

**Networked Governance in Three Policy Areas  
with Implications for the Common Core State Standards Initiative**

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Common Education Standards: Tackling the Long-Term Questions  
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## **Introduction**

Determining how to refashion governance to improve valued public outcomes has become a popular activity among scholars and policy makers. The focus on improving “governance,” not just “government,” also reflects current views about how traditional, hierarchically managed public organizations can at best offer limited solutions to urgent problems. Scholars and public officials have come to recognize that government agencies can be most effective when they marshal the broad capabilities of organizations inside and outside traditional hierarchical lines of authority. Those cross-cutting arrangements are commonly known as policy networks.

Identifying the proper mix of potential network actors and then creating appropriate institutions to foster coordination across organizational boundaries is a key task facing public officials today.

Put differently, policy makers and researchers now recognize that designing effective institutions to govern policy networks is a major challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Presently, the Common Core State Standards Initiative resembles an emerging network of organizations united around the goal of developing clear and challenging academic expectations for students in elementary and secondary schools. The present initiative has received praise from across the political spectrum, but the future of the Common Core network, assuming it persists, could take many forms. This paper aims to spark discussion about the potential future governance of Common Core by examining it through the lens of network management.

It is unclear whether Common Core’s future operation will continue to resemble a network of groups as in the current arrangement led by the governors and chief state school officers, and involving supportive work and endorsements from additional organizations. Other potential governing arrangements might emerge, which the authors in this Fordham white paper series

address. To analyze one possible future, this paper assumes that Common Core will persist as a network of connected organizations representing state and other interests. In exploring that possibility, the paper focuses on four issues. First, it considers network governance in theory by offering basic definitions as well as potential advantages and disadvantages of this organizational form. Second, it describes examples of network governance in action across a few diverse policy areas outside education. Third, it discusses some key governance questions that those examples suggest. Fourth, it considers some implications for any networked effort, including Common Core, designed to develop common educational standards and assessments.

### **Network governance in theory**

Networks are ubiquitous in modern societies. Each day, millions of people talk on cell phones, exchange information on the Internet, and travel via connections between cars, trains, ferries, and airplanes. Government institutions find themselves more and more involved in networked action. Agencies work across traditional boundaries, contractors perform crucial functions, and, in social policy especially, nonprofit organizations provide services that government workers previously offered. Such policy networks have grown more complicated as leaders have tackled multidimensional problems at home and abroad.

In theory, all networks possess the same basic building blocks, but a network's organization, function, and purpose can vary.<sup>1</sup> Nodes represent particular organizational locales within a network, such as government agencies, nonprofit, or private sector organizations. Links are the

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<sup>1</sup> See O'Toole and Meier's "Networks, Hierarchies, and Public Management: Modeling the Nonlinearities," Agranoff's *Managing within Networks*, and Goldsmith and Eggers's *Governing by Network* for overviews of management and governance in policy networks.

connections between the nodes. They can represent relationships based on some exercise of authority, transfer of resources, communication, common clients, or shared interest.

Depending on the configuration of nodes and links, a network's shape can suggest different degrees of connectedness among the organizations involved. At one extreme, networks with high centrality contain a single node linked to all others, with the remaining nodes primarily connected to the organization at the hub, but not each other. In contrast, networks with high density represent situations in which each node is directly connected to every other node. In the latter instance, no single node is the hub because all possible connections exist.

Finally, networks also can exist with varying degrees of formality. Non-chartered networks are the least formal. Bylaws, constitutions, or other documents of incorporation do not bind members of non-chartered networks. Nevertheless, records of the members' communications, meetings, and joint actions provide evidence that the network does indeed exist. Chartered networks are more formal and involve cases where network members have crafted a written founding document, or several, to guide their collaboration. Such documents can describe the network's purpose, the conditions of network membership, member roles and responsibilities, and the process by which new members might join.

Networks exist for many reasons. Based on a study of networks of government and non-governmental organizations formed to address public problems, Robert Agranoff has identified four primary network types, summarized in Figure 1. The types differ in the degree to which their members are mobilized to act. In practice, few networks will always perfectly fit any single type. Therefore, the types in Figure 1 are perhaps best thought of as points residing along a continuum from low to high levels of coordinated network action.

