

Testimony on SB 826 Repeal & Replace Common Core to Senate Education Committee April 19, 2016
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You have all heard about the problems with Common Core standards and assessments. Even if some think they are good and perhaps more rigorous than our previous Michigan standards, they are unproven, not validated and are causing stress for our teachers, parents and children. You have also heard that before Common Core, Massachusetts student achievement was the best in the country and among the best in the world. The pre Common Core Massachusetts standards and assessments are proven, are validated and were never reported to have caused stress in the ten plus years they were used.

So let's say the legislation to Repeal & Replace Common Core Standards & Assessments is passed. What does this mean in practice?

First it means school districts in Michigan have more freedom to work with their community and parents to revise the curricular offerings. Teachers can continue to use the parts of Common Core they may find effective. But the local school communities can eliminate those parts of Common Core that are ineffective and causing stress. For example, teachers can teach the standard multiplication and division algorithms and teach other methods depending on the students' needs. The goal, as established by this new state assessment, will be for students to have a reliable method for solving problems and calculating the correct answer, rather than memorizing multiple methods and writing paragraphs. Teachers can use these techniques for teaching, not teaching to the test!

Secondly, it opens the door for a substantial education choice in Michigan. One of the most popular new programs spreading across the country is actually an old teaching method, classical education based on the Trivium. This model, employs the normal development of children, reflects that all pass through similar phases of development but at differing paces. We know children need to learn to walk before they can run, but parents know some kids walk for about one day before they start running! Classical educators understand that true critical thinking and problem solving skills are based on a strong knowledge foundation and disciplined logic skills. As in sports, let's say basketball, children need to learn how to dribble and run at the same time before they can develop knowledge of game strategy. A good coach knows how to build skills in each individual while developing the sense of team and a love of the game. Because of the right mix of tools and strategies, classical educators can do the same for reading, writing and arithmetic!

Third, the Michigan Department of Education needs to get busy replacing the failed M-Step with the pre-Common Core Massachusetts assessments. You have now seen in real life that computer based assessments are not a silver bullet. Test results were later than ever this last year. And we have no credible historic data to assess if learning has improved or declined. Since the M-Step was never validated, there is no evidence that a passing or failing score actually means anything!

The Massachusetts assessments come with validated cut scores and historic results that can be disaggregated into student groups for valid comparisons and trend analysis. Our confidence that assessment results reflect knowledge and skill appropriate to each grade will be restored.

MDE also needs to establish teacher certification and professional development based on proven educational practices based on these new standards as evidenced in Massachusetts, and move away from fads and theory.

This legislation provides an avenue for bringing us all together, educators, leaders, and parents in the best interest of our children.