learning for students across disparate schools and districts?

### **Direct Funding to Advance the Common Core Policy Agenda**

The Strategic Investment Pathway's direct recipients include a wide array of non-profits that advocate and provide logistical support for the reform (e.g., Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisers, New Venture Fund). The direct recipients also help scaffold the Common Core with a range of constituencies and convenings, which per RDT are efforts to market and legitimate the reform. Some 48% of philanthropic support – about 11% of all funding for the reform – has been expended for these direct recipients to carry the torch for the Common Core.

One consequence of this weighting toward strategic investment has been to draw a good deal of attention to the funders' role in promoting the Common Core (e.g., Dillon, 2009; Layton, 2014; Ravitch, 2013; Schneider, 2015). Such attention, in turn, has raised questions about the claims

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the districts received both foundation support and RTT-D federal support. For example, the seven districts in the Puget Sound Educational Services District received funding from the Gates Foundation and an RTT-D award.

made by Common Core advocates that the reform is a state-led effort. Suspicions over the reform's origins have spurred resistance to it (Ravitch, 2014a).

Another possible consequence is that the commitment among some of the reform's supporters may be shallow (Greene, 2015) and dry up once the philanthropy spigot is shut. Moreover, entities that are resource dependent, or heavily reliant on such funding, may need to be compliant. Such compliance may stifle potentially useful ideas that fall beyond the funders' preferred technical-rational nostrums. Thereby, potential blind spots in the Common Core's development and implementation may go unnoticed or unvoiced.

### **Channeling Dollars Into, Through, Around and From School Districts**

While the pathways' direct recipients vary, all eight pathways directly or indirectly channel dollars to entities beyond schools and districts. Approximately 86% of direct funding from philanthropies and the federal government to advance the Common Core was awarded to such entities. The 14% of direct funds for school districts targeted fewer than 1 in 200 of them. As a result, the vast majority of districts will have to expend part of their budgets to acquire aligned resources, computers, and related technology to implement the reform. Though estimates vary widely, collectively districts are expected to pay billions of dollars for Common Core resources (Murphy, Regenstein, & McNamara, 2012; Rebarber, 2012).

It is possible to see this distribution of money into, through, around, and from school districts from the perspective of the reform's leaders and allies. That is, such funding reflects an effort to support the resources needed for a systemic, standards-based reform that can prepare all students for college and career, achieve greater transparency, and yield economies of scale. Our analysis of pathways and clusters of pathways casts some doubt on this perspective. Aligned curriculum materials and professional development fundamental to teaching and learning within a new set of standards garnered 8% of total funding. In contrast, testing systems absorbed 25% of the overall funding.

Given such allocations, it may be more justifiable to see the Common Core from the perspective of contemporary scholars who find that education policy is increasingly guided by technical-rational nostrums imported from venture capitalism and venture philanthropy, e.g., metrics, big data, accountability systems, and competition (Barone & DeBray, 2011; Cuban, 2015; Greene, 2005, 2013; Hess, 2015; Mehta, 2013; Reckhow, 2014; Scott, 2009). This perspective is reasonably well supported, given that 39% of overall funding came from the federal RTTT competition, which prioritized not only common standards and assessments but also the development of data systems to track measurable growth, and 12% was allocated in the RTT-D District Pathway for a funding competition among districts. An additional 25% supported the testing consortia that would generate the data to track such growth.

Resource dependence theory provides another useful lens through which to understand how funding was used to advance the Common Core. The federal government and private foundations' financial support for the Common Core was a relative pittance: some \$1.4 billion over six years, even as K-12 spending annually is over \$605 billion. Yet, this proverbial 'drop in the bucket' has leveraged a great deal of activity on behalf of the reform (Greene, 2015) across the districts and schools in more than 40 states. By coordinating their efforts, the foundations and federal government reduced uncertainty over the reform's adoption. This reduction was possible partly because social control processes are more effective when an organizational alliance includes an entity that has regulatory authority over an entire sector (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Additionally, RDT helps explain how this relative pittance influenced all but four states initially to adopt the reform.

Philanthropies and the federal government allocated a critical resource – additional money – during a severe recession that left state education systems vulnerable to social control processes.

The federal RTTT and RTT-D funding for common standards and common tests can also be seen as efforts by the U.S. Department of Education to secure its own legitimacy. RTTT and RTT-D indicated the Department held values and beliefs that mirrored higher-status business and philanthropic entities. (See Mehta, 2013.) Thus, some 25% of overall funding was allocated in pursuit of test metrics and 39% and 12%, respectively for RTTT and RTT-D, were established as “competitions.”

Grants in the Strategic Investment Pathway, estimated at 11% of overall funding, sometimes performed double duty. Alongside reducing uncertainty from interdependence, grants to organizations focused on education in disparate communities (e.g., the Military Child Education Coalition, the Council of Great City Schools) enabled public relations and marketing to those communities. Grants to policy groups across the political spectrum (e.g., Center for American Progress, American Enterprise Institute) served the analogous purpose of marketing the reform to divergent political camps. Notably the largest single philanthropic grant went to the New Venture Fund for communications and advocacy to key states about the reform. Such marketing is meant to enhance legitimacy from the wider social and political contexts and thereby support for the reform.

Yet, despite federal and foundation funding that should have limited sources of uncertainty for the Common Core, dissent against the reform has risen since mid-2013 (see McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). As flaws with the reform’s implementation surfaced, key stakeholders such as teachers unions, parents, and some state governors questioned the Common Core. Existing and new entities sought to delegitimize the reform and used the media to market and amplify their message (Harris, 2015; Ravitch, 2014b, Ujifusa, 2014; Ujifusa & Sawchuck, 2014).