Figure 1: Network types

Informational: Members have joined to share ideas and knowledge, which they use to inform their own work in their home organizations. Whether actions result from the exchanges depends entirely on the members' individual preferences and the constraints they must manage in those home organizations.

Developmental: Members exchange information and ideas, but the network also holds educational sessions and offers members services. Those sessions and services help develop capacities so that workers at each node can improve their performance.

Outreach: Members engage in informational and developmental activities, as in the prior two types. Additionally, network members share client contact information, resource opportunities, and may include attempts to loosely coordinate their home-designed programs. Such efforts can increase programming opportunities for individual nodes in the network and help them forge connections to other organizations.

Action: Members are formally bound and work to alter their home organization's policies and routines to help achieve the network's common goals. Harmonization in policies across network members is an intended result. Formal collaborations between network nodes emerge, which could include sharing of funds, service delivery, or development of common resources for the network's future use.

Source: Agranoff's *Managing within Networks*, p. 10.

Researchers and advocates of networked governance have discussed several advantages that networks possess.<sup>2</sup> When compared to traditional organizational forms that operate along stove-piped hierarchical lines, networks can more easily solve multidimensional problems by leveraging diverse expertise and more abundant resources. Such pooling can foster policy experimentation and adaptive solutions to meet complex challenges. Fluid networks can also react relatively quickly to fast-moving circumstances on the ground, as when citizens need help during an emergency, or when unexpected opportunities arise, such as the announcement of a new grant program with a relatively short application timeline.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of the advocates' arguments appear in Goldsmith and Eggers's *Governing by Network* and Agranoff's *Managing within Networks*.

Although networked governance has become a popular concept, it is not a panacea for solving public problems.<sup>3</sup> Increasingly relying on networks, rather than on single organizations, creates challenges for holding actors accountable for results. It becomes difficult for elected officials, for example, to assign rewards for success and punishments for failure when results emerge from the joint efforts of many organizations. Further, a network with multiple member organizations may have difficulty agreeing upon core goals. A diversity of perspectives can bring fresh ideas, but also new interests that labor in tension. In some cases, a powerful network member, given its knowledge or resources, can distort the environment so that the network's activities serve the dominant organization's preferences, not the network as a whole.

The next section introduces three examples of networks in action. A common thread across them is that state governments are directly involved, either as network conveners or participants.

### **Network examples**

A few examples of existing networks are instructive.

#### *Amber Alert*

In 1996, a horrific tragedy sparked the development of several informational networks designed to recover abducted and missing children. In that year, nine-year-old Amber Hagerman was kidnapped and murdered while riding her bicycle in Arlington, Texas. A grassroots effort ensued in the Dallas area, leading local media outlets and law enforcement agencies to create a network for sharing and broadcasting alerts to prevent future such tragedies.

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<sup>3</sup> Network limits are discussed in O'Toole and Meier's "Desperately Seeking Selznick: Cooptation and the Dark Side of Public Management in Networks" and Goldsmith and Eggers's *Governing by Network*.

The original effort in Dallas has been replicated many times in states and local communities to create what are commonly known as Amber Alert networks.<sup>4</sup> Those efforts now receive support from a U.S. Department of Justice program as well.<sup>5</sup> As of 2009, all fifty states operated Amber Alert networks, some of which have expanded into cross-state networks to further enhance coordination. Within individual states, regional networks also exist, including some that cross state lines in Illinois and Missouri (St. Louis metro area), and Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana (Cincinnati metro area). Finally, municipal or county networks also operate on smaller scales.<sup>6</sup> The basic goal of these networks is to get the word out quickly when children go missing or have been abducted. The logic motivating Amber Alert networks is that the best way to return children to safety is to have as many eyes as possible looking for them.

