



Senate Education Committee

**Senator Mike Folmer
Chairman**

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Public Hearing on Common Core

Senate Hearing Room 1

August 29, 2013

9:30AM - 12:00PM

The following questions were submitted by Pennsylvania residents. They have been separated by topic.

Background Questions:

1. Please provide background on the origin of Common Core at the international, national and state level.
2. How are the Pennsylvania Core Standards the same as the national Common Core standards? How are they different?
3. What success has the Common Core standards had in other states?
4. Will the federal government play a role in the implementation of Pennsylvania's Core Standards?
5. Pennsylvania was recently granted a waiver from No Child Left Behind. What does this mean for Chapter 4 changes? Can you explain why Common Core would be an improvement over NCLB?

Standards:

1. Why does PA need academic standards?
2. How is PA Core different from the PA Common Core Standards adopted by the State Board of Education in March 2013?
3. What kind of success-rate did our existing standards have?
4. Why does Pennsylvania need to revise its standards at this point in time?

5. Are Pennsylvania schools using Common Core/Pennsylvania Core standards now? If so, how many?
6. Has the State Board thought about adopting the standards as a pilot for some districts to try before mandating them for all?
7. How can the Department guarantee the changes made to the standards will reap better student results for all students? Is there data that demonstrates the effectiveness of these standards?
8. How does the Department respond to statements claiming that the standards are untested, not valid or reliable and are not “internationally benchmarked”?
9. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?
10. How would the Department respond to concerns that Pennsylvania Core standards may dilute a district’s control over its curriculum?
11. Why can't the old standards be tweaked without the massive expense of revamping curriculum, teachers' training, new books, computers, etc?
12. What is the source of the majority of the curriculum implemented by PA school districts?
13. Under Pennsylvania Core, will students read literature in their English class?
14. I have read that the new standards shift student reading from literature to informational text. Why is reading informational text important for students?
15. Is there a required reading list under PA Core?
16. Is it true that it is okay for students to get the wrong answer on the math standards as long as they can explain how they got the answer? Will Pennsylvania Core encourage this type of teaching?
17. How does the state intend to challenge top performing math students given the total math process will be changed based on the concept of commonality for all students in math?
18. Please explain how Pennsylvania is going to provide students who are seeking STEM majors and jobs with higher levels of high school math?
19. Will there be consequences for districts whose students fail to meet the standards?
20. How do you respond to the concern that we are imposing a one-size fits all standard on all of our children and the impact this will have on our much lauded history of creative innovation?
21. If it is determined that Pennsylvania Core Standards are not appropriate, what are the consequences of the state revising or discontinuing its use of the standards? Who would enforce the resulting consequences?
22. Are there penalties if Pennsylvania does not implement Common Core?
23. What is Race to the Top and does it obligate Pennsylvania to implement Common Core?

24. How much Race to the Top money did Pennsylvania receive?
25. Do the changes from Common Core to Pennsylvania Core jeopardize the Race to the Top grant?
26. On Page 4 of the Chapter 4 document dated August 5, 2013, the Department indicates it will not require school entities to utilize a statewide curriculum. However, in the PA Race to the Top application, you state that “due to limited resources most districts have for curricula improvements, the overwhelming majority of districts will rely on the SAS portal to bring their instructional program in-line with the new standards.” Does this not mean the Department will be influencing local curriculum?
27. Why is the Department saying it is not implementing Common Core, while telling the federal government this it is implementing them?
28. If we are not implementing Common Core, then what exactly are we doing?
29. Did the Department have to seek permission from the federal government to change our standards? Why? How are the standards state-driven if we need to seek permission and what do we need to do if we want to change them in the future?

Parent and Student Issues:

1. Will Pennsylvania Core benefit students and if so, how?
2. How can we guarantee the success of core standards in underfunded school districts?
3. How can we insure that students actually learn skills and gain knowledge and are not simply prepared to pass a standardized test?
4. How does Pennsylvania Core address the unique needs of children with disabilities?
5. How does Pennsylvania Core address the unique needs of English as a Second Language Students?
6. How does Pennsylvania Core address the unique needs of students from military families?
7. Why should the public believe that Pennsylvania Core will better prepare students for college and career when test scores will only be testing short-term knowledge?
8. Will home schooled families be placed at a disadvantage for college if they do not use Pennsylvania Core aligned educational materials?
9. Please explain why these standards will help address problems in districts like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Harrisburg. What will happen if implementation creates more problems with issues like the drop-out rate?
10. What rights do parents have to review curriculum and assessment exams in their entity? Will parents be able to excuse their children from objectionable lessons?
11. What support will be in place for students who have difficulty meeting the standards?

12. At what grade levels will the additional support be provided to students that cannot meet the standards?
How will this be funded?
13. What will the state do to “level the playing field” for all students in the Commonwealth so that all students will have adequate materials, staff and other resources necessary to meet Pennsylvania Core Standards?

Teacher Issues:

1. Who developed the Pennsylvania Core Standards? Were Pennsylvania educators involved?
2. Has the Department consulted with local experts, school boards, teachers, parents, community members and higher education for feedback on how to revise the standards?
3. How many early learning educators were involved in the process to develop these standards and from what subject areas?
4. What do the Pennsylvania Core Standards mean for teachers and how are they being implemented?
5. Is Pennsylvania Core another means for which teachers can “teach to the test?”
6. Please respond to the concern that education keeps becoming more “standardized” when test scores keep dropping?
7. What kind of professional development will be provided for teachers to carry out these standards?
8. School districts are strapped for funds; how will they provide the support for teachers to learn and adapt teaching to meet these new standards?
9. Middle and high school teachers of content courses, such as history and science, are expected to help develop students’ literacy. Most of these teachers have had little background in how to do this. What kinds of professional development opportunities will be targeted toward these teachers?
10. What kind of support will there be for additional materials for schools to implement Pennsylvania Core?
11. Have teachers been trained on Common Core or the Pennsylvania Core standards? Will they need to be retrained for Pennsylvania Core purposes?
12. Since Pennsylvania Core has not been adopted, are teachers instead teaching Common Core? What impact will this have on our schools?
13. Since most of the text books are now aligned to Common Core Standards not Pennsylvania Core, how will that impact students?
14. Most colleges are revising their teacher training to align with Common Core not Pennsylvania Core. How will that impact our students as they head off to these colleges?
15. Are charter schools required to use Pennsylvania Core? What are the consequences if they fail to meet the standards?

Data Collection:

1. What procedures and protections are required of the Department and school entities when dealing with any data pertaining to students, teachers and school staff?
2. Explain in detail our involvement in data collection? What is specifically being collected and who has access to information on our students?
3. Is there any data collection requirements associated with the Pennsylvania Core standards?
4. How will the Department guarantee the privacy of a student's academic data?
5. Who is the data being shared with and what happens if there is a breach of a child's personal information?
6. Will the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) be used to collect data on students?
7. Where can we find the policy and rules authorizing the information to be collected?
8. The proposed revisions to the regulation prohibit collecting of individual test scores and only allows for collection of aggregate test scores. However, in order for Pennsylvania to comply with the federal America COMPETES Act yearly test records of individual students is required. How is the Department going to comply with the federal law if your own regulation prohibits it? What are the consequences for not complying?
9. The proposed revisions to the regulation prohibit the collection of personal family data, in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Has this law been revised to allow for the collection of Common Core/PA Core data?
10. Can the Department engage in expanded data collection or family data collection if it does not pertain to implementation of Pennsylvania Core? Does the Department currently collect this type of data?

Costs:

1. We have heard multiple price tags on the cost of implementing Pennsylvania Core. How much has it cost the Commonwealth thus far and how much will it cost districts, charter schools and intermediate units?
2. Why did the State Board indicate initially to the IRRC that the Chapter 4 changes were cost neutral when clearly that is not the case?
3. Where will this funding come from to implement Pennsylvania Core?
4. Has a thorough fiscal analysis been performed to assure Pennsylvania taxpayers that this initiative will not impose an insurmountable monetary burden on them?
5. Why is a cost projection not done each time a change to an education regulation is made?

6. To implement Pennsylvania Core, what contracts has the Commonwealth signed? Who are the vendors? How were they chosen? How much will they be paid in total?
7. Where will the funds come from to pay for increased tests and the computer infrastructure required to implement them?
8. What are the costs involved if a district decides to have a local assessment in lieu of the Keystone?
9. How will the additional costs for teacher development, materials, assessments and academic support be met?

Testing:

1. Section 4.3 includes a definition for state assessment as a “valid and reliable measurement of student performance on a set of academic standards as measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment or the Keystone Exams.” How does the Department determine what is a valid and reliable measurement?
2. How much supplemental instruction will a district have to provide? For how long will they have to provide the instruction if the student cannot pass the test? Can parents opt for outside tutoring instead?
3. Why doesn’t Pennsylvania use a standardized norm-referenced test for national comparison of our students? Do we not need to know how our students will compete in a national workforce and culture?
4. What are the Department’s thoughts on the recent New York Common Core test results?
5. What are national testing consortia? Which consortia does PA participate in, and will they be withdrawing from participating in any of these consortia? Will Pennsylvania be using these assessments?
6. While the proposed revisions to the regulation say that Pennsylvania will not be a “governing state,” mere participation in the PARCC consortium contractually obligates Pennsylvania to implement national assessments. Is that correct? What does it mean to be a “governing state?”