



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 30, 2012

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The Common Core Need Not Break the Bank

New Analysis Projects State-Level Costs of Implementing New Standards

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The total cost of implementing new common standards in math and English Language Arts will range from \$3 billion to \$12 billion, depending on how states approach that challenge over the next several years, according to a report released today by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. *Putting a Price Tag on the Common Core: How Much Will Smart Implementation Cost?* estimates the implementation cost for each of the forty-five states (and the District of Columbia) that have adopted the Common Core State Standards. Since states and districts are already spending money on related items like textbooks and professional development, the report explains, *new costs* could range from less than zero to about \$8 billion, with a “balanced” approach costing less than \$2 billion in the aggregate.

Authors Patrick J. Murphy of the University of San Francisco and Elliot Regenstein of EducationCounsel LLC show that costs naturally depend on how states approach implementation, and illustrate this with three models:

- ***Business as Usual.*** This “traditional” (and priciest) approach to standards-implementation involves buying hard-copy textbooks, administering annual student assessments on paper, and delivering in-person professional development to all teachers.
- ***Bare Bones.*** This lowest-cost alternative employs open-source instructional materials, annual computer-administered assessments, and online professional development via webinars and modules.
- ***Balanced Implementation.*** This is a blend of approaches, some of them apt to be effective as well as relatively cost-efficient.

The report examines the tradeoffs associated with each strategy and estimates how much the three approaches would cost each state that has adopted the Common Core. The authors point out that, since states already invest billions annually in professional development, assessments, textbooks, and other expenses in connection with existing

standards, proper forecasting of Common Core costs should “net out” the sums that states would spend anyway for activities that this implementation process will replace.

National Estimates for Gross and Net Transitional Costs, by Approach
(Dollars in millions)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	<i>Business as usual Gross Costs</i>	<i>Bare Bones Gross Costs</i>	<i>Balanced Implemen- tation Gross Costs</i>	<i>Estimated Current Expenditures</i>	<i>Business as Usual Net Costs</i> (Column 2 – 5)	<i>Bare Bones Net Costs</i> (Column 3 – 5)	<i>Balanced Implementa- tion Net Costs</i> (Column 4 – 5)
Forty-five CCSS states plus D.C.	\$12,131.8	\$2,951.1	\$5,064.9	\$3,878.5	\$8,253.3	-\$927.3	\$1,186.4

How to read this chart: The transition to the Common Core could take between one to three years, so these figures are best understood as total, not annual, transitional costs. Also note that the *Bare Bones* option would produce a negative net cost number. This does not mean the transition to CCSS will result in a surplus—it is meant to illustrate that it is possible to make the transition with resources that are already included in budgets.

“Spending reasonable sums to ensure that America’s schools and students successfully attain high standards is a worthy investment,” said Fordham Institute President Chester E. Finn, Jr. “That doesn’t mean implementing the Common Core will break the bank—assuming states and districts are flexible and forward-thinking about how they spend.”

Find *Putting a Price Tag on the Common Core: How Much Will Smart Implementation Cost?* online at <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/putting-a-price-tag-on-the-common-core.html>

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is committed to the renewal and reform of primary and secondary education in the United States. Generous support for this report was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as by our sister organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. For further information on this report, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, please visit us online at www.edexcellence.net.

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