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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 52nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Personal Reflections of Common Core Hearings

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A Brief History of Wisconsin's Adoption of Common Core Standards

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) adopted the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards (WMAS) for grades 4, 8, and 12 in 1998. After a few years, it became clear that the WMAS were no longer adequate to meet the needs of Wisconsin students. As a result, in 2006 the DPI began to consider developing new standards.

The DPI convened the *Summit for 21st Century Skills* in March 2007 in conjunction with an organization called *Competitive Wisconsin, Inc.* According to its website, *Competitive Wisconsin, Inc.* acts, “As a nonpartisan coalition engaging business, higher education, agriculture and labor, Competitive Wisconsin is uniquely positioned to provide the opportunity to bring groups together to provide analysis and recommend action on issues affecting Wisconsin’s economy and quality of life. The result will be a strong, growing economy that can encourage and sustain family-supporting jobs, economic prosperity and secure Wisconsin’s quality of life.” Following the summit, the DPI created a task force to examine model academic standards and joined the *American Diploma Project Network* (ADPN).

Originally launched by *Achieve, Inc.* in 2001 as the *American Diploma Project* (ADP), and relaunched as the ADPN in 2005, this organization is a 35-state network committed to the following four actions:

- Align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for the demands of college and careers.
- Establish graduation requirements that require all high school graduates to complete a college-and-career-ready curriculum so that earning a diploma assures a student is prepared for postsecondary education.
- Develop statewide high school assessment systems anchored to college-and-career-ready expectations.
- Create comprehensive accountability and reporting systems that promote college and career readiness for all students.

Serving the communities of Fond du Lac, Oakfield, Byron, Empire, Taycheedah, and the western half of Calumet township

According to the DPI document “Transforming Teaching and Learning”, midway through the process of revising the WMAS for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) began to discuss creating a common set of college and career ready benchmarks for mathematics and ELA—the Common Core Standards (CCS). Work on developing the CCS was begun in 2009.

On June 1, 2009, Governor Jim Doyle and then-State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster signed a memorandum of understanding to partner with the NGA and the CCSSO and other states in creating the new benchmarks. It should be noted that this did not commit Wisconsin to adopting the standards, rather it included Wisconsin in the action of creating the standards. By this time, the revision of the WMAS begun in 2007 was nearing completion.

Upon completion of the revised WMAS for ELA and math, they were submitted for review by *Achieve, Inc.* and received high commendation. In a July 2009 letter to the DPI, *Achieve, Inc.* praised the level of rigor of the proposed revisions. “The proposed WMAS in ELA and Mathematics present student learning expectations that are intellectually demanding and well aligned with the ADP benchmarks.” In spite of this praise, the DPI continued aiming to scrap the newly-proposed WMAS and replace them with the CCS.

The initial draft of the CCS was offered to Wisconsin for comment from Sept. 21 - Oct. 21, 2009. (Appendix A) The comment period for the final draft of the CCS was available from March 10 - April 2, 2010. (Appendix B) Having been presented during the busiest time of the school year, this time frame offered precious little opportunity for Wisconsin educators or the public to reflect on the draft prior to adoption. Documents recovered from the DPI reveal that the DPI (Appendix C.1, C.2), the *Wisconsin Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development* (Appendix D), the *Wisconsin Mathematics Council* (Appendix E) and the *Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English* (WCTE), particularly the latter, expressed numerous criticisms of CCS.

In a March 18, 2010 email to members, WCTE President Donna Pasternak urged members to raise their concerns fearing “that our silence will be misunderstood as acceptance of the situation.” Pasternak continued, “...we will be on record that WCTE is not happy with the narrow vision of English studies found in CCS.” (Appendix F)

This was not the first time WCTE had expressed strong reservations to the CCS. The minutes of the organization’s summer board meeting on July 29, 2009 state, “...we perceive as the abandonment of literature and concentration on skills...” and, “NCTE [*National Council of Teachers of English*] is at odds with ACHIEVE.” The minutes further stated, “There was a LOT of concern about the motivations behind these standards (i.e. global markets, capitalism), and also the moral and ethical considerations inherent in the Humanities which are not addressed in these Common Core National Standards at all.” (Appendix G)

In the fall 2013 edition of the WCTE's publication the *Wisconsin English Journal*, Associate Editor Catherine Compton-Lilly examined the CCS related to reading and the achievement gap. She closes her article by stating:

...it is questionable whether a “common” and “core” curriculum will serve students who bring diverse cultural knowledge, socioeconomic experiences, language practices, gender positionings, religions, physical appearances, and sexual orientations to classrooms. In short, the knowledge and experiences of too many students will be left behind highlighting the potential of the Common Core standards to exacerbate rather than address inequity. (Appendix H)

The WCTE membership passed a rather tepid *Position Statement Regarding the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts* on Oct. 11, 2013. (Appendix I)

It is unclear if any of the aforementioned criticisms resulted in alterations of the final copy of the CCS standards. The CCS in ELA and mathematics were finalized and submitted to the states on June 2, 2010. State Superintendent Tony Evers adopted the standards the very first day the CCS were available.

Authority to Adopt and Revise Standards

Superintendent Evers adopted the CCS based on his interpretation Article X of the Wisconsin State Constitution where it states, “The supervision of public instruction shall be vested in a state superintendent and other such officers as the legislature shall direct; and their powers, duties, and compensation shall be prescribed by law...” Recent criticism has been leveled at Superintendent Evers over his claim that he alone, not the legislature or the governor, has the authority to adopt academic standards. (Appendix J)

The Assembly and Senate Select Committees on the CCS heard testimony on Oct. 30 in Wausau from Rick Esenberg, President of the *Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty* who told a different story:

...the ability to develop and implement academic standards, such as Common Core, is a “duty” given to the Superintendent by the state legislature...2011 Act 32 directed that the Department of Public Instruction shall replace the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination, and the new assessments shall measure mastery of the Common Core standards. Determining the type of standards, i.e. how high to set the bar, is a public policy decision, and, as such, it does not fall within the Superintendent's supervisory authority but rather falls within the legislature's power to make policy. (Appendix K)

Involvement of the WI Legislature Prior to Adoption of CCS

Up until the formation of the Select Committees, at no time was the Wisconsin legislature, either by committee or as a whole, involved in any meaningful way in the development or approval of the CCS. Furthermore, when the opportunity for feedback was provided to the DPI in March 2010 and the subsequent adoption of the CCS in June 2010, the legislature was out of session and did not return until January 2011. The attention of the legislature and the public through most of 2011-12 was diverted in the midst of massive protests at the capitol, major economic and budgetary issues and recall elections—all of which received wide national media publicity. This largely precluded any demand for public hearings where citizen’s voices would normally have been heard on the adoption of the CCS.

Since being formally adopted, the following actions have occurred regarding the implementation of the CCS in Wisconsin:

- October 2010 - Wisconsin joined a consortium of states working together to develop a common assessment aligned to the CCS.
- 2011 WI Act 32 (2011-13 budget law) - Required the DPI to replace the *Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination* (WKCE) with new pupil assessments that measured mastery of the CCS.
- January 2012 - The *Wisconsin Read to Lead Task Force* recommendations included a DPI review and update of *Wisconsin’s Model Early Learning Standards* to ensure alignment of early childhood learning standards with the CCS.
- 2013 WI Act 20 (2013-15 budget law) - Provided funding for the state’s new assessment system that will measure mastery of CCS.
- CCS-aligned assessments will be used with other data to form the evaluation of the effectiveness of schools and teachers.

Federal Involvement in CCS and Assessment Consortia

In the recently-concluded public hearings held by the Select Committees, a large portion of testimony was devoted to the federal government’s involvement in state’s adoption of the CCS. A white paper prepared by the *Pioneer Institute*, dated February 2012, to a great extent details these concerns. The paper is entitled, “The Road to a National Curriculum: Legal Aspects of the Common Core Standards, Race to the Top, and Constitutional Waivers”. This paper asserts:

Since 2009, through three major initiatives—the Race to the Top Fund [RTT], the Race to the Top Assessment Program, and conditional NCLB [No Child Left Behind] waiver guidance (the “Conditional NCLB Waiver

Plan”)—the [U.S.] Department [of Education] has created a system of discretionary grants and waivers that herds state education authorities into accepting elementary and secondary school standards and assessments favored by the Department. Left unchallenged by Congress, these standards and assessments will ultimately direct the course of elementary and secondary study in most states across the nation, running the risk that states will become little more than administrative agents for a nationalized K-12 program of instruction and raising a fundamental question about whether the Department is exceeding its statutory boundaries.

The 2009 federal stimulus package allotted \$4.35 billion to the United States Department of Education (USDE). In order to measure student progress in CCS, standardized testing will be required as has been the case since NCLB. Stimulus funds were awarded by the USDE in the amount of \$362 million to two multi-state testing consortia. The states within the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers Consortium* (PARCC) and the *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium* (SBAC) agreed, among other stipulations, to adopt common college-and-career-ready standards common across other states (essentially CCS) and remain in the testing consortium. As a result, participating states are compelled to align their curriculum and instruction to what are, in essence, national standards and assessments.

It is noteworthy that despite two attempts to receive significant RTT funds connected to CCS, Wisconsin was unsuccessful. However, upon a 3rd attempt, Wisconsin was awarded \$22.7 million for specific application to early childhood education. (Appendix L)

In 2011 the Obama Administration responded to growing agitation from states over the NCLB accountability requirements by issuing executive orders through the USDE offering conditional waivers to NCLB. Among the factors weighed for consideration of a waiver were a state’s adoption of standards “common to a significant number of states” (essentially CCS) and assessments aligned to those standards. These waivers, especially when married to state attempts to obtain stimulus funds at a time of historic economic struggles, effectively coerced states into compliance with the CCS. It paved the path to a *de facto* nationalizing of standards and assessments.

Standardized Testing in Wisconsin

Wisconsin is a member of the SBAC. The WKCE has used several configurations since it was first used in 1996, and it is slated for partial elimination following the current academic year. (Appendix M) The *Smarter Balanced Assessment* (SBA) went through small-scale pilot testing in 2013 and will use a large-scale pilot in 2014. The SBA will be administered to all Wisconsin public school students in grades 3-8 beginning the 2014-15 academic year. In 2014-15 high school students will be administered the ACT suite of tests which are also being revised to align with the CCS.

The assessments formed by SBAC will use “computer adaptive testing”. In this type of test, the computer program adjusts the difficulty of the questions throughout the

assessment based on student responses. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging follow-up item, conversely an incorrect answer generates an easier question. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these tests present a set of questions individually-tailored to each student.

A key component of NCLB was to intensify standardized testing to help determine if schools were showing “adequate yearly progress”. While controversial, the increase in standardized testing has successfully led educational evaluations to be mostly data-driven. However, the value, frequency and appropriate application of standardized testing has long been debated in the education community and will continue to be questioned.

How much testing time will be required of Wisconsin students? It seems certain that significant increases in testing time will further remove students from classroom instruction. Estimates by SBAC indicate a range of 7 hours (3-5th gr.) to 8.5 hours (11th gr.). (Appendix N) Adding the continuing portions of the WKCE (science & social studies) will bring approximately 2 more hours. (Appendix O) Also, in Dec. 2012 there were 287 school districts using the *Measure of Academic Progress* (MAP) test as well. An adaptive computer-based test (much like the SBA) the MAP test is administered to students up to three times a school year. The MAP test will occupy another 1.5-3.25 hours for students each time it is taken. The MAP test appears to also be aligned to CCS. (Appendix P) In total, some Wisconsin students may be required to partake in an estimated 14 hours of standardized testing.

Questions have been raised as to the cost to implement the SBA, and since it will be web-based, the ability of rural schools to efficiently access them. The SBAC predicts a probable cost of at least \$22.50/student for the SBA. A 2013 Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) budget paper (#535) has estimated a cost of \$26/student. All studies I found indicated a significantly increased cost per pupil over the WKCE. A phone conversation with a DPI spokesperson on Nov. 25, 2013 revealed that the current cost of the WKCE averages \$11.55/student. It should be remembered that the entire cost of the WKCE will not be eliminated when SBA is instituted due to the continuance of the science and social studies components. Unless schools abandon the MAP test, it, too will add to the overall cost. It appears that school districts will see heavy increases in testing costs beginning in the 2014-15 academic year.

Recently Florida joined several states that have withdrawn their previous participation in one or both of the federally-financed testing consortiums (PARCC & SBAC). A growing number of states are reevaluating their participation in the consortiums citing concern over federal involvement, a desire to maintain their curricular and testing independence, the cost of the assessments, interest in other testing options and a lack of confidence in the test’s effectiveness.

Any state leaving PARCC or SBAC after having received a federal waiver to NCLB is at risk for revocation of their waiver. Likewise, any state that has adopted CCS and were to decide to withdraw, may be deemed out of compliance with their successful application

for a RTT grant. Wisconsin would not bear the latter burden due to being denied RTT grants associated with the CCS.

What would happen if Wisconsin chose to follow other states that have scaled-back or left PARCC or SBAC? According to a LFB paper produced for the Joint Committee on Finance on Aug. 30, 2013:

It is unclear what system of assessment would be in place in Wisconsin while new standards and assessments were developed. State and federal accountability provisions require testing each year. The state's prior model academic standards, with which the WKCE is aligned, are not considered college and career ready. Therefore, it appears that the state could not use the prior set of standards, and continue to administer the WKCE, without jeopardizing its ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or NCLB] flexibility waiver.

Closely gauging curriculum and standards to standardized testing produces commonality across classrooms. Although teachers will certainly maintain a measure of pedagogical freedom, rigid and specific standards leave little incentive to explore skills that are ultimately not tested. This limitation is intensified further when teacher, school, administrator and/or district performance evaluations are tethered to test scores.

Violations of Federal Law?

Much testimony in the hearings from those opposed to the CCS centered on the questionable legality of the federal role. The aforementioned *Pioneer Institute* paper argues that the involvement of the federal government in the implementation efforts of the CCS violates three federal laws:

Federal law lays down broad prohibitions on Department [USDE] involvement in curricula decisions. The General Education Provisions Act prohibits the Department from “exercis[ing] any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel” of any school, or “the selection of . . . textbooks, or other . . . instructional materials” used in any school. Similar prohibitions exist in the Department of Education Organization Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Common Core is the vehicle by which the federal government is evading these prohibitions...the Department has herded the states into adopting Common Core by dangling before them Race to the Top funding while denying them the opportunity to review the Standards before signing on.

The paper also analyzes the federal government’s role vis-à-vis the states in the RTT Fund, the RTT Assessment Program, and conditional NCLB waiver guidance. At the end of the paper, the authors make seven recommendations. Five of these are recommendations to Congress, but the last two apply to states:

- “Sixth, Governors, State Superintendents of Education, State Boards of Education and State Legislators should reconsider their respective states’ decisions to participate in the [CCS Initiative], the Race to the Top Fund, and the Race to the Top Assessment Program.
- Seventh, the eleven states that have applied for waivers under the Department’s Conditional NCLB Waiver Plan should amend their waivers to delete the Department’s four non-statutory conditions....”

These four non-statutory conditions are:

- Adopt college-and-career-ready standards in at least reading and language arts and mathematics and develop and administer annual, statewide, aligned assessments [SBAC] that measure student growth in at least grades 3 through 8 and at least once in high school.
- Develop and implement differentiated accountability systems that recognize student growth and provide interventions for the lowest-performing schools and those with the largest achievement gaps.
- Develop and implement new systems for evaluating principal and teacher performance, based in part on student academic growth.
- Remove burdensome reporting requirements that have little impact on student outcomes.

It is likely that a close examination would find that no laws were directly violated by the USDE in the implementation of CCS. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the spirit of the law is violated when federal incentive becomes compulsion. In essence, the federal government (particularly in the funding of the PARCC and the SBAC) has paid other groups to do what it legally could not. Likewise, if the federal government was unable to fund any favored CCS-related projects, it was able to rely on well-heeled private organizations such the *The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*. One is left to wonder if the supporters of the CCS would feel the same if the private financial backing instead came from the *Koch Family Foundations & Philanthropy*.

The Growth of Federal Involvement in K-12 Education

It is clear that the growth of the federal government’s role in K-12 education has increased significantly. Prior to the Cold War the federal government played little or no role in K-12 education. Much of the federal government’s interest has focused on two areas, 1) raising overall achievement, and 2) closing achievement gaps. Beginning in 1958, a series of initiatives have been enacted at the federal level that have essentially made all states dependent on federal largesse to operate their schools:

1958 – Congress passed the National Defense Education Act to aid states in producing students to compete with the Soviet Union in scientific and technical fields.

1965 – The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) launched programs to address the problems of poor urban and rural areas. Of particular note was the establishment of Title I funding.

1980 – Congress established the Department of Education as a cabinet level position, charged with supporting K-12 education. It today touches nearly every area and level of K-12 education.

1994 – The ESEA reauthorization required states to: (1) develop academic standards, (2) create and administer annual assessments aligned to those standards (once each in grades 3–5, 6–8, and 10–11), and (3) develop a system of adequate yearly progress by which to judge student attainment of state academic standards.

2002 – NCLB becomes law. This law was another reauthorization of the ESEA. The law was primarily aimed at improving the academic performance of disadvantaged students. Placing a heavy emphasis on data, NCLB ramped up standardized testing, mandated schools to demonstrate progress, forced states and districts to provide annual report cards with required data, and enhanced teacher qualification requirements.

In spite of the federal government’s ever-increasing role in K-12 education, little or no national academic progress has been seen as a result, particularly in comparison with other top-performing nations. In the face of enormous increases in federal education spending over the years, none of the targeted problems have seen subsequent improvement. Adjusted for inflation, federal spending on K-12 education is three times what it was in 1970 with no appreciable gains in outcomes. In the parallel time frame, productivity has risen dramatically in almost all areas of American life with the exception of education. (Appendix Q)

National Science & Social Studies Standards

Some discussion in the hearings centered on the potential of Wisconsin further adopting *Common Core* science and/or social studies standards. Although my research indicates there seemed to be some initial interest in doing so, comprehensive science and social studies standards are not being developed for *Common Core*. However, CCS does include cross-curricular standards for literacy in grades 6-12 in history/social studies, science and technical subjects.

In 2009 the federally-funded *National Research Council* began working with national experts in the development of “The Framework for K-12 Science Education.” After receiving public comment on the draft released in July 2010, the completed Framework

was released to the public in July 2011. Using the Framework, in 2011 *Achieve, Inc.* (the same group that managed the CCS) began managing the development of the K-12 *Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS), published in April 2013.

Some confusion has been evident that the NGSS are related to CCS. Outside of the involvement of *Achieve, Inc.*, the NGSS are not part of CCS and the State of Wisconsin is not a member of the state coalition from which the science standards were written and developed. However, the University of Wisconsin (Madison) and the UW School of Education's Center for Educational Research were considered critical stakeholders in the process with one Wisconsin teacher on the standards writing team.

Additionally, the NGSS are almost wholly a federal project. *Achieve, Inc.* partnered with around 13 federal agencies including NASA, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior. (Appendix R)

In 2007 the *National Council for the Social Studies* (NCSS) began to examine revising its 1994 "National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies". A task force was formed and the standards were introduced in March 2010. The NCSS standards are not intended for adoption as a set of national standards. They are intended as a framework that teachers, schools, districts and states may use for reference in establishing their own unique standards. I was unable to locate any formal Wisconsin connection to the establishment of the NCSS standards.

Student Data

Much debate has centered on the potential of student data being transferred to the federal government or other entities. The 2009 stimulus law awarded money to states that established "state longitudinal data systems" (SLDS) for housing information on public school students. The USDE intends these SLDS to "capture, analyze, and use student data from preschool to high school, college, and the workforce." (Appendix S)

Until recently the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) of 1974 disallowed the federal government from maintaining a database of personally identifiable student information. The USDE has rolled back some provisions of the FERPA by issuing a reinterpretation of the regulations in January 2012. Now, under certain constraints, personally identifiable student information may be released without parental consent. This reinterpretation of the FERPA faced a recent lawsuit that was thrown out by a federal court due to the litigant's lack of legal standing to bring suit. (Appendix T)

SBAC needs student data to produce tests compatible with CCS and reflective of student skills. In turn, according to a document produced by the NGA titled, *Realizing the Potential: How Governors Can Lead Effective Implementation of the Common Core State Standards*, student data is vital to the successful implementation of the CCS. Many private entities also have a strong desire to obtain student/family data for marketing purposes. It is clear that as legal data collection by states and/or the federal government

multiplies, pressure from marketing agencies to sell will increase. In addition, a strong concern is evident for the viability of the security systems in place to protect such data from hackers. Based on history, it would be naïve to believe that personally identifiable data would never befall such a fate, or never be used against those from whom its collection was intended to help.

An example of an organization interested in collecting data is *inBloom, Inc.* *The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation* has received much criticism for funding various aspects of CCS-related materials, projects and organizations such as the NGA (\$21.8 million), CCSSO (\$79 million), *Achieve, Inc* (\$36.7 million). All told, estimates are that Gates has contributed \$175 million to CCS-related organizations. (Appendix U) *inBloom, Inc.*, has also received approximately \$100 million from *Gates* and others. (Appendix V) Wisconsin is not among the states involved with *inBloom, Inc.* which touts itself as an “organization working to make personalized learning a reality for every US student by improving the effectiveness, variety and affordability of education technology.” This would be accomplished by analyzing individualized student data released by member states and making tailored plans available to teachers in those states.

Committee member comments and numerous testimonies before the committees seemed to indicate a consensus to make certain there be little to no increases in the collection of personal identifiers, and that no more than aggregate data be provided outside of state borders. I agree with this privacy-related protection. I personally requested on Nov. 12, 2013 that the DPI provide me with the data points it currently collects from students. As of this writing I have not been given an answer.

Biometric Testing

Concern was expressed regarding some rather odd and invasive biometric testing methods that were included in a study commissioned by the USDE *Office of Educational Technology* titled “Promoting Grit, Tenacity and Perseverance” (p. 44). Evidence of similar methods being employed by schools in Wisconsin could not be found. But, a memo from the Legislative Council indicated that no law currently prevents these examples of biometric measurement. School district personnel during testimony before the committees indicated a desire to create a “firewall” to make certain such measures cannot occur. (Appendix W) I support taking proactive measures to prevent biometric data collection.

Copyright of CCS

The NGA and the CCSSO hold a copyright on the CCS. States committed to adopting the CCS are limited to no more than 15% of additional state-based standards. Assuming normal copyright enforcements, no unauthorized alteration of the CCS standards will be allowed beyond 15%. Testimony before the committees questioned how such a percentage could be quantified, and what repercussions could come if the copyright would be violated by the state or an individual school district. If enforced, this limitation

on altering the CCS will result in a loss of flexibility for Wisconsin to brand the CCS in any significant amount to best fit our students.

Regarding the copyright, a spokesman for *Achieve, Inc.* stated, “States can do whatever they want and always have been able to. There is no limit to what changes, additions or subtractions a state wants to make.” (Appendix X)

Grade-specific Standards

Much consensus seemed to exist that the grade-specific nature of the CCS is a step forward for Wisconsin. Although such a system will clearly allow more up-to-date analysis and direction, it will also sacrifice instructional flexibility. Wisconsin’s 1998 WMAS were for 4th, 8th and 12th grade. This created much flexibility in the sequencing of skills and led to creativity of lessons fed by the absence of year-to-year accountability.

Standards are not curriculum, but they heavily guide the curriculum. Additionally, having grade-specific standards such as the CCS tightens the availability of curricular materials. This tightening is exacerbated when the aim is to have students score proficiently on standardized tests that are aligned closely to the standards. Educators straying from the prescriptive guidance of CCS-aligned curricular materials will be at risk of not meeting the rigid nature of the CCS. The strain on educators due to the effectiveness of their teaching being judged (partially or wholly) on student performance and growth will greatly curtail their willingness to explore outside the standards.

Several speakers in the hearings stressed concern over the developmental appropriateness of particularly the K-2 CCS. There indeed seems to be a much heavier academic nature to the K-2 standards than was evident in the WMAS. Serious reservations were also leveled about the lack of algebra until the high school years and the use of experimental geometry methods. Additionally, as stated earlier, the ELA standards have also received harsh criticism for their increased focus on informational texts, increased attention to writing and speaking at the expense of reading, and for the inappropriateness of some of the exemplar texts.

Monopolization of Educational Resource Material

Educational resource materials are well on the pathway to a virtual monopolization of the market under the CCS label. Not wanting to be left out of a burgeoning market, educational resource providers have been adjusting their products to align with the CCS. This movement is causing great concern for entities (primarily private schools and home schools) who will soon be struggling to provide quality alternate materials outside the CCS realm. This could cause schools that have historically operated successfully outside the mainstream to lose their identity as alternative educational venues.

Common Core Lessons

Among the most high profile criticisms of the CCS have been examples of the plethora of disturbing lessons that have been encountered around the nation—purportedly under the Common Core label. These problematic lessons typically lure students down a path to a certain political ideology, show admiration or scorn to certain beliefs, are potentially or blatantly pornographic in nature, etc. Such occasional lessons of a disconcerting nature have been occurring for many years, and school districts have methods in place to deal with such issues. But, does the advent of the CCS worsen this problem? I believe it does and the inclusion of several inappropriate exemplar texts in CCS is evidence.

It is not impossible under the synergistic umbrella of the CCS that the frequency of disturbing lessons has intensified and will continue to grow. The near-universal standards have created a network that readily acts as a launching pad for many issues. Due to the unified nature of the CCS, the impact will be felt far more widely than under the former much more diversified approach to standards. The CCS have already effectively limited the availability of competitive alternative educational resource materials.

STEM

One of the stated predominant reasons for boosting standards is the dearth of college-and-career-ready students adequately trained and focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields (STEM). This shortage has led to growing dissatisfaction on the part of the business community, in their zeal to find STEM-trained employees properly prepared to deal with the expectations of such careers.

Considering the depth of the problem, one would assume that any boosting of K-12 standards in Wisconsin would take direct aim at solving the shortage of STEM students. This appears not to be the case with the CCS. While certainly improvement is evident over the 1998 WMAS, the CCS will not create a “core” of students able to be accepted into selective 4-year universities. Some of the most riveting testimony at the hearings came from Dr. Sandra Stotsky (Fond du Lac hearing) and Dr. James Milgram (Eau Claire hearing), the only two subject matter specialists to serve on the CCS Validation Committee. Stotsky and Milgram testified to the inadequacy of the standards for leading to STEM-related careers. They felt strongly enough that each refused to sign the final CCS document as presented to Wisconsin in June 2010. Dr. Milgram provided to the committee video evidence of a primary writer of the CCS, Dr. Jason Zimba (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJZY4mh2rt8>), admitting to its STEM deficiencies in a meeting with the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on March 23, 2010.

