



JOHN LEHMAN

STATE SENATOR

Testimony of Senator John Lehman, October 16, 2013
Special Committee on Common Core Standards

Since our first hearing a few weeks ago I have had some observations and contacts on Common Core Standards (CCS) in Wisconsin that I wish to share through direct testimony. This is obviously aside from the point I have previously stressed that these hearings are, in my opinion, redundant to previous work and little more than a distraction to more important legislative work.

With CCS we are not reforming Wisconsin school funding nor doing enough for our high poverty schools, but we are reaching higher in a very rational way in all of our schools.

The adoption of Common Core Standards in Wisconsin is an accomplished fact, the reasonable result of/corollary to a long-time call for higher educational standards nationwide and in our state. The absence of Senator Luther Olsen and Representative Steve Kestell is unfortunate because they could report their own efforts on behalf of CCS as Education chairs. As the former chairperson of the Senate Education Committee, I hope to add some missing perspective with these few comments.

It is good for us to be reminded of what we have already heard. School people by my count were unanimously in favor of CCS at our hearing two weeks ago. Based on that hearing alone these further hearings could easily be cancelled with no ill effect. Continuance here today and for two more weeks is certainly an insult to all the hard work that has already been done for years by professional educators around the state.

1. In Schools Today. Since our first hearing I was invited to Trevor-Wilmot Elementary/ Middle School in (Republican) western Kenosha County. I was able to see their remarkable efforts to improve instruction and how Common Core Standards are helping immensely providing depth and individualization to math and language arts instruction. If you have not done so, visit a school soon. Unfortunately, you will be embarrassed to know that the hearings of this committee are viewed by many folks out there in school districts as a mockery of years of good work by so many principals, superintendents, curriculum supervisors and teachers.
2. University Support. I did not hear testimony "for information only" at our hearing two weeks ago from the University of Wisconsin System. However, I think it is important to read Kevin Reilly's letter again and see his strong arguments for CCS.
3. Wide, Centrist Republican support. Republicans who question work on Common Core Standards should be alert to the position of their friends and traditional supporters. I have included as an addendum to this testimony the list "Conservatives for Higher Standards" supporting CCS.

4. Brookhill Foundation of Waukesha. Shortly after our first hearing I got a call from my brother-in-law, a recently retired teacher who wanted me to know of the strong private foundation effort supporting CCS. Joe Georgeson, my brother-in-law, is a former middle-school math teacher, a former Wisconsin teacher of the year and a long-time teacher of math workshops for teachers all over the country. He has worked for several years leading teacher training workshops for the Brookhill Foundation of Waukesha. I called Kathy Stumpf, Brookhill's executive director, and learned about the full-blown effort of this educational philanthropic foundation to better mathematics instruction in Wisconsin both before CCS and now, using CCS. They have helped hundreds of teachers get up to speed on the CCS and have not previously considered this work politically sensitive or controversial.

Finally, I wish to address the criticism we have heard of CCS from the progressive left. It is real. We have heard it. But it does not justify changing our present course in Wisconsin.

Some experienced educators—I recommend Diane Ravitch's recently published Reign of Error—see Common Core as just a continuation of wrong efforts of folks on the right who want to over-test and overly criticize teachers for student failure.

Ironically, even the right-wing think tank Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. in their report on schools of education in their October publication includes "The Case of Finland" which calls for greater autonomy of teachers and granting greater professional judgment to teachers, not more testing.

"Finland does not use widespread standardized testing. Instead, the ability of teachers to grade their students' performance is trusted as an indication of student achievement. The situation is exactly the opposite of the trend toward using standardized test scores to judge teacher performance in the United States."(WPRI, October, 2013, page 15.)

Finnish schools have worked an educational miracle over the last half century without the testing/standards movement we are involved in. It's not surprising some educators are critical of our American present direction.

The slippery slope from CCS to more testing is where the criticism on the left lies. Ravitch argues with a point-by-point agenda that there are many better ways to help high poverty schools—and schools full of poor kids are where the failure in our generally very good educational system resides. More testing and higher standards still leave poor, minority kids out in the cold, she convincingly argues.

But let's be direct. If we are going to go down the road of school report cards, higher standards and greater accountability—which I presume all my Republican colleagues support—then CCS and Smarter Balanced assessments and "value-added" is what you are going to get with it.

Resistance to CCS is, at this late point in time, resistance to a whole, big educational reform of our public schools. This is your thing, which Republicans have supported for years and years. You can't have it both ways even if your Tea Party fringe is upset.

