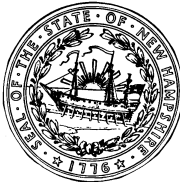


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House Bill 1508

This bill requires the State Board of Education to terminate all plans, programs, activities and expenditures relative to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards which have been adopted or may be adopted by the state board, including any assessment and instruction based upon such standards.

TESTIMONY OF VIRGINIA M. BARRY, COMMISSIONER *New Hampshire Department of Education*

Thursday, February 6, 2014

Madame Chair and trusted House members: I am Virginia Barry, Commissioner of Education for the State of New Hampshire. I come to you today distressed given the fact that we are in our seventh year of discussion on the Common Core State Standards. Many schools are in their third year of implementation, others are in their second and first. Thousands of teachers, leaders, parents and school boards have committed to improving standards in public education. Many of these stakeholders are confused by how a small, loud group of misinformed individuals continues to distort information regarding Common Core State Standards.

Make no mistake: these standards raise the bar in our state with regard to teaching and learning. They have been studied, analyzed, reviewed and now are part of our common language of teaching. I find it shocking that any discussion focused on raising standards and improving teaching and learning would get so much negative attention.

The public is confused. Citizens look to us to lead and support their children. We are not in the business of managing schools districts. We are charged with supporting all schools to move forward in a time when transformation is taking place in public education. The goal is helping all children to be competent and career- and college-ready with the goal of preparing citizens to support our country and state and improve our state economy. Quality education is the number one reason people reside and migrate to a state. I am grateful to our business leaders who see the critical relationship between better standards in public education and a thriving economy.

With this said, I want to once again communicate the facts for the public record:

Schools are not required to participate in the Common Core State Standards. However, to their credit, many educators made the choice to study them and integrate the standards with their own definitions and vision for their schools. I find it interesting that now a group is trying to control those schools by asking for laws preventing participation. This flies in the face of local control.

Districts have their own implementation strategies and may request assistance from the NHDOE.

The cost of any best practice implementation resides with the district. There is absolutely no indication that this best practice will have a significant financial impact. This is particularly well aligned with the NH strategy to be thoughtful before jumping into anything.

We should be proud of the mindful educators and school board members in our state that have made the decision to move forward carefully and look at the Common Core Standards.

Smarter Balanced is a new form of assessment that will enable us to see our children in a different manner – how they examine, analyze and synthesize information. It is new. We are piloting Smarter Balanced in our state. Volunteers have come forward recognizing the value of a new way of assessing children that helps to improve teaching and learning. The best experts in the nation are helping to lead the way to build transformative assessments that supports the success of each child.

I find it extraordinary that an assessment that improves teaching and learning has received so much negative attention. Thank you. Thank you to all who gave testimony in support. Parents are involved in better understanding how their children perform.

New Hampshire has taken the lead in privacy protection issues and none other than our own Representative Neal Kurk leads the country in ensuring all students are protected.

Change is difficult. But we all know the face of public education must change to meet the needs of students preparing for a complex society in the future. The Common Core State Standards, the new way of assessing student learning and changing teacher preparation programs, supporting leaders – these are all parts of a movement toward excellence. Issues such as the timing, the amount of testing and support are all within our control. Through communication, collaboration across stakeholders and coherent decision-making in the best interest of children, we will make our state one of the best in the nation.

I attend hundreds of meetings in a year. Many focus on the economy and attracting young people to our state. Businesses and corporations are all seeking a state with a high quality education system. Sadly the message prevailing in our state is confusion regarding continuous improvement and innovation in our schools.

As Commissioner, I would suggest to you that many of the groups you have heard from have created an interesting discussion in our state; helpful, but old now. Educators, parents and students are looking to us to lead now and move forward. These issues have created distractions away from the real issues our state is facing, such as:

- Childhood poverty;
- Early childhood and support for young families;
- Declining enrollments;
- Fragmentation of our schools; and
- Lack of focus on a seamless quality system Pre-K-higher education and the workforce

As Commissioner, I ask that you continue to lead our state and give clear messages to the public that NH is focused on having a quality education system and is truly a great place to live.