


House Education

August 5, 2013

Committee(s):	House Education Committee
Audio:	 (click here)
Meeting type:	Informal Briefing
Subject:	Informal Briefing on Revisions to the PA Common Core Academic Standards
Bills discussed:	HR 338
Keyword(s):	PA Common Core, education, Pennsylvania Department of Education, Keystone Exams, PSSAs
Testimony:	Carolyn Dumaresq , Executive Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Education Karen Molchanow , Executive Director, State Board of Education A. Lee Williams , Co-chair of Academic Standards Committee, State Board of Education
Members Present:	Majority Chairman Paul Clymer, (R-Bucks), Minority Chairman James Roebuck (D-Philadelphia), and Representatives, Kathy Rapp (R-Warren), Hal English (R-Allegheny), Mark Gillen (R-Berks), Seth Grove (R-York), Scott Conklin (D-Centre), Mark Longietti (D-Mercer) Jake Wheatley (D-Allegheny) and guest representatives Mike Tobash (R-Schuylkill), Rosemarie Swanger (R-Lebanon), Lee James (R-Venango), Adam Harris (R-Juniata), and Dan Moul (R-Adams).

The committee held an informal briefing on the revisions to the PA Common Core Academic Standards.

[HR 338 English, Hal](#) - (PN 2084) Resolution urging the Secretary of Education and the State Board of Education to ensure that Pennsylvania's academic standards are thoroughly rigorous for all Pennsylvania students. (Prior Printer Number: 1886)

Majority Chairman Paul Clymer (R-Bucks) and Minority Chairman James Roebuck (D-Philadelphia) and spoke on behalf of their support for common core standards.

[Carolyn Dumaresq](#), Executive Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Education testified on a panel with [Karen Molchanow](#), Executive Director and [A. Lee Williams](#), Co-chair of Academic Standards Committee, both from the State Board of Education on the current regulatory amendments to Chapter 4 of Title 22. Dumaresq remarked on the changes to the Pennsylvania academic

standards in relation to the common core. Dumaresq commented the primary issues in Chapter Four are academic standards and assessment. "Whether a student plans to attend an institution of higher education, pursue career and technical training, join the military, or enter employment directly from high school, the academic standards set for each student to achieve optimal learning capacities and the assessment system used to measure student progress are critically important toward their success," Dumaresq stated. Dumaresq contended the standards only apply to public schools; there will be no state or federal textbook or reading lists and no additional data will be collected in the new regulations beyond what is already collected from school districts. Dumaresq stated the standards are the minimum that schools should have and abide by; however, the curriculum and textbook decisions are decided by local school district decisions. Dumaresq contended the state is in the process of examining the PASA assessment test under Chapter 14 for special needs students. She added the board will be reviewing other tests given by states similar to PASA and will make changes accordingly if it is found that another state has a test better than the one Pennsylvania uses.

Molchanow remarked on the process for reviewing the academic standards for the core subjects of reading, writing, math and public speaking. Molchanow explained a study was conducted to examine the content, rigor of those standards for the subjects and the best ways to improve the rigor. Molchanow remarked individual student tests scores are not allowed to be collected. Molchanow reiterated no data collection will be expanded as a result of the common core standards.

Dumaresq added the data that is collected from school districts is on the district and students. She explained the department collects the name, address, school district, the grade the students entered the district to track on-time graduation rates, career and technical education data, and many more. Dumaresq stated data is collected from the districts to determine accountability that the standards are being met.

Chairman Clymer remarked many of the conversations about the changing of the common core standards occurred at the local level. He stated no national or state officials were included. Dumaresq commented and said educators from school districts across Pennsylvania were involved in the discussion and process for developing the standards.

Rep. Seth Grove (R-York) asked if there is way to break down academic standards for the average person, such as parents or laypersons so he or she can understand what the standards mean. He asked to explain the difference between standards and curriculum. Dumaresq replied standards are what the

students should learn during a particular grade level, and the curriculum is how the students learn to achieve the goals through textbook and the curriculum itself. She added the assessments test whether the students have achieved the goals, or standards, that are set.

Rep. Grove asked if Dumaresq can discuss the difference between testing and assessments. Dumaresq stated as a part of the federal No Child Left Behind program, the state is required to test students using the PSSA for English, math and science. She said those are the state assessments, however, local districts can conduct standardized tests also. Williams commented a standardized test is a test with the same set of instructions for all students and all students have the same amount of time to complete the test. Williams added the test can be scored in one of two ways: one where each student can have the opportunity to receive the highest score, and two if the test is set up as norm referenced where only a few students are able to get the high score while most fall in the middle and the lower end. She said the SAT is an example of a norm test.

Rep. Jake Wheatley (D-Allegheny) commented the reason behind the push for common core standards occurred because Pennsylvania and the nation were seeing individuals enter the workforce and higher education institutions without the necessary skills that should have been developed in primary and secondary education schools. Rep. Wheatley asked if the panel knows approximately how much money school districts have already spent to prepare to train teachers and established resources for the changes to the common core standards. Dumaresq commented she cannot give a specific number but she added because of the long ramping to the change there is no question school districts have already spent tax dollars to prepare.

Rep. Wheatley stated he thinks the common core standards should be set in place and remained so there is clarity among students, parents, school districts, administrators for what should be learned and taught. He said he hopes the state should not fear how the bar is raised and expectations.

Rep. Kathy Rapp (R-Warren) remarked that she does not believe the standards are the problem parents are concerned about. She said she thinks the parents should examine the textbooks that are used in the classroom to teach. Rep. Rapp said she encourages parents to be mindful and watchful about the content in the textbooks.

Rep. Rapp commented there is an increased concern about the dropout rate in Pennsylvania. She said she questions how the department will be monitoring the dropout rate to see if there is a correlation between the rate and the keystone exams. Rep. Rapp also asked how the department will ensure the public that the

instruction in the classroom will be of quality so students will be able to pass the keystone exams that will be needed for graduation. Dumaresq stated the dropout rate will be monitored and the state will provide interventions for how to find faulty achievement levels and how to provide support for districts that could possibly need help getting students to reach those achievements. Dumaresq stated it is a supportive system to have instructors into the system to help. Dumaresq stated online resources will be created to help students who may not initially pass the Keystone Exams.

Rep. Rapp asked how the students will be monitored if they have to take the remedial courses online. Dumaresq stated the department encourages a certified professional or mentor encourages the learning through the online resource. Rep. Rapp asked if there is data that shows online remediation is successful. Dumaresq stated the data is just starting to be collected and she can provide more data next year.

Rep. Mark Longietti (D-Mercer) asked what led to the desire to update the standards. Dumaresq stated it was input from colleges, business and a commission charged with examining high school graduation rates that said the standards and rigor should be raised because of lack of workforce and higher education readiness. He added if the military was also considered in the discussion and Dumaresq stated yes. Rep. Longietti asked if the department has heard feedback from school districts to proceed with common core standards. Dumaresq replied yes. She stated she has in person from administrators and other school officials. Rep. Longietti asked what the significance of the change to Pennsylvania Common Core is. Dumaresq said educators in Pennsylvania asked for changes to the standards to create a hybrid approach for the standards to add a Pennsylvania approach. Williams added roundtable discussions were conducted discussing the potential changes. Molchanow said the changes to the common core standards have been discussed by the board since 2007 before the 2010 talks of changing the standards. She said the conversation has been lengthy and discussed years back and school districts have had a lot of time to prepare for the changes.

Rep. Longietti said he does understand why there may be an objection to common core because Pennsylvania entities are expecting that students who graduate high school should have the same skills regardless of where they attended high school.

Rep. Mark Gillen (R-Berks) asked if Dumaresq could share the NEXIS with the National Governor's Association (NGA) and if there were federal assets at the table when the common core standards were developed. Dumaresq stated the officers in the education sector gathered together to discuss the base for

graduation standards. Dumaresq remarked members of the NGA, education secretaries, and school administrators gathered together after noticing military children who moved around the country a lot encountered different graduation requirements and curriculum in the different places they would move to. Dumaresq said the standards were developed at that level for a base which became the first common core standards. Molchanow added the standards initially came from the group and was brought back into the states where Pennsylvania examined the standards further and added some of its own. Dumaresq said the military was consulted for increasing the rigor for graduates because it had students not being able to pass the test to get into the military.

