

Are Common Core standards a “rotten” idea?

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There have been rumblings in national political forums recently that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been foisted on unsuspecting children and families by liberal groups seeking to indoctrinate our students with “extreme leftist ideology,” as one talk show host described it. That kind of rhetoric has landed locally, as well. A local/neighborhood publication recently pictured an apple in an advanced stage of deterioration with the title, “Common Core: Something Rotten in Education.” So, thinking that citizens would like to know the facts and our perspective, here is a short overview.

First, the drafting of these standards began long before our current president and federal education department were in office. In fact, the movement toward the CCSS began when George Bush was President, and it actually was driven by the states. Georgia Republican Governor Sonny Perdue chaired the National Governors Association that started the crusade to set a single set of standards in our country that by implementation would provide an education for students that had them well-prepared for college or career and competitive internationally. It would also level the playing field among states with common assessments so that states under the *No Child Left Behind Act* who had set their achievement standards very low so all children could pass would no longer have an advantage over states like South Carolina who had set our achievement standards among the highest in the country. Forty-five states have adopted the standards, which had strong input from education experts and teachers from across the country and have been endorsed by just about every professional group of teachers of math and English that exists. They are rigorous, and they make sense.

Some claim that the standards endorse immorality and promote a liberal political mindset. What I would challenge anyone who makes that statement to do is to find one standard at any grade level that does so. They are readily available to all who will take a moment to actually look at them at www.corestandards.org. You can click on every grade from kindergarten to 12th grade in either English-language arts or math and see every standard; there is nothing to hide or fear.

Another important point is that the standards are not the curriculum. The standards define the skills and knowledge students must have to be successful in math, reading and writing; how you get there is the curriculum (teaching strategies and resources) you use. The curriculum is not in the standards; it is a local decision. Our teachers and staff have been writing and revising our curriculum for the past two years to reflect the increased rigor of these standards. We choose the books, articles, websites and other resources that will be used. Our curriculum was not written by anyone but us, certainly not the U.S. Department of Education.

And frankly, we are seeing the highest level of student engagement I have witnessed in my career. Students are deeply involved in solving problems and studying important ideas. Teachers are working with small groups and individual students with much less reliance on pure large group lecture, and students are getting the individual attention they need to excel. Topics are largely relevant to the real world, and a hands-on approach with the use of much technology is the norm.

Perhaps these new state standards and our implementation of them are a prime factor in Spartanburg Two winning the State Academic Championship in 2012-13 for the highest score on the State ESEA Report Card. Let's not turn back now....