

Kentucky Needs Higher Expectations for its Students

**Testimony Submitted to the
Kentucky Board of Education**

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I am submitting testimony to the Kentucky Board of Education for its hearings on the *Next Generation Science Standards* and the Common Core State Standards. Kentucky should have higher academic expectations for all its students, not just for those in the bottom 30%. Kentucky high school teachers should be given rigorous academic standards to aim for, not the low level of high school standards offered in the *Next Generation Science Standards* and in Common Core's English language arts standards and mathematics standards.

My professional background: I was a senior associate commissioner in the Massachusetts Department of Education from 1999-2003 and, among other duties, was in charge of development or revision of the state's K-12 standards in all major subjects, licensing regulations for teachers and administrators, teacher licensure tests, and professional development criteria. I reviewed all states' English language arts standards for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in 1997, 2000, and 2005. I co-authored Achieve, Inc.'s American Diploma Project high school exit test standards for English in 2004. Finally, I served on Common Core's Validation Committee from 2009-2010.

I will speak briefly to the following points.

- 1. That Common Core's mathematics standards are not rigorous and will seriously retard high school science learning.**
- 2. That Common Core's mathematics (and English language arts) standards lack a research base, international comparison, and qualified authors.**
- 3. That Kentucky can do better by inviting higher education faculty in its own universities and colleges to recommend the mathematics, science, and English/reading standards THEY think Kentucky students should be taught to before they graduate from a Kentucky high school.**

1. Common Core's standards are not rigorous.

The notion that Common Core's college and career readiness standards are "rigorous" needs to be publicly put to bed by the U.S. Secretary of Education. Two of Common Core's own mathematics standards writers have publicly stated how weak Common Core's college readiness mathematics

standards are. At a public meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in March 2010, physics professor Jason Zimba said: “the concept of college readiness is minimal and focuses on non-selective colleges.” Mathematics professor William McCallum told a group of mathematicians in January 2010: “the overall standards would not be too high, certainly not in comparison [to] other nations, including East Asia, where math education excels.” What words don’t Duncan and the media understand? Why keep on pretending that the Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s A-for Common Core’s mathematics standards was an honest grade, that Achieve, Inc. produced first-class, high school science standards, and that the high school mathematics and science courses that future undergraduate science and engineering majors need will be in place.

Is Kentucky really ready to agree to Achieve’s and Common Core’s low-expectations for college readiness? Is it willing to lower the bar as a way of closing the achievement gap? Common Core and *Next Generation Science Standards* are not about high-quality national education standards. They are not about getting low-income, high-achieving students into advanced mathematics and science courses in high school and then into college. They are about how to lower the academic level of what states require for high school diplomas and for admission to public colleges.

Of course, Common Core and *Next Generation Science Standards* proponents can’t say that lowering academic standards is their goal. Instead, they claim that these standards will reduce the seemingly terrible problems we have with interstate mobility (actually less than 2% nationally) or enable Kentucky teachers to know how Mississippi students compare to theirs (something they never said they were eager to learn), or facilitate nationally the sale of high-tech products to the public schools (something the P-21 skills folks were eager for).

Their major selling point is how poor our K-12 public education system is in too many states. The fault of the teachers in them? Of course not. The fault of education policy makers who enjoy being Lord High Central Planners? The fault of the education schools and the professional development “providers” that “trained” teachers and administrators for the last 50 years? These possibilities have been outside the bounds of public discourse and beyond the grasp of the media.

Proponents of Achieve’s science standards and Common Core’s mathematics and ELA standards never understood, however, that as parents or grandparents learn more about them and see the lessons built off

of them, they will fight it. No parent or grandparent of any color or gender is willing to see his or her kids or grandkids sold short. They want capable doctors and engineers who build bridges and tunnels that won't collapse. And there are ways Kentucky can get rigorous academic standards for its high schools.

2. Common Core's standards lack a research base, international comparison, and credible authors.

Common Core's Validation Committee, on which I served, was supposed to ensure that its standards were comparable with those in the highest-achieving countries and supported by a body of research evidence. Even though several of us regularly asked for the names of the countries the standards were supposedly compared with, we didn't get them. Nor did we get citations to the supposed body of evidence supporting the idea that an increase in instruction in informational reading in English or other classes will make students college-ready.

We did not get evidence on international comparisons because Common Core is not about "rigor for all," despite all the parrot talk. The aim of its high school mathematics standards is not to strengthen the high school science curriculum and to prepare a regularly increasing number of students for college freshman calculus courses and for science and engineering majors.

Reading researchers have acknowledged there is no research to support Common Core's claim about the value of informational reading instruction in the English or other classes. It is also the case that there are no reports or analyses showing that Common Core's standards or *Next Generation Science Standards* meet current entrance requirements for most colleges and universities in this country or elsewhere. Moreover, the Gates Foundation chose the chief writers of Common Core's standards in English language arts and mathematics (David Coleman and Jason Zimba). Neither has ever taught in K-12 or published anything on curriculum and instruction in English language arts or mathematics (or science).

3. Kentucky can do better by inviting higher education faculty *in its own universities and colleges* to recommend the mathematics, science, and English/reading standards THEY think Kentucky students should be taught to before they graduate from a Kentucky high school.

Surely, Kentucky must have engineering, science, and mathematics faculty members, as well as literary scholars, who have a good sense of what Kentucky's students should know and be able to do in order to take calculus courses at Kentucky's own colleges and universities and become science and engineering majors. Do education policy makers in Washington DC know more than

Kentucky's own freshman college instructors?

Kentucky's Board of Education could also be a trail blazer and opt for differential high school diplomas. It could require all high schools to offer advanced mathematics, science, and English coursework, available without exception to all who qualify, that would lead to an academically advanced diploma, with all others qualifying for the Common Core diploma if they pass Common Core's minimal competencies.