The Debate: Common Core and our Education System

By Dayna Sipila

Common core, an American curriculum to try and get students to be at similar levels of knowledge within each grade level, isn’t doing much to help students in the long run. It seems as if it is only creating more and more problems, rather than truly solving any. Teachers are even saying that the common core standards are not doing anything to prepare the students for higher education or to help improve their learning. The common core standards within our country need to be re-evaluated. We, as a country, need to look at what “learning” truly means and what exactly it is that we want our students to get out of public schooling.

When it comes to education, there is not a “one size fits all”. There have been many studies done on the different types of learners that exist within educational settings. Therefore, in a more recent study, seven different learning styles have been recognized. Those being: visual, aural, physical, verbal, logical, social and solitary. Each of these seven styles are different. Every student learns differently, and it varies by subject matter. Something like common core tries to mold students in this “one size fits all” cookie cutter, but that is not what learning looks like. You can’t mold learning. It is nearly impossible to meet the needs of all students, but common core is not taking different learning styles into account when it creates its standards. It has a “this is the one and only way” type of mentality when it comes to solving a problem. It does not allow for creativity or much critical thinking. This is not what we should be promoting within our schools, and we should allow for flexibility in terms of problem solving as long as it leads in the right direction.

Common core creates a new focus on meeting standards, rather than learning. Rather than trying to actually “learn” the material, students are just trying to meet the standard to get the grade. Teachers, principals, and administrators are promoting it to help get their numbers up. Is this what we want for our students? Learning is a lifelong process, not something you throw in your short term memory just to forget later on. We should be teaching concepts that stick. We should be promoting learning within our school systems, not crunching to meet numbers.

Common core is not preparing students for what they need to know for their possible future endeavors. For example, the math standards will not put students at the level they need when they graduate high school. James Milgram, a Stanford
math professor hired to review the math curriculum within common core refused to sign off on it. He did not think the curriculum was going to help students in the long run. Therefore, what is said when an intellectual from one of the country’s best higher education institutions refused to sign off on mathematics common core standards? We need to think about that.

I understand the direction that the common core creators were trying to go, but it does not mean that it is currently working well in our society. Education is about learning, knowledge, questioning, and thinking. It is not about fitting into a mold. It is about focusing on the students and nurturing their passions and purpose. It is not about trying to get them to meet a standard so the school can make more money. If our country focused more on promoting students’ strengths and guiding them through their weaknesses as a curriculum, we would be much more successful. We need to ask ourselves, can learning be evaluated in such a way?

Common core is not doing much good. There really should be no debate any longer, it is time to re-evaluate. Students are valuable and need to have curriculums that support their needs. I would only hope that our society realizes this because before we know it, this will be a much bigger issue. What is the purpose of “learning”? What is the purpose of “schooling”? Those are the very important questions it comes back to. Education is a lot more powerful than one may think. We need to start treating it that way.