Decision-making in Amber Alert networks varies by state and can involve different network partners and partner responsibilities. Consider Arizona's approach as one example.<sup>7</sup> Activated in 2002, the state's Amber Alert network involves collaboration between state broadcasters, state and local law enforcement agencies, the state department of transportation, and the Arizona lottery. Arizona's network is somewhat unique in that the head of the state's broadcasters' association is the network coordinator. In nearly all other states, state law enforcement agencies, such as the state police or state highway patrol, serve that coordinating function. A fifteen-member task force developed the state's plan in 2001, and an oversight committee remains in place to monitor its implementation and make changes as needed. The plan that governs the

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<sup>4</sup> "Amber" is actually an acronym, which stands for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response plan.

<sup>5</sup> See U.S. Department of Justice, <http://www.amberalert.gov/>. Last accessed on May 13, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> See National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, [http://www.missingkids.com/en\\_US/documents/AMBERMapList.pdf](http://www.missingkids.com/en_US/documents/AMBERMapList.pdf). Last accessed on April 15, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Information on Arizona Amber Alert, including its complete plan, is at <http://azamberalert.org/default.aspx?region=21146>. A list of state Amber Alert contacts is at [http://www.amberalert.gov/state\\_contacts.htm](http://www.amberalert.gov/state_contacts.htm). Last accessed on May 13, 2010.

network is a “cooperative agreement” that identifies the Arizona Department of Public Safety as the agency responsible for giving network partners access to the system that manages alerts.

Local law enforcement agencies participating in the network agree to adhere to a set of reporting and capacity standards. Participating broadcasting stations also agree to disseminate the alerts at regular intervals. Finally, the Arizona Department of Public Safety is also responsible for canceling alerts that become inactive.

### *Homeland security fusion centers*

A major finding of the 9/11 Commission was that the nation was vulnerable to terrorist attacks because intelligence and law enforcement agencies lacked the capabilities to share information and coordinate their actions. A need to “connect the dots” became a common refrain in the nation’s discourse during the ensuing years. While national intelligence reforms, which created the Department of Homeland Security and the Director of National Intelligence, have garnered much attention, the states themselves have begun developing their own integrated networks designed to coordinate information across state law enforcement and other agencies.

Since 2001 the development of homeland security fusion centers has been a popular state effort to coordinate the networks of organizations that respond to emergencies.<sup>8</sup> Fusion centers exist in nearly every state and, within states, some regions as well. The organization and governance of these centers, and how they interact with network members, varies across the country. Over time, fusion centers have broadened their missions. Initially focused on counterterrorism, some have expanded to incorporate responses to all-crimes or all-hazards, whether of human or natural

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<sup>8</sup> Background on fusion centers appears in Rollins’s *Fusion Centers* and the Government Accountability Office reports of October 2007 and April 17, 2008.



origin. Across the states, fusion centers range across all four of Agranoff's network types, depending in part on how long the center has existed and its available resources.

Several considerations influence governance and decision-making in state fusion centers. A common model has been for states to create these centers within the context of preexisting state law enforcement agencies, typically the state police or emergency management agency. Those agencies are tasked with developing rules and regulations to govern the center's operation. Collaborations with federal law enforcement and homeland security personnel add another layer. Although the federal government has published voluntary guidelines to facilitate the development of state fusion centers, other federal considerations also influence center governance.<sup>9</sup> For example, fusion centers may receive classified information from federal agencies, but not all staff in the center may have permission to review it, nor will the center be able to disseminate that information to other organizations in the fusion center network unless they possess proper security clearances. Local agencies participating in fusion centers typically do so by way of memoranda of understanding or other agreements, which may include sharing of resources or tasking personnel to the center itself.

#### *Council of the Great Lakes Governors*

In 1983 the governors of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin recognized their common interest in designing water policies to better use and protect the Great Lakes, the world's largest source of fresh water. That mutual interest led those leaders to create an outreach and action-oriented network known as the Council of the Great Lakes Governors.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The suggested federal guidelines are available from the U.S. Department of Justice at [http://it.ojp.gov/documents/fusion\\_center\\_guidelines\\_law\\_enforcement.pdf](http://it.ojp.gov/documents/fusion_center_guidelines_law_enforcement.pdf). Last accessed on May 13, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Background on the Council is available at <http://www.cglg.org/index.asp>. Last accessed on May 13, 2010.

