



Testimony to House Education Committee

Common Core State Standards

February 14, 2013

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Chairwoman Kelley and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate this opportunity to share our perspective on the Common Core State Standards (Common Core). The decisions facing educators and legislatures on Common Core are complex and, for reasons I'll explain shortly, quite circumstantial. Opting in to Common Core could be a net positive for students in some states but detrimental in other cases.

There are many aspects of Common Core to which we are opposed, including but not limited to issues of curriculum and outside intervention in local education issues. But we also recognize that Common Core will have superior educational standards as compared to those currently used by the Kansas Department of Education. Kansas students are hampered by having some of the lowest state standards in the nation, and given the track record of KSDE and the Kansas State Board of Education, we believe that adopting the more rigorous standards of Common Core may well be in students' best interests. Accordingly, our position on Common Core for Kansas is neutral.

Our neutral position is quite circumstantial. We would be opposed to Common Core if Kansas had strong educational standards. But as opposed as we are to certain aspects of Common Core, we cannot in good conscience recommend depriving students of what may well be their only hope to have standards rigorous enough to prepare them to be college- and career-ready.

Kansas Policy Institute is not alone in believing that current state standards are too low. According to the March 22, 2012 Staff Notebook published by the Kansas City, Kansas school district, "...numerous students arrive at college unprepared for college-level work. These students must then pay to take developmental classes that do not count toward college graduation. "The district has a goal that all students graduate ready for college and careers, and that at every level, students are on-track and on-time for success,"

(Superintendent Dr. Cynthia) Lane said. “The Kansas assessment is not rigorous enough to guarantee that our students are on-track with where they need to be.”ⁱ

Dr. Lane’s bold statement in support of rigorous standards and the well-being of her students is inspiring and we admire her courage to say what we know to be quite unpopular within Kansas education circles.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education also says Kansas has very low standards. NCES performed an analysis of state proficiency standards for 2009 and concluded that “...most states’ proficiency standards are at or below NAEP’s definition of Basic performance.” Indeed, Kansas is one of those states, with its Reading Proficiency standard set lower than what the U.S. Department of Education considers Basic performance.

NAEP Cut Scores / Kansas Equivalent Scale Scores for State Proficiency			
		Grade 4	Grade 8
NAEP cut scores (lower end)	Basic	208	243
	Proficient	238	281
	Advanced	268	323
Kansas equivalent scale scores for state Proficiency	Reading	186	236

Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

To put Kansas’ Reading standards in further perspective, ten points on the NAEP is considered to be about a year’s worth of learning; Kansas therefore has its 4th Grade Proficient level set about two years below what the NAEP considers to be Basic for 4th Grade. ‘Below Basic’ is also a polite way of saying ‘functionally illiterate.’

The complete state ranking from the 2009 NCES analysis is attached, which shows that forty states and the District of Columbia have higher 4th Grade Reading standards than Kansas; thirty-five states and the District of Columbia have higher standards for 8th Grade Reading.

Kansas Reduced Standards in 2002 and 2006

Kansas did not always have such low standards. When the federal government implemented No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, it created the impossible requirement that every school reach 100% proficiency by 2014. But NCLB allowed states to set their own proficiency standards, and as U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan says, most states reacted by significantly reducing their standards.

Kansas reduced standards twice; first in 2002 and again in 2006. Documents provided by KSDE characterize the 2002 change as being “...made to better reflect mandates and

expectations in NCLB.” However, No Child Left Behind did not require states to change their current standards; Kansas could have left its pre-NCLB standards in place. NCLB only required that states have all students at 100% of their self-designed Proficiency standard. KSDE may have reduced Proficiency standards in reaction to NCLB, but the fact remains that the change was not mandatory.

One of the significant changes implemented in 2002 was to move Proficient from the second highest of five categories to the third highest category and eventually define

Performance Categories for State Assessments		
Listed in Descending Order		
2000	2002	2006
Advanced	Exemplary	Exemplary
Proficient	Advanced	Advanced
Satisfactory	Proficient	Proficient
Basic	Basic	Approaches Standard
Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Academic Warning
<i>Source: Kansas Dept. of Education</i>		

Proficient and Satisfactory as one and the same. Consider how KSDE and the State Board of Education changed the primary definitions of Proficient as they changed the standards.

