

Testimony on HB 2289  
By  
Ken Willard  
Kansas State Board of Education

Madame Chair, members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this written testimony to your committee on HB 2289, which would halt implementation of Common Core standards in English Language Arts and Math. It is my hope and intention to provide some perspective that will enable you to make an informed decision on this matter.

I offer this testimony as the legislative liaison for the State Board of Education and my remarks are on behalf of the State Board of Education.

*As I begin this testimony, I want to state parenthetically that I am as wary and worried about federal intrusion into the state's constitutional authority over education as anyone. It is with that understanding that I hope you will receive my testimony.*

**As a fellow policy maker, I fully understand the difficulty you face on an issue like this on which the testimony you receive is widely divergent. And yet, you must somehow sort through the information you receive and find truth in the middle of that testimony that will enable you to make good decisions and write legislation that moves the state forward.**

In a recent briefing for your committee, I sat in the audience and heard testimony that Kansas has some of the lowest reading and math standards in the country, and on the other hand testimony that Kansas ranks in the top five in the nation on the NAEP assessment and consistently above the national average.

You heard testimony that the CCS are both better and worse than our old standards, and that implementation would be prohibitively expensive.

You also heard testimony indicating that the reading called for in the Common Core standards (CCS) is too difficult for kids to handle, which in my view is an under-estimation of student's ability to read and understand biographical and content rich, non-fiction texts, which are recommended in the CCS.

You heard that good standards are not enough, and that Reading and Math proficiency are not an adequate measure of college and career readiness. **The State Board of Education completely agrees with those statements, which is evidenced by our published "Vision for Education" document that you received at that briefing. That document outlines all the other necessary pieces of the puzzle that we believe are required to produce students who are college and career ready, without remediation, when they graduate from high school.**

You heard from one presenter that our old standards in reading and math were not so great, and the CCS are a definite improvement, but that same presenter implied that the Kansas Department of Education is engaged in an effort to deliberately deceive the public about how well our students are

doing. That's an implication that I have trouble not taking personally. That implication is simply untrue.

In that briefing you heard testimony that the CCS are national standards and that states who adopt them do not own their own state standards based upon the common core, and can make no changes in the way they are taught without jeopardizing federal education funding. That testimony is not only inaccurate, but it indicates a misunderstanding, or misinterpretation, of what Reading and Math standards are. Curricular standards simply identify what students should know and be able to demonstrate at different grade levels and the sequence in which the learning should take place in order to be most effective. The standards also often make recommendations for learning activities and teaching resources that a classroom teacher may consider using to facilitate student learning.

You were told that implementation of the standards would be prohibitively expensive because of the cost of technology required for computer based assessments. The truth is that Kansas schools have been administering computer based assessments for several years. We do so because it enables teachers to get immediate results and use those results to inform instruction to address the immediate needs of their students. We don't have to purchase the technology needed for implementation of our reading and math standards, as many other states will have to do.

Possibly the only area of complete agreement among the people interested in this subject is that our old standards were inadequate and not producing enough students who were college and career ready when they graduate from high school. The disagreement comes when we attempt to address those inadequacies.

The State Board of Education has set up a cyclical process for reviewing and revising all our curriculum standards every seven years. When the Common Core initiative came into play, it was at the exact time that we were scheduled to review our standards in Reading, Writing and Math. We could have continued with our usual process of developing our own standards with assistance and expertise from national and regional education research and development organizations, like WestEd and MCREL, completely at our own expense, or we could join with other states in the effort, thereby ensuring Kansas influence in drafting the standards and gaining some commonality between the states in the standards and expectations of students in reading and math, which are essential to success in all other academic areas of education. In the past there has been wide disparity between the standards from state to state. Since Reading and Math are essential parts of all other curricular areas, it seemed to us reasonable and prudent to join with other states in the work.

So, what we are really dealing with here is, in essence, a change of process. Rather than revising our Reading and Math standards state by state, state boards of education and departments of education decided to collaborate together in the process of writing standards, then states had the opportunity to adopt, or not adopt, the common core as the basis for their standards and modify them to fit their individual state needs. Kansas has chosen to modify them to fit within our Career and Technical Education emphasis.

The Common Core initiative came about from an agreement between the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers in an effort to strengthen state standards in Reading and Math, believing that to be in the best interest of students in states all over the country. It was not an initiative that came from the US Department of Education.

One of the concerns often expressed by those who oppose the CCS is that adoption will require states to purchase all new textbooks, or that the CCS require a uniform curriculum. **That simply is not true.** Kansas schools are over two years into the implementation of CCS, and no school has had to purchase new textbooks just to implement CCS.

There is a strong move away from purchasing textbooks, because of the availability of a wide range of open source educational materials that can be found online for free. Textbooks will probably never go away, but more and more schools will rely on open source educational materials because of the cost savings.

The State Board of Education in Kansas does not dictate textbooks or curriculum to be used by our schools. Those are strictly local decisions. Local school boards decide what curriculum and textbooks they want to use to ensure that their students meet the standards set by the State Board of Education.

The CCS are certainly not perfect, any more than any other set of standards is perfect, but it is pretty generally agreed that they are better than our current standards, in that they are more rigorous and designed to produce college and career ready graduates.

The decision that must be made regarding HB 2289 is really whether or not the legislature should interject itself into the process of writing of curricular standards, which has always been the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education.

If this bill is passed, it will cause the interruption of over two years of teacher training and implementation of the CCS, and require the Department of Education to go through the lengthy and expensive process of writing our own college and career ready standards, which will, no doubt, look very much like the Common Core Standards which we have already helped to develop and retraining our teachers in use of the new standards. In the meantime, Kansas students will not have the benefit of college and career ready standards that they need. Such action does not seem to be in the best interest of Kansas educators, students or taxpayers.

For many years we have heard that schools should increase focus on the Three Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). It is our belief that the Common Core Standards do, in fact, increase focus and emphasis on these crucial components of a quality education, and require students to be better grounded in them in order to ensure their success in college or career after high school.

Finally, it seems that the greatest objection to the CCS is that they are assumed to be federally instigated and represent another federal incursion into state's authority. While that is certainly a legitimate concern in many areas of education, it is my view, and the view of the Kansas State Board

of Education, that the Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Math, written and agreed upon in a collaborative effort by volunteer states, **do not** represent such a federal incursion. Backing away from them now will represent a temporary step backward, and will require an expensive and time consuming effort to revise and rewrite our own standards, which will, no doubt, result in standards very similar to the Common Core Standards.

There may be other questions you have that I have not addressed in this testimony, about which I will be very pleased to speak with you individually, or as a committee. If that is the case, please feel free to contact me by phone or email.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ken Willard  
Member, State Board of Education  
[kwillard48@gmail.com](mailto:kwillard48@gmail.com)  
620-727-6507