

Last fall Michigan PTA began a campaign to educate parents and communities about the Common Core State Standards and the possibilities they represent for the improvement of education in Michigan and across the nation. Michigan PTA wishes to emphatically state our support for the Common Core State Standards.

Our previous state standards left much to be desired. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute released a report in July 2010 entitled “The State of State Standards – and the Common Core – in 2010.” In this report, researchers assigned a letter grade to the mathematics and English Language Arts standards for each state based on clarity and rigor. Michigan’s standards were rated clearly inferior to the Common Core in English Language Arts, while our mathematics standards were comparable.¹ In adopting the Common Core, Michigan clearly stated that we want to hold all children to high expectations and provide them with an education that will make them competitive in the national and global economy.

Raising expectations was not the only benefit of adopting the Common Core. Michigan also signaled to the nation that we value equity in education – that we think all children, regardless of where they live, should be held to high academic standards and expected to perform rigorous tasks. We showed our teachers that we value their ability to collaborate and work together as a profession. With the adoption of the Common Core, educators can share best practices, instructional materials, and worthwhile strategies with their colleagues no matter where they live. Previously, state standards represented a barrier to collaboration that resulted in a silo effect – an Algebra II teacher in Michigan couldn’t collaborate with an Algebra II teacher in New York, for instance, because they were working from a completely different set of blueprints. Lastly, we demonstrated that we value clarity. The Common Core State Standards are written so that teachers, students, and parents can all understand exactly what is expected of our students. This represents an unprecedented opportunity for family-school partnerships. In short, adoption of the Common Core represented the first step in revolutionizing Michigan’s education system and increasing student achievement. Michigan PTA applauds the State Board of Education and the Legislature for taking that step.

I would like to offer Michigan PTA’s views on the issues raised by Ms. Burke in her recently-published paper “States Must Reject National Education Standards While There Is Still Time.” Throughout her paper, Ms. Burke characterizes the Common Core as an expansion of federal control into what is rightfully a state and local issue. Michigan PTA disagrees with this characterization and would note that the Common Core State Standards Initiative is a bi-partisan effort led by the National Governor’s Association and The Council of Chief State School Officers.

The crux of Ms. Burke’s argument is that by incentivizing adoption of the Common Core through Race to the Top funding, the federal government is crossing constitutional lines and dictating in an area reserved to the states. This argument deserves a vigorous rebuttal. The Common Core State Standards have been voluntarily adopted by 46 states and a handful of territories and school districts. Each state, including Michigan, exercised its constitutional right to set education standards and chose to do so by adopting the Common Core. Given the tremendous benefits the Common Core represents, this should not be surprising. The fact that the

government incentivized adoption of the Standards does not demonstrate a constitutional overstepping, but a legitimate action of the government to encourage states to take steps that will improve education in our country. Instead of condemning these actions, Michigan PTA applauds the federal government for incentivizing such a significant opportunity to improve educational outcomes for all students.

Ms. Burke's work also accuses the federal government of "dictating curriculum content," which we, again, must correct. The Common Core is a set of standards, not a curriculum. Standards represent the skills and knowledge we want students to attain in a given grade level or subject. They are the "what." Curriculum is the "how," and the Common Core State Standards make no requirements of districts or states to adopt specific curricula. Parents are still empowered to analyze the curriculum being offered in their schools and advocate for changes. To call the Common Core a nationalization of curricula, as Ms. Burke repeatedly does in her paper, is misleading.

In our efforts to engage parents and communities about the Common Core, we have given more than 45 presentations to date, directly educating over 700 stakeholders. We have also reached hundreds of thousands of Michiganders through print and online media. Based on data collected after the presentations, 93.4% of those in attendance are supportive of the Common Core. We have partnered with school districts and curriculum directors across the state, all of whom are excited about the increased rigor and clarity of the Common Core. In short, public support for Common Core is strong once they are educated about the benefits it will present to Michigan's students.

To close, Ms. Burke writes that "State leaders who believe in limited government and liberty should reclaim control of the content taught in their schools by preventing the imposition of national standards and tests in their states." This is not an issue of limited government or educational liberty – Michigan was not forced into adoption, we exercised our Constitutional right to set educational standards. We are not sacrificing educational liberty; we are empowering parents by clearly stating rigorous expectations for their children and building a framework that will facilitate data sharing and meaningful communication between all stakeholders in a child's education. State leaders who believe in improved educational outcomes for all students should reaffirm their commitment to the Common Core and celebrate the potential it offers for the students of Michigan.

ⁱ (http://www.math.jhu.edu/~wsw/FORD/SOSSandCC2010_FullReportFINAL.pdf)



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THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT SHOULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO SHATON BERRY, PRESIDENT OF THE MICHIGAN PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION

DETROIT (January 20, 2012) – “Michigan PTA enthusiastically supports the Michigan State Board of Education’s decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and is eager to see the Standards implemented.”, commented Shaton Berry, President of Michigan PTA.

While the Common Core State Standards will not by themselves solve our education problems, they offer tremendous potential centered around five key aspects:

Competition: For the first time, all students in our country will be working to meet targets that are internationally competitive. Why would we not want our students doing the same kinds of tasks as students in high-performing nations? Based on data from the Global Report Card project at the University of Arkansas, Michigan’s highest-performing district in math would fall in the 53rd percentile in Singapore and the 69th percentile in Canada. This disparity is simply unacceptable, and exists in part because our current standards don’t match up against those used in other countries.