It seems rather odd that there has been such great focus on boosting standards specifically to meet the STEM needs of the workforce, but then not invest in a foundation of students to fulfill that need. CCS does not meet this need. A route must be created to make

Wisconsin standards more closely aligned with STEM careers so many more high school graduates are prepared for prerequisite post-secondary college degree programs.

Concluding Statements

Superintendent Tony Evers formally adopted the CCS for ELA and math largely unnoticed by the media, the legislature and the public. School districts statewide immediately began adopting the CCS and planning the path toward full implementation. This was clearly a head-long rush to put in place standards that were in use nowhere in the world and were completely untested to gauge their effectiveness.

Many superintendents and principals testified that abandonment of the CCS would cause great frustration, further loss of already-low teacher morale and sacrifice the costs of three years of training and implementation. Nevertheless, if the CCS are determined to be insufficient for the goals of future Wisconsin students, the legislature must act. Such action must take place in a way that will respect the well-intentioned work that teachers have been directed to do in the implementation of the CCS, curb any damage already done, but immediately place our state on the right track toward localizing academic standards. If additional costs will need to be expended to begin altering course, the legislature must be willing to appropriate the resources.

The Founding Fathers of our nation envisioned a nation powered by individual states with very limited powers on the national level. Each state was intended as a virtual laboratory of ideas being crafted, tested, implemented and when successful, copied by others seeking solutions to their own problems. Education was left out of the Constitution to be entirely the purview of the states. Education was important in 1787—so much so that the Founders left it out of the national powers because education would thrive under state competition and would also be more accountable and responsive to unique local needs. Local control has magnified the diversity of educational thought and practice, which are reflective of the distinct American subcultures that have developed over time.

It would be folly and a denial of history to believe that the acceptance of the CCS and the partner assessments will end the growth of federal intervention into Wisconsin's schools. It would likewise be ignorant of factual history to believe any federal intervention in our schools will accomplish its stated goal. We can be reasonably certain that with the CCS the groundwork has been laid for more future federalization of our state education systems and local school districts. As federal involvement grows, local accountability toward school children will largely disappear being deflected to the distant and unscalable peak of the Washington DC blame game.

Wisconsin students will be best served by Wisconsin standards. The legislature must look to responsibly implement standards that address the shortcomings of the CCS. We need higher and better standards than the CCS provides. To accomplish this, the legislature must immediately consider legislation that will establish a revolving process for the review and revision of all of its K-12 academic standards. The review process must

include legislative oversight and involve stakeholders across the spectrum of education—including parents. Once established, this review should begin with ELA and mathematics, and be followed by science and social studies. Standards should be allowed to be in place no more than seven years without review and revision. Additionally, all current standards must have a ‘sunset provision’. There must also be an immediate moratorium on the adoption of any further academic standards outside of the proposed review process.

Wisconsin school districts have long held the right to establish their own localized standards or adopt others that suit their needs. Districts must reaffirm and exercise this right. It must be our goal to create or adopt state standards that mirror the needs of our economy by equipping citizens with skills to sustain themselves, lead young minds to be filled with ingenuity, independence and self-direction, promote competition to elevate our free market economy, and above all, promote good citizenship which is the heart and soul of preserving our republic.

I believe that the nationwide rush to standardize education will lead to a standardization of mediocrity across the nation. Parity in education lacks innovation. The playing field is wide open for any state to break away and aim higher than the CCS offer. Wisconsin ought to wrest itself from the grips of this hold as soon as practicably possible and strike a new course. Wisconsin has an opportunity to reaffirm one thing we all know about education but seldom practice—education is best served when led from the bottom-up.