



# Wisconsin State Assembly

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TO: SPEAKER ROBIN VOS

FROM: Members of the Assembly Select Committee on Common Core Standards

RE: Summary Report of Committee Activity

DATE: December 10, 2013

This is the summary report of committee activity of the Assembly Select Committee on Common Core Standards (CCSS). It summarizes the four public hearings held and the November 19, 2013, committee meeting to discuss committee recommendations.

## OCTOBER PUBLIC HEARINGS

The committee held four public hearings on the following dates at the following locations:

- October 3, 2013, in Madison.
- October 16, 2013, in Fond du Lac.
- October 23, 2013, in Eau Claire.
- October 30, 2013, in Wausau.

At each hearing, there was testimony by invited speakers followed by a public hearing.

The following invited speakers testified on October 3, 2013:

- **Tony Evers**, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, spoke in favor of the CCSS. He said that the CCSS challenge students to learn at higher levels in the critical areas of reading, writing, and mathematics; are rigorous, clear, and deeper than prior standards; are benchmarked to the highest state and international standards to ensure students are ready to succeed in college and careers; and are aligned with the expectations of higher education and employers. He described the process used in adopting the CCSS and listed the organizations that support adoption of the CCSS. He also discussed how the Legislature and Governor have supported the implementation of the CCSS.

The following invited speakers testified on October 16, 2013:

- **Tamara Maxwell**, English Language Arts Consultant, Department of Public Instruction (DPI), spoke in favor of the CCSS. She said that, prior to her position at DPI, she was an English teacher in Kimberly. While she was a teacher, she served on DPI's English Language Arts Standards Leadership Team beginning in 2008. As a teacher, she said she found that the CCSS provided all educators with a common language to talk about setting high expectations for all students. She said there was a resulting increase in collaboration between regular and special education teachers. She also said it was helpful to have the progression of skills set forth in the CCSS so that she could identify what skills a particular student was lacking.
- **Sandra Stotsky**, Professor of Education Reform, 21st Century Chair in Teacher Quality, Department of Education Reform, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, spoke against the CCSS. She served on the CCSS validation committee and voted not to validate the CCSS. She raised several concerns regarding the English language arts standards. She said they are neither rigorous nor internationally benchmarked. She said there is no research to support CCSS' stress on writing instead of reading and on informational reading instead of literary study. Ms. Stotsky recommended that Wisconsin adopt its own standards, test to its own standards, and review and revise its standards regularly.
- **James Sebert**, Superintendent, and **Danica Lewis**, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Fond du Lac School District, spoke in favor of the CCSS. Mr. Sebert said that his staff has embraced the CCSS. He said that it is not a curriculum and does not dictate how teachers should teach. He said the CCSS have not been a burden or a great expense to his district. Ms. Lewis said that the Fond du Lac School District has seen incredible gains in student learning since adoption of the CCSS. She said that there has been an increase in the number of students taking Algebra in middle schools and that kindergarten students are able to write a full page. She said the district chooses the curriculum, but the teachers determine the day-to-day lessons.
- **Duke Pesta**, Academic Director, FreedomProject Education and Professor of English, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, spoke against the CCSS. He said that university professors were not consulted in the development of the CCSS, and that he believes Wisconsin students have poor reading skills following adoption of the CCSS. He stated that the CCSS has some of the worst aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), such as a one-size-fits-all approach to education and a system based on nationalized testing. He said that states accepted the CCSS, sight unseen, based upon the promise of federal funding and that the CCSS have never been voted on and have not been means tested.

The following invited speakers testified on October 23, 2013:

- **Mary Ann Hardebeck**, Superintendent, Eau Claire Area School District, spoke in favor of the CCSS. She said that adoption of the CCSS was only part of the federal initiatives regarding waivers to NCLB. Prior to the adoption of the CCSS, she said it was difficult for school boards to assess and compare standards to determine what students should learn. She stated that the CCSS represents the work of teachers across the country and that the standards do not limit local control of what to teach and how to teach it.
- **Gary Thompson**, Director of Clinical Training and Special Education Advocacy Service, Early Life Child Psychology & Education Center, Inc., South Jordan, Utah, spoke against the CCSS. He said that the level of testing that students will be subject to under the CCSS is unprecedented in the history of the U.S. He stated that the testing is experimentation on children without informed consent. He said that there is not data to support the validity of the Smarter Balanced testing and raised concerns that it may be detrimental to minority test takers, such as children with disabilities or mental health issues. He suggested that parents should opt their children out of the Smarter Balanced testing.
- **Sheila Briggs**, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Academic Excellence, DPI, and **Diana Kasbaum**, Mathematics Consultant, spoke in favor of the CCSS. Ms. Kasbaum said that there had been misinformation provided at previous committee hearings. First, she said that it is not true that experts from Wisconsin colleges and universities were not part of the CCSS adoption and review process and discussed their involvement. Second, she said that it is false that Wisconsin did not take the time to have input in the adoption of the CCSS. Third, she said that it is untrue that the CCSS do not address basic math skills and prepare students. She said that the CCSS are not a ceiling and that high-achieving students will continue to soar. Ms. Briggs described the process Wisconsin used in adopting the standards and discussed the various groups that support the CCSS in Wisconsin.
- **James Milgram**, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, Stanford University, spoke against the CCSS. He said that he is the main author of the California math standards, consulted on Massachusetts' standards, and served on the validation committee for the CCSS. On that committee, he voted against the standards. He said the CCSS prepare students for poor colleges but not for selective four-year institutions. He stated that data shows that when less math is required in high school, fewer students in the lower socioeconomic population earn bachelor's degrees. He criticized the CCSS mathematics standards as promoting instances of "fuzzy math." He suggested that Wisconsin adopt its own mathematics standards.

The following invited speakers testified on October 30, 2013:

- **Richard Esenberg**, President and General Counsel, Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, Inc., spoke for information. He discussed the State Superintendent's powers to supervise public education under the Wisconsin Constitution. He argued that establishing academic standards is creating public policy and is, therefore, within the authority of the Legislature.
- **Michael Petrilli**, Executive Vice President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, spoke in favor of the CCSS. He said that Fordham has evaluated the CCSS and given the English language standards an A minus and the mathematics standard a B plus. He said the CCSS are stronger than Wisconsin's previous standards. He said that the CCSS are a conservative victory because they promote fiscal responsibility, accountability, school choice, competitiveness, innovation, and traditional education values.
- **Theodor Rebarber**, CEO and founder, AccountabilityWorks, spoke against the CCSS. He asserted that few states evaluated the cost and feasibility of the CCSS before adopting them and said that a cost analysis shows that adopting the standards will be very expensive for states. He compared the achievement of U.S. students to the achievement of students internationally and said that, even with the CCSS, the U.S. will be one to two years behind an internationally competitive track.
- **William McCallum**, Distinguished Professor of Mathematics, University of Arizona, spoke in favor of the CCSS. He was a member of the committee that created the mathematics standards for the CCSS. He said the focus of the committee was on evidence and that the standards require mastery of fewer topics but with a deeper understanding. He described the standards as coherent so that mathematics makes sense to students and teachers. He said that the standards aim to prepare a student for four-year entry level college courses and courses at a two-year college, and that students who plan to attend a more competitive university or to pursue a career in mathematics, science, or engineering will need to take higher level courses in high school.
- **Ze'ev Wurman**, Visiting Scholar, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, spoke against the CCSS. He said that the CCSS mathematics standards should set expectations but, instead, dictate pedagogy. He said that the standards may be too high in kindergarten and first grade, but then slow down too much in the remaining elementary grades. He said that all students should study Algebra in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but the CCSS places its first Algebra course in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He said the goals of the mathematics standards should be an increased number of students taking advanced math courses; increased success in advanced math courses; and closing the gap for minority and disadvantaged students. He described California's success in meeting these goals using their state standards for mathematics. He argued that the CCSS

will lower expectations and lead to a decreased number of students being prepared for science and math careers.

Following the testimony by the invited speakers at each hearing, the committee held a public hearing. The public testimony included testimony from parents, grandparents, elementary and secondary educators, professors, advocates for children, and school board members.

In the testimony, there appeared to be general agreement on the following:

- Rigorous state standards are important.
- The CCSS is more detailed, specific, and rigorous than Wisconsin's 1998 Model Academic Standards in English language arts and mathematics.
- Responsibility for determining curriculum should continue to be the responsibility of the local school districts.
- Student privacy should be safeguarded.

