



Pennsylvania Business Council

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Testimony

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Pennsylvania Business Council
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Good afternoon. My name is David W. Patti. I serve as the president and CEO of Pennsylvania Business Council – a business organization that represents among its membership the largest employers in the Commonwealth.

PBC envisions a Commonwealth in which residents enjoy a very high quality of life in sustainable communities, where those who are seeking employment find high quality jobs with good compensation, and where those who invest their capital and hard work can grow firms that flourish and are profitable.

I also have the honor of serving on the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board, a post to which I was appointed by Governor Corbett. I served on the PAWIB during the Rendell Administration as well.

I want to thank Chairman Mike Folmer and Democratic Chairman Andy Dinniman, and the members of the Senate Education Committee for the invitation to appear here this afternoon to discuss a public policy proposal that could have significant ramifications for Pennsylvania's competitive position relative to other states and nations.

The Pennsylvania Business Council strongly supports Pennsylvania's decision in 2010 to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and to later adapt them to the Commonwealth's unique needs as "Pennsylvania Common Core."

The Common Core State Standards were created through the combined efforts of many parties including governors, state education secretaries and commissioners, business leaders, academics, think tanks, associations, foundations, and public school educators. To date, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted some form of the standards.

Contrary to some of the information circulating, these actions taken over several years and many meetings began during the Bush Administration and were wholly propelled by state government leaders, business groups, and non-profits; not by the Federal government.

Business leaders, nationwide, are strong supporters of Common Core and aligned statewide assessments (exams) that assure us our young people are proficient in key learning areas and our education dollars are spent wisely achieving high performance.

I want to share some of the findings from research conducted by our affiliated PBC Education Foundation. In the spring of 2009, PBCEF conducted non-partisan survey research into the views and perceptions of Pennsylvania business owners and managers regarding the job readiness of young people.

Four hundred Pennsylvania businesspersons – owners, presidents and very senior managers – were interviewed by telephone. Industries represented in the interviews included Construction, Retail Trade, Services, Agriculture, Mining, Manufacturing, Transportation, Wholesale, and Finance. The interviewees were proportionately representative of Pennsylvania's population centers.

The survey research found:

- Only seven percent (7%) of interviewees were “very confident” that high school students are graduating with the necessary knowledge and skills to perform well in the workplace.
- Only fourteen percent (14%) of interviewees thought the quality of Pennsylvania's workforce had improved in recent years. Half thought it had stayed the same and 33 percent thought it had gotten worse.
- Fifty-six percent (56 %) of interviewees were “somewhat concerned” or “very concerned” about their ability to hire qualified candidates for their companies.
- Only fifty-three percent (53%) of interviewees thought “a high school diploma is a good indicator of a candidate's competency, basic skills, and knowledge.”
- Eighty percent (80%) of interviewees were “strongly” or “somewhat” supportive of “new guidelines that would require high school students to meet certain statewide requirements to prove they are proficient in basic skills by passing a series of common final exams in reading, math, science, writing, and social studies in order to graduate.”

Of course, there are very few jobs available today for persons with only a high school diploma. In fact, we estimate that only about one-quarter of jobs in Pennsylvania's economy are available to persons with a high school education or less. Unfortunately, nearly one-half of Pennsylvania's workforce does not possess any post-secondary or higher education credentials. This means there are two applicants for each of our low skill – and correspondingly, low wage – job opportunities. You can imagine that in order to be successful winning and holding one of these jobs, an individual with a high school diploma seeking employment must truly be proficient in English language skills including reading, writing and listening; and in basic algebra skills.

About one-quarter of Pennsylvania career opportunities require a four-year college education or even more (advanced degrees, professional degrees). While we have fewer engineers and scientists than we need and perhaps a few more liberal arts majors than the economy requires, the Commonwealth is close to meeting these needs. More than ever, it is critical that Pennsylvania's young people who hope to have a strong career with a potential for high earnings, must be college ready. And, with the extraordinary cost of higher education and the alarming amount college debt being shouldered by students and their families, it is

essential that college-bound students are already proficient in the basics and not in need of costly remediation before commencing their studies.

