

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2010/08/acquisition_news_in_the_world.html

Acquisition News in the World of Common Standards, Tests

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on August 4, 2010 3:01 PM

Some players in the common-standards-and-assessments arena—folks you've been reading about here—have announced a business deal.

[Pearson PLC](#), the London-based education company, has agreed to buy America's Choice for \$80 million.

The agreement was [announced](#) yesterday. It still has to clear a federal antitrust review, but officials at the two companies say they expect it to close in about a month.

You might recall that [America's Choice](#) was launched by the [National Center on Education and the Economy](#), a Washington-based nonprofit school reform group, to implement the school improvement model it had developed. That model features standards-based instructional materials, coaching and professional development for teachers, and catch-up programs for struggling students. America's Choice became a for-profit subsidiary of the NCEE in 2004.

The NCEE was involved in an ill-fated attempt to write national standards years ago, and also got wide notice for its 2006 report, ["Tough Choices or Tough Times,"](#) which laid out a sweeping vision of school reform.

Did you think we were going to lose the common-standards-and-assessments thread? Nope. Hang on. NCEE is the organizer of one of the three groups of states applying for \$350 million in federal [Race to the Top money to design new assessments](#). It's the group seeking the \$30

million chunk to craft high school board exams. (See [our story](#) on the contenders.)

NCEE's president, Marc Tucker, also served on the feedback team for the common standards in English/language arts. And two senior fellows at America's Choice, Phil Daro and Sally Hampton, served, respectively, on the math and ELA work groups that drafted the standards, a point that America's Choice has not been shy about [promoting](#).

What about Pearson, you might ask? If you've been reading this blog, you will recall that [Pearson has been exploring](#) the possibility of developing assessments via the Race to the Top assessment initiative. Exactly what its role might be in that work isn't yet clear (at least to me).

Pearson and America's Choice officials said in a prepared statement that Pearson, which has a [K-12 education division](#) based in Upper Saddle River, N.J., is "exploring opportunities to bring the America's Choice model to an international market."

Proceeds from the sale will create a [\\$3.6 million-per-year endowment](#) for NCEE. That stream of money will support its work to identify international best practices in key education areas such as school finance, teacher quality, standards, curriculum, and instruction, and to implement the vision it laid out in "Tough Choices."

How will common standards and assessments [change the education business landscape](#), you ask? Keep reading as the answers emerge.

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“Do You Believe Us Now?”

by Donna Garner

5.10.10

Here it comes: Pearson, the largest educational publishing company in the world, has released its Common Core State Standards for Literacy and for Mathematics package

(http://assets.pearsonschool.com/asset_mgr/current/201018/CCS_booklet.pdf).

Basically this package is a national curriculum tied to the national standards (which have not even been finalized yet). However, not to worry because Pearson is helping to write the standards. Page 9 in the Pearson package states, “In fact, many of the program experts we have relied on wrote and reviewed what will now drive instruction across our nation.” In other words, Pearson’s contacts are helping to write the Common Core Standards and, therefore, know what to put into the Pearson package.

In the Pearson package will be benchmark assessments that teachers will give to their students regularly to get them ready to take the national tests. This is called “teaching to the tests” and will be a necessity to give students a chance to figure out how to outmaneuver the national test scoring system.

Of course districts will be only too glad to buy the Pearson package no matter how expensive it is. After all, it is just taxpayers’ dollars, right?

I would not be surprised one little bit to see Pearson get the federal contract to design and publish the national tests. I feel sure Pearson is licking its chops right now at the prospect of getting such a lucrative contract.

The good thing for Pearson and its lobbyists is that instead of having to satisfy individual states and their constituencies, Pearson lobbyists will only have to appease entities at the

U. S. Department of Education in Washington, D. C. The new slogan for Obama's plan for education will be "One size fits all."

Pearson will not only provide the curriculum and test materials but will also provide teacher training and community support. I cannot even imagine how much the entire Pearson package will cost a local school district, but it will undoubtedly be a small fortune.

Teachers will be forced to utilize the Pearson curriculum and benchmark tests because their own teachers' salaries, evaluations, and contracts will be based upon how well their students do on the national tests.

All of the information compiled on the national standards, national curriculum, and national tests will be carried on the national database. This will cost another small fortune in technology and software to implement throughout each school district and then to link it to the federal database.

