

A Letter to Parents about Common Core

Fall 2014

Dear Parents,

As we begin a new school year, you have probably heard much about the new Common Core State Standards. Some of what I'm hearing is true, and some is not, so I'd like to dispel some myths about the standards and address concerns you might have.

First of all, some fear that these national standards are an attempt by federal politicians to take over education. Actually in the past, political appointees wrote our state education standards. These new Standards on the other hand were written by educational researchers who know students and how they best learn.

Secondly, each state is given the opportunity to opt in to the Common Core Standards. They can also opt out at any time and write their own standards as in the past. They can even adopt the Common Core Standards and modify them if they wish.

In the past when every state wrote their own standards, it was difficult to compare the progress of students in California to those in Ohio or Texas as both the standards and the tests used to measure them varied dramatically. For the first time, we now have a level playing field for all students. Given that we live in a mobile society where it is not uncommon for students to move across country, it is time for a more consistent curriculum.

Some of the concern I hear is aimed at how the Standards are being taught. However, the Standards are simply that: a set of benchmarks by which student progress can be measured. The Standards do not dictate *how* schools should teach to reach these benchmarks; that is still up to individual states and school districts.

By far the majority of the concern I hear is regarding the materials being used to teach the Standards, but this, too, is not mandated by the Standards themselves. States purchase instructional materials from private publishing companies. These companies, in turn, write their curriculum according to guidelines set up by *state* education departments. If any of the materials being used to teach the Standards are deserving of a watchful eye, this should be attributed to the publishers and the appointees as the state education departments.

As a math teacher who has spent over three decades in the classroom, I care deeply about who I teach and what I teach. I am encouraged that for the first time the focus is on how students learn instead of on politics. In the past, California had very rigorous standards, but they did not reflect the skills that today's modern industry valued. The Common Core State Standards are not only based on valid research but on the skills students will need to enter today's technological society.

Sincerely,

Brad Fulton
Enterprise Elementary School District