Rep. Gillen questioned if federal representatives attended the meetings to be observers of the process and not put any input to what the standards should be. Dumaresq said to her knowledge it was a state initiative and he added she does not have information to suggest there was a federal "intrusion" of the process. Rep. Gillen asked if any lessons were learned from the No Child Left Behind federal policy. Dumaresq said the many successes are measured from schools and the state has learned there are other measures that are "equally important" to help students who learn differently achieve the same results. She added remediation and interventions need to be done by the providers with services that are already aligned with the school district that the provider accompanies.

Rep. Gillen asked if efficacy is currently delivered in the Chapter One of the No Child Left Behind program. Dumaresq said she thinks the state will find more efficacy in the way the state evasions to implement it in the future. She said the state has learned interventions should be tailored differently than as is currently and targeted more specifically to the needs of the particular student. The interventions should also be aligned with the school curriculum, Dumaresq stated.

Rep. Mike Tobash (R-Schuylkill) asked what path the state is going as far as the standardized tests are concerned. Dumaresq said two more, civics and government and reading, are being looked at to be added the three that are in place. She said if the state has additional resources five additional voluntary exams could be offered that would not be mandatory for graduation if the state has the ability to assess and run trials on the tests. Rep. Tobash asked what expense the commonwealth has gone through to put in place the first three tests, Dumaresq said she can get the information to them. Rep. Tobash questioned what unintentional consequences may occur as a result of passing the standards. Dumaresq said field testing has been done for the standards and the results will be monitored. Rep. Tobash commented he is concerned with using too many commonwealth resources without yet knowing what the potential consequences will be.

Rep. Tobash asked if adopting the new standards will work and solve the concerns individuals in the higher education and business world had about students entering the fields unprepared. Dumaresq said it will be a couple years before the first groups will be able to be examined. She said she hopes the keystones will be effective. Molchanow commented the state heard from businesses that writing ability was necessary for students regardless of the career path the student chooses to take.

Rep. Grove asked why data is collected and what it is used for. Dumaresq said the two basic purposes are accountability for the school and school districts and for federal requirements for special education so children with disabilities are receiving the proper programs and services.

Rep. Wheatley asked how the state makes sure the standards will provide the results that the businesses and higher education institutions said were problems with the workforce. Dumaresq replied if the curriculum, standards, assessments and textbooks are aligned then the program should prove effective. She said if not, the standards, curriculum and achievements should be realigned and examined because it means the students are not receiving the instruction and learning that they should.

Rep. Dan Moul (R-Adams) asked why the state is asking the schools to rewrite the curriculum if the state does not determine that. Dumaresq said because the standards are being increased the school districts are being asked to change their curriculum to be aligned so that the standards will be able to be achieved.

Rep. Moul asked what a parent would have to do to see a sample test. Dumaresq said there are sample questions on the state website and if there is a particular problem with a specific aspect of the test the regulation has a process for the parent follow to see an actual test. Rep. Moul asked who the individuals were on the list helped to develop Pennsylvania's common core standards. Dumaresq said the list has educators who came together to create a common core.

Rep. Hal English (R-Allegheny) remarked the goal of the common core standards is to create minimum standards for students to be able to succeed in their career path whatever path they choose. He commented on how increasing the standards will improve the education system in Pennsylvania. He noted the process may not be perfect but starting to create a way to increase the challenge for students will be beneficial in the long run.

Chairman Clymer asked what the timeframe is for implementation and what the next steps in the process are. Dumaresq said there are meetings scheduled with the Senate and the state board committee in the near future.

Minority Chairman Roebuck commented education lacks the rigor which lets students know in the beginning what the standards are and what the ultimate goal after high school graduation is. He remarked communication between high schools, colleges, and businesses should occur in order to make sure that the students are learning the necessary information to succeed in whichever career, workforce or higher education path they choose.