



COMMITTEE ON COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (LRC) (2013)
December 17, 2013
Room 643 of the Legislative Office Building

The Committee on Common Core State Standards (LRC) (2013) met on Tuesday, December 17, 2013 at 1:00 PM. The meeting was held in Room 643 of the Legislative Office Building. Members of the committee present were: Senator Dan Soucek, Senator Chad Barefoot, Senator Warren Daniel, Senator E.S. (Buck) Newton, Senator Earline Parmon, Senator Jerry Tillman, Representative Bryan Holloway, Representative Marcus Brandon, Representative Tricia Cotham, Representative Jeffrey Elmore, Representative Craig Horn, Representative Larry Pittman and Representative Michael Speciale.

Senator Dan Soucek presided.

Chairman Soucek called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM. He welcomed the committee members and the audience and then called on Dr. Patsy Pierce of the General Assembly's Research Division to outline the committee's responsibility.

Dr. Pierce explained that the committee would be responsible for studying the Common Core State Standards and their potential financial, educational and legal impacts on the State and that it would then issue a final report by Friday December 19, 2014.

Chairman Soucek and Representative Holloway then made statements outlining their vision for the committee. They both asked the members of the committee to work through the study with an open mind and to keep in mind the limited reporting-only scope of the committee's mandate.

Dee Atkinson of the General Assembly's Research Division was then called on to go over the location and content of the committee's website.

Following her presentation, Dr. Pierce was called on again to brief the committee members on the existing statutes regarding the State's curriculum (see attachment). She outlined the differences between curriculum and standards, outlined the statutory references and clarified the role of the General Assembly relative to the role of the State Board of Education.

Chairman Soucek then called on Michael Brickman, National Policy Director of the Fordham Institute for a presentation to the committee on Common Core as a part of ongoing education reform (see attachment). Mr. Brickman started with a background on education reform, chronicling a history of inadequate standards, overburdened higher educational institutions being forced to remediate incoming students, and ultimately yielding an unprepared workforce. He explained that these issues led to discussions within the National Governors' Association leading



to a set of joint standards that incorporate best practices from around the nation, which became known as Common Core. He cited the unprepared nature of the workforce and a business skills gap as reasons that have led the business community to endorse Common Core.

He explained that concerns about cost are difficult to address because they are entirely dependent on how Common Core is implemented. He explained however, that there is typically a cost-savings due to a wider range of available materials since the vast majority of states are now aligned with Common Core. The cost savings are most apparent on the local level, since local districts purchase materials. He related that testing costs are also lower for Common Core states since there are so many of them.

Mr. Brickman then began to discuss ways to improve the Common Core standards. He suggested that concerns about data privacy were valid in an internet-driven world, but that these concerns are not a result of Common Core. He cited Utah's Senate Bill 82 and Oklahoma's House Bill 1989 as examples of recent legislation designed to protect student data.

Further, he opined that three different sets of standards in ten years would be a large burden to place on teachers. He cited a Scholastic survey of teachers that 73% of teachers nationwide and 78% of teachers in North Carolina are "enthusiastic about the implementation of the Common Core State Standards."

Finally, he assured committee members that adjustments could be made to suit North Carolina specifically.

Chairman Soucek thanked Mr. Brickman and called on Senator Newton for a question. Senator Newton asked for clarification on the poll and related that the results cited differ from his personal impressions of speaking with educators. Mr. Brickman responded that Scholastic polled over 20,000 teachers nationwide and polled statistically significant numbers of teachers in all 50 states.

Representative Elmore was then recognized and asked Mr. Brickman to explain who it was that determined that previous standards were inadequate. Mr. Brickman replied that the grades in the attached summary were issued by a Fordham Institute panel that has been studying standards for many years. Representative Elmore was recognized for a follow-up question and asked about the qualifications of the members of the panel. Mr. Brickman indicated that the panel was made up of content experts.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Senator Tillman, who asked Mr. Brickman if he was aware of North Carolina's recent scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Senator Tillman answered his own question, explaining that North Carolina did well and he opined that the NAEP performance was an indication that the previous standards in North Carolina were better than Mr. Brickman stated. Senator Tillman was recognized for a follow-up question and asked about how much flexibility Common Core would allow for in curriculum.