With CCS we are not reforming Wisconsin school funding nor doing enough for our high poverty schools, but we are reaching higher in a very rational way to improve learning as best we can in this political climate.

CONSERVATIVES FOR HIGHER STANDARDS

[\(http://highercorestandards.org/\)](http://highercorestandards.org/)

“Conservatives for Higher Standards is a project of the Foundation for Excellence in Education and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Founded by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, the Foundation for Excellence in Education is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to building an American education system that equips every child to achieve his or her God-given potential. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute is the nation’s leader in advancing educational excellence for every child through quality research, analysis and commentary, as well as on-the-ground action and advocacy in Ohio.”

“Governors, leaders and organizations across the country support the movement for higher standards for students. Here are just a few of the individuals and groups supporting efforts to raise expectations in American classrooms:

- U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R – TN)
- Louisiana Senate Education Chairman Conrad Appel (R – LA)
- Pennsylvania State Representative Ryan Aument (R – PA)
- Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour (R – MS)
- Craig Barrett, Former CEO and Chairman of the Board, Intel Corporation
- Bill Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education to President Ronald Reagan
- Iowa Governor Terry Branstad (R – IA)
- Arizona Governor Jan Brewer (R – AZ)
- Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush (R – FL)
- The Business Roundtable
- New Jersey Governor Chris Christie (R – NJ)
- Carlos Curbelo, Miami-Dade School Board Member
- Former Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels (R – IN)
- Georgia Governor Nathan Deal (R – GA)
- Former Michigan Governor John Engler (R – MI)
- Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin (R – OK)
- Chester E. Finn, Jr. President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute; Former Assistant Secretary for Education in President Ronald Reagan’s Administration
- The Foundation for Excellence in Education
- The Foundation for Florida’s Future
- Former U.S. Senator Bill Frist (R – TN)

- **Great Lakes Education Project**
 - **Tennessee Senate Education Committee Chairman Dolores Gresham (R – TN)**
 - **F. Phillip Handy, Co-Chair of the Romney-Ryan 2012 National Education Policy Committee and former Chairman of the Florida State Board of Education**
 - **Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam (R – TN)**
 - **Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (R – AR)**
 - **Former Florida Lt. Governor Toni Jennings (R – FL)**
 - **Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal (R – LA)**
 - **Florida Senate Education Chairman John Legg (R – FL)**
 - **Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna (R – ID)**
 - **New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez (R – NM)**
 - **Wyoming Governor Matt Mead (R – WY)**
 - **Military Child Education Coalition**
 - **Mission: Readiness**
 - **National Association of Manufacturers**
 - **Idaho Governor Butch Otter (R – ID)**
 - **Former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue (R – GA)**
 - **Michael J. Petrilli, Executive Vice President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute; Former U.S. Department of Education official in President George W. Bush's Administration**
 - **Utah State Representative Kraig Powell (R – UT)**
 - **Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice**
 - **Edward B. Rust, Jr., Chairman and CEO, State Farm Insurance Companies**
 - **Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval (R – NV)**
 - **Florida Governor Rick Scott (R – FL)**
 - **Michigan Governor Rick Snyder (R – MI)**
 - **Ohio House Education Committee Chairman Gerald Stebelton (R – OH)**
 - **Thomas B. Fordham Institute**
 - **U.S. Chamber of Commerce**
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TIMSS fraction item

TIMSS is an international set of tests on mathematics and science which is given every four years in grades 4 and 8 to a sample of students, and occasionally for a sample of students taking advanced mathematics and physics in their last year in high school. All of these will be given in 2015.

The following useful link gives access to the released TIMSS-2011 items and the scores different countries made on these items.

<http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2011/international-released-items.html>

Here is one eighth grade item on fractions.

Item M 052228

Which shows a correct method for finding $1/3 - 1/4$?

A $(1 - 1) / (4 - 3)$

B $1 / (4 - 3)$

C $(3 - 4) / (3 * 4)$

D $(4 - 3) / (3 * 4)$

Here are some results. A second link is needed to see what percent students had on various answers, both correct and incorrect. Here is the link.

<http://timss.bc.edu/timss2011/international-database.html>

and then click on almanac.

The numbers are percents.

