

TESTIMONY
of
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(Common Core Standards and Assessments)

Good afternoon. I want to start by thanking Senator Folmer, Senator Dinniman, and the entire Senate Education Committee for the opportunity to speak to the issues surrounding the Common Core Standards and Assessments.

I would like to give you a brief introduction to our organization. The Commonwealth Education Organization (CEO) was started informally in 1989 by parents and education professionals, and became a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization in 1996. We recognize that children form the foundation for America's future, and part of our mission is to research any changes in education policies and programs at the local, state, and national levels that impact the children and their education.

I personally have a very diverse background given I had close to 10 years working for a corporation in management and advertising, and almost the same amount of years working directly with children in Pre-K programs. I am now the Director of CEO. Therefore, I am I looking at the standards and assessment issues from a variety of perspective.

What I would like to do in my testimony is to go over Pennsylvania documents related to these Chapter 4 changes. I want to concentrate on the quality of the standards, the over all process by which we have these standards, costs, related assessments, data collection, and other issues that bring up questions from the paperwork.

Good teachers have always had classroom objectives, and if you ever received a syllabus from a teacher you know what I am referencing. What we are really talking about here is who should have control of those standards, the people closer to the children and their needs, or adults working hundreds of miles away concentrating on their specific agendas which many times do not benefit the children or their academic performance.

Going back in our office files, I found documents from Chapter 4 discussions back in 1997-2000. It appeared there were many more legislative hearings on these issues back then than we have had recently. One letter was from Paul O'Neill the CEO of Alcoa, and Chair of the Education Standards Committee. Clearly the business community had input into those standards at that time. In a letter to Gov Ridge, he said the committee was charged with creating a rigorous set of state based standards (math, reading, and writing) the achievement of which demonstrated the attainment of high levels of student competency in core subject areas. He also stated that the request they received from their

various meetings was the standards being proposed should be enduring so that the education community be spared the aggravation of constant changes so they can concentrate on education.

What we are being told today, as educational consumers and taxpayers, are the schools have been teaching thousands of PA students to standards for years, which now have to be revamped because we did not have high levels of student competency as stated in Mr. O'Neill's letter. Again we are being asked to accept the same thing over and over-different/more standards and more assessments.

Academic Committee (alignment analysis) at the University of Pittsburgh on the Common Core Standards-May 21, 2010

- Changes must be made regarding the PA State Board of Education. They have limited transparency and poor communication with the public. There is no accountability from the State Board to the taxpayers, and no cost considerations.
- I was possibly 1 of a possible 12 people that attended this presentation. They very specifically reference in the documents they passed out that the Commonwealth students will be learning from standards that are shared academic goals established by aligning the standards with those endorsed by the Council of Chief School Officers, and the National Governor's Association. It also shows that 85% of the PA standards must be aligned to the National Common Core (CCS) with 15% flexibility. This is very much a semantics game.
- There is also a statement from Pitt's analysis that the previous PA Language Arts standards are closely aligned with the Common Core. That verifies the concerns from standard experts such as Dr. Stotsky who was asked to be on the Common Core Validation Committee, and refused to validate them. "Common Core Standards for ELA and reading are simply empty skill sets," according to her evaluation. She had previously help develop the Massachusetts Standards considered some of the highest in the nation. In the Fordham analysis of the previous PA Language Arts standards, PA. received a grade of a D. The concern becomes are the current PA Common Core any better given the State Boards' own statement that the standards were originally closely aligned with CCS. We have asked Dr. Stotsky to take a look at what PA is showing as Common Core Language Art Standards. Her initial reaction was to find out who was involved with these standards, because they made the standards even worse.
- We also asked Jim Milgram from Stanford, the only mathematician on the Common Core Validation Committee, to look at what PA shows as Math Standards. He also refused to validate the National Common Core. His initial response was the PA standards, which at first glance appear to be ok, but when looked at more closely have many meaningless elements.
- PA. has spent a great deal of money on Early Learning, and should be deeply concerned about the K-3 standards. The Joint Statement of Early Childhood Health and Education Professionals, and Education Professionals on the Common Core, issued the following statement, "We have grave concerns about the

standards for young children. The proposed standards conflict with compelling new research in cognitive science, neuroscience, child development, and early education about how children learn, what they need to learn and how best to teach to K-3-developmentally appropriate practices.”

Pennsylvania’s State Assessment System Proposed Transition July 2012 and PA Race To The Top

- Does PA really have control over the standards and assessments? What if we would want to make changes? What about the Waiver under No Child Left Behind? Under the Proposed Transition Report submitted from the Pa Dept of Education to the US Dept. of Education in July 2012 it shows stages of implementation of the PSSA, Keystone Exams and talks about the standards, which also shows either online testing or paper/pencil. The technology factors related to the testing and related costs is being denied when many people contacted Harrisburg.
- “ Please note that the proposed transition is contingent upon approval from the US Dept of Education, approval of new state Chapter 4 Regulations.” Quote is on second page of this transition report. www.education.state.pa.us. If this is a state driven initiative then why is it necessary for PA to get federal approval?
- Race To The Top grant- In PA’s Phase II application for the funds, PA included a timeline for State Board adoption of CCS in Appendix B-79 available online). keeps final adoption date of August 2, 2010 to meet federally specified target. (Again PA is working to meet federal guidelines where is state control?) The timeline states the State Board WILL ADOPT the Common Core Standards. The appendix includes a statement that the Independent Regulatory Review Commission may not stop the process since the standards will be necessary to receive a federal grant. This goes around state procedure which must include the IRRC review of the regulations. The IRRC comments cannot be ignored if they uncover serious problems. For example, the State Board had indicated that the proposed regulation changes will not impose any new costs on to districts. However, IRRC disagreed acknowledging costs for redesigning curriculum and remediation are financial considerations.
- Section (A) (2) (i) (d) states, “ Using funds for this grant, as described in the State’s budget and accompanying budget narrative, to accomplish the State’s plan and meet its targets, including where feasible, by coordinating, reallocating or repurposing education funds from other Federal, State and LOCAL sources so that they align with the Race to the Top. What funds are being re-allocated or re-purposed specifically locally and from the state?
- PDE said that the districts have control over curriculum. “Every school district in the state must update its instructional program to reflect the new standards and they must use the state mandated new summative assessments. We anticipate that given the limited resources most districts have for curricula improvements, the overwhelming majority of our districts will rely on SAS portal to bring their

instructional program in-line with the new standards. So districts may not have as much control over their own curriculum given the cost.

- Also there are a number of questions related to the data collection part of Common Core, and how the children's privacy and information will be protected. There are specifics in the Race to the Top that do verify the data part of CCS.

PDE says PA. is only keeping an eye on the national testing consortia, Smarter Balance and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College & Careers (PARCC), that received millions in funding to alignment the Common Core to national testing.

- There are 4 identical letters from Pitt, Penn State, The PA State System of Higher Education, and the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges going to U.S. Secy. of Education Arne Duncan outlining their willingness to participate with Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) in a number of steps related to the national testing and standards. PA is clearly more involved in the national testing then just "keeping an eye on things".
- Looking at the list of people who attempted to work on the 15% of the PA Common Core-why did it not include more college level curriculum and standard's specialists, and also did not include more urban teachers? Both groups would have brought a broader perspective to the issue of any standards.

Ze've Wurman, a STEM professional and someone that once served as an advisor to the Assistant U.S. Secy. of Education for K-12 focusing on issues such as assessment and accountability said the following about Common Core. "I have thoroughly reviewed the Common Core Standards and have found that they fail to achieve their stated goal of improving K-12 math achievement. After looking at the PA standards he sent an email saying the following: "There is no way national standards can be done right in any free or sizable nation. Even in math there seem not to be any single right way to almost anything. Curricula of successful nations differ significantly. What works in a smaller place reasonably well may fail miserably in a larger and more diverse location. The relationship between academic standards and achievement is tenuous at best." He was not complimentary about what he observed with the PA Common Core Math Standards.

There is one other thought related to the Common Core Standards. A year ago, people were fighting and arguing over School Choice. In the Pa Race to the Top agreement it refers to charter and cyber schools. People fought for options, which means something other than the bureaucracy in the "public" schools. Is the Dept of Ed. and the State Board sacrificing real choice and options? Is local control being sacrifice? Above all are we getting better standards, or more bureaucracy?

I would be very happy to have a conversation about possible changes which can yield better college readiness and workforce results.