Mr. Brickman answered that there would be the same flexibility as always since standards are not curriculum. He added that there is of course an inevitable relationship between standards and curriculum, but that local districts maintain full control over curriculum.

Chairman Soucek then called on State Board of Education Chairman Bill Cobey. Chairman Cobey explained to the members that the State Board of Education (SBE) had adopted Common Core in 2010. He added that much positive feedback has been received from professional educators. He related that insofar as not all of the implementation has been positive, the SBE is committed to following-up. He assured members that while some in the public are concerned that Common Core represents a federal takeover of education, he does not believe it and indicated his belief that education should always be controlled by states.

Rep. Speciale was recognized and asked Chairman Cobey if considering changes in the makeup of the board since 2010, the Board had reviewed Common Core. Chairman Cobey responded that the SBE has not reviewed Common Core and that they were monitoring its ongoing implementation.

Chairman Soucek then called on State Superintendent of Education, Dr. June Atkinson for a presentation to the members. She started by thanking the committee and stating that it is important that the State have high academic standards. She reminded the members that standards have always been changing and related from her own experience that teachers have always been anxious about changes.

Superintendent Atkinson also reminded members that the Common Core sets standards only in the fields of English and Mathematics. She added that field-testing of any set of standards is done by outcomes in higher education and the workforce. She stated that standards are a starting point of what students should learn and how they perform. She then provided examples of standards in practice (see attachments).

She outlined the history of assessment related to curriculum and stated that control of testing in the State belongs to the General Assembly and the State Board of Education. She elaborated that by eliminating "mystery testing," students would know what to expect.

She explained that the reason so many states and stakeholders have endorsed the Common Core is the desire for a better workforce. She added that there had already been much positive feedback.

In an attempt to address some common misconceptions, she clarified that there is no federal mandate to adopt Common Core. She also explained that there is no loose data collection and reassured the members that all student data is secure.



Superintendent Atkinson explained that professional development had already begun, stated that teachers had received between sixty and eighty hours of training and that the costs would be much higher if North Carolina were to withdraw from Common Core.

Chairman Soucek then questioned Superintendent on whether all teachers had received the stated figure of 60-80 hours of professional development on Common Core. Superintendent Atkinson responded that the districts had flexibility on how to implement the training, but that all teachers have had the opportunity for the training.

Senator Tillman was then recognized and asked about potential increases in testing. Superintendent Atkinson responded that there would be fewer high school mathematics tests, and the same amount of testing in elementary and middle schools. Chairman Soucek recognized Senator Tillman for a second question and Senator Tillman asked Superintendent Atkinson whether the name of the standards could be changed. Superintendent Atkinson indicated that it could and mentioned that all standards are reviewed as well.

Chairman Soucek recognized Senator Parmon who expressed to Superintendent Atkinson her concern about a lack of funding for technology. Superintendent Atkinson conveyed her shared concern about funding.

Representative Brandon was recognized and asked Superintendent Atkinson why there was such discrepancy if as she stated, the Common Core standards are similar to existing standards. Superintendent Atkinson replied that the changes are still ongoing, which has led to much of the confusion.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Representative Horn who questioned Superintendent Atkinson's earlier statement that there would be fewer tests because of Common Core. Superintendent Atkinson clarified that Common Core does not affect testing and that her statement was simply to indicate that future testing would be less than existing.

Representative Holloway was recognized and asked about Superintendent Atkinson's statement that the NCGA was responsible for testing. He referred to a bill he sponsored to repeal all testing and wondered whether the bill had missed any tests. Superintendent Atkinson clarified that all remaining tests are required by Congress.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Senator Barefoot, who queried about the number of teachers that had participated in the Common Core-related professional development. Superintendent Atkinson indicated that since each district conducted their own training, she was not aware of any statewide numbers. She added that the testing was paid for with \$27 million of State funding and \$31 million of Federal funding.

