

The Columbus Dispatch

May 15, 2014

Richard A. Stoff commentary: Common Core standards are vital to Ohio's future



Staying the course on full implementation of Ohio's New Learning Standards, including the Common Core State Standards for English and math, is absolutely vital to the future success of our children and to the economic health of our state.

There is no longer a debate about the need for higher academic standards. In Ohio and across the nation, too many students are leaving high school unprepared for college or work. Even our best students who work hard in school are being shorted by a system that fails to challenge them. We tell our young people to "be all you can be," but we adults in the system fail to uphold our role in helping them achieve that goal.

We all believe in human potential — and there is no greater good than helping our children set goals beyond what they believe they can achieve. Ohio's New Learning Standards, which embed the Common Core for English and math, deliver what parents expect and students deserve. I have read the new standards from cover to cover. There is not a single thing in them that we wouldn't want our children to know.

To business leaders, it is dismaying that a controversy has suddenly arisen about the Common Core, because the standards it recommends are so basic to life — and success — in America, and here at home in Ohio. But now, incredibly, naysayers seem intent on slowing down or, in some cases, derailing implementation of higher academic content standards in Ohio schools. Others seek to delay the testing that is part and parcel of implementing new standards, which is tantamount to saying, "You can have the football game, but you can't keep score."

Some more reasonable voices have said that standards and tests should proceed, but consequences for children and teachers should be delayed until both are fully implemented and understood. It is fair to postpone consequences a year or so while schools get used to the new standards and tests. But to repeal the standards, or to delay or repeal the testing that goes with them, is to bring educational progress to a grinding halt.

For example, our legislators have wisely enacted such forward-looking initiatives as teacher evaluation, the third-grade reading guarantee which will cut Ohio's intolerable dropout rate in future years, and Gov. John Kasich's "A through F" grading system for our schools. All would face delay or elimination if standards or testing are delayed or eliminated.

Ohio overwhelmingly adopted and began implementing the Common Core three years ago as part of its new accountability system. Teachers and administrators have vigorously supported these standards and are working hard to implement them. Ohio must not go backward, losing time and wasting tax dollars that have gone into readying our schools to produce improved results for students.

The Ohio legislature is properly looking at issues such as privacy of student data, reducing the number of tests our children are required to take and updating technology in all schools, in addition to opening up the process for more transparency. These are important areas for inquiry.

But what is vital is we must keep moving forward.

For 20 years, education has been the Ohio Business Roundtable's stake in the ground for a healthy economy. Nothing matters more. We have positive momentum in Ohio. But obstructionist efforts to thwart progress on higher standards, aligned testing and accountability is a looming crisis that would stop that momentum. These efforts must be turned back. To do otherwise will be to signal both to ourselves and the nation that Ohio lacks the fortitude to do what is essential for its children.

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