This national database will be very intrusive of all students' and teachers' lives. Where is the ACLU when we need them to file a lawsuit because of the loss of personal privacy?

The people who are writing the Common Core Standards for Literacy and Mathematics (including the Pearson "experts") are tightly linked to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and the Obama administration,

and it will be the Obama agenda that will permeate our public school classrooms in the coming years.

My fear is that the tests themselves will be subjective in nature and that students' test scores will be based upon how closely the students align their answers to what the Obama administration wants them to say.

The federal carrot that was dangled in states' faces was the Race to the Top funds. Every state in the United States except for Texas and Alaska was fooled by the "carrot."

All of this was achieved while the nation was engaged in fighting the federal takeover of the healthcare system and the other Obama initiatives that are turning our country into a socialized nation.

Few people were watching as the Obama administration stealthily took over the public schools, and it was done without Congressional approval.

Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, Senior Fellow, Governance Studies, Brookings Institution stated in an article entitled "Did Congress Authorize Race to the Top?" published on April 27, 2010:

There is nothing in the text of the ARRA [Stimulus package], or in the portions of the two other statutes to which it points (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the America Competes Act), that authorizes, requires, or even suggests that

states competing for funds would need to adopt common state standards, create more charter schools, evaluate teachers and principals based on gains in student achievement, emphasize the preparation of students for careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or restructure the lowest 5 percent of their schools.

Yet the grant program the administration designed to implement the provisions of the ARRA, the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top initiative, included each of these policy priorities, and states had no chance of winning unless their applications were built around them...

Based on the ARRA itself, I don't think Congress intended to give Secretary Duncan the carte blanche he took...

It used to be that Bill Gates was the most powerful education philanthropist in America. Thanks to the Race to the Top, that mantle has passed to Arne Duncan.

I have to say that I was one person who was not asleep and have predicted and fought this federal takeover of the public schools by the Obama administration since before he was elected President. Others have joined me in sounding the warning bell.

“Do you believe us now?”

Donna Garner

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<http://dailycensored.com/2010/03/25/education-reform-is-the-best-stock-on-the-market/>

[Pearson stands to make even more millions from Common Core Standards/Race to the Top. Pearson sells the very items that it promotes in government education policy -- tests, teacher certification, benchmarks, help on applying for Race to the Top, techie toys, summative and formative assessments. Pearson has also partnered with David Driscoll who happens to be chairman of NAEP and is a trustee at Fordham Institute. Pearson promotes the kind of federal policies that will end up causing schools to buy Pearson products. Our tax dollars at work -- Donna Garner]

EDUCATION REFORM IS THE BEST STOCK ON THE MARKET

Written by [Adam Armstrong](#) [Education](#) Mar 25, 2010

By Guest Blogger George Thompson

Numerous corporations such as Microsoft and ETS (Education Testing Service) use philanthropy to influence education policies in such a way as to create demands for their products. To take but one example of how this works, **[consider how Pearson PLC, is expanding its current markets through the push for national standards.](#)**
[\(http://www.corestandards.org/\)](http://www.corestandards.org/)

[After increasing profits by 46% at the height of the recession, based largely on its stake in the burgeoning school improvement industry,](#)

Pearson is now in a position to profit even more from “Obama’s push for common state standards in math and reading”, according to CEO, Marjorie Scardino.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704754604575094751085387736.html>

The Wall Street Journal explains that “The implementation of core standards would reduce the burden Pearson faces in adapting materials to individual state requirements. It could also open up an opportunity for Pearson to win a new contract measuring the progress of that common-standards initiative.”

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704754604575094751085387736.html>

Pearson also plans to cash in on Obama’s “Race to the Top”, which will require “Data systems that measure student success” which, according to Scardino is “one of Pearson’s key areas.”

Pearson, like other for-profit education corporations has been far from a passive recipient of its lucrative education contracts. It actively uses its tax-free philanthropy funding to finance research, policy papers and other media which push for government reforms that both heighten competition for “achievement” and the need to for tools to measure it, which they just happen to sell.

As one can see from a Pearson news release in late 2009, the global media company is now pressuring state governments for precisely the national reforms such as the common core standards that will benefit their own bottom line most.