Dr. Rebecca Garland, Chief Academic Officer for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was then recognized to add to the presentation. She began by adding that much



of the professional development work is conducted online. She indicated that DPI is in the midst of an ongoing process to educate teachers and told members that comfort with any set of new standards improves as the changes are adopted. She then proceeded to outline in detail the differences in the standards and explained the alignment of the standards with higher education (see attachment).

With the presentations concluded, Chairman Soucek then invited the members to ask questions of any of the speakers. He cautioned the members to be cognizant of the difference between study and advocacy.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Representative Pittman for a statement. Representative Pittman explained that many people are concerned about Common Core and its implementation. He expressed concerns on data collection and potential ramifications for home schools and private schools. He expressed a desire for the state to resist any Federal control. He reminded the committee members that he had introduced a bill to withdraw from Common Core and expressed frustration that 67 questions sent from the Lieutenant Governor to Superintendent Atkinson were not properly answered. He also called on Superintendent Atkinson to provide specific answers in writing to the Lieutenant Governor and to the members of the committee prior to the next meeting.

Superintendent Atkinson was recognized for clarification and she related that the incident with the 67 questions was misunderstood. She explained that she had communicated on a repeated basis with the Lieutenant Governor both publicly and in conversations around various meetings.

Chairman Soucek then recognized Representative Speciale, who sought clarification from Superintendent Atkinson about the local nature of curriculum. Superintendent Atkinson confirmed that local districts are responsible for their own curriculum and added that it is up to each district and indeed each teacher to decide how best to help students reach the standards.

Representative Speciale was recognized for a follow-up question and asked about the responsibility for determining age appropriateness of curriculum materials. Superintendent Atkinson replied that as with all decisions on curriculum, the responsibility is local, not "top-down" from the State.

Chairman Soucek recognized Senator Tillman, who repeated his earlier opinion that curriculum will be adjusted based on the standards.

Representative Brandon was then recognized and asked how Common Core would affect individualized education. Superintendent Atkinson replied simply that it would provide resources to educators continuing to develop individualized education plans as before.

Chairman Soucek then called on Representative Horn, who asked for clarification on data collection. Superintendent Atkinson explained that the General Assembly and State Board of



Education determine what data is collected, that teachers, principals and parents were the only ones who could access the data and specified that Congress requires benchmarks, but receives no individual data. She repeated her earlier statement that all data is protected.

Senator Newton was then recognized and he asked Superintendent Atkinson to confirm her earlier statement that a total of \$58 million was spent on professional development related to Common Core. Superintendent Atkinson indicated in the affirmative. Senator Newton was recognized for a follow-up and asked why the teachers he had spoken with felt so unprepared if \$58 million was spent. Superintendent Atkinson repeated her earlier statement that local districts operated their own training regimens and that all but three districts statewide had sought five-day scheduling waivers in each of the last two years in order to provide Common Core-related training.

Chairman Soucek recognized Senator Newton for a final question and he asked how Common Core would affect home schools. Superintendent Atkinson related that DPI has no authority over home schools, but makes all of their materials available to home school families should they choose to use them.

Senator Parmon was then recognized and asked how Common Core would affect testing at charter schools and for students receiving Opportunity Scholarships to attend private schools. Superintendent Atkinson responded that there are no requirements placed on private schools with regard to testing and added that charter schools have the same tests with some additional flexibility.

Chairman Soucek recognized Senator Parmon for a final question and she asked Superintendent Atkinson to explain what DPI was doing to help African-American students. Superintendent Atkinson related that DPI is focused on providing resources to all minority students.

Chairman Soucek thanked the members and adjourned the meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:45 PM.

Senator Dan Soucek
Presiding

John Clark, Committee Clerk