

Reviewing Common Core??

A bill is moving in the Senate Education Committee that requires the Dept. of Education to conduct a comprehensive review of the Iowa Core standards. This bill has passed the Iowa House and now it is being considered in the Iowa Senate.

Do you remember discussion some years back about the Iowa Core? I had fought for a number of years to get the legislature to look at the Iowa Core standards and now it appears there is a great deal of interest to do so. I guess I was ahead of the time!

What is the Iowa Core?: The Iowa Core is, for all practical purposes, the Common Core. There are a few Iowa-specific standards sprinkled in but it is basically the Common Core.

The Iowa Core, or Common Core, consists of K-12 academic standards that outline what students are expected to learn in 2 subject areas: English Language Arts (ELA) and in Mathematics. Its stated goal is to make students “college and career-ready”.

Where did the Common Core come from?: It was written by private nationwide organizations out in Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc., National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officials (CCSSO). It was funded by the Gates Foundation.

How did Iowa get the Common Core?: In 2005 the legislature adopted the Iowa teacher-created Iowa Core standards in math, English, and science as a set of voluntary standards. In 2008 the Iowa Core became mandatory for all schools. In 2010 the State Board of Education mostly threw out the Iowa Core math and English standards and adopted in their place the Common Core, which are a set of federally incentivized standards for math and English. This was done, not by the legislature by the way, for the state to have a chance at getting federal “Race to the Top” money. Well, guess what? The state got no money but it did get Common Core! Implementation of the Common Core began in the Fall of 2012 for high schools and in the Fall of 2014 for K-8.

What are the advantages of Common Core?: Proponents say having all school districts study the same thing at the same time enables children who move from one school to another to not have any “gaps” in their education because they can pick up at the new school where they left off at the old school. The intended focus is on critical thinking and higher order thinking skills, which is very necessary and important. In math, there is a push for a deeper cognitive understanding, “how do you know?”. Have these advantages been realized?

What are the disadvantages of Common Core?: The biggest problem with the Common Core system is the not so thinly disguised control of the federal government over our children’s education. Under the 10th Amendment of our Constitution any power not specifically given by the Constitution to the federal government belongs to the states or to the people. And the right to direct our children’s education is one of those rights that is not given to the federal government by our Constitution but belongs to the states or to the people.

In accordance with this our federal laws explicitly state that the federal government may *not* establish a set of national educational standards or national curriculum. And the Obama administration years ago pushed this using back-door means by luring the states with grants, promises and possibilities of money and dangling before states a waiver from No Child Left Behind if states would adopt Common Core. So the effect of their actions was to do exactly what federal law explicitly prohibits.

“Experts” have varying opinions on the quality of the content and rigor of the Common Core. I have heard mixed messages from people about that as well. The Common Core is like any other set of standards/curriculum. It has its strengths and it has its weaknesses. I don’t believe student achievement, performance, and ability to function in a positively contributing way in a free society has greatly increased with the adoption of the Common Core. If anything it has stagnated or gone down. And of course, covid didn’t help.

English Language Arts: According to some experts the English Language Arts (ELA) standards are more skill-based and less content based. Another complaint is the de-emphasis on the study of classic literature in favor of “informational texts”, such as government documents, court opinions, and technical manuals. Much could be said about the benefit of studying classic literature: understanding great principles and

character qualities that have endured throughout human history such as faith, courage, respect, pursuit of truth and wisdom, what it means to love others, what it means to sacrifice at great cost, justice, consequences of our actions, taking responsibility for our life, and the rewards of a moral and virtuous life, etc. It has been questioned whether the focus in ELA is on educating students who can take their place in society as thoughtful, understanding, caring, and productive citizen leaders who are empowered in their exercise of the precious gift of liberty secured for them at great cost or is the focus on educating students to just learn the skills of reading to prepare them to take their place in the workforce and train them to conform and obey in jobs that will produce a good or a service for society. Not to denigrate training for the workforce, certainly that is needed, but in ELA, we have opportunity to impart something much more.

Mathematics: I have heard complaints from parents about the sometimes complex and difficult methods used in common core math to teach students, the reasoning so circuitous and obtuse that parents had a hard time helping their kids. Concerns have been raised that in the elementary grades there is not enough repetition and memorization of math operations in the math standards to reach the necessary proficiency level. Concerns have been raised that unless students take extra math courses over and above common core math, they will not be ready for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors and careers. Related concerns are that students under common core math standards are behind students in other nations. Business owners and managers have expressed frustration with the lack of math skills on the part of employees who work for them.

With these ELA and math standards having been in place for 10 years, I would imagine many teachers have discovered the weaknesses and have worked to compensate for them. In other words perhaps they have added in more classic literature or required more repetition and memorization of math facts to make their courses better -- if time allows. If you are a teacher let me know how you have handled this.

If this bill passes, the Dept. of Ed. will do a comprehensive review of our Iowa Core standards and be taking input and comments from teachers, parents, administrators, and the public.

Bills Passing the Senate

Illegal Immigration – Criminalizes the act of being an illegal alien in Iowa. Makes illegal immigration a state crime, ranging from a misdemeanor to a felony. Gives Iowa law enforcement authorities the power to stop, arrest and jail people who are suspected of entering the state illegally on new, state-level illegal entry charges. Arresting officers must have probable cause. The law would also allow Iowa judges to order migrants suspected of committing the new illegal entry misdemeanor crime the choice of returning to Mexico (de facto deportation orders) or continuing their prosecution. Migrants who don't leave could face arrest again under more serious felony charges.

Bars state officials from arresting migrants in certain locations, including schools, places of worship and health care facilities, including those where sexual assault forensic examinations are conducted. The law cannot be enforced against people lawfully present in the U.S., including those who were granted asylum or who are enrolled in the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program](#). This bill is the same as the bill recently passed in Texas to help Texas law enforcement defend the southern border.

There has been disagreement between the state of Texas and the federal government regarding the constitutionality of Texas' action. The dispute is now being litigated and Texas' law is currently being temporarily put on hold by the U.S. Supreme Court until they make a final decision.

Vaccination Information – Schools are required to inform parents of exemptions allowed under state law from vaccinations required to attend school.

Patient's "Right to Save" Act - Requires health care providers to set a discounted cash price they will accept for specific health care services. A patient can use the cash price against their deductible. Insurance companies are prohibited from preventing health care providers from offering cash discount prices.

State Horse: Designates the American cream draft horse as the official state horse of Iowa. Only horse breed developed in Iowa.

Feel free to contact me with ideas, thoughts, and concerns. My phone is 319-987-3021 or you can email me at sandy.salmon@legis.iowa.gov . I want to hear what you are thinking and will listen to your input. Together we will work to make a difference for the future of Iowa. Thank you very much for the honor of representing you!

Sincerely,

Sandy