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The National Curriculum – A Saving Grace or Unsustainable?

The idea of equity teaches us that dealing everyone with the same hand of cards leads to better outcomes for everyone. This begs the question – can it apply to United States education? The United States educational system is currently funded and controlled mostly through state and local taxes, which leads the system to adopt a similar system to curriculum where towns and states control the content that students learn. Some people believe that this state-by-state solution has led to inequality in teaching standards, censorship, and opportunity for states that do not prioritize education over others, and to rehabilitate American education, we need to deal every student the same hand. (add context for being against nationalized curriculum) In reality, the idea of instituting a nationalized curriculum with a standardized way of teaching does not do anything to solve these problems and would even make some of them worse. The nationalized curriculum, although praised by some as the only equitable way to save our education system, cannot deliver on its promises to fix education for everyone, making it ineffective in the long term for the United States.

Although the movement is backed by an overall goal to help the country, the nationalized curriculum abandons individuals who are ahead and those who are behind, prioritizing the average student who already has enough resources. Supporters of the nationalized curriculum argue that kids just need to meet expectations to enter a certain career as long as the course

content adequately prepares students for a career, claiming that course variance “would break the fundamental promise of AP ... that course would not prepare students for success in the discipline,” with such a supporting viewpoint also broadly applied beyond AP as well (CollegeBoard). On the contrary, others who criticize the nationalized curriculum find that “... we all learn most efficiently when the subject ‘happens’ to pique our interest, overlaps with what we are currently ‘into ...’” (Meier). Essentially, supporters argue that because jobs within the same field require the same skills, students should be aiming to adhere to the average, so there is no point in trying to advocate for an unnecessarily high skill ceiling. Realistically, careers differ in their difficulty and people naturally want to pursue different career paths within their own discipline. For example, a Computer Science job might only require that someone know a single programming language, but to develop the expertise and the experience necessary to excel in their field, students would need to learn more than just the concepts within that language. Especially considering the nuance between different languages, it is impossible to structure a curriculum that is fully comprehensive without specializing for career. The nationalized curriculum simply cannot support that. Additionally, some people are naturally more or less academically inclined. That does not mean that they are less intelligent or less adaptable to the modern world; they simply do not adhere to traditional careers (for example, not everyone wants to have a STEM related career). By limiting this variation through the nationalized curriculum, there is a difference between the variation kids experience within the educational system and what they will experience in their careers. Variation should be encouraged because it creates a diverse, passionate, and effective workforce across many careers. What is the best way to fight for variation? It is to adhere to people’s interests – the exact opposite of what the nationalized curriculum serves to fight for.

Even if our individual students are not harmed, the nationalized curriculum would ensure that entire states and communities are taken down with it as well, leaving the quality of states that are better at education to diminish in quality while other states simply cannot catch up, with no end in sight. Despite popular belief from those in favor of the nationalized curriculum, “the same pressures that detract from the quality of many state standards are likely to plague national standards as well. ... undercutting states with higher quality standards”, ultimately destroying more advanced states (Marshall and Burke). Additionally, it would have also caused bipartisan distaste as it “offended conservative activists and lawmakers who saw the initiative as an encroachment on the American tradition of states’ rights” and liberals who wanted more control over what was taught (Gewertz). This bipartisan dislike for the nationalized curriculum represents a major problem with the policy – it does not work for any state, causing division from the inside out. It obviously does not make sense to most people to drag down states that are doing better, as we should be looking to model our systems after them. However, if we do not undercut better states, then we leave an infinitely large gap for other states to clear. The growth of education in states with less resources to do simply cannot exceed the growth of those that are already far ahead in education because of this resource disparity. Nationalizing the funding to ensure equal resources would be a nearly impossible task, and dealing with those inequities would be much more lucrative than standardizing the content being taught in the classrooms anyway.

Either way, the people affected by this change are not merely the kids walking through the school gates, but also the parents and taxpayers who work to support the schools and support the students. Instituting a nationalized curriculum would alienate these crucial supporters from the system, preventing them from creating positive change in their communities. How do parents

and taxpayers contribute to our school system? Besides alienating the people who pay for the system in the first place, “centralized standard-setting would force parents and other taxpayers to relinquish one of their most powerful tools for school improvement: control of the academic content, standards, and testing through their state and local policymakers” (Marshall and Burke). Supporters of the nationalized curriculum would say that this is good, as standardized and recognized experts should have the ability to determine course content, not parents and taxpayers who do not have expertise in the fields. At the end of the day, students are not just representing themselves when they go to school. They represent their dreams and goals. Parents should be entitled to help their kids achieve these goals, a goal itself made impossible by the nationalized curriculum. Nationalizing the curriculum will do nothing to make every course of the highest quality and could actually work against that goal. Adapting a single course for every single student is simply impossible without catering to the needs of every student. Equalizing the curriculum will do nothing to solve the inequality “problem” caused by socioeconomic divide, and could even make it worse. Regardless, parents who already have a higher socioeconomic status than their peers will still be able to afford extra resources and instruction over other parents in lower socioeconomic statuses, granting them that same, inequitable advantage. Additionally, schools who have less funding will not be able to surpass the nationalized curriculum as easily thanks to the fact that they are now rewarded for sitting at the bare minimum. Therefore, inequity is still passed around to schools who have the resources to surpass the bare minimum and those schools which do not.

Ultimately, dealing everyone with the same hand does not solve inequality, and it also actively harms the students behind the policy. The nationalized curriculum will not live up to its promise to fix education, and to solve these issues, the United States should be looking to tackle

the roots of these issues by providing everyone the resources they need in the first place, not by prioritizing uniformity over their students.

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