



**Press Release – February 20, 2008**  
**Embargoed until 9:30 am, February 26, 2008**

### **Survey of 17-year-olds Finds A Nation Still at Risk**

Students Earn “D” When Tested on History and Literature

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A new report from Common Core finds that many of America’s high school students do not possess the basic knowledge they need to succeed in the world or to achieve their full potential as democratic citizens. The report, entitled “Still at Risk: What Students Don’t Know, Even Now,” shows that, twenty-five years after the publication of the landmark study, “A Nation at Risk,” America’s children continue to demonstrate a stunning ignorance about basic facts of U.S. history and literature. Overall, the 1,200 17-year-olds surveyed earned a “D.”

- Nearly a quarter cannot identify Adolf Hitler, with ten percent thinking Hitler was a munitions manufacturer.
- More than a quarter think Christopher Columbus sailed *after* 1750.
- Fewer than half can place the Civil War in the correct half-century.
- A third do not know that the Bill of Rights guarantees the freedom of speech and religion.
- Half have no idea what the Renaissance was.
- Nearly half think that *The Scarlet Letter* was either about a witch trial or a piece of correspondence.

“It is easy to make light of such ignorance. In reality, however, a deep lack of knowledge is neither humorous nor trivial,” said Lynne Munson, Common Core’s executive director. “What we know helps to determine how successful we are likely to be in life, and how many career paths we can choose from. It also affects our contribution as democratic citizens.”

The survey also identifies a consistent gap—the size of a letter grade—between respondents who have at least one college-educated parent and those who do not. “This is particularly bad news for students who come from homes where the discussion of history and literature is rare,” said Munson, “because if the school doesn’t impart this knowledge, these students are not likely ever to learn it.”

“Still at Risk” is authored by Frederick Hess, the director of education policy at the American Enterprise Institute. Common Core is a non-partisan research and advocacy organization devoted to strengthening liberal learning in K-12 education.

Common Core will be holding a breakfast policy event to discuss the report’s findings on Feb. 26 at the National Press Club, 529 14th Street NW, from 9:30 am until 11:00 am. The event will be moderated by Ms. Munson. The panel will consist of Mr. Hess and two members of Common Core’s Board of Trustees—Diane Ravitch, Research Professor of Education at New York University and Antonia Cortese, Executive Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers.

Breakfast and refreshments will be served beginning at 9:15 am. The general public is welcome. All media inquiries should be directed to Lauren Prehoda at 202-420-1761 or [lprehoda@commoncore.org](mailto:lprehoda@commoncore.org).

*To find out more about the ways you can help support broad-based, rigorous education, please visit [www.commoncore.org](http://www.commoncore.org).*

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