

Position on National Standards

The Issue

The Common Core Standards are on a fast track for implementation. Wisconsin ASCD's concern centers on what will be done with these standards. How they are implemented and how well they are implemented is the key—especially in the critically related areas of assessment and instruction.

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Why National Standards?

American education is in an increasingly competitive situation as global contenders invest heavily in education and are rapidly closing gaps or surpassing us. In order to preserve and expand our economic well-being, it is necessary to invest in a dramatically redesigned education system including international benchmarks. This is particularly important as the National Common Core Standards are being developed with historic speed and restricted input.

Current Status

A common set of “national” standards is being developed to align reading and mathematics curricula and assessment among states and with other nations. Forty-seven states are signed on to the national Common Core Standards Initiative (WI among them). The decision to adopt them is tied to federal stimulus funds.

Proponents of the Common Core standards argue that they are critical for economic growth. They also argue that “benchmarking” (defined as finding out who is performing better than you, then emulating and eventually surpassing them) is only possible if our curriculum and assessment are comparable or benchmarked to international standards.

Opponents fear loss of local and state control of education or question the efficacy of new standards. Research shows high standards by themselves will not lead to increased academic performance.

We believe our efforts should be directed to the outcomes of the Common Core Standards rather than focused on debating the efficacy of having national standards. We currently have *de facto* common standards as each state's standards are drawn from a common professional content area research base.



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As Wisconsin ASCD monitors this movement toward common standards, we are aware that this may be the first step toward nationalizing the rest of our education system. Most accounts envision a revised assessment system and eventual alignment of curricula, textbooks, and digital media with the common standards.

Wisconsin ASCD's Response

WASCD is taking an active role in the implementation of new standards and the reforms that flow from these standards. We aspire to foster a broad-based discussion on how standards can be used to improve student achievement in Wisconsin. WASCD will help local districts determine how best to use the standards to improve teaching and learning.

TO OBTAIN INSTRUCTIONAL IMPACT FROM COMMON STANDARDS, Wisconsin ASCD advocates the following recommendations:

Quality Standards:

- Focus our attention and resources on student achievement and improving learning.
- Need to be sufficiently rigorous to describe expected skills and knowledge required in the global marketplace.
- Need to be manageable in number and emphasize key concepts, generalizations and processes of the content area(s).
- Align across and within core instructional areas.
- Focus classroom instruction and intervention so that high performance can take place in every classroom.

Meaningful Assessment:

- Aligns with the standards, local curricula and instructional materials.
- Provides timely and meaningful feedback to impact and inform classroom instruction.
- Utilizes multiple measures, both broad and balanced, to measure students' attainment of standards. This will be economically possible with a broad base of commonly held standards across the nation.
- Should be instructionally relevant for students, mirroring real world work.
- Should undergo ongoing evaluation for the optimization of student learning.
- Provides data with the ability to search and analyze multiple variables and with an option to input local data into the system for comparability and alignment.

Effective Instruction:

- Includes authentic curricula based on application of knowledge and skills rather than on test preparation
- Professional development in standards and assessment changes, alignment methods, and how changes affect classroom instruction must accompany standards implementation. Teachers and administrators need to understand the purpose, intent and appropriate use of standards in order to improve instruction.
- Training for educators in effective instructional support mechanisms for underperforming subgroups is essential.
- Ongoing identification and access to global and national experts consistent with the standards should be provided.

Once standards are approved (currently slated for December of 2009 for college and career readiness and June 2010 for K-12 reading and math), much work needs to be done in terms of modifying curriculum, providing professional learning, creating and validating formative assessment and providing feedback to teachers and other staff. WASCD intends to take a leading role in these efforts in Wisconsin through advocating and supporting best practices for all students.

Many Questions Remain

Questions for discussion and debate remain unanswered at this time

- What happens to local autonomy under a Common Core Standards system?
- Can a reasonable, useful assessment system be developed from these Common Core Standards? Or, are we still constrained by difficult-to-interpret, late-to-report, multiple choice standardized tests? Will there be funding available for more useful assessment?
- How can large-scale assessments measure “21st century skills” with the concomitant need for professional judgment or interpretation in the assessment process?
- Can our instructional and assessment system be adapted to the rigor and intellectual demand of these standards?
- Can most districts manage the professional development and curriculum retooling, given the serious resource constraints they are currently encountering?
- How does technology and the informational restructuring it demands link to these standards?
- In addition to raising standards, inequity between various schools and types of students is a significant problem in American schools. What mechanisms are proposed to meet the new standards and also reduce inequity?
- Should a greater focus be on international standards rather than on national standards since the Common Core Standards are setting the expectation for global competition?



www.wascd.org

Attend the WASCED Fall Conference to learn more and discuss this initiative with colleagues from across the state.

Foundations and Future Directions
Sept. 30 – Oct. 2, 2009
Radisson Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton
Featuring Futurist Ian Jukes &
Ken Kay, President – Partnership for 21st Century Skills