	Correct	A	B	C	D
Average	37.1	25.4	26.0	9.4	37.1
Korea	86.0	2.7	6.9	4.2	86.0
Singapore	83.1	4.8	5.5	6.5	83.1
Taipei	82.0	2.9	7.7	7.0	82.0
Hong Kong	77.0	4.0	8.7	10.0	77.0
Japan	65.3	15.4	11.1	8.2	65.3
Russia	62.8	12.3	18.8	4.8	62.8

Average 37.1 25.4 26.0 9.4 37.1

US 29.1 32.5 26.1 10.7 29.1

Finland 16.1 42.3 29.5 8.7 16.1

Canada did not take TIMSS as a country but some provinces did as did some US states. Here are some of these results

Mass. 44.4 21.4 20.8 9.9 44.4

Calif. 38.0 28.2 21.6 11.0 38.0

Minn. 35.1 23.5 26.3 14.0 35.1

Quebec 33.0 27.3 23.0 13.0 33.0

Ontario 32.5 27.7 22.4 14.0 32.5

Conn. 31.3 21.8 25.8 17.7 31.3

Alberta 27.8 34.7 23.7 12.3 27.8

There was a small percent of students who left the answer blank and an even smaller percent who did not reach this question.

One interesting fact is that among the 42 countries which tested 8th grade students, Finland had the highest percent of students who picked answer A and the third lowest percent correct. Chile had 11.7 correct and Sweden had 14.4 percent correct. The Finnish result is likely a surprise to the people who have praised the Finnish school system for their results on another international test, PISA. However university and technical college mathematics faculty in Finland will not be surprised. See an article signed by over 200 of them which is on the web at

<http://solmu.math.helsinki.fi/2005/erik/PisaEng.html>

Students who pick answers A or B have no idea what fractions really are. The answer $1/3 - 1/4 = (1-1)/(4-3)$ cannot be right since $1-1$ is 0 so the fraction on the right is 0 and $1/3 - 1/4$ is not zero. It cannot be $1/(4-3)$ which is $1/1 = 1$ and $1/3$ is less than 1 and something has been subtracted from it. For C, $1/3 > 1/4$ so $1/3 - 1/4 > 0$, but $(3-4)/(3*4) = -1/(3*4) < 0$ so C is not correct. There is a little reason why students who knew something about fractions might have picked C. One can be careless and get a minus sign wrong. However, there is no good excuse for picking A or B.

Among the 42 countries which tested 8th grade students, the US had almost 60% picking A or B and Finland had over 70%.

Part of the Common Core treatment of fractions is to help students learn that fractions are numbers and they can and should be thought of as living on a number line. Addition and subtraction of whole

numbers has been done and students are moderately good at knowing what is happening there. Fraction addition and subtraction should be thought of as coming from whole number addition and subtraction, with equivalent fractions being the new part which makes this possible. For a short summary on how to do this see a paper in *American Educator* by Hung-Hsi Wu.

<http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2011/wu.pdf>

Lest a reader think that only East Asian countries can teach fractions well, one can consider the Flemish part of Belgium, i.e. Flanders. They did not take TIMSS-2011, but took TIMSS-1995. There was a somewhat similar fraction problem, to add three fractions. The US had a higher percent adding numerators and denominators than the international average and a lower percent getting the correct answer than the international average. We had more adding numerators and denominators than got the correct answer. Flanders had a very small percent adding numerators and denominators, less than some of the well performing East Asian countries, and a very high percent getting the result correct, again higher than some of these East Asian countries.

What content is taught and how it is taught from a mathematical point of view is very important. One cannot just assume that things like this will be done adequately, much less done well.

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Reference Baraboo Common Core Resolution

Dear Senator Farrow,

Please present the following resolution to the Senate Special Committee on the Common Core which passed unanimously on October 14th by the School District of Baraboo Board of Education:

The Baraboo Board of Education resolves to support the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts and encourages the Legislature and Governor to continue to support them too for the following reasons:

1. We do not feel it takes away our local control in making decisions on the type of curriculum, instructional material and assessments we use.
2. We believe that the Common Core State Standards for Math and English Language Arts sets and clarifies a rigorous benchmark that when met will help our students in becoming college and career ready.
3. These are standards which establishes an academic floor not a ceiling for our students.
4. It would not be fiscally prudent to drop the CCSS at this point. We have invested a tremendous amount of time and money into our professional development of our teachers, administrators, and staff to utilize the CCSS. We also have spent a significant amount of money for curriculum resources that align with the Common Core.
5. If the Common Core in State Standard is repealed it will place our District years behind where we are now at the level of education we can provide to our students. That is even with the assumption that a standard could be provided that would be benchmarked to as high a level as the currently approved CCSS.
6. Much of the work with the Educator Effectiveness initiative would also be needed to be placed on hold. Without the current CCSS standard and training of our teachers, administrators have in place then we would have to go back to ground zero on our training and implementation.

We would appreciate if you consider this in your deliberations on this subject.

Sincerely,

Doug Mering
Legislative Contact
Baraboo School Board

