

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB 2292

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on this issue.

My Personal Experience with Common Core

My experience with Common Core began in 1975. When I was in fifth grade, I watched my parents and my older brother David struggle with the transition to what they called “new math.” The theory was that students didn’t have to know HOW and WHY they got the right answer; they just need to get the correct answer. After all, technology was changing things very quickly and we would not have to waste our time doing the rudimentary work because calculators would handle that task. My dad borrowed a \$75 Texas Instrument calculator from his store and we thought it was very cool.

A couple of years ago, I came home to a frustrating evening of math homework. We weren’t the only parents having this challenge. A meeting with our teacher helped us understand a transition was occurring to what she called “the new math.” I explained that this, in fact, is the “old math” from when I was in elementary school where there is an increased focus on knowing HOW and WHY you get the right answer. Process and reasoning are critical to long term success in school and life.

Two generations of students have grown up with a certain approach to math; an approach that focused on “get the right answer” rather than “understand how and why you get the right answer.” I believe this is the genesis of much of the challenge for parents and teachers as college and career readiness standards are implemented. This fundamental challenge requires approaches to teaching and learning that we abandoned as a nation forty years ago.

The President and Common Core

During his January 25, 1983 State of Union speech, President Reagan proposed an “education initiative to encourage a substantial upgrading of math and science instruction.” The President noted that other nations were jumping ahead of the United States in these critical areas of learning and he wanted the federal government to help change what is being taught in American classrooms. He wanted to tie federal money to states and local school districts to their adoption of curriculum that met his administration’s approval. He wanted to use federal government block grants to increase accomplish this change.

I believe President Reagan was correct in his objectives about the role of the federal government to help ensure better classroom learning.

Today, federal dollars are offered to states if they upgrade the quality of education and if they quantify the results. The current federal initiative, Race to the Top, is not like Reagan’s proposal

and does not get into the content of classroom curriculum – this is left to states and school districts.

For the Future of Kansas

Employers of all types continue to cry for a flexible workforce with better skills in problem solving and critical thinking. These are the soft skills the new curriculum teaches and reinforces. This new curriculum fits perfectly in the Kansas College and Career Readiness Standards.

Salina area students have access to excellent Career-Tech Education facilities and improved career pathways. It is important that Salina schools make continued gains in student achievement, improve graduation rates and ensure student preparation for success in college and careers. This is critical to economic development and growth. The Common Core standards are one of the methods a state can use to quantify that it is preparing students for the future workplace by developing critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Support from the Business Community

The United States Chamber of Commerce, The Business Roundtable and National Review (the excellent conservative publication founded by William F. Buckley) endorse the approach included within Common Core and the Kansas College and Career Readiness Standards.

A dispassionate review of the Common Core education standards leads one to the same conclusion reached by National Review, the United States Chamber of Commerce and The Business Roundtable.

National Review notes:

“For decades, students in different states have been taught different material at different rates and held to radically different standards. Several years ago, a small group of governors joined together in an effort to align their states’ standards and assessments. This group expanded through the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. In 2007 (before Obama took office), curriculum experts began to devise the new Common Core standards.

Common Core offers American students the opportunity for a far more rigorous, content-rich, cohesive K–12 education than most of them have had. Conservatives used to be in favor of holding students to high standards and an academic curriculum based on great works of Western civilization and the American republic.”

The Chairman and CEO of Exxon Mobil Corporation observed:

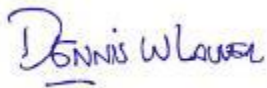
“The Common Core State Standards are designed to allow each state to make its own decisions regarding the curriculum, technology and lesson plans to be used in local schools.

In other words, the standards stipulate what we want all students to know and be able to do, but each state retains the explicit authority to determine how it teaches its students. The standards are a tool to help educators, not a straitjacket for them.

A major benefit of the Common Core State Standards is that they encourage students to analyze and apply critical reasoning skills to the texts they are reading and the math problems they are solving. These are the capabilities that students need as they prepare for high-skill jobs.

We need to raise expectations at every grade level so that, for instance, students who do well in math in lower grades are spurred to take algebra and more advanced math. But we need high standards to drive efforts to improve educational outcomes in every subject.”

My most important job is “dad.” I believe this approach to teaching will help our sons succeed because the curriculum encourages critical thinking, sound reasoning and problem solving skills.



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