



**STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Mick Zais
Superintendent

1429 Senate Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

August 6, 2013

Mr. Neil Robinson
Chair, South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
227 Blatt Building
1105 Pendleton Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Mr. Robinson:

The purpose of this letter is to express my concerns regarding a proposed resolution the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) may consider during its upcoming retreat and to suggest a way forward. The subject matter of the resolution is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the prospect of the EOC requesting the State Board of Education (SBE) to withdraw the standards.

The resolution, as currently drafted, takes no position on the CCSS.

As you and EOC members know, I did not support the adoption of the CCSS in 2010. These standards reflect a one-size-fits-all approach that is pervasive in education. They provide little flexibility, especially in high school, for students to choose different courses to meet the requirements for a high school diploma. There is an overemphasis on theoretical and abstract material, such as Algebra II, at the expense of concrete and applied concepts, such as personal finance and business math, which are just as rigorous.

However, state law assigns authority to establish academic standards to the SBE and EOC, not the State Superintendent of Education. While I still do not support the CCSS, I have faithfully executed the duties of my office, even though I disagreed with the decisions made in 2010 by the SBE and EOC.

The draft EOC resolution states:

"If at any point during the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, independently verified data documents that:

Students are not graduating from public schools in South Carolina able to compete globally for jobs in the 21st century or that students are not college and career ready; or

If local decisions about what and how to teach are threatened to be taken from the state, districts, and schools,

Then, the EOC may recommend to the State Superintendent of Education and the State Board of Education that South Carolina, in collaboration with higher education, revises its English Language Arts and Mathematics standards to create new South Carolina College and Career Readiness Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Furthermore, the EOC recommends that the Science and Social

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Studies standards continue to be reviewed, revised and adopted as South Carolina academic standards for the Science and Social Studies content areas.”

Although I know you didn't write this resolution, no English teacher would give a passing grade for such abstruse, convoluted language.

There are several open-ended conditions in the current resolution. How low does the state graduation rate need to be to trigger the first condition? How is a “threat” to local control defined? What “independently verified data” will be used by the EOC? When will the EOC make a decision about the CCSS?

Make no mistake about it – school districts in South Carolina are spending public funds to implement the CCSS. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) has offered hundreds of professional development hours to teachers and principals implementing the CCSS. Some districts have been working on adoption for nearly three years.

I suggest the resolution the EOC should be discussing is which assessment the state will use beginning in 2014-2015. In February 2012, the SBE recommended the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). A pilot test was held this past spring and a field test is scheduled for Spring 2014. But the EOC has been silent on its plan for state assessments. The EOC needs a plan for state assessments aligned to state standards.

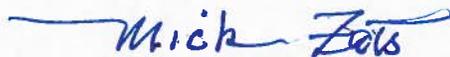
The draft EOC resolution provides policy makers, the SBE, the SCDE, teachers, principals, school leaders, parents, and the public no direction. However, the EOC must take a position on the CCSS. It did so in 2010 when it voted to adopt the standards. A clear, concise replacement resolution that takes a position on CCSS might be:

“The Education Oversight Committee requests the State Board of Education withdraw from the Common Core State Standards initiative.”

This alternative resolution clearly states a position on the CCSS. Whether this resolution is approved or disapproved by the EOC, a clear public policy position would be established.

To paraphrase President Reagan, this week is a time for choosing for the EOC. My position on the CCSS has been clear and consistent for three years. The SBE's position on the CCSS has been clear for three years. Three years ago, previous members of the EOC staked out a position in favor of the CCSS. Today's EOC has an obligation to the students, parents, educators, taxpayers, policy makers, and the public to take a position. One way or the other, the EOC must settle its internal debate on the Common Core State Standards initiative.

Very respectfully,



Mick Zais, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Education

Cc: Members, Education Oversight Committee