Opt Out, a movement advocating test refusal, was launched in August, 2011 (McDermott, 2016). By spring 2015, some 675,000 students across the country were opting out of Common Core tests (FairTest, 2015). Their actions highlighted the dissatisfaction felt in thousands of local communities with policies, curriculum, assessments, and/or accountability systems that the federal government and philanthropies supported.

Elected officials began to take note. Since 2014, the two testing consortia have lost most of their state participants. As of 2016, only 14 of the original 31 states in the Smarter Balanced consortium remain. Just six of the original 26 states remain in PARCC (Gewertz, 2016; Robelen, 2010). It appears that \$361.7 million in federal awards to the two testing consortia will not serve their intended purposes, i.e. forging a system of common high-quality assessments, fostering transparency across states, and enabling economies of scale.

The most recent reauthorization of the ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), reflects the failure of the federal government and foundations to sustain the social control processes that enabled the launch and implementation of the Common Core. ESSA prohibits the federal Department of Education from exercising authority or influence over states’ academic standards or tests. The Department of Education is also prohibited from mandating penalties against states when fewer than 95% of students participate in state accountability tests. The legislation furthermore allows states to provide parents with testing opt-outs for their students (Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015). Without mandates for common standards, aligned tests, and test participation central to the reform’s design, the Common Core will be hard-pressed to achieve its aims.



## Conclusion

We conclude by considering the benefits derived from Common Core funding. Money is beneficial insofar as it can be exchanged for something that is wanted. Here we assess how money to advance the Common Core has benefitted different types of grantors and grantees.

Philanthropic foundations benefitted in several ways from their spending on the Common Core. They further rooted their preferences for competition and technical-rational nostrums, e.g., metrics, big data, measurable growth, and competition, in the education sector. They did so in part by funding entities essential to the reform's operation, its supply of aligned resources, its support among constituencies in the wider social and political context, and its marketing. They did this even as the data that is supposed to drive venture philanthropy provided scant evidence that SBR improves achievement (e.g., Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008; Loveless, 2012, 2016). Venture philanthropists' broad and strategic funding enabled them to purchase increased influence over public policy and public institutions without incurring any accountability for the policies they advanced. It has also empowered them to install public policies without democratic processes (Cuban, 2015; Ravitch, 2014a; Scott, 2009).

Spending to advance the Common Core also benefitted the federal government, at least to the point of ESSA's enactment. The federal government wielded RTTT and RTT-D funding in a competitive manner, placing bets on potential winners in a manner akin to that of higher status venture philanthropies and businesses. We estimate that the combined funding along the RTTT and RTT-D Pathways totaled just over .12% of the \$605 billion spent annually on public education. Yet, these competitions for critical resources during a deep recession enabled the federal government to exercise unprecedented influence over nearly every state's standards.

For-profit grantees that provided Common Core tests, aligned curriculum, or other resources benefitted through increased sales and revenue. A survey of vendors of educational software and digital content indicated that their market grew by 57% between the 2010-11 and 2012-13 school years due to the Common Core and related demands for new assessments (Cavanaugh, 2014b). This growth occurred even though it is not evident that such products improve teaching and learning or reduce achievement gaps.

Non-profits that received direct or indirect funding to advance the Common Core benefitted by securing staff and other resources to sustain or grow their organizations. In some cases, the organizations continued doing work that was central to their aims. For example, Achieve received \$4.2 million in direct funding from philanthropic foundations, and \$16 million downstream in the Federal Testing Consortia Pathway. This money enabled Achieve to continue its long-term role in advocating for standards-based reform.

However, in some cases, Common Core funding came partly at the expense of a non-profit's mission or integrity. For example, the Aspen Institute received five grants totaling over \$6 million. Aspen has an Education and Society Program to provide "an informed and neutral forum for education practitioners, researchers, and policy leaders to engage in focused dialogue regarding their efforts to improve student achievement...." (Aspen Institute, Overview of the Aspen Institute Policy Programs, n.d.). Yet, the Aspen Institute's Education and Society website page was almost exclusively devoted to reports supporting the Common Core (Aspen Institute, Education and Society, n.d.). Similarly, the National PTA began advocating for the Common Core after receiving funding to do so from the Gates Foundation (Ravitch, 2014b). Yet, the National PTA's mission is "to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children" (National PTA, n.d.). The relationship of this mission to the Common Core is tenuous, since SBR does not typically raise achievement but often distorts teaching and

learning (e.g., Beardsley, Berliner, & Rideau, 2010; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Davidson, Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2013; Koretz, 2008; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez-Heilig, 2008; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2007).

School districts and schools may have benefitted by obtaining funding to secure resources to implement the Common Core. However, most districts were not directly funded, and collectively districts were expected to lay out billions to acquire aligned resources (Murphy, Regenstein, & McNamara, 2012; Rebarber, 2012). Moreover, implementation of SBRs has driven attention to metrics and measurable growth at the expense of attention to non-tested content or students' social, emotional, and civic development (e.g., Koretz, 2008; Mehta, 2013). Given the performance of past standards-based reforms, the benefits of Common Core resources for school districts, schools, teachers, and students are, at best, uncertain.

An analogy to the Gold Rush may be useful here: The claim stakers are the federal government and philanthropies that have staked out the Common Core for public policy. To work that stake, they incentivize states and school districts to mine the Common Core and get higher measured achievement. To do so, the miners need equipment. The vendors who sell the equipment profit in the short term, even if their tools rarely enable the miners to get the sought-after results. In essence, those who set directions for the Common Core and those who provided resources for its implementation have benefitted, even as potential benefits to schools, educators, and students are elusive, and the entire claim may ultimately be empty.

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