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21 March 2013

House Education Committee

12:00PM

Re: Opposition to HB 2289

Representative Kasha Kelley, Chair

Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill #2289 that would prohibit the use of common core standards.

I was co-chair of the Kansas Mathematics Curriculum Standards committee which developed the Kansas Math standards adopted in 2003. The committee consisted of elementary, middle, high school, district, and post-secondary representatives. The math committee and the reading committee had multiple joint sessions to discuss the expectations for the 2003 standards and the requirements of the newly adopted reauthorization of ESEA. Our task was to develop curricular standards, determine which standards at each grade level were to be included in the Kansas Assessments, and inform the field about our work. The two committees decided to follow the same process to achieve our tasks. That process involved the analysis of the current research in our two fields of study, consideration of the standards developed by our respective national organizations, the experiences the members had with actual children, and feedback received from our colleagues.

As per K.S.A 72-6439 the Kansas Curricular Standards are to be reviewed at least every seven years. The required curricular review for both reading and math occurred during the National Governors' Conference and Council of Chief State School Officers joint effort to create internationally benchmarked standards which increased the rigor and relevance the curriculum all students were to receive. All Kansas educators and especially those on the Kansas Curriculum Standards review committees were asked to provide feedback to the groups developing the common standards.

The development of the common standards followed the exact same process used to develop the previous versions of the Kansas Curricular Standards. Many of the concerns, suggestions, and comments submitted by Kansas educators in general and by the Kansas Curricular Standards review committees were part of the final versions of the common standards. Additionally Kansas had the freedom to include up to 15 percent more content to the final common standards documents. The Kansas Curriculum Review committees had different approaches to the optional 15 percent of content based on their membership desires, but each committee has identified a Kansas 15 percent.

The Kansas State Board of Education adopted the standards developed through the leadership of the National Governors' Conference and the Council of Chief State School Officers in October 2010. Since that time many Kansas districts have been confused about whether to continue to teach the 2003 Kansas Curricular Standards or to move to the State Board adopted common standards. Much of this confusion results from the required 2003 based Kansas Assessments which are not aligned with the expectations of the common standards. Schools were conflicted in not knowing whether to begin teaching the 2010 adopted common standards or continuing the 2003 standards until assessments change in 2015.

Emporia USD 253 is one of many districts which determined the common standards were an improvement to the 2003 Kansas Curricular Standards for both mathematics and English Language Arts. The common standards are much more rigorous, are designed to develop higher order thinking, and lead students toward the integration of thinking across subjects. When considered with the other Kansas Department of Education and State Board initiatives, (Career Pathways, MTSS, College and Career Ready expectations, and the 21st Century Skills initiative) the common standards provide another piece of the process of developing well prepared Kansas students who can compete with anyone for the jobs of the future.

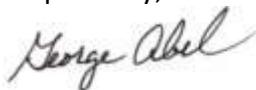
Emporia USD 253 and many other Kansas districts have spent the past three years working with our teachers to develop an understanding of the common standards and in preparing to deliver instruction at the classroom level aligned to the common standards. The common standards have created an opportunity for collaboration across state boundaries. More than 40 states have been able to pool knowledge and efforts through the common standards to create resources that was not possible when each state had a different set of standards. The ability to collaborate with educators across the country has ignited a willingness to communicate, share, build synergistic solutions not considered possible a few years ago.

Emporia USD 253 has spent significant effort and funds to move the common standards toward reality in our district. This summer we are ready to develop the actual units through which the common standards will be delivered and plan to implement those units during the 2013-14 school year. Adoption of HB 2289 will cause our local work to become a waste of time, effort, and funding as well as creating confusion for all Kansas educators. Would schools return to teaching toward the 2003 standards? How much different than the common standards would a new set of Kansas standards be since KSDE/districts are required to work with Kansas post-secondary institutions to develop college and career ready standards? Upon what standards would the 2014 Kansas assessments be based? What about the 2015 Kansas assessments?

The students of Kansas have proven repeatedly they can and will rise to the level of expectations set for them. I confidently state our teachers can deliver and our students achieve the promise and expectations of the common standards. Taken with the other educational initiatives adopted by the Kansas State Board of Education, the common standards help create a perfect storm which has the potential of redefining Kansas educational expectations so that all students graduate college and career ready. Can Kansas afford to provide less than an internationally benchmarked set of standards to its citizens?

Thank you for your attention to this very important issue.

Respectfully,



George Abel

Assistant Superintendent – Teaching and Learning