Preparation: Common Core State Standards will prepare students for both college and the workplace by emphasizing higher-level thinking skills instead of knowledge and recall. Coupled with innovative assessments, the new standards will demand that students work at higher cognitive levels, accelerating their academic achievement and ensuring that they are capable of the kinds of synthesis and analysis required in post-secondary settings.

Equity: The Common Core will create consistent expectations not dependent on state, district, or school. For too long it has been acceptable in our country that students were held to different standards based on their zip code, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. While adopting the Common Core alone will not completely solve these problems, they are a vital first step in holding every student in our nation to high expectations, and holding our schools accountable for meeting them.

Clarity: To achieve success all stakeholders must know what is expected of a child and how to support their learning at home. Currently, unclear standards confuse teachers, students, and parents, and present a considerable barrier to student achievement. The Common Core seeks to address these issues by writing standards in a way that is accessible to all partners in a child’s education.

Collaboration: The Common Core will serve as a foundation for educators to work together across buildings, districts, and states to ensure a quality education for every child. Currently, different standards prevent teachers from working together to drive student achievement. With Common Core standards, the barriers for collaboration are greatly diminished. This will be increasingly important as more attention is paid to teacher effectiveness through efforts such as the Gates Foundation’s Measures of Effective Teaching Project. As we learn more about what good teaching looks like, having common standards will make educators more willing to try new practices and become a part of an increasingly collaborative profession.

“The Common Core State Standards,” President Berry continued, “represent the first leg of a long journey toward educational equality and competitiveness in this country. But without the common framework the standards provide, the road will be longer and littered with more obstacles. Implementation and monitoring will ultimately determine the success of the Standards – teachers will have to be trained, curriculum will have to be developed, and administrators will have to make sure high expectations in line with the Standards are being set in every classroom. But the cost of maintaining the status quo is too great for our students and the continued prosperity of our country.”

For more information or to schedule a presentation in your community, contact Michigan PTA’s Common Core State Standards Initiative at thestandards@michiganpta.org

BACKGROUND:

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort designed to improve educational outcomes for students by developing a set of consistent and clear K- 12 academic standards in English language arts and mathematics. These Standards are relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills young people need to be prepared for both college and work in a global economy.

Michigan PTA, a branch of the National PTA, is comprised of over 60,000 members in numerous PTA units throughout the state. Michigan PTA has been an advocate for public education, a relevant resource for parents, and a powerful voice for children for almost 100 years.

For more information contact David Musselwhite, Michigan PTA’s Common Core State Standards Initiative Team Leader at thestandards@michiganpta.org

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CCSS | The Facts on Federal Intrusion, Mandates & Legalities

On federal intrusion:

While the US Department of Education (USDE) created incentives for states to adopt college- and career-ready standards, the federal government has not imposed the adoption or implementation of Common Core State Standards – or any variation thereof – on states.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were the product of the field – not USDE. No political figures or federal entities were involved, and the federal government had no hand in the writing of the Standards. In fact, there was no federal financial funding provided for their creation. The only federal support has been to states that *voluntarily* agreed to their adoption.

Further, all states are free to use any means they wish to develop curriculum aligned to their new standards, and Michigan is doing just that.

Condemning the CCSS as “federal standards” because they emerged from efforts of the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) is misguided and lacks rationale. CCSSO and NGA are not creatures of the federal government. These are organizations that have *responded to a need – at the direct request of their members* – for a set of consistent, college- and career-ready standards that meet the demands of our global economy.

On federal mandates:

Congress set limits on federal involvement in education well over a decade before the US Department of Education was established. And, their intent was clear: *“The federal government cannot mandate, direct, supervise, or control curriculum or programs of instruction.”* The specific law speaks to curriculum and materials, and it never mentions or was intended to cover standards. In fact, standards did not even exist at the time these laws were written.

That said, the Common Core is in accordance with that law. It is not a federal decision as to how states implement standards, nor is the federal government mandating, directing, supervising, or controlling curriculum. These decisions and efforts remain state-led.

National assessments are not new. It’s worth pointing out that the federal government has supported the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) for more than 40 years, as well as international assessments like TIMSS and PISA for decades – none of which have led to federalization of schools.

And on the issue of waivers: don’t misconstrue them with federal coercion. They were not used to advance a federal agenda on curriculum. The only requirement is that students with disabilities and English language learners are to be better served in achieving standards. That’s fair, considering that everyone should support giving *all* students the opportunity to succeed.

National PTA Supports Final Draft of Common Core State Standards

*The following statement should be attributed to
Charles J. "Chuck" Saylor, National PTA Past-President*

CHICAGO (June 2, 2010) –National PTA enthusiastically supports the adoption and implementation by all states of the Common Core State Standards, which were released in final form today.

The K-12 standards for math and English Language Arts are challenging and clear, and states that adopt them will be on their way to graduating more of their high school students ready for college and career.

The standards form a solid foundation for the high quality education systems that states must build. If states adopt the standards and align their curriculum, assessments and professional development to the new standards, many more of their students will graduate with the skills they need to succeed in college or a career.

National PTA urges all states to adopt the standards. The association is focusing its work in support of adoption and implementation in four critical states, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, and North Carolina; four additional states will be named later this year.

National PTA continues to encourage its millions of members to get behind this important campaign. We also encourage chief state school officers and state boards of education to include parents and PTA representatives in the adoption and implementation process. Parents and PTA members can provide valuable perspectives and can be key partners in advocating for standards adoption and implementation at the local level.

Adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards will not only mean that our young people will be better prepared for college and a career; it will make our economy stronger over the long term.

About National PTA

PTA comprises millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of parent involvement in schools. PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. Membership in PTA is open to anyone who wants to be involved and make a difference for the education, health, and welfare of children and youth.