Six years later, the governors of New York and Pennsylvania joined the Council. Since its founding, the Council has remained a nonpartisan effort and has seen its influence extend across the U.S.-Canada border. It has forged partnerships with the provinces of Ontario and Québec, a relationship that helped produce the Great Lakes Charter of 1985, the region's first water management agreement, which was reaffirmed in an Annex of 2001.<sup>11</sup>

As the nation's economy evolved during and after the 1980s, the Great Lakes region found itself losing population as industrial production contracted in its automotive, steel, and other industries. The reality of interstate and global economic competition, as well as fears that fast-growing regions in the west (and even countries around the world) would try to siphon the Great Lakes for their own development, led the Council to develop a more comprehensive effort to coordinate the economic and environmental activities of its members. Common efforts followed to protect natural resources, increase economic development, and promote the Great Lakes region for tourism and as a home to potential new industries.

The Council is governed by a board of directors, comprised of the governors of each Great Lakes state. The board elects one of its members to serve as chair. The Council also receives support from a professional staff, led by an executive director and four other full-time staff members. Decision-making proceeds via negotiations among the Council's members, which commonly lead to the development of multi-state agreements, such as the Great Lakes Charter mentioned earlier, and the creation of cooperative regional projects that involve participation from some or

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<sup>11</sup> Both of these documents were last accessed from the Council on May 13, 2010, at <http://www.cglg.org/projects/water/docs/GreatLakesCharter.pdf> and <http://www.cglg.org/projects/water/docs/GreatLakesCharterAnnex.pdf>, respectively.

all of the Council's members. The multi-state agreements themselves operate much like treaties among nations. The governors sign them and then pledge to work to incorporate their expectations into state laws and practices.

### **Governance questions**

The three networks described above operate with different goals and have evolved along different paths. Those diverse experiences help to identify some key governance questions that any network designed to promote common educational standards should address.

#### *How to formalize links in the network?*

Whether a network should be chartered or non-chartered partly depends on whether its members are committed to coordinated action, not simply information sharing, development, or outreach. Building upon the Great Lakes Charter, the Council of the Great Lakes Governors, for example, has developed several treaty-like documents to guide policy-making within member states. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement of 2005 established a framework that all members committed to follow in developing future water policies. The small group of states involved in the council and the recognized collective benefits of following such agreements, despite individual incentives to violate them, have helped the region to develop more coordinated policy. Certainly the governors do not have supreme power to set state law, but the agreements provide them a framework from which to work with their state legislatures and other decision-making bodies.

Strategies to formalize governance of state homeland security fusion centers have varied.

Whereas the Great Lakes governors have established new agreements to coordinate their actions, fusion centers in most states have tended to operate based on authority residing within

preexisting laws and regulations. A common model, according to the Congressional Research Service, is for a state to form a fusion center by expanding “an existing intelligence and/or analytical unit or division within the state’s law enforcement agency”; such a model has led some people to refer to fusion centers as “state police intelligence on steroids.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, as is alluded to earlier, the agency home to the fusion center will develop its own internal policies for center oversight and maintenance, along with memoranda of understanding between the center itself and other network members. The use of memoranda of understanding is also a common device used to connect members in Amber Alert networks, be they across state lines, across an entire state, or among localities within a state.

#### *How to define the network’s membership?*

Identifying the parameters that define membership is another governance issue that networks must address to sustain their activities over time. A factor affecting nearly all networks is that participation is voluntary because, typically, current members can leave at any time. Certain types of members perceived to be especially valuable for helping to achieve the network’s future objectives can lead a network to alter its processes or goals.

Homeland security fusion centers provide an interesting example of goal development that has been tied to network maintenance.<sup>13</sup> The initial wave of fusion centers created after the 9/11 attacks focused primarily on counterterrorism activities. A perceived need to enlist more local law enforcement or emergency management agencies into fusion center networks led some centers to expand their focus to the all-crimes or all-hazards mentioned earlier. Local

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<sup>12</sup> Rollins, *Fusion Centers*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> Rollins, *Fusion Centers*, p. 21.

communities that perceived no compelling threats from terrorism, and that wished to devote resources elsewhere, tended to lack interest. Without such local buy-in, the overall effectiveness of the fusion center concept was undermined because it depended on creating a web of information sharing and coordinated action across a state or substate region. Broadening the mission was one way to increase membership.

