

*Common Curriculum Standards: A Matter of Common Sense*  
A position paper of Arkansas ASCD

In recent months, reports of growing opposition to the Common Core State Standards Initiative have become staples of the print and broadcast news. Much of the reported opposition has been overtly political-in-nature.

A diverse group of educators who are dedicated to ensuring the success of all learners through the development of leadership and best practices in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and supervision, Arkansas ASCD has no interest in embroiling itself in an ideological debate. The primary focus of Arkansas ASCD is serving the whole child. Given our goals of influencing policies that govern teaching and learning, and of communicating effectively and efficiently with all who care about schools, we are nevertheless compelled to articulate our position on this matter of genuine importance to educators, students, and families across the state.

The idea of common curriculum standards is not an especially radical one. Who would argue, for example, that a youngster should be denied the opportunity to learn the same important concepts or essential skills as her age mates simply because of where her family happens to live? Neither is the notion of common curriculum standards particularly new. In 1983, a national commission on excellence in education that had been empanelled by the Reagan administration lamented, “Where there should be a coherent continuum of learning we have none, but instead an often incoherent, outdated patchwork quilt.” Not quite a decade later, in response to calls from the nation’s governors and the first President Bush for goals by which to improve American education, the National Council on Education Standards and Testing wrote, “High national standards tied to assessment can create high expectations for all students and help to better target resources.” These common standards, which would benefit our country’s “increasingly diverse and mobile population,” would couple “substantive content” with “complex problem-solving and higher order thinking skills”; reflecting “high expectations, not expectations of minimal competency,” they would “provide focus and direction, not become a national curriculum”

The current debate over the standards that have finally been issued under the aegis of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers affirms the prescience of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing, which, two decades ago, stipulated that any such standards “must be national, not federal” and “must be voluntary, not mandated by the federal government.” While the Common Core standards do, in fact, meet both of these requirements, they have been tainted in many people’s minds by the Obama administration’s full-throated endorsement of them through both its Race to the Top and NCLB Flexibility programs.

Arkansas ASCD has approached its consideration of the Common Core State Standards Initiative much as it has approached any other issue related to the education of our children: objectively and on its merits alone.

Arkansas ASCD finds the Common Core State Standards themselves to be of high quality. Purposefully limited in number, these standards allow – indeed, invite – teachers to engage their students in in-depth investigations of literacy and mathematics at higher levels of thinking. Likewise, these standards represent a thoughtful, appropriate progression of concepts and skills from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade. Moreover, while they identify the appropriately high levels of competency and skill that students need to attain by certain points in their school careers, the Common Core State Standards in no way dictate how each school or district will write its own curriculum or prescribe the instructional experiences in which individual teachers will engage their students.

Fully recognizing the value of well-constructed assessments aligned with rigorous standards in helping educators to prepare their students to take their places in the world, Arkansas ASCD likewise understands that effective implementation of any initiative – let alone one so robust as the Common Core State Standards – takes considerable time and effort. We fully support the notion that students’ mastery of the literacy and mathematics standards should be assessed regularly, and sincerely appreciate the opportunity that so many of the schools and districts across the state have had to field test the measure that Arkansas has selected for use, the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career) assessment. Arkansas ASCD supports any additional time and professional development that may be needed for the successful administration of these assessments.

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