At the hearings, some of the concerns regarding the CCSS that were raised were the following:

- The CCSS do not provide sufficient rigor, especially for students who plan to attend a competitive four-year university.
- The federal government exerted undue influence to coerce the states to adopt the CCSS.
- The CCSS are not tested.
- Choice of teaching materials will be limited because publishers will align all of their materials with the CCSS.
- The process of adopting the CCSS was not transparent and was hurried.
- Teachers and professors were not included in the development of the CCSS.
- Wisconsin should have academic standards that are unique to the needs of Wisconsin students.
- The CCSS do not require high school students to take higher-level mathematics courses.
- The CCSS are copyrighted and cannot be adapted to meet the needs of students.
- Schools are using inappropriate materials in English classes under the CCSS.
- Because the ACT will be aligned to the CCSS, home-schooled students will have less academic flexibility.

- Implementation of the CCSS is expensive.

At the hearings, testimony in support of the CCSS included the following:

- The common standards across school districts ensure that students who move from place to place will meet the requirements of their grade level.
- Having common standards ensures that school districts have set expectations for their students regardless of the population served or the wealth of the district.
- Students are more engaged in learning since the adoption of the CCSS.
- Teachers have a better understanding of the skills students should have at each grade level.
- Since the prior standards were only for three grades, the CCSS provide greater uniformity, especially in the grades for which there were no state model academic standards.
- The CCSS encourage more reading in middle and high school and provide guidance to teachers in how to teach reading across various disciplines.
- The CCSS were written by national experts in English and mathematics and are world-class academic standards.
- The CCSS give school districts and educators the flexibility to choose materials and instructional methods that best serve their students.
- The CCSS and the testing associated with it will hold schools accountable for their students' achievement.
- It would be harmful to Wisconsin students to abandon the CCSS at this point.

### NOVEMBER 19 MEETING

On November 19, 2013, the committee met to discuss its recommendations and plans for making recommendations.

### Committee Discussion

**Representative Knudson** said that he approached the committee hearings with many questions and that some have been answered, and some have not. He said he had the following thoughts:

- The CCSS are more detailed, specific, and rigorous than Wisconsin's 1998 Model Academic Standards. He said, nonetheless, the CCSS should be viewed as a floor and not a ceiling. He said that Wisconsin should pursue an accelerated mathematics track that applies statewide so that teachers can share best practices for high-achieving students.

- Wisconsin needs to take additional steps to protect student privacy. He said that he has requested a list of data that DPI collects and is troubled that DPI is finding this to be a difficult task.
- The state needs to do a better job of communicating with local school districts about their rights and obligations. He said that local school boards are not obligated to adopt the CCSS and that decisions for curriculum must remain at the local level. He also stated that decisions regarding the content of standards and testing must be made without federal interference.

He said that he hopes the recommendations of the committee will receive bipartisan support.

**Representative Steineke** said that he appreciated the committee process and wished that DPI had involved all parties when it adopted the CCSS. He said that his biggest concern would be returning to the Wisconsin's 1998 Model Academic Standards.

He said that he would recommend creating a process in the statutes to review Wisconsin's academic standards at least every five years by a committee comprised of legislators representing both parties, professors, elementary and secondary school educators, and representatives from the public, including parents. He said the initial review should begin by September 1, 2014, with a report to the Legislature by June 1, 2015. He also said that such a committee should be required to hold at least four statewide hearings before issuing its report.

He also recommended legislation to protect student-level data to ensure it cannot be shared outside of the district or with any other entity other than DPI. He recommended legislation to ensure that determination of curriculum remains with local school districts. Finally, he recommended researching the practical and fiscal implications of eliminating statewide standardized achievement test and instead using, in elementary and middle school, a growth model test administered at least twice each year and, in high school, the ACT suite of tests.

**Representative Schraa** said that he believes Wisconsin's former academic standards in English language arts and mathematics were inadequate. He said that there was contradictory testimony at the public hearings held by the committee regarding whether DPI is planning to adopt science standards based on a national model, whether the CCSS for mathematics are appropriate, and whether the CCSS are internationally benchmarked. He also said he was concerned that there were conflicts of interest in the way the CCSS was developed and about how quickly the standards were developed and adopted. He raised concerns about data collection and student privacy, including changes to federal law regarding pupil records. He said that he thought the implementation costs for the CCSS are high. Finally, he questioned the partnership between the test consortia and the CCSS funders.