The conditions for participating in a network can be relatively simple or complex, depending on a network's activities. Membership in Amber Alert networks tends to be based on a relatively simple set of expectations. Guidelines vary from network to network, but most involve some agreement to adhere to a consistent set of reporting standards. In other words, a local law enforcement agency in an Amber Alert network must only issue an alert when certain conditions are met. Broadcasters agree only to announce Amber Alerts that come from network partners adhering to those standards. Network members might also be required to maintain a dedicated staff member who serves as the local agency's point of contact for Amber Alert communications or queries. Uniform reporting criteria are especially important for these networks given the need to avoid prematurely activating the network and thus saturating it with unnecessary or inconsistently understood alerts.

#### *How to resource the network's efforts?*

Networks developed out of a pressing emergency or a unique joining of energized organizational leaders can survive in the short-run partly because their members are so inspired that they willingly contribute time and money. Witness the aftermath of natural disasters, for example, when loose networks of community organizations develop more robust links in order to meet immediate human needs. Yet for other networks, which lack a galvanizing moment or a time-

sensitive reason for being, sustaining the network's activities over time requires the development of resources and capacities.

In 1989, hoping to leverage preexisting capacities and cultivate new ones, seven of the eight members of the Council of the Great Lakes Governors (all except Indiana) established the Great Lakes Protection Fund.<sup>14</sup> The fund is a private, nonprofit corporation that manages a permanent environmental endowment supporting projects that serve the region's environmental and economic goals. The fund is governed by two governor-appointed representatives from each state that launched the endowment with original contributions in 1989. Since then, earnings from the fund have provided financial support for relevant projects, which take the form of grants, loans, or other investments. Two-thirds of the endowment's earnings serve regional projects, and the other third is returned to the contributing states to support their own individual initiatives. Among others, the fund supports current projects to optimize industry water use, control invasive species, and integrate water and energy policy decision-making.

Resourcing state homeland security fusion centers has been more challenging, in part because the centers and their networks are less than a decade old, sometimes even much younger than that. Studies have identified a couple of persistent problems. First, the financing and staffing of fusion centers have often come from within preexisting agency budgets. According to the Government Accountability Office, nearly two-thirds of fusion centers surveyed indicated "they encountered challenges with federal, state, or local agencies not being able to detail personnel to their fusion center, particularly in the face of resource constraints."<sup>15</sup> As a result, staffing at the centers varies greatly. One study from the Congressional Research Service found centers employing between 3

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<sup>14</sup> Background is at <http://glpf.org/about/index.html>. Last accessed on May 13, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> See page 12 of the April 17, 2008, Government Accountability Office report.

and 250 full-time staff members, with 27 being the average.<sup>16</sup> Second, the networks that fusion centers attempt to coordinate are still hampered by traditional operational concerns common in organizational hierarchies, such as bottlenecks that limit information flow, which limit full use of the network resources. As noted earlier, some classified data that federal agencies produce cannot be distributed widely in fusion center networks unless members possess required security clearances. Thus, even when fusion centers have federal personnel on site, not all network members can benefit fully from that resource.

### **Implications for common standards and assessments in education**

The network examples described above suggest several issues that Common Core's supporters should consider as they examine potential arrangements to govern their long-term efforts.

#### *Network type and level of formalization*

How to govern Common Core in the future will depend in part on the type of network that its members envision creating. If information dissemination is the primary objective, in which states could access common standards and assessments and then use them as they see fit, then a less formal structure seems necessary. However, taking that route could run the risk that states would retreat back into their own patterns of work, as organizational routines of current state institutions adapt the Common Core products to suit their own purposes. If more coordinated and consistent action is the goal, in particular fostering more consistent expectations at the classroom level, then something more formal would be required, as in the agreements of the Great Lakes Council or the memoranda of understanding that have established procedures in Amber Alert networks. The Great Lakes governors' experience suggests the added possibility, though, that

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<sup>16</sup> Rollins, *Fusion Centers*.

some activities seem to require more strictly coordinated governance, which treaty-like documents can foster, while others can be more loose, such as informational or developmental activities.

