



ARKANSAS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

An NEA State Affiliate

BRENDA ROBINSON, *President*
E. C. WALKER, *Interim Executive Director*

1500 West 4th Street
Little Rock, AR 72201

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**Testimony from the Arkansas Education Association
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We are now entering the fourth decade of efforts to “reform” public education, kicked off by the publishing of “A Nation at Risk” by the U. S. Department of Education under President Ronald Reagan. From the beginning, in 1983-84, one thing that hampered reform efforts was the struggle of how to deal with the knowledge that the increasing mobility of the American population means that many students attend school in multiple school districts and even multiple states – while under the 10th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, education remains a state responsibility. A second problem was caused by the pressure on policy-makers to devise “quick-fix” solutions with an eye to making things better before the next election.

As a result, all too often reform proposals put the cart before the horse by focusing on assessments and evaluations before there was agreement on what students needed to learn and when they needed to learn it. In far too many places this created a situation where schools and even individual teachers were being evaluated based on student assessments that were not tied to what was being taught. When education groups tried to point out this disconnect, too often the reformers and, sometimes, the policy-makers, brushed aside those legitimate concerns saying educators and their Associations were just “defenders of the status quo” and “didn’t want to change” or “didn’t want any accountability.”

We share those points to make this point: the successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), through appropriate curriculum development and appropriate assessments, is crucial to driving the reform efforts in the direction of creating what all of us want: A Great Public School for Every Student. Finally, after more than 30 years, we are presented with an opportunity to put in place the alignment that is necessary to successful education outcomes. We appreciate the recognition on the part of the Governor, the Legislature and the Arkansas Department of Education that it is important to involve practicing educators in each stage of the implementation as we move forward. AEA believes that inclusion of classroom teachers in every school district in the planning and implementation of the CCSS is absolutely necessary.

In a recent article, National Education Association (NEA) President Dennis Van Roekel said: “As we get closer to implementation of the Common Core Standards, some of the buzz is quickly turning to widespread anxiety. The most recent accusation: Common Core English standards will crowd literature out of the curriculum, replacing *To Kill a*

Mockingbird with federal EPA pamphlets about insulation. Separating fact from fiction – like Common Core calls for the death of literature – has become the latest education pastime.”

‘Change is hard. And a healthy dose of skepticism may be in order, especially when the stakes are so high. But as a general rule, doomsday scenarios rarely materialize.’

The NEA has been working to ensure educator input throughout the development and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As an early partner of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, NEA provided support for common standards and opportunities for our members to provide specific feedback on the standards themselves.

At the state level, the Arkansas Education Association (AEA) has been and continues to be a supporter of CCSS. We believe that this work on Common Standards has the potential to provide teachers with more manageable curriculum goals and more freedom to exercise professional judgment in planning and instruction. Their broadness allows teachers to exercise professional judgment in planning instruction that promotes student success.

We are pleased to see that the Arkansas Department of Education agrees with our belief that implementation of the CCSS should not be used to tell local school districts and teachers what or how to teach. Educators at the local district level must and will decide how the Standards are to be met.

We also are pleased to see that ADE recognizes that implementation of the CCSS, because they require a higher level of mastery of information, will likely negatively impact student test scores, at least initially. It is important that parents, teachers, students and policy-makers understand that a dip in test scores often occurs when you implement a major change like the CCSS.

The National Education Association Representative Assembly recently called for a moratorium on using the outcome of the new CCSS assessments to evaluate teacher and school performance until states and school districts have worked with educators to create authentic curriculum, assessments and professional development related to the Common Core. This is an issue of particular concern in those states that have adopted a fixed weight or percentage tying standardized test results to teacher and school evaluation. Fortunately, Arkansas’ new teacher evaluation law avoids that trap.

AEA was invited by the ADE to participate in the development and implementation of the Arkansas Common Core Strategic Plan. According to ADE, the Strategic Plan is a work-in-progress; it is supposed to be continuously revised, edited and expanded to help educators implement the CCSS. AEA believes that the Plan does an adequate job of laying out the respective roles of teachers, schools, school districts, other partners and the state in implementing the Standards.

According to the Plan, during the 2011-12 school year, stakeholders were to focus on developing a broader understanding of the intent and implications of the CCSS, as well as communicate the levels of expectations of the Standards. The 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years were to be used to develop tools and evaluations to help identify appropriate resources and materials.

In the area of assessment, training programs to build assessment literacy were to be developed in 2011-12 school year. The 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years are to focus on ensuring that teachers utilize formative assessments continuously. Also, during this entire period, the ADE has been involved in the work of the PARCC consortium to develop a new assessment system to replace the benchmark tests currently used by the state.

In the area of instructional leadership, the plan calls for specific outcomes in the 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years for the dissemination and promotion of evidence-based instructional practices aligned with the Standards, as well as the development of instructional leaders.

During the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years, all stakeholders were to articulate and create tools and methods to assist school districts in creating an aligned system.

The 2012-13 school year was also supposed to see an alignment of all policies to support implementation of the Standards.

The 2013-14 school year is to see a focus on professional development.

During the 2013-14 school year, the ADE is supposed to develop a feedback system to support local implementation of the CCSS; the ADE, school districts, Educational Service Cooperatives and STEM Centers are to conduct research reflecting the best available data to evaluate the level at which students are currently performing and reallocate resources appropriately.

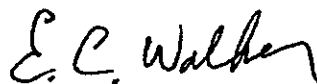
AEA believes that much of the work outlined in the Strategic Plan has been successfully implemented, at least on the state level. However, we continue to hear reports that suggest that some schools and school districts have not implemented all the elements of the Strategic Plan in a timely manner.

We also believe that it is critically important this year that the state has accurate information as to where all schools and school districts are in implementing the Strategic Plan. This information is essential for a successful full implementation of the CCSS.

Respectfully submitted,



Brenda Robinson, President



E. C. Walker, Interim Executive Director