Now let me address those learners often termed “the forgotten half.” About half of the jobs in America – and the world – do not require a four-year college degree, but do require significant and meaningful post-secondary education and training. This includes two-year associate’s degrees, technical training, apprenticeships, skills development that might continue from high school in a 2+2 program, or military training.

These jobs – once known as “skilled labor” but increasingly thought of as “gold collar,” “technicians,” or “para-professionals” – are well paying, family sustaining occupations with long-term career options and trajectories. But our young people must be prepared for this education and training. The technical manuals required for these studies are more complex than many college textbooks. The writing and listening skills required to share technical information between shifts, workteams, and operating units – sometimes across international borders – are mission critical. The required math skills are irreplaceable.

Today employers, union apprenticeship programs, and the US military are unable to find qualified applicants for their training programs because graduating students are simply not proficient in core competencies.

Business leaders support common core as the best way to ensure a future workforce available anywhere in the United States able to compete on a global scale.

The opinion of business leaders is important, but I thought you might be just as interested in knowing what the voters of Pennsylvania think. In the summer of 2012, PBCEF contracted with well-known Washington, DC pollsters The Tarrance Group who conducted on our behalf a 20 minute telephone interview with 600 registered Pennsylvania voters. Among the results:

- Asked to give a letter grade to public education in Pennsylvania, only 32 percent of respondents assigned an “A” or a “B” while nearly two-thirds, 64 percent, gave Pennsylvania public education grades of “C,” “D,” or “F.”
- Nearly half of all survey respondents – 48 percent – believe public education in Pennsylvania has gotten worse over the past 10 years.
- Eighty percent (80%) of voters surveyed say that “recent graduates of PA’s public schools are [only] ‘somewhat,’ or ‘not at all’ prepared to get and succeed in a job right out of high school.”
- Eighty-three percent (83%) of Pennsylvania voters surveyed believe that the students should be educated to the same standards in every part of the state.
- Eighty-four percent (84%) of Pennsylvania voters surveyed believe that a more rigorous public school curriculum would better prepare students.
- Seventy percent (70%) of Pennsylvania voters surveyed support having every student pass a common exam of core material.

Allow me to share with you the full data from a very specific question asked in August 2012:

As you may be aware, a Common Core State Standard has been adopted in Pennsylvania. This standard defines what all Pennsylvania students should know in each grade, testing students on a yearly basis, and holding schools accountable for results. Do you support or oppose Common Core State Standards defining the curriculum for all students here in Pennsylvania?

<i>Support/strongly</i>	<i>38%</i>
<i>Support/somewhat</i>	<i>29%</i>
<i>Unsure/Did Not Respond</i>	<i>11%</i>
<i>Oppose/somewhat</i>	<i>8%</i>
<i>Oppose/strongly</i>	<i>14%</i>

That's 67% total "support," compared to 22% total "oppose." And it's worth emphasizing that nearly two of every five Pennsylvania voters surveyed, "strongly support" the Pennsylvania Common Core as it was described to them.

While there were questions, criticisms, and recommendations throughout the more than six years since Common Core was conceived, Pennsylvania's preparation to implement the standards in the 2013/14 school year has progressed smoothly and with good cooperation among all parties.

In recent months, there has suddenly been new opposition to Common Core that I would largely characterize as "political" - dealing more with perceptions, personalities, and the role of government than with issues of educational quality. Many of the issues raised during the recent debate, while not unimportant, are not actual Common Core issues, but ancillary topics. And some of the criticisms leveled against a national model just don't apply to Pennsylvania's own customized standards.

Many good pieces have been written separating fact from fiction regarding Common Core and explaining why business leaders and others support the standards. I have shared much of that material with the Committee earlier and am happy to gather more for you. But, I believe that we can deal with many of those issues today by simply answering your questions. So concluding my formal remarks, I would be delighted to address those topics foremost in your mind.

Thank you.