**Representative Pridemore** said he agrees with what his colleagues had already said. He said that Wisconsin needs to maintain its sovereignty in education, and that Wisconsin has local control and will continue to have local control.

He stated that he supports a process to review Wisconsin's academic standards and said that any review should consider what businesses and higher education institutions are doing in Wisconsin.

He said that the CCSS should be viewed as the floor for academic standards and that Wisconsin should consider add-on standards. He said he views the requirement of the CCSS Initiative that the standards may be changed by no more than 15% as unenforceable and that Wisconsin should be free to establish higher standards.

He said that collection of student data is a tentacle of the CCSS and that he has drafted legislation to protect student privacy by prohibiting data from going to anyone outside the school district and allowing parents to opt in to data sharing.

**Representative Hesselbein** said that the public hearings provided good information and cleared up some misconceptions. She noted testimony from a person in the military who appreciated the consistency of standards across districts and states since he moves frequently with his family. She also noted the favorable testimony from the Fordham Institute.

She said that she is concerned about testimony that some teachers fear retaliation if they raise any opposition to the CCSS. She said that she is trying to identify the districts where these teachers work and would like to know why they are afraid.

She said that she agrees that local control is good and that periodic review of standards may be a good idea.

**Representative Larson** said that he has had numerous contacts from constituents regarding the CCSS. He said that he cannot support the CCSS.

He said that he believes the CCSS is unconstitutional and illegal because it removes local control and was implemented because of federal money.

He raised concerns about inappropriate curriculum under the CCSS. He said that the CCSS provides a narrow path for curricular choices.

He said that the CCSS treats all children the same and will make them the same as each other. He said that children will not be able to reach for the sky under the CCSS.

**Representative Pope** said that she believes the CCSS should continue without change. She said that standards ought to be reviewed, perhaps every seven years.

She said that she was dismayed at the misinformation presented at the hearings. She stated that she thinks the best information is information provided by the people who are using the standards. She said that she had counted that 90 educators appeared in support of the CCSS at the hearings and 70 registered in favor. She said that there was one appearance against the CCSS from an individual from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and one from the Merrill School District. She said that educators overwhelmingly support the CCSS and believe it is working.



In response to comments relating to data collection, she said that schools need to collect data in order to hold teachers accountable. She said that she has faith in DPI and that she knows the standards are the floor and are standards, not curriculum. She said she also knows that local control will continue.

**Chair Thiesfeldt** stated that states adopted the CCSS while legislatures were distracted by other issues and with the promise of federal money. He said having national standards is not reflective of the intention of the founders of the U.S. who wanted states to be laboratories for education. He said that the process for the development and adoption of the CCSS was not transparent and was hurried.

He said that federal involvement in education has grown since the mid-sixties, but student achievement has not grown and achievement gaps have not improved. He said that national standards will create a unified launching pad which will make it easier to indoctrinate students in the beliefs of the educational industrial complex that controls educational materials and has the support of the educational bureaucracy.

He stated that it would be best for Wisconsin to have Wisconsin standards, and that they may turn out to be very similar to the CCSS. He also said he is increasingly concerned with standardized testing, the amount of time it takes from classroom time, and the high-stakes nature of it.

He ended by making the following points:

- A lackluster process has brought Wisconsin to where it is today, and Wisconsin is not unique in this struggle.
- Protecting students' and their families' privacy must be a priority.
- The Legislature must reiterate to Wisconsin school districts that they have the authority to establish standards for their students.
- Federal interference and coercion must be rejected and, if necessary, legally challenged, in order to protect Wisconsin's independence in education.

### Other Business

Representative Knudson said that he had sent to committee members' offices and released to the media two memoranda prepared by Legislative Council staff: *School District Adoption of Academic Standards* (October 3, 2013), and *Use of Blood Pressure Cuffs, Pressure Sensors, and Posture Chairs Under the Common Core State Standards* (October 16, 2013).

Representative Thiesfeldt said that he would work on preparing a final report summarizing the committee's work and that the committee would meet one more time to discuss recommendations to submit to the Speaker of the Assembly. He said that he would like the committee to complete its work by the end of December.

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