



# For Pearson, Common Core is private profit

*Has the company that produces many standardized tests gained control of our education system?*

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by [Nicholas Tampio](#) @NTampio

Who stands to gain from education reforms such as the controversial Common Core standards?

One big winner is the British publishing company Pearson, which [delivered](#) 9 million high stakes tests to students across the United States in 2014, including the PARCC Common Core assessments. Pearson has an especially tight hold on New York's education system, which one critic has compared to the grip of an [octopus](#). Pearson runs the [edTPA](#) program, which certifies New York teachers, and the company has a \$32 million [contract](#) to administer the state's end-of-year tests. And it offers a wide variety of [services](#) to implement the Common Core, including curriculum models and tools to measure student understanding.

The company is [expanding](#) its brand into the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, South Africa, Brazil, India and Saudi Arabia. Pearson earns over [\\$8 billion](#) in annual global sales, with much more to come if countries continue to use standardized tests to rate students, teachers and schools.

We can learn more about Pearson and its sweeping vision for the future by turning to a 2011 book by the company's chief academic officer, Michael Barber. In "Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders," he lays out his philosophy and, unintentionally, reveals why parents, teachers and politicians

must do everything they can to break Pearson's stranglehold on education policy around the world.

Barber has worked on education policy for British Prime Minister Tony Blair as well as for McKinsey & Co. "Deliverology," written with assistance from two other McKinsey experts, is clearly inflected by the worldview of management consulting.

The authors define "deliverology" as "the emerging science of getting things done" and "a systematic process for driving progress and delivering results in government and the public sector." The book targets systems leaders, politicians who support education reform and delivery leaders, employees responsible for the day-to-day implementation of structural change.

Deliverology alternates between painting a big picture of what needs to be done and offering maxims such as "To aspire means to lead from the front" and "Endless public debate will create problems that could potentially derail your delivery effort."

**Pearson just happens to be one of the world's largest vendors of the products Barber recommends for building education systems.**

Barber believes in the "alchemy of relationships," or the power of a small group of people working together to enact structural change. For example, Barber applauds Barack Obama's Race to the Top program for providing a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform public education in America," including through the Common Core. Barber's book offers leaders advice on how to implement the Common Core standards that Pearson employees helped write.

Taking inspiration from Margaret Thatcher's motto "Don't tell me what, tell me how," Barber rarely discusses what schools should teach or cites scholarship on pedagogy. Instead, the book emphasizes again and again that leaders need

metrics — e.g., standardized test scores — to measure whether reforms are helping children become literate and numerate. Of course, Pearson just happens to be one of the world’s largest vendors of the products Barber recommends for building education systems.

This spring, a prominent anti–Common Core activist [tweeted](#), “I don’t think the Ed reformers understand the sheer fury of marginalized parents.” Barber understands this fury but thinks the “laggards” will come around once enough people see the positive results.

Deliverology even instructs leaders how to respond to common excuses from people who object to education reform.

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<b>Common excuses</b>	<b>Response</b>
The changes you’re asking for will have unintended consequences.	We will have mechanisms for ensuring potential co realized (e.g., monitoring indicators of unintended c
The changes you’re asking for are risky.	The risks of inaction are greater.
The target is wrong.	The changes were chosen from fact-based analysis when viewed as part of the trajectory.

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[Source: Michael Barber, with Andy Moffit and Paul Kihn. “Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders” (New York: Corwin, 2011), page 166.]

“Deliverology” is a field guide — or a battle plan — showing education reformers how to push ahead through all resistance and never have second thoughts. As Barber quotes Robert F. Kennedy, “Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.” Parents and teachers who do not want to adapt to the new state of affairs are branded “defenders of the status quo.” Barber ends the book by telling reformers to stick with their plans but acknowledge the emotional argument of opponents: “I understand why you might be angry; I would not enjoy this if it were happening to me either.”

But Pearson’s investment in the Common Core has become a lightning rod for criticism. Professor Nancy Carlsson-Paige of Lesley University recently contributed to a [report](#) identifying problems with the Common Core standards, including the one that requires kindergartners to “read emergent texts with

purpose and understanding.” According to the report, there is no scholarly basis for setting this bar for kindergartners. In fact, the evidence suggests, expecting children to read too early can have adverse consequences. Early childhood researchers have shown the benefits of play-based kindergarten for cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. “Children learn through playful, hands-on experiences with materials, the natural world and engaging, caring adults.” The report calls for the Common Core kindergarten standards to be withdrawn.

Politicians are listening to informed dissent against the Common Core and its corporate sponsors. In New York, state Sen. Terry Gipson, D-Rhinebeck, has introduced legislation to sever the state’s connections to Pearson. After identifying problems with the company’s Common Core exams, Gipson [said](#), “This is a for-profit corporation funded with taxpayer money, so we have more than enough reason to ask the state Education Department to cease and desist all relations.”

Expect such resistance to grow — and for good reason. Parents, educators and politicians no longer buy what Pearson is selling.

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*The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera America's editorial policy.*

Common core seems to be a way to make the education system appear functional. It sets a common test and then education becomes the test result. Students, I believe, are being cheated out of a quality education and introduction to the working world. Privatization in education is the act of private companies buying their way into public education, mostly through lobbying and campaign funding, thanks to Citizens United. In exchange of money, the potential candidate can pass bills and regulations once president. Common core, focused mainly on testing, standardized curriculum and provided tests, assessing the teacher's ability to teach, and the student's ability to test/learn? The company's Common Core strategy ran into trouble on two fronts: It struggled to develop and deliver new digital courses on time, as the academic standards themselves faced a political backlash in which several states pulled out. Pearson's strategy included a digital curriculum for the common academic standards approved by most U.S. states starting in 2010, and a vigorous pursuit of standardized testing contracts that backfired. Those were among several factors that hurt the U.K.-based Pearson, exacerbating a decline in U.S. college textbook sales that company executives say is the primary culprit for its problems. Pearson's share price has declined 32% over three years and sales have fallen in three of the past four. It has laid off thousands of employees. JC559 / Getty Images. For Pearson, Common Core is private profit. Has the company that produces many standardized tests gained control of our education system? March 24, 2015 2:00AM ET. by Nicholas Tampio @NTampio. One big winner is the British publishing company Pearson, which delivered 9 million high stakes tests to students across the United States in 2014, including the PARCC Common Core assessments. Pearson has an especially tight hold on New York's education system, which one critic has compared to the grip of an octopus. Pearson runs the edTPA program, which certifies New York teachers, and the company has a \$32 million contract to administer the state's end-of-year tests. The Pearson's Common Core Engagement. Pearson appeared on the CCSS scene in 2009, at which time its nonprofit, the Pearson Charitable Foundation (PCF), paid the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) a \$100,000 grant. PCF paid CCSSO two additional grants in 2010 (\$340,000) and 2011 (\$100,000). A decision to give the education provider Pearson a major, potentially lucrative contract for common core testing is being challenged by a competitor who claims the award was made through a process that was unfair and biased in favor of the eventual winner.