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June 16, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Travis Dulany

RE: STAFF REPORT: COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS) UPDATE

INTRODUCTION

Designed to emphasize critical thinking skills and to ensure that students leave high school with the necessary skills for college and/or a career, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative began in December 2008 when the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) published the document *Benchmarking for Success*.

In June 2010, Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) staff reported to the committee that the Governor and the Secretary-designate of Public Education had signed a memorandum of agreement in May 2009 with the NGA and the CCSSO, along with other states and the District of Columbia, to develop common standards in English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics for grades K-12.

According to the NGA, the standards were designed to be:

- aligned with college and work expectations;
- clear, understandable, and consistent;
- based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- built upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;

- internationally benchmarked; that is, informed by other top-performing countries so that all students are prepared to succeed in a global economy and society; and
- evidence-based.

Since the adoption of the CCSS, the LESC has received testimony from a variety of educational stakeholders, including school district personnel, the Public Education Department (PED), and national policy analysts. For this June 2014 meeting of the LESC, committee staff have arranged for presentations from:

- Dr. Jann Hunter, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Alamogordo Public Schools; and
- Ms. Karina Vanderbilt, Policy Program Manager, PED.

In order to provide contextual and background information on the CCSS, this staff report provides:

- an overview of the benefits and challenges of the standards;
- a summary of 2012 interim testimony;
- a summary of 2013 interim testimony; and
- related background.

OVERVIEW OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THE STANDARDS

The CCSS have become a controversial topic in recent years, with some states withdrawing support for the movement. Most recently, Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina have enacted legislation opting out of the CCSS. Meanwhile, other states, such as Florida, have rebranded the standards by changing the name and creating their own standardized tests. Nationwide criticism of the standards has not been limited to a single political party or group, with both Republicans and Democrats expressing dissent for different reasons, including:

- loss of state educational autonomy;
- unrealistic expectations of students; or
- the time-consuming task of implementing the standards in addition to other reforms.

Still, aside from the three states that have withdrawn from the initiative – as well as states that did not adopt the standards to begin with, including Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia – 43 states continue to implement the standards in their public schools, and several groups, including 200 college presidents and state higher education leaders, have voiced support for the standards.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) notes certain benefits and challenges for the CCSS:

- standards proponents have argued that the CCSS would further states' educational goals and objectives by allowing them to:

- articulate to parents, teachers, and the general public expectations for students, regardless of where the student lives;
 - align textbooks, digital media, and curricula to international standards;
 - base professional development for educators on identified needs and best practices;
 - develop and implement an assessment system to measure student performance against the CCSS; and
 - evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the CCSS;
- proponents also report the following benefits:
 - rigor: many states consider the CCSS to be at least as rigorous, if not more so, than their current standards;
 - state-driven: states, not the federal government, voluntarily developed and adopted the CCSS;
 - cross-state comparability: the CCSS will become a common metric across a majority of states and will allow for easy comparison between schools, districts, and states; and
 - portability: students and parents will have common expectations in the classroom regardless of location;
 - conversely, opponents to the CCSS point to the following:
 - federal involvement: at least three federal activities that may dilute state authority over education policy are cited by opponents, specifically that the US Department of Education (USDE):
 1. included adoption and implementation of “common standards” as a weighted criterion in awarding states Race to the Top Phase 1 grants;
 2. required statewide adoption of “college- and career-ready standards” as a condition precedent before granting *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) flexibility; and
 3. has provided \$350 million to aid in the development of the assessment systems aligned to the CCSS (these include the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium);
 - unknown policy consequences: implementation of the CCSS may have unforeseen or unintended consequences (e.g., a student in a certain grade receiving instruction based on one set of standards and then being tested the following year on the new CCSS);
 - cost: states stand to endure a net loss of time, money, and effort in their adoption of the CCSS, along with costs associated with aligning instructional materials, curricula, and teacher professional development; and
 - standards are only one component in an education system: standards should be accompanied by rigorous curricula and formative tests that provide teachers with useful information about each student’s growth toward meeting the standards; and
 - additional challenges or drawbacks cited by opponents are included in the memoranda of understanding (MOU) signed between states and testing consortia:

- loss of autonomy over core content area assessments (all MOU condition that, by school year 2014-2015, each state must employ the consortia’s assessment for federal accountability purposes under the ESEA); and
- potentially costly implementation: both testing consortia (PARCC and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) require computer-based assessments, which may result in additional costs to purchase or upgrade the needed technology infrastructure to deliver the assessments.

SUMMARY OF 2012 INTERIM TESTIMONY

During the 2012 interim, the LESC heard testimony about the CCSS in both formal presentations on the topic itself and references within presentations on related topics.

The initial testimony, in June, came from NCSL, when a staff member described the criteria used to develop the CCSS and emphasized that the standards are:

- not a federal mandate, but rather a common effort among the states;
- focused on the core areas of ELA and mathematics;
- state-led; and
- not a curriculum or a national assessment, but rather a set of standards.

Among other points in the NCSL testimony:

- the implementation timeline continues through 2015 and includes several years of pilot programs in various districts and states; and
- New Mexico is a governing state member of one of the two consortia implementing the initiative, PARCC, which will administer its first summative assessment in 2015.

The NCSL testimony also addressed the cost of implementing the CCSS across the country. Estimates from two different institutes – the Pioneer Institute and the Fordham Institute – each of which has certain limitations, place the cost anywhere from a low of \$3.0 billion to a high of \$16.0 billion.

During the August and September interim meetings, the committee heard testimony on the implementation of the CCSS from representatives of the Pecos Valley Education Alliance (PVEA), Cooperative Educational Services (CES), the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), New Mexico State University (NMSU), and several school districts.

Members of the PVEA, a regional education cooperative serving five school districts, testified that the PVEA expects the total cost to implement the new standards in its member districts to be approximately \$500,000. The PVEA testimony also explained the role of CES in obtaining resources for the implementation of the CCSS and noted that SEDL would be providing professional development and support. Testimony from the SEDL representative provided an overview of the major shifts in ELA and literacy as a result of the CCSS.

According to the NMSU testimony, the CCSS will provide several benefits to K-12 education in mathematics, among them:

- collaborative professional development based on best practices;
- development of common assessments and other tools;
- development of CCSS mathematics-aligned textbooks and resources; and
- development of resources for students to learn how to think and reason mathematically.

The summative assessments in mathematics, this testimony continued, will include a performance-based assessment that will be administered as close to the end of the school year as possible and that will focus on the mathematical practices of applying skills, concepts, and understanding to solve multi-step problems.

Staff from Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS) testified that the district began its implementation of the CCSS over the summer of 2012 by:

- developing pacing guides for teachers;
- ensuring that all students have access to the CCSS; and
- creating a K-3 report card aligned to the CCSS.

Created by teams comprising two teachers, one instructional specialist, one administrator, and one district professional development school representative for ELA and mathematics, the LCPS pacing guides provide an interval-based description of what teachers teach in a particular grade or course, the order in which it is taught, and the amount of time dedicated to teaching the content. The purpose of the pacing guides is to ensure that all of the standards are addressed during the academic year, according to LCPS.

Finally, the CCSS testimony in November turned to information technology needs and mandatory computer-based testing scheduled to commence in school year 2014-2015.

SUMMARY OF 2013 INTERIM TESTIMONY

In August 2013, LESC staff, the Secretary-designate of Public Education, and a representative from the Educational Issues Department of the Washington, DC office of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) provided an update on the implementation of the CCSS in New Mexico.

The Secretary-designate testified that PED was allocated \$1.0 million in FY 13 and \$1.5 million in FY 14 to support teachers and principals in efforts to implement the CCSS. Between January 2013 through June 2013, over 2,500 teachers and administrators had been trained, she said. Speaking more specifically, the Secretary-designate said that:

- 645 educators had taken online courses in ELA, math, and teaching reading to English language learners;
- 1,460 teachers and administrators had participated in in-person workshops;
- 289 educators had participated in webinars, which were recorded and continue to be available online; and
- CCSS experts had delivered regional mentoring sessions to 160 educators.

The Secretary-designate also noted that the department hosted a CCSS professional development summit in September 2013, as well as an “anchor standards workshop” for secondary school teachers. PED also provided support for parents, the Secretary-designate concluded, with five town hall meetings across the state and brochures that have been translated into Spanish.

The AFT representative testified that the organization has formed an ad hoc committee that adopted the following recommendations for CCSS implementation in May 2011:

- school, district, and state administrators should participate in the same professional development trainings required of teachers, in order to ensure that administrators also have a deeper understanding of the processes and implementation of the content and instructional changes;
- collaboration among stakeholder groups should be encouraged during the rollout of the new standards;
- state officials should provide a “road map” to guide what children should learn and teachers should teach; and
- modern technology should be used in innovative ways to reinvent approaches to teaching with the rollout of the standards.

Finally, at the December 2013 LESC meeting, the Secretary-designate indicated that more than 700 public schools in New Mexico met PARCC technical standards, leaving over 100 schools that must have their technical standards addressed before PARCC implementation.

RELATED BACKGROUND

In 1967, legislation was enacted requiring the State Board of Education (now PED) to prescribe standards for all public schools in the state, including curriculum, academic content, and performance standards.

In 2001, in order to receive Title I funds, each state was required to:

- adopt rigorous content and academic achievement standards; and
- implement an accountability system based on a system of annual assessments aligned with those standards and approved by the USDE for all students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics.

In 2007 and 2008, in connection with the LESC’s study of high school redesign, and supported by an appropriation to the LESC, New Mexico joined the American Diploma Project. This effort, spearheaded by Achieve, Inc., provided states with a formal process to revise their mathematics and ELA standards so they aligned with the expectations of college and careers. A state team that included staff from the LESC, PED, and the Higher Education Department, as well as faculty from state public secondary and postsecondary institutions, spent 18 months reviewing and revising the state standards. The revised math standards were adopted in PED rule in June 2009 and the ELA standards in September 2009.