

State Chamber CEO Presents Business Case for Common Core Standards

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The following testimony was presented Tuesday, July 23, 2013 by Randy Zook, president and CEO of the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce, and closed the two-day hearing by the Joint House and Senate Interim Committees on Education's hearing on the Common Core Standards.

I'm Randy Zook, president and CEO of the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce, We are comprised of over 1,300 Arkansas businesses, employing more than 300,000 Arkansans. I come before you today in strong support of continued, full speed implementation of the Common Core Standards.

At its core, Common Core is fundamentally an issue of competitiveness and resulting individual, family, community and state economic progress or lack thereof.

National political organizations opposing Common Core energize and excite their support bases by deriding the Standards as a federal mandate and imposition of a nationalized curriculum. We all know this is just not the case.

For those who want to throw the states' baby out with the feds' bathwater, I would ask you to consider the alternative. Arkansas recently tied with four other states at 43rd and earned a D grade when comparing proficiency on our state benchmark exams to proficiency as measured by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). But, comparing Arkansans to Arkansans, we are lulled into believing 77% of our eighth graders are proficient in math. But when our eighth graders were compared with the nations', only 29% were proficient. It's the education equivalent of giving kids a trophy for participation. Don't keep score. Don't compete. But by all means, inflate your self-esteem by just going through the motions.

It's a lot like the Hogs bragging about an undefeated season after only playing the Red-White Game. It's a different story when the season starts, particularly when you're competing not against yourselves, but with the very best in the nation, if not the world.

For those who still believe we can build a wall around Arkansas and be just fine, I suppose Common Core is unnecessary. But for those who know our children and grandchildren are not just competing with talent in Arkansas, but with their contemporaries across America and around the world, we must know how we compare – apples to apples.

In the thirteen years of K through 12, we spend nearly \$150,000 on each student in Arkansas. And our return on investment? One in five don't graduate. Nearly half of all college-bound students require remediation. And we're 49th in percentage of our people with a four-year degree.

Though talent is the new driver of economic development, Arkansas is treading water on far too many measures, and we seem determined not to acknowledge it openly.

While much is made of the short-term costs of implementation, consider the long-term costs to Arkansas's students, businesses and economy if we stop or seriously delay increased rigor and accountability? Today, thousands of jobs are going wanting in Arkansas because we simply do not have the educated, trained, drug-free workforce to fill them.

Finally, Common Core is simply, Common Sense. On behalf Arkansas's business community, I ask that you trust yours, put students first, and reject those who would not only hold Arkansas back, but would deny our children and grandchildren the tools to compete.