



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony
Senate Education Committee
Public Hearing on the PA Common Core
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Thank you Chairman Folmer, Chairman Dinniman, and members of the Senate Education Committee for holding this public hearing to discuss the PA Common Core. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to provide a historical perspective of state standards, explain the development of the current PA Common Core standards, address several myths about this initiative, and answer any questions the committee may have on this issue.

I am Carolyn Dumaresq, Deputy Secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Before serving in my current role, I spent my career working in the field of public education, including time as a math teacher, school superintendent for two districts, and as an executive at the PA State Education Association.

The PA Common Core is a set of improved academic standards specifically in Math and English Language Arts adopted by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education (State Board) intended to raise the rigor of education for our students in Pennsylvania. These standards will benefit the Commonwealth's students by providing a clearer set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help students succeed. They help delineate what children should know at each grade level and describe the skills they must acquire to stay on course toward college and career readiness. They will also reduce the levels of remediation required for students who proceed to higher education.

Improving knowledge, comprehension, and the ability to apply stronger analytical skills in these two primary academic areas will help students better prepare themselves for higher education, career training, employment, the military and other future paths in life. These are some of the reasons many in the business community, higher education institutions and student-focused advocacy organizations have strongly supported the adoption of the state's improved academic standards.

The development of the PA Common Core was a multi-year process that included the Department of Education, the State Board, Pennsylvania teachers, school administrators, legislators, and significant input from the general public. Several public hearings were held both in Harrisburg and across the state through this process and significant work was done to ensure Pennsylvania policy-makers were creating the best standards for Pennsylvania students. Because of this significant work over several years, many Pennsylvania educators, institutions of higher education, businesses, student advocacy organizations and other groups strongly support the PA Common Core standards recently adopted by the State Board. Despite the strong support by many, I have heard several concerns recently and this hearing is a great opportunity to discuss these issues.

As Deputy Secretary and as a strong supporter of the democratic process, I am always interested when the general public is engaged in policy debates over education in the state. A substantive exchange regarding the best way to educate Pennsylvania's students is healthy and necessary for the system to work, but it is critical these discussions are rooted in facts. Unfortunately, many of the concerns we have heard recently regarding PA Common Core are based on rumors and myths circulating through other states, media outlets, social websites and other sources. This misinformation must be corrected for the betterment of not just the discussion of today's

committee meeting, but for the future direction of Pennsylvania's academic standards and our education system as a whole.

Let me be clear in addressing some of the misinformation I have heard. The Common Core is not a federally-driven initiative. It does not take away state control over standards, nor does it take away local control in reaching those standards. It does not mandate curriculum from either the federal or state level. It does not require reading lists or other mandated texts. It will not lead to a mining of massive data on students, their parents and families' personal information. It will not cost the Commonwealth taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars to implement. Finally, it will not 'dumb-down' Pennsylvania's educational process.

These are just some of the common myths I have heard that are not an accurate description of what the PA Common Core actually is. As a mother of children who attended Pennsylvania public schools and as a strong supporter of states' rights and other protections provided for in both the United States and Pennsylvania Constitutions, I would be very apprehensive if many of the concerns and fears I have heard on the PA Common Core were true, but fortunately they are not.

Now let me explain what is true about PA Common Core. To understand the context of what is being discussed in 2013, it is important to first examine what academic standards are and how we've used standards in PA public schools. Standards are statements of what students are expected to know at specific grade levels. Standards are a 'goal line' set to be achieved in specific subject areas. Schools accomplish educating their students to reach the goal lines set by standards through curriculum, lesson plans and other tools. In Pennsylvania, that has always been up to local school officials and PA Common Core does not change this longstanding practice.

Pennsylvania and other states began adopting standards in the 1990s. At the time, the State Board adopted its first standards in *Mathematics* and *Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening*. These original standards became effective in January, 1999. Additional standards in other subjects were later adopted in subsequent years between 2002 and 2006.

Although Pennsylvania was a leader in these efforts at the time and many other states subsequently began also adopting their own standards, the level of rigor and quality in the standards fluctuated greatly from one state to another. States wanted to compete against one another less, and partner more with each other to better compete internationally in the global economy. The differences amongst states were noticeable to many higher education institutions, employers and other groups when students matriculated from different states. As a result, many states began to recognize the need for common benchmarks in the core courses of Math and Reading and a multi-state effort on this process began as early as 2004. Several years later, a formal effort was coordinated by two entities representing state leaders in education policy:

- National Governors Association (NGA) – which represents all states' chief executives, and;
- Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) – which represents every state's top government official overseeing education.

The NGA and CCSSO worked collaboratively with state officials, teachers, parents and other groups across the country to develop model standards in Math and English Language Arts for states to consider using. The model standards created by this state-lead initiative are now called the Common Core. The federal government was not involved in this process and it cannot require any state to adopt these standards. States can adopt the model standards as is, can accept some of the model standards, or not adopt any of them.

The PA State Board originally adopted the model Common Core standards for Math and Reading in full in 2010. Since then, the State Board has amended the standards to further improve them and tailor them more closely to Pennsylvania's specific educational needs. This process resulted in the PA Common Core standards, which are similar to the model supported by the NGA and the CCSSO, but make further adjustments that are state-specific to Pennsylvania.

In closing, I am submitting two documents for the committee's consideration:

- First, I have submitted an attachment showing the history and public involvement in the development of these standards over the last few years. We have heard some false criticism trying to portray an inaccurate view that the process in developing these standards was not transparent or publically vetted. The attached document summarizes some of the many public forums, workgroups and hearings that have been held in the process of developing these standards.
- Second, I have submitted a hard copy of the PA Common Core standards with this testimony, which were also posted on the State Board website. I recommend the members of this committee and the general public here today reviews the actual text of the standards. Contrary to what some other states may be doing or what you may be hearing from constituents, media sources, social media, internet blogs and other sources, the actual PA Common Core standards do not do what many have speculated. What they do is provide Pennsylvania's students and education professionals a more rigorous and quality set of standards to learn and teach towards. This is why the Department and many groups across the state support this initiative.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today. I look forward to answering your questions.