

**From:** Donna L. Pasternak [dlp2@uwm.edu]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 18, 2010 2:15 PM  
**To:** Aprill Lynn; Emily Ihrke; Donna L. Pasternak; John M Zbikowski; kskelley@uwm.edu; pentim@tds.net; emlerm@sbsd.k12.wi.us; koelker@desoto.k12.wi.us; jotenk@btsd.k12.wi.us; arnesonl@cesa5.k12.wi.us; osowskip@ripon.k12.wi.us; berkas@fonddulac.k12.wi.us; jrauscher@dce.k12.wi.us; stephanie reid; zwicke@pctc.net; beverma@scf.k12.wi.us; jacalyn mabon; jfradrich@wittbirn.k12.wi.us; Connie@Stratford.k12.wi.us; JoAnne Katzmarek; Amundson, Emilie A. DPI; Carol Conway-Gerhardt; Barbara Dixson; Jacki Martindale; Marti Matyska; kathy Nelson; Scott Oates; Tom Pamperin; Bill Schang; Tom Scott; Marty Wood; Erin Schwane; John Pruitt; Mary Louise Gomez; Jen Scott Curwood; Paula Wolfe; CATHERINE F LILLY; Gallo JESSICA R; tabersl@uwgb.edu; kaufmant@uwgb.edu; frickly@staff.saukpr.k12.wi.us; lbarring@wi.rr.com  
**Subject:** Common Core Standards Response

Evidence of NCTE feedback on CCSO on the draft CCS Feb, 2010

Dear Colleagues:

What follows is the WCTE response to the CCS, crafted from notes taken at the DPI preview last Tuesday. The board members who participated in the conversation included Barbara, Erin, Scott, Tom, Emilie and me. I want to thank those of you who provided feedback on the first draft and/or accepted the invitation to place your name on the document. If you haven't already done so, I encourage everyone to read the CCS at <http://www.corestandards.org/>

I know you are all extremely busy, dedicated to the advancement of our profession, and some of you felt you did not have enough time to study the CCS in the time I allotted for helping me craft a response to it. I concede that I expedited its writing, because I felt the CCS warranted an immediate response after the DPI preview. When initiatives such as the CCS are shaped by organizations that appear to sidestep the members of the professional organizations that will have to enact them, I fear that our silence will be misunderstood as acceptance of the situation. Will our response change having to follow the CCS? I think not, but it may cause some revision to occur. At the very least, we will be on record that WCTE is not happy with the narrow vision of English studies found in the CCS. I encourage you all to respond to the CCS individually.

All best,

Donna

Donna L. Pasternak, President, WCTE

\*\*\*\*\*

The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (WCTE) is firm in its insistence that the Common Core Standards (CCS) fit the needs of English Language Arts teachers and their students in the State of Wisconsin. Therefore, WCTE asks that the following concerns be taken into consideration when revising and implementing this document:

1. The English Language Arts Common Core Standards fail to acknowledge the heart of our discipline: Humanities.

Focusing the CCS on the skills needed to read, write, listen, and speak is only a partial vision of what is necessary for students to be college and career ready in English Studies. What is missing from the CCS is an articulation of the humanities portion of the discipline. The CCS document does not

acknowledge the reasons for reading, discussing and writing about literature, which is to explore the readers' own experiences and the social and political worlds they inhabit. The skills identified in the CCS are the means to learning the content of English Studies. Without this content articulated in the CCS, the reading of texts becomes nothing more than sophisticated (or unsophisticated) decoding.

The CCS should identify standards that address the knowledge foundational to literary (textual) study and meaning-making. This content should facilitate the students' personal growth in a developmentally appropriate way, increasing their awareness of the world around them, fostering their growth as independent learners, and supporting their own decision-making. In the same vein, the study of writing in English Studies should address creative exploration. If these aspects of English Studies are not included in the CCS, we fear that the disciplinary knowledge of English Studies will be subordinated to learning to write, read, speak, and listen in "history, social studies, and science." In other words, we fear that teachers in English studies will become the handmaidens (gendered language intended) to the other disciplines as English teachers teach students skills and teachers in other disciplines teach content. We recommend that the State of Wisconsin contextualize the CCS with what we know and value about English Studies that helps all of us better understand the human condition.

2. Grade-specific standards and grade appropriate texts ignore what we know about child development.

Providing grade-specific standards, while helpful for teachers who wish guidance, ignores what we know about child development. Students come into our age-specified grades (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> grade) with different abilities and widely varying backgrounds in language experience and exposure. To expect that all students would achieve the standards specified in a narrow grade level identified in the CCS is tantamount to saying that scientific studies of child development are irrelevant. Providing bands spanning grade equivalencies (e.g., K-2) of expected development would be much more in line with scientific knowledge and commonplace experience.

Despite the disclaimer that the texts listed in the narrow grade levels in the CCS are merely "illustrative," we fear that school districts will purchase these texts out of expediency to implement an unfunded mandate. The exemplar texts listed do not address the complexity and diversity of the State of Wisconsin. We propose that the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provide English teachers in the State of Wisconsin with peer-reviewed models that reflect the values of its population. This type of document could become a "living" compendium where additional peer-reviewed exemplars could be uploaded and commented upon by practitioners.

3. The use of the term "Standard" English throughout the CCS is offensive and does not underscore what we know about audience and register in the study of language in the State of Wisconsin.

WCTE recognizes that differences in language have always existed and respects that people in Wisconsin have home languages that are central to their identities. We will not subordinate the home language by assuming that there is one "standard" language in the United States, and we repudiate the use of the term "standard." The CCS should reflect the understanding that there are varieties of language in the United States and students have a right to their own languages and patterns of language appropriate to their home situations. The CCS should indicate such and discuss the teaching of language in a more equitable manner.

WCTE acknowledges the impending reality of the CCS in the State of Wisconsin. We ask the writers of the CCS to implement changes to the document as it now stands to make it relevant to teachers of English in our state.

Respectfully submitted,

The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (WCTE)

Donna L. Pasternak, President, WCTE

2 of 3

Associate Professor of English Education  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Marti Matyska  
English Teacher  
Menominee Indian High School

Katherine M. Nelson  
Arrowhead Union High School  
Hartland, WI

Tom Scott, Ph.D., Executive Treasurer and Membership Chair, WCTE  
Lecturer in English Education  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee