



August 19, 2013

Mississippi Department of Education  
Lynn J. House, Ph. D.  
359 North West Street #270  
Jackson, MS 39201

Dear Dr. House,

As you are aware, the Mississippi Senate Conservative Coalition (MSCC) has serious concerns about the integrated policies encompassing the adoption and implementation of Common Core, as well as the standards themselves. The concerns and questions revolve around the following.

1. Development of the Standards,
2. the Standards themselves,
3. the Impact on the LEA's, the Students, and Parents,
4. the Cost and Technology Requirements,
5. Data Collection,
6. Race to the Top Grant,
7. and the significant Role of the Federal Government in the previously mentioned integrated segments of this new movement.

We also have the following concerns regarding the potential conflicts of interest regarding the participating entities in various aspects of this implementation.

1. from test development to curriculum development,
2. consultants participating in both non-profit foundations and for-profit companies simultaneously, as well as
3. confounding conflicting alignment studies of MS Current Mathematics and ELA standards from the Fordham Institute commissioned by the Gates Foundation to comparatively assess each state's standards against the Common Core State Standards, and the assessment by SEDL's Southeast Comprehensive Center who conducted an alignment study for MDE (page 18 ESEA Waiver Request, February 24, 2012).

We hope you can further alleviate our concerns by answering several questions. Please answer the questions on the following pages regarding the parameters of development and implementation of Common Core State Standards as it relates to Standards development and the impact on student achievement.



Questions on the Standards development and potential impact on student achievement:

1. As far as potential stakeholder input in adoption of the standards as a part of the Race to the Top Grant and as a requirement for the ESEA Waiver, was there any other notice besides the notice on the MS Dept. of Education Website 'Hot Topics' Section? Was there any newspaper ad run anywhere in the state of MS to announce any "stakeholder meetings"? If so please provide publication names, dates of run, and a copy of the notice.
2. Were any statewide notices sent home to parents regarding the adoption of Common Core Standards prior to the June 25, 2010 MS Board of Education meeting where the standards were unanimously adopted? If so please provide copies and dates.
3. Was there any correspondence from any MDE Employee or State Board of Education Member to any members of the MS Legislature regarding adoption of the Common Core Standards or application for Race to the Top Grant prior to the June 25, 2010 board meeting? If so please provide a copy of each correspondence.
4. As far as the Common Core standards being marketed as "internationally benchmarked", please provide a link or reference to the set of standards to which they were aligned as well any empirical data showing that common standards provide a higher level of academic achievement, especially in relation to those countries with uniform standards scoring higher or lower than the USA on PISA.
5. With regard to the 2012 Brown Center Report on American Education's key findings that
  - a. Common Core Standards will have little to no effect on Student Achievement,
  - b. most of the variation of NAEP scores lies within the states, not between them,
  - c. whatever impact uniform standards alone may have on reducing within state differences should have already been felt since most states have had uniform standards since 2003,
  - d. history shows that state standards have never really been able to penetrate down into changing the environment of the teaching and learning in a classroom.

What proof can you provide that Common Core will provide any different results?

6. What steps were taken to include the input of legislators, parents, and or policy groups outside the educational establishment (besides those so named in the ESEA Waiver regarding minority input) who may have expressed opposition to Race to the Top Grant's requirement of a Data Collection System as well as the adoption of "College and Career" ready standards in the form of Common Core Standards?
7. Do you think there may have been significant opposition if the general public had known the financial enticement provided by the Federal Government to sign on as evidenced by the following excerpt taken from the June 25, 2010 Board of Education minutes:



*“On a motion by Dr. O Wayne Gann, seconded by Mr. Claude Hartley, the Board voted unanimously to adopt the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects as a temporary rule to become effective immediately based on a finding of imminent peril to public welfare in the loss of substantial federal funds from the Race to the Top Grant and that the Board begin the Administrative Procedures Act process to adopt the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.”*

(Mississippi ESEA Flexibility Waiver Attachments, page 184.)

Do you believe education standards is a state or a federal issue?

8. Please comment on the recent email sent out by Nancy Loomer of the Parents’ Campaign which attests that no grant money was rewarded due to adoption of the CCSS and that there was no federal mandate to adopt the CCSS, but cleverly leaves out the fact that adoption of CCSS was done primarily to compete for the grant money and that lack of doing so would result in “imminent peril to public welfare in the loss of substantial federal funds from the Race to the Top Grant” as evidenced by the June 25, 2010 above referenced MS Board of Education Minutes.
9. Would you consider Ms. Loomer’s statement about federal grant money misleading or incomplete?
10. Would you as a superintendent agree with DR. Ginn and Nancy Loomer that since we did not get any of the federal funds from Race To The Top, but did adopt the CCSS that we find ourselves in “imminent peril to public welfare in the loss of the federal funds from Race to the Top Grant”?
11. Please explain the conflicting statements by two major players in the Common Core arena which have direct impact on MS students futures:

*“In October 2010, the MDE worked with SEDL’s Southeast Comprehensive Center to conduct an alignment study, which revealed that the overall alignment between the Mississippi Language Arts Framework and the CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy is strong and that the rigor is comparable”. (ESEA Waiver Request February 24, 2012)*

Compare with the Fordham Institute’s alignment study which says that Mississippi’s ELA standards are “among the worst in the country” and not at all closely aligned with Common Core ELA standards.

MSCC members see this controversy as another reason to stop and re-evaluate what we are doing in MS Classrooms with regard to Common Core Standards. Can we really have any faith in these newly aligned standards with these major disagreements among these groups working directly with MS standards alignments and the Fordham Institute?

12. How do you hope to prevent the loss of cultural identity in the state of MS and in the US with the removal of a large percentage of classical literature out of the language arts



standards in favor of “informational texts”? How can you guarantee that we will not dilute the knowledge and impact of great MS writers such as Welty and Faulkner, and American authors such as Poe, Longfellow, or Thoreau, or British authors such as Dickens or Chaucer in favor of teaching a student to read a technical manual, an executive order, or a chart or graph? What proof exists that this methodology will increase student reading and writing achievement as well as prevent the dilution of knowledge and application of classical literature and cultural heritage?

13. How is rigor and knowledge of key mathematical concepts ratcheted up when CCSS moves Algebra I back to ninth grade when currently we estimate that at least 30 percent of MS students take Algebra I in eighth grade?
14. How do you justify dismantling and removing some key content in the college prep mathematical content from our current MS Standards? How do you disregard the warnings of Dr. Stanley Milgram of Stanford University, mathematics consultant for NASA and the statement of Chief Software Architect for MonolithIC3D Ze’ev Wurman (former USDE Senior Policy Advisor and 2010 member of the California Academic Content Standards Commission that evaluated the suitability Common Core Math Standards)? Mr. Wurman finds the following in his evaluation:

*“Common Core suffers from a number of systematic defects. It groups mathematics standards into “conceptual categories,” which provide a vague structure for high school courses and makes for difficult use by teachers and textbook publishers. It provides verbose and imprecise guidance as to the level of fluency needed, omits basic skills such as factorization(reducing problems to the basic “building blocks” of the equation), and deemphasizes algebraic manipulation, leading to under-preparation for STEM disciplines. In terms of college readiness, its content is far below what is presently expected for college eligibility, which will create unreasonable expectations by parents and pressure on state universities to admit under-prepared students, with concomitant growth in remedial enrollment in college.” (Wurman’s April 18, 2012 statement taken from Exhibit B, Controlling Education from the Top, a publication from the Pioneer Institute.)*

Other concerns raised in the leading paragraph of this letter will be addressed in later correspondence. Thank you for your time and consideration in answering our concerns.

Sincerely,

MS Senate Conservative Coalition