Kansas’ primary definition of ‘Proficient’ in 2000 (pre-NCLB): Capability with information and skills in the content area is unquestionably evident. Breadth as well as depth of understandings is evidenced. The ability to go beyond mechanical application of appropriate information is in evidence. Proficiency with difficult, rigorous and formidable material is observed.

Kansas’ Primary Definition of ‘Proficient’ 2002 through 2005: Students who perform at the proficient level on the Kansas State Assessments demonstrate a mastery of core skills. These students exhibit competence in applying knowledge and skills in most problem situations. They show evidence of solid performance.

Kansas’ primary definition of ‘Proficient’ since 2006: When independently reading grade-appropriate narrative, expository, and technical and persuasive text, a *proficient* student has *satisfactory* comprehension.

“Proficiency with difficult, rigorous and formidable material” and “mastery of core skills” is a far cry from “satisfactory comprehension.”

Additional information on how KSDE and the State Board of Education reduced standards can be found in a study we published last year entitled “Removing Barriers to Better Public Education.”ⁱⁱ Prior to publishing our findings we sent a draft to Commissioner of Education Diane DeBacker and KBOE Chair David Dennis and asked if they found anything factually inaccurate; they did not respond.

Meets Standard is Not Full Comprehension

Parents are often shocked to learn that KSDE standards do not require students to have full comprehension of grade-appropriate material to Meet Standard and be considered Proficient. KSDE actually considers their definition of full comprehension to be 'Advanced.'

Naturally, when parents and legislators hear that upwards of 90% of students Meet Standard and are Proficient, they understandably assume that Kansas has very high achievement levels...and in fact that is what they are told by educators and media. But even by State standards, achievement levels are much lower than parents and legislators are led to believe.

2012 State Assessment Results				
	Reading		Math	
	Meets Standard	Full Comprehension	Meets Standard	Full Comprehension
4th Grade	88%	62%	88%	62%
8th Grade	87%	64%	84%	60%
11th Grade	89%	56%	84%	49%

Source: Kansas Dept. of Education

As shown on the attachment to our testimony, achievement results on independent national tests (NAEP and ACT) are considerably lower.

Conclusion

When parents learn the truth about student achievement, most immediately ask what can be done, but a false sense of high achievement is a tremendous barrier to getting students the help they need. Given that KSDE and the State Board of Education have created some of the lowest standards in the nation and that considerable effort is expended to divert attention from true achievement levels, we must consider the real possibility that the more rigorous standards associated with Common Core are, for now at least, in students' best long term interests.

The good news is that the Supreme Court decision on the Affordable Care Act, or ObamaCare, which determined that participation is optional (states cannot be financially coerced into participation) applies universally, so Kansas can opt out of Common Core at any time without fear of retribution.

ⁱ <http://kckps.cloudaccess.net/images/newsletters/archive/s032212.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.kansaspolicy.org/researchcenters/education/studies/94532.aspx>



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Kansas' NAEP-Equivalent Cut Score for Proficient is Actually Less Than Basic

Grade 4			Grade 8		
State	State Equivalent for Proficient	Rank	State	State Equivalent for Proficient	Rank
NAEP Minimum Score for Proficient is 238			NAEP Minimum Score for Proficient is 281		
Massachusetts	234	1	Missouri	267	1
Missouri	229	2	Florida	262	2
New Jersey	221	3	Vermont	259	3
Vermont	214	4	Wyoming	259	3
New Hampshire	211	5	Minnesota	259	3
Oklahoma	211	5	California	259	3
Mississippi	210	7	New Hampshire	256	7
Rhode Island	209	8	Indiana	255	8
Connecticut	208	9	Mississippi	254	9
Wyoming	208	9	South Dakota	254	9
NAEP Minimum Score for Basic is 208			NAEP Minimum Score for Basic is 243		
Maine	207	11	Maine	253	11
New Mexico	207	11	Kentucky	253	11
Florida	206	13	Washington	253	11
Pennsylvania	206	13	North Dakota	253	11
West Virginia	206	13	Rhode Island	252	15
District of Columbia	205	16	Ohio	251	16
Kentucky	205	16	Oregon	250	17
Washington	205	18	Massachusetts	249	18
Minnesota	204	19	Oklahoma	249	18
North Carolina	204	19	West Virginia	249	18
Hawaii	203	21	Iowa	248	21
Indiana	203	21	New York	247	22
North Dakota	203	21	New Mexico	246	23
California	202	24	North Carolina	246	23
Nevada	202	24	Nevada	246	23
Arkansas	200	26	Montana	246	23
New York	200	26	Pennsylvania	245	27
Delaware	199	28	South Carolina	245	27
South Dakota	199	28	New Jersey	244	29
Illinois	198	30	District of Columbia	244	29
Montana	198	30	Connecticut	243	31
Utah	196	32	Louisiana	243	31
Iowa	194	33	NAEP Minimum Score for Basic is 243		
Michigan	194	33	Hawaii	241	33
South Carolina	194	33	Arkansas	241	33
Arizona	193	36	Arizona	241	33
Louisiana	192	37	Maryland	237	36
Ohio	192	37	Delaware	236	37
Wisconsin	189	39	Michigan	236	37
Texas	188	40	Kansas	236	37
Maryland	187	41	Utah	235	40
Idaho	186	42	Illinois	234	41
Kansas	186	42	Alabama	234	41
Virginia	186	42	Wisconsin	232	43
Alaska	183	45	Alaska	231	44
Colorado	183	45	Virginia	229	45
Alabama	179	47	Colorado	228	46
Georgia	178	48	Idaho	218	47
Oregon	177	49	Tennessee	211	48
Tennessee	170	50	Georgia	209	49
Nebraska	Data not available		Texas	201	50
			Nebraska	Data not available	

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

WWW.KANSASPOLICY.ORG | WWW.KANSASOPENGOV.ORG



The Truth about Student Achievement in Kansas

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

- Only 36% of 4th graders are Proficient in Reading
- 29% of 4th graders are Below Basic, which is a polite term for functionally illiterate
- Only 35% of 8th graders are Proficient in Reading
- 21% of 8th graders are Below Basic

ACT

- Only 29% of 2012 high school graduates scored well enough on the ACT test to be considered “College-Ready” on English, Reading, Math and Science

Kansas Board of Regents

- 21% of the 2009 high school graduates who attended public university in Kansas signed up for remedial training. No data is available for students who attended private or out-of-state universities. 2009 is the most recent data provided.

Kansas Department of Education (KSDE)

- Only 56% of 11th graders can read grade-appropriate material with full comprehension. Students are not required to have full comprehension of grade-appropriate material to be considered Proficient and Meet Standards. KSDE considers full comprehension to be “Advanced.”

U.S. Dept. of Education / National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

- Kansas has some of the lowest standards in the nation. Kansas’ NAEP-equivalent score for Proficient is below what NAEP considers to be Basic.



How Many More Generations of Kids Will Be Left Behind While Waiting for Achievement Levels to Inch Forward under the Current System?

Reads Grade-Appropriate Material with Full Comprehension

School Year	All	11th Grade Students		
		Hispanic	Black	Low Income
2006	51.9%	28.1%	26.0%	32.9%
2007	51.5%	24.2%	25.8%	32.0%
2008	49.6%	24.4%	25.9%	31.6%
2009	50.7%	25.3%	28.0%	33.0%
2010	52.6%	26.8%	31.4%	35.3%
2011	54.9%	30.7%	35.3%	38.7%
2012	56.1%	32.3%	37.6%	39.3%
Avg. annual gain (points)	0.7	0.7	1.9	1.1
Years to reach 87%	45.9	80.4	26.7	45.3

Source: Kansas Department of Education, State Assessment Results; percentage of students at or above Exceeds Standard. KSDE reports that 87% of students Meet Standards but full comprehension of grade-appropriate material is not required to Meet Standards. KSDE considers full comprehension to be Advanced and Exceeds Standard.