The release begins, with a useful mantra which requires no justification, only repetition: “Education reform is a national priority.” As a result of

this supposed priority, “*Pearson, the education, services and technology company, is stimulating discussions of school reform issues with today’s launch of a series of video interviews with nationally recognized education leader David Driscoll, Ed.D. The company’s Evaluation Systems group, the most experienced provider of standards-based teacher certification testing programs, developed these thought-provoking videos with the former Massachusetts Commissioner of Education to contribute to the national conversation on the most effective ways to improve student achievement.*” http://www.pearsoned.com/pr_2009/122309.htm

It seems Pearson has in one way or another partnered with Driscoll, who not only holds a great deal of reputation-clout based on his former role as former Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, but also is even more influential at policy tables as **“the chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress: The Nation’s Report Card.”** Thus, while the news release uses Driscoll’s role at NAGB to lend an aura of impartiality to their advocacy of national standards, it is also a sign of considerable backdoor policy influence that the company is able to use a government leader to advertise its position.

Not mentioned is the fact that **Driscoll is also a trustee at the Fordham Institute** http://www.fordhaminstitute.org/detail/bio.cfm?name=David-P-Driscoll&page_id=127&id=435 which proudly through its philanthropy sponsors charter schools <http://www.fordhaminstitute.org/sponsorship/index.cfm> which are, in the long run going to be a very lucrative industry for Fordham’s business sponsors, such as the Gates, Walton (Wal-Mart) and Hoover foundations, **all of whom are heavily invested in the charter movement and profitable school competition.** <http://www.fordhaminstitute.org/index.cfm/our-funders>

What policies are promoted in Driscoll’s videos? Firstly, it wants to follow Driscoll’s lead in Massachusetts, where “The key to our success...was not just student testing, but also teacher licensure testing.... **The thing that made the biggest difference in Massachusetts was ratcheting up teacher standards.**” Of course, Pearson just happens to be a world leader in the delivery of teacher testing services. Indeed, pressure to “ratchet up” teacher standard will mean more money for

quality measurement (ie. teacher testing) and a lot more money for professional development, a field which Pearson already dominates, especially through its delivery of online teacher upgrading materials.

A big part of the Driscoll videos is the promotion of national standards, and a parallel expansion of such standards to teachers:

“In the video, ‘Education and the Future,’ Driscoll talks about the potential effect on teachers of the current movement toward common, national standards for student achievement. ‘As common standards are established across the country and we raise expectations for students, in most states, they are going to have to raise the expectations of teacher skills and knowledge.’”

The Pearson Foundation itself is also a very active player in “donating” funds towards initiatives calculated to drive up demand for their own products. **Pearson is a world leader in education delivery centered around the use of mobile digital devices, such as cell phones, television, video games, smart devices, and computers.** To this end, Pearson has funded research which conveniently demonstrates the value of what it calls “emergent literacy”. The research says:

Opportunities to engage with digital media increasingly prevail through the use of mobile devices – and in developing countries access to mobile devices is more commonplace than access to other technologies.

Developmental milestones are changing as young people’s access to mobile and digital technology grows.

Digital media positively impacts children’s opinion of learning, providing engagement opportunities not always seen with print materials.

<http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/emergentliteracy/>

Thus, while most teachers see mobile electronic devices as a major obstacle to student focus within the learning environment, Pearson-promoted studies use foundation money to press the need for “Pockets of Potential: Using Mobile Technologies to Promote Children’s Learning.” <http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/emergentliteracy>

Pearson also promotes policies with papers on a wide variety of issues that relate directly to other profitable activities. For example, Pearson’s response to the Race to the Top is based around the corporation’s expanding line of data-warehousing products for tracking student progress and recording interventions in relation to test performance:

In many ways the future of assessment has nothing to do with the assessments themselves. If we are to achieve the common goals of education reform (improved learning, increased college readiness and true international competitiveness), we must design a learning system that uses assessment data as one component of a much broader and comprehensive information management model. Such a learning system must start with the premise that our fundamental objective is to facilitate personalized instruction and early interventions so that we prepare each student to compete in a global economy and thrive in a global society. This new student-centered learning system must use technology to reduce the burden on educators, students, parents, and the public. It must facilitate the flow of information for timely instructional interventions and continuous improvement to remove current barriers to student success. <http://www.education.pearsonassessments.com/NR/rdonlyres/CF3F0357-1B0E-4460-96DB-6F680994ADFC/0/RacetotheTopAssessment.pdf>

Another key area of expansion for Pearson will be that of broader assessments, often called “benchmark assessments”. Whereas ETS dominates the summative state-wide testing industry, the market for all the pre-assessments (also called “interim” or “formative” assessments) which can be used along the way to prepare students for such tests is infinitely expanding. Thus, Pearson policy reports include research which advocates for “carefully designed tools [which] make data-driven decisions possible, provide clear reflection and improve day-to-day teaching and learning in the classroom.”

Indeed, the possibilities are great for Pearson to effectively take over control of entire education systems through its expansion to high-stakes data-surveillance on which both teachers' livelihoods and students fates will be decided. The **PA Series** will “Measure instructional effectiveness in **reading, writing, algebra, and mathematics** using PA Series progress and diagnostic assessments with scientifically based year-end achievement forecasts.”

Another product, the Stanford Learning First system, also gives us clear indication of the extent to which Pearson's promotion of assessment will ultimately give it control over entire education systems:

Stanford Learning First can be described as comprehensive, by including both summative and formative assessments; coherent and integrated, through its horizontal alignment to standards and vertical alignment to the goals and structure of education systems; and continuous, by using multiple periodic assessments to track student achievement. Stanford Learning First clearly has an important role to play in the development of complete assessment systems.

<http://www.pearsonassessments.com/NR/rdonlyres/FE876B0C-3E31-4847-B761-2370630F2748/0/TowardCompleteAssessment.pdf>

It is instructive to look at Pearson's policy guidance on the so-called “narrowing of curriculum” and “teaching to the test” which has been observed by many to have resulted from the high-stakes testing on math and literacy that has swept the globe in recent years. Pearson's solution has not in any way been to suggest a “lowering” of the stakes or the removal of such high-stakes testing altogether, **but rather to call for more and better assessment which will need to be purchased from Pearson.**

Thus, the report concludes,

“In the current era of accountability, curriculum narrowing is the latest challenge

facing the education system. Frequently, the accountability assessments mandated

by NCLB are identified as the source of this issue. However, accountability

assessments are intended to be one source of data about what students know and

are able to do. Many other sources of information are necessary to build a complete understanding of a student’s abilities. Proponents of accountability

assessments do not suggest that a high-stakes decision be made based on one and

only one piece of evidence. Test results are a single point of evidence that, when

added to other pieces, help students, parents, and teachers understand what a

student knows and can do. Because a single assessment result is not necessarily

reflective of a student’s abilities, many state assessment programs allow students

multiple opportunities to succeed on the annual accountability assessment.

Assessments must be understood as tools that are only useful when used correctly.”

<http://www.education.pearsonassessments.com/NR/rdonlyres/FE876B0C-3E31-4847-B761-2370630F2748/0/TowardCompleteAssessment.pdf>

Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a company being more dialled in to the profits to be made from government funded education. Pearson even offers for-profit services in helping companies strategically apply for Race to the Top funding. The “Pearson Resources for Grants and Funding” reminds us that “Funds + Resources = Success”. Pearson also facilitates applications for NCLB funding for poverty (Title I), technology (EETT) and School Improvement. In other words, the complexity of school application processes is such that Pearson can become a virtual gate-keeper for government funding.

As mentioned in earlier, Pearson is only one of many high-stakes players in this game of “raising the bar” and “closing the gap” for an ever greater accountability which is to be extracted from public funding in the name of “school improvement”.

What is more disconcerting is the extent to which we have allowed public education to be effectively controlled by the education improvement industry and the accountability measurement organizations.

Readers of previous articles in *Daily Censored* have been made well aware of the complex web of partnerships between for-profit organizations and non-profits, non-governmental organizations, research agencies, think-tanks, front groups, foundations, mass media controllers and politicians. This network holds a mafia-like grip over the government production of education policy which can only be broken by popular demand for an education system that is entirely government owned and operated and one that is driven by the principle of equality rather than “targeted” funding. **Until the general population is made aware of how school improvement and accountability that serves it are being used to subvert their power over education, it seems likely that policy will continue to be dominated by reform’s fundamentally anti-democratic agenda.**