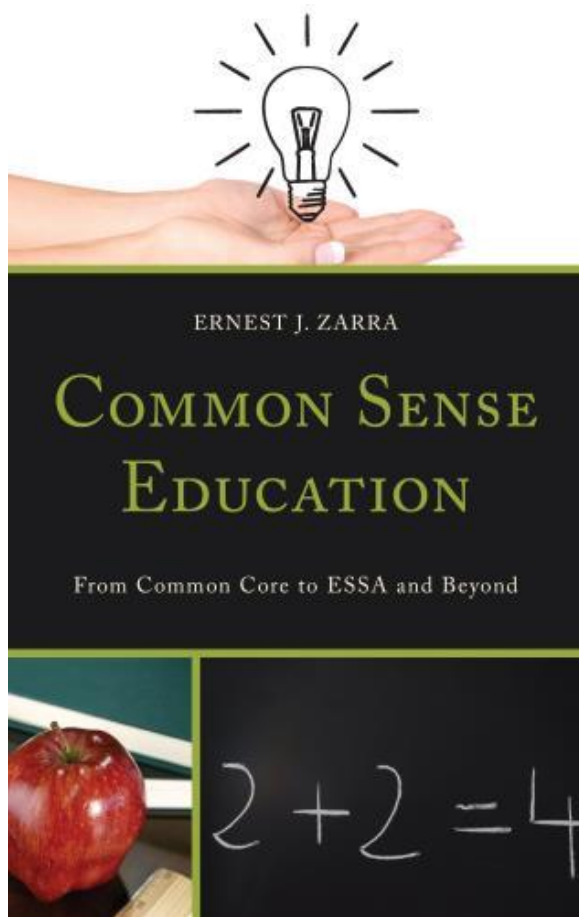


Book Review

From Common Core to ESSA and Beyond

“Common Sense Education” by Ernest J. Zarra

By Colin Everett



In *Common Sense Education*, Ernest Zarra attempts to make sense of the dizzying collection of educational reforms from the final years of the Obama administration. Most of the book’s content is a reaction to consequences from the 2009 Race to the Top initiative, including the widespread adoption of the Common Core.

Zarra’s new book builds upon his previous publications, such as *The Wrong Direction for Today’s Schools: The Impact of Common Core on American Education* (2013), which frames the opening chapter, “Why replace Common Core.” Zarra’s objections to the Common Core focus on what he views as its pedagogical shortcomings, which he justifies by using recent testing data. Zarra also includes both conservative objections about governmental overreach as well as liberal objections, such as an overemphasis on testing.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which became law as Zarra was finishing his book for publication, is a common theme throughout *Common Sense Education*. Zarra does not render a judgment on ESSA, but he does welcome many of its curtailments of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, ultimately taking a “wait and see” approach to the law.

As with any book with “common sense” in its title, Zarra believes that the fix to American education is straightforward. His solution might be summarized best as embracing traditional educational values. These traditions include using schools to champion a shared Judeo-Christian cultural heritage, civics, and morality. Some of the solutions to achieve these goals include

more selective teacher preparation programs, higher compensation for educators, and more authentic and diverse learning opportunities for students.

Common Sense Education has a conversational tone that often reads like a heavily annotated blog. The excessive lists that introduce each section can detract from the readability. The topics covered are also extremely numerous. One 19-page chapter, for example, has 13 different topic sections. As a result, topic sections are often superficial in their coverage. However, for those looking for a broad overview of the externalities of the Common Core and ESSA (which is the book's intended audience), a more in depth discussion might not be necessary and this book might serve as a useful introduction.

“Common Sense Education: From Common Core to ESSA and Beyond.” By Ernest J. Zarra. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4758-2511-4

About the Author

Ernest J. Zarra III, Ph.D., lives in California, holds five earned degrees, and is a life-long educator. He has authored four books and nearly two dozen journal articles on issues related to education. He teaches Advanced Placement classes to high school seniors at a state and nationally distinguished secondary school.

About the Reviewer

Colin Everett, Ed.D., is a public high school teacher in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts, and a visiting lecturer in the Accelerated Post-Baccalaureate Program at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts.