



Position Paper: Response to Core Standards Draft -- Ideas for Consideration

Presented by the DuPage Regional Office of Education

During the 2008-09 school year, the DuPage Regional Office of Education scheduled a series of meetings with representatives of DuPage school districts, Choose DuPage, and the DuPage County Workforce Development Board. As a result of this joint venture an Action Plan was developed to focus on college and career readiness. In order to move forward the Action plan developed by this coalition, the ROE designed a leadership series to focus on college and career readiness.

First in the leadership series, the Regional Office of Education invited Susie Morrison, Chief Education Officer with the Illinois State Board of Education to share information about the America Diploma Project, International Benchmarking, the National Career Readiness Certificate, and the Core Standards work. A second opportunity featured Dr. Tony Wagner, co-director of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, addressed education and business leaders in the county. His message of college and career readiness and change for the 21st century resonated with all in his audiences.

As a follow-up to that work, the DuPage County Regional Office of Education developed a three-phase process for gathering input on the draft of the Core Standards. Phase I consisted of a small group session with Dr. Tony Wagner to hear his vision for national standards and 21st century skills. In Phase II the DuPage Regional Office provided a process for high schools in DuPage to provide feedback on-line and through local focus/feedback groups of English-Language Arts and Mathematics Teachers. English and Mathematics Department Chairs lead discussions within their respective departments based on a review of these proposed standards. Teachers were asked to use the on-line process to provide individual feedback on the drafts.

In Phase III, the DuPage Regional Office of Education conducted two focus/feedback groups at the Center for Professional Learning. Districts identified key teachers and central office personnel representative of curriculum, assessment, special education, and English Language Learners to attend a focus/feedback session related to the draft standards. The ROE aligned the key elements from Dr. Tony Wagner's and Dr. Susie Morrison's presentations as the framework for the focus group questions. Four types of questions were used to elicit feedback: ***Introductory Questions; Linking Questions; Probing Questions; and Closing Questions.***

Several themes emerged from the Focus Groups:

The English/Language Arts draft standards are clearer and better developed than the Mathematics draft standards. The alignment of technology is a strong component and is well developed. Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening should be spelled out.

The math standards are overstating that high level math is the key to college and career success. We may still be a mile wide and an inch deep with these standards. Increased rigor in both areas is obvious. There is a concern on how the standards will be measured.

Assessments will be the key for making the standards realized. Actually making a difference for students-standards are place to start, but KEY is how they are put into practice-meaningful teaching and differentiation. The "How to" is essential.

Purposes of this document:

The DuPage Regional Office of Education has a mission to collaboratively build and sustain a high quality county educational community for all youth. The primary purposes of this document are:

1. to indicate DuPage educators' support for the general tenets on which the *Core Standards Draft* is based;
2. to specifically address positives and areas of concern; and
3. To recommend an alternative framework.

Positives evident and valued in the draft of the Core Standards:

- Establishing national standards – everyone having the same expectations – equity between the states is apparent
- Philosophy of fewer, clearer, higher was attempted
- Standards are based on evidence
- Technology as a tool to support the standards is evident
- Setting high expectations – rigor is demonstrated
- Integration across content is outlined

English/Language Arts – Positives/Concerns/Questions:

- Less about content, more about skill sets
- Beginning to decrease the mile-wide, inch-deep
- Assessment needs to define what meeting the standards looks like
- Unifying understanding of what the “end” looks like
- Instruction makes impact- should be included
- Implications for teacher evaluation is evident
- Encourage masters in content and pedagogy - -increase teacher knowledge-teacher quality
- Order: standards; assessment; instruction;
- Good start as an umbrella
- Need framework to help us reach standards – mapping backward to Pre-K
- Math and LA need to look alike for end users (teachers); Currently not in same format
- 6 core practices in introduction – connect well to LA
- Exemplars presented

Mathematics- Positives/Concerns/Questions:

- More complex than LA to wade through
- Research base – does **every** student need high levels of math for college/career readiness? E.g. calculus? Or does that apply more to specific goals – for math specialists?
- Written by people who **LOVE** mathematics; not a practical document yet. Abstract in complexity. Would like to see more concrete.
- HS students need read-world scenarios posed--what do you need to consider, where's the math in that?
- Differentiating for students with special education needs
- Balance problem solving and algorithms
- Not as much depth as LA-gaps-less relevance, more like what we already have
- Less new, more revamped
- Knowledge and skills evident
- Very Scripted
- Missed framework and introduction found in LA standards

General Comments:

- Rigor is intended – Question is – how it will be assessed – will it be embedded all the way back to Pre-K?
- Without performance-based assessment of specific outcomes – no clear measure of rigor
- Big Questions- where does assessment fit-will it be the traditional old style or something new with international benchmarking?
- Need to define “Selective abandonment”-the draft standard documents are nebulous and will not yet help teachers decide what to jettison
- Is this a vision or an “accountability hammer”?
- Major concerns about special education.
- Need both a differentiated assessment system and differentiated instruction
- What do students need to survive in the world?
- Create assessment protocol that un-encumbers teachers and frees them to teach
- Literacy and math are NOT equal life skills
- Need creative and critical thinkers most for 21st century
- Are we losing our strength of broad perspective about the world? What about Science, social studies – well-rounded citizens are needed. Did we forget the importance of music and art?
- Must offer many pathways to individual student success and confidence
- Not just math and reading –there are other measures of success that are valid
- Standards could lead to ability to measure growth Pre-K-12 – a growth model assessments
- Standards are not discreet entities-they must be orchestrated/integrated-there is need for authentic performance assessment

DuPage ROE Recommendations for an alternate framework:

The DuPage Regional Office of Education presents the following alternative framework and questions for reflection to the Illinois State Board of Education, Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor’s Association in response to the national call for input from interested parties concerning the draft Core Standards. This alternate proposal presents recommendations for rethinking how the CCSO/NGA Core Standards Project should work on behalf of American Public Education and all the students it serves.

Based on the qualitative data reflected in the previous sections of this document, we ask that the following be considered:

What is timeless learning? We do not believe that there is such a thing as 21st century skills. There are only timeless skills much as there is timeless literature, orations, poetry and drama which cross centuries, cultures and continents for successive generations to inherit and enjoy. Timeless literature is also fluid, responsive and inclusive over time of new insights and additions after much and often global consideration. We applaud the emphasis in the English/LA standards on the four receptive and expressive skills that all humans require to engage fully and richly with others as well lead a reflective life. The exemplars are exemplary. We do not hold this same view with the math core standards and we ask “what math knowledge is of the most worth over time?” What math skills do all students need to know and be able to do to lead productive lives? While many of the math standards represent noble goals, they are not necessary for all students. We believe that there is an over reliance on a tired, undocumented belief that high level math is the key to college and career success for all students. Perhaps many of them were developed for future math specialists, scientists, and engineers by those with another less transparent end in mind? In our view just noting in the draft math document that another country has a certain standard is not sufficient evidence of worth. We urge re-consideration of the math standards and exemplars.

What is the relationship between accountability and assessment? First of all, we believe national core PK-12 standards have validity in an international, interdependent world to maintain America's global standing, social fabric and economic future. National core standards have much value and we do not object to the national core standards movement. However, we know that core standards, to be of real worth to any society, ultimately require attainment measurements. Input and output, formative and summative, sampling and general, and as well as qualitative and quantitative multiple measures are all legitimate assessment means and should be used and respected in measuring attainment. If the core standards are clearer, fewer and higher, then the attainment measures, which surely must follow, must be richer, deeper and more meaningful. Ultimately, the assessments matter more than the standards themselves. Will the assessments measure what matters? Proper attention must be paid to their development. Standards writers and test writers are generally not the same people. Efficiency models preferred by test-making companies should not trump designing meaningful assessments. How can technology help to measure what matters? It is a truism now based on the NCLB consequences over the past eight years that high stakes assessments will drive instruction as well as drive how the school will focus its precious, limited amount of time with students. Will thought be given to how foundational English/language arts and math skills can be used to understand history, political science, and civics among other equally important content within the national core standards assessment framework? Also, if critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, imagination matter, then will a multiple choice test be sufficient? Will punitive consequences work for all settings? Have they? We think not. We recommend differentiated measures be developed and implemented. A balanced assessment approach using technology-enabled methods can help with is preferred for this national standards movement. We recommend that the NAEP sampling model using richer, deeper, more meaningful assessments also be considered with incentives for states, districts and students to participate. We urge CCSSO/NGA to get it right this time.

What is the purpose of education and what does it mean to be a global citizen?

Much has been written over decades, even centuries, if Jefferson, Dewey and Mann still matter, on the purpose of education and what it means to be a citizen. Current thinkers, Wagner, Eisner, Reeves, Gardner, Goleman, Zhao, etc have weighed in on these as well with a particular interest in global citizenship given this era's current events. These are thoughtful, timeless questions which deserve responses from the educational stewards of this generation. How will the drivers of the current national core standards movement respond? Too many past American education reform movements lie in metaphorical cemeteries from coast to coast. Those who do not honor the past are doomed to repeat it. With that said, we believe that the skills measured to get into college or get a job are not the skills needed to stay in college or keep a job. Most importantly, they are not the skills needed to live a meaningful life. We submit that they are not even the skills to maintain America's place in the world. We urge that this lens be used when writing all of the national core standards. The United States is still a beacon of educational light for other countries despite their ranking higher on current international tests. Visitors from all continents come to learn how American public education promotes teamwork and collaboration, critical thinking, empathy, creativity, service, problem-solving, curiosity, imagination, individualism, accessing and analyzing information, etc. Why? Why do they come here with our diverse population, test score results on international indices, English language learner and special education issues, high school graduation issues, poverty and urban education issues, etc? We believe it is because committed, resilient educators keep trying to address these issues as well as provide a well-rounded education for all youth. This focus and drive is powered by American knowledge, devotion, and energy, harnessed together by skilled, competent, caring educators at all levels, who understand what it means to be educated in a democracy and are able to apply it in their local settings. These pockets of excellence exist in each state and should be celebrated and recognized nationally **every day** in the press and from the bully pulpit as well as in the local, state and federal halls of government. Use these thousand points of light to scale up as we know not

all schools are equal, never forgetting that the implementation of American educational goals and policies like politics is local.

What roles do Ethics and Equal Opportunity Have in Educational Reform?

Few would deny that even the clearer, higher, fewer national core standards are simply words and good intentions unless brought to life by the very best instruction, engaged students, and high quality assessments. These are all ingredients over which the education community has almost complete control. Many have also written about the fact that education is **big business** in America. How do these interrelate and what reforms need to take place in order for the national core standards movement not to end up in that metaphorical cemetery for past reforms. Who are the perennial players in the US educational reform movements? We have identified the following players, and surely have missed a few: **higher education, teacher unions, testing companies, businesses of all types, US and state departments of education, all authors of reform documents, elected officials at all levels who oversee educational content and funding formulas, and professional organizations.** These vested interest groups represent different points of view and hold different agendas. All profess noble beliefs about educational reforms. Yet, they often work at cross purposes for true reform. Worse, ethics and transparency often are not even discussed or apparent in many reform calls by these groups. What moral compass do these groups use? "Follow the money" has become a foundational refrain lately when considering any system in America. This is not a cynical comment. Needless to say, but please consider the current reforms of the auto, banking, Wall Street, mortgage, and military industrial complex industries to name a few. We ask the following questions? There are more but too many to list here.

Do higher education and certifying educational institutions admit only the most qualified students to teacher and leadership preparation programs? Do they gate keep out before graduation? Do revenue demands trump preparing high quality teachers and leaders?

Do unions protect the incompetent? Does tenure? Do dues buy labor silence? Or worse, pay for detour campaigns to other issues which derail a valid discussion?

How much money do textbook and testing companies invest in supporting reforms which will garner even greater profits with each successive iteration of reform?

Are authors of reform documents declaring their connections to groups which stand to gain financially from certain reforms?

Do funding formulas approved by elected or appointed officials at all levels result in the dollars necessary to provide equal access and opportunity for all students in our diverse democracy? What roles do lobbyists and transparency play here?

Do professional organizations have an economic interest in maintaining the status quo?

Do all school districts assure that all students have access to high quality curriculum and instruction? Does the budget reflect its mission statement?

The United States is a wonderful country. Its documented values and beliefs are the wonder of much of the world. Its educational system aspires to excellence for all of its students as evidenced by the repeated interest in reform movements. Yet, it is not a great system, yet. This will only occur when passionate forces form alliances based on transparency and guided by a strong moral compass to assure a delivery model that actually delivers the high quality education promised to all students since the beginning of our country.

In summary, the input and insights from many of the DuPage educators who attended the focus groups provided the content for the recommendations described above. Our sincere hope is that the call for educator input from CCSSO and NGA on the draft national core standards was a genuine request for assistance in shaping this reform movement. We stand ready at the DuPage Regional Office of Education to help in any way.

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