Identifying the different categories of action that Common Core members might hope to pursue collectively could help to determine when to establish relatively tight or loose commitments. The fact that state education governance is multifaceted, involving governors, legislatures, state education agencies (some with independently elected chiefs), and boards (whose members may also be elected in some states), suggests that some commitments will be easier to establish than others. While the governors and agency chiefs are already deeply embedded in the activities of Common Core, state board members and legislators are not. Deciding whether and how to formalize involvement of the latter two groups is something the current Common Core participants could explore in charting the network's future.

### *Defining and sustaining membership*

The voluntary nature of the Common Core network resulted in nearly all, but importantly not quite all, states participating. That reality means states could decide to leave and pursue their own independent work on standards and assessments in the future. Thinking about what kind of governance structure could help enhance member buy-in while simultaneously upholding the overall goals of the network will be challenging. As the fusion centers example suggested, local law enforcement agencies that perceived little immediate threat to terrorism were not persuaded to commit resources to the centers. Altering network goals to embrace more broadly defined threats helped to encourage others to join. When network membership entails paying a cost or assuming responsibilities, then potential members must see concrete benefits for themselves in



return. The Great Lakes governors' strategy of creating a research endowment to help finance regional efforts that would also contribute to individual state projects could represent a creative solution that Common Core could adapt for its own needs.

Given the Obama Administration's interest in Common Core, it is likely that some of the effort's future work could benefit from federal subsidies. Relying on federal funds can create its own difficulties, however, especially if the money comes with requirements that some network members support and others oppose. Federal subsidies can also dry up, which means some consistent state funding to sustain Common Core, assuming its members have long-term ambitions, would be wise to establish.

#### *Recognizing variation in member capacity*

Even if states saw potential benefits from a long-term Common Core effort, variation in state capabilities might influence state participation. Such was the case in some state Amber Alert networks and fusion center networks that required participants to dedicate staff resources to the common good. States with low capacity might be unable to shoulder the responsibilities of network membership, while more advanced states could lose interest if they believed weaker states were free-riding off their resources and expertise. State decisions to house fusion centers in relatively mature state bureaucracies (e.g., state police or investigative agencies) suggested a recognition that those organizations were best equipped to launch the centers. Common Core might adopt a parallel strategy in which certain leading states have a larger role during the initial years of the initiative's governance, with the goal that their staff and financial resources will not be tapped indefinitely. In the meantime, less developed states could be encouraged or supported in efforts to boost their capacity to be more valuable, long-term contributors to the network.

### *The looming federal presence*

As members of the Common Core network discuss the initiative's governance, they should anticipate that the federal government will seek to influence the network to promote federal objectives. The strong tradition of local enthusiasm in Amber Alert networks is one reason why federal involvement has typically been advisory or supportive in that area. Federal mandates do not dictate how these networks must operate. In state fusion centers, the federal footprint has been heavier in terms of providing funding and staff support that links these centers to intelligence resources in federal agencies like the FBI or Department of Homeland Security. Presently, federal law has not dictated the centers' priorities or organizational forms, although the aforementioned federal guidelines have tried to encourage some consistency in the centers.

Given that education remains primarily a state and local activity in the United States, members of the Common Core network may occupy a better subsequent bargaining position if the effort remains credible and produces identifiable results. Well into the future, accomplishing federal education goals will continue to depend on state and local governments' capacities. Even with competent governance and evidence of success, history strongly suggests that the Common Core effort will not deter federal policy makers from attempting to influence future state policy agendas.<sup>17</sup> If anything, it will likely increase their interest. Still, if Common Core is successful in promoting educational equity and excellence, states will be more able to respond to or shape federal initiatives in future negotiations with leaders in Washington.

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<sup>17</sup> Manna, *School's In*.

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