

August 9, 2013
Laura Mahler
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Dear chairman and members of the subcommittee:

Hello and thank you, chairman and members of the subcommittee. My name is Laura Mahler and I have been a teacher for over 15 years. I am a high school teacher for Clarkston Area Schools as well as the subject-area coordinator for English Language Arts for grades 6-12. I am also one of the lead writers for the MAISA (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators) English Language Arts Units of Study for grades 9-12. In addition, I have worked on two national curriculum-writing initiatives, both joint projects between The National Writing Project and The Literacy Design Collaborative. In these multiple roles over the past three years, I have had the opportunity to work extensively and closely with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), with teachers, and with the MAISA curriculum written expressly to support the Standards and student learning. While this task to move to the CCSS seemed daunting at first, over time I have come to realize what an incredible gift the Standards are.

As the CCSS set a high bar for learning, I have come to deeply believe how important it is to set high standards as the goal for all students to reach. In my work as a lead writer for units aligned to the CCSS, I have seen and heard from so many teachers, from districts rich and poor, who initially doubted that their students could perform up to such high grade-level standards; however, after piloting the MAISA units of study, teachers expressed how they discovered that their students had been capable of so much more than they had initially imagined possible. They simply needed to be shown how to move their students through the steps that enabled the necessary growth. It is true that these teachers experienced extra support through the piloting process, but with the right professional development I believe that teachers across the state can absolutely address the needs of the learners in their classrooms as they meet the rigorous demands of the CCSS.

As my writing team and I have spent years pouring over the Standards and have come to understand what they are really asking for, we have come to understand how helpful it is to have concise, clearly delineated goals for every grade level. This

precise scaffolding of student expectations makes it clear to teachers at every grade level what the expectation for student learning is. There is nothing that tells a teacher *how* they must teach in order to reach that goal, simply that they must reach it. Teacher flexibility and choice remains. Only the end goal is prescribed. Teachers who understand the basics of what the CCSS are asking for have endless teaching possibilities.

While I must admit that I was at first worried about meeting common educational goals designed for students across the whole country, the very fact that they are common to so many states allows for incredible collaborative ventures that would never have been possible when we only had Michigan's standards. I have only more recently had the opportunity to work with and learn from teachers across the country, but one specifically is Massachusetts, a state that had exemplary standards and teaching practices even before the CCSS. Over the course of a year-long project we exchanged ideas, curriculum, and provided each other feedback on curriculum designed to meet the goals of the CCSS. It was one of the most fulfilling professional experiences I have ever had. And it was only possible because we were using a common vocabulary and a common set of educational goals.

I implore you to consider the years of work and adjustment that has already taken place as teachers have been preparing for these new standards. For years my school district and many others have poured professional development time and money into preparing for what were told was to come. Changing direction now would only serve to reinforce the idea that, sadly, many teachers are coming to believe: there's no incentive to adjust teaching practices because politics will intervene and change things before we've had time to adjust to the last mandate. This mindset is tragic for education as a whole but especially for students. Please keep the Common Core State Standards at the center of Michigan's vision for the future. Students, teachers, colleges, universities, and employers are all depending upon the CCSS for future success.

Sincerely,



Laura Mahler
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ELA Teacher
Lead Writer, MAISA ELA Units of Study, Grades 9-12