

MINUTES
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, January 15, 2020

TIME: 9:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room EW41

MEMBERS: Chairman Clow, Vice Chairman Kerby, Representative(s) Shepherd, Boyle, Mendive, DeMordaunt, Moon, Ehardt, Goesling, Marshall, Raymond, Wisniewski, McCrostie, Abernathy, Berch

**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Representative(s) Shepherd

GUESTS: The sign-in sheet will be retained with the minutes in the Committee secretary's office until the end of the session. Following the end of the session, the sign in sheet will be filed with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

Chairman Clow called the meeting to order at 9:01 am.

MOTION: **Rep. Raymond** made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 8, 2020 and January 9, 2020 meetings. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

Chairman Clow called for testimony and comments regarding the omnibus rule, stating no vote would be called in this meeting for **Docket No. 08-0000-1900.**

Chairman Clow turned the gavel over to **Vice Chairman Kerby.**

**DOCKET NO.
08-0000-1900** **Vice Chairman Kerby** outlined the format to review the docket. Agencies would speak first, each side of the issue was allotted four speakers, and then would finish up with three minutes for general public testimony.

Debbie Critchfield, President, State Board of Education (SBOE), recognized Board members in attendance and presented her view on **Docket No. 08-0000-1900.** Standards are vital for achievement and fulfill the constitutional duty for thoroughness and uniformity. She saw no clear evidence for a complete rejection of current Idaho Standards, stating it would be irresponsible to reject standards with nothing to replace them. The SBOE voted to support Idaho Core Standards as valuable and effective. She asserted standards are not the weak link in efforts to increase achievement. Ms. Critchfield suggested tools to move education forward, including a review of the ESSA plan, discussion of graduation requirements, role of assessments, support and training for local boards, literacy and readiness, etc.

Sherri Ybarra, Superintendent of Public Instruction, gave a brief history of the creation of core standards for education. She reiterated standards are not curriculum, but a set of expectations for students. She emphasized locally elected boards are free to select and create their own curriculum and textbooks. While expectations should be clear and consistent across the state, Ms. Ybarra expressed commitment to continue to review and modify the Idaho Standards, citing upcoming reviews.

Following a discussion by the Committee concerning State Board authority, the standards, the changes from Common Core to Idaho's ELA standards, and funding for standards, various State Department of Education personnel answered clarifying questions. In particular, **Marilyn Whitney**, Deputy Superintendent for Communications and Policy, State Board of Education, spoke on the process of proposed standards changes recommended by a review committee in 2015.

Rep. Moon testified of the alarming number of people who did not like content and testing. In response to questions, she suggested addressing the whole package accompanying the SBAC test, which she claims drives the curriculum.

Julia Withers, 7th grade ELA teacher from Caldwell, testified **in support** of the docket. She stated the standards support students through skills progression, work skills, depth over breadth, and analysis over comprehension. She cited local control as a positive aspect of the standards. In response to Committee questions, she said the level of rigor of the lessons and teacher responsibility for the next grade has increased. According to Ms. Withers, the testing experience is valuable, she has had no complaints from parents, and students enjoy the increase in collaboration.

Kenn Roberts, resident of Salmon, Idaho, testified **in opposition** to Common Core. He served three years on the Salmon School Board and tutored kids whose parents were frustrated with their struggle with reading comprehension. He requested the Committee repeal Common Core. Mr. Roberts asserted the material was inappropriate; for example, a fifth-grade class on literacy included a violent text. Test scores drive everything, but local boards do not decide what is on the tests. He emphasized the importance of teaching kids basic work and life skills.

Erin Morillo, sophomore English teacher at Fruitland High School, testified **in support** of the standards. She argued standards are not curriculum, but are important benchmarks for vertical alignment and skill scaffolding. They act as a unifier since all educators teach the same skills. She stated implementing the standards was prudent but time consuming, and it would be a burden to scrap the standards. In response to Committee questions, Ms. Morillo stated she has noticed a significant difference in writing skill levels. The standards have made finding appropriate curricular material and parent collaboration easier. Ms. Morillo expressed her belief the test is no more challenging than meeting the standards in class, and the teachers regularly collaborate as a department to discuss test results and goals.

Sonya Harris, resident of Blackfoot, testified **in opposition** to the standards. She is a current member of the Blackfoot School Board looking into publishing a new ELA curriculum. Ms. Harris stated she has felt pressured to choose curriculum companies closely aligned to Common Core and promised to improve SBAC scores, but a list of novels from such a curriculum company included pornographic language. She read an excerpt from Dreaming in Cuban to make her point. In response to questions, she explained she feels pressured because the teachers are evaluated on SBAC results.

Pierrette Madrid Harris, teacher at New Plymouth High School, testified **in support** of standards, stating standards are needed for continuity within districts and the State, but the curriculum is up to districts. Ms. Harris suggested individuals against the standards are confusing them with curriculum. Without standards, the teaching could be redundant or have gaping holes.

Fred Birnbaum, Idaho Freedom Foundation, requested the standards be removed from the rules, as standards have not driven significant progress since 2009. In a side-by-side comparison of the original and revised standards, Mr. Birnbaum asserted they are basically identical to Common Core. He would like clear standards drafted to drive better results and suggested replacing the standards. In response to Committee inquiry, Mr. Birnbaum stated there would be no risk in replacing standards since they have not improved results.

Tom Luna, former State Superintendent, reviewed the history of the standards, stating in the 1990s the first statewide assessment and accountability system was established to combat the lack of a guaranteed foundational education across the State. In 2009, Common Core was designed as a nationwide effort by states to standardize education. In Idaho, the purpose for adopting these standards was part of a comprehensive change in Idaho's approach to education, which meant infusing technology into the classroom and granting more control to the school boards. A few years later, pushback started around the myths of losing federal funding and choosing from pre-approved textbook lists. He asserted we should keep the standards, keep them high, and make sure they are the right ones. In response to Committee questions, Mr. Luna stated in his memory, Madison School District tried to opt out of the SBAC, not the standards, but the governor wanted them to participate in the assessment. He also said ACT and SAT scores were an unreliable way to measure states before standards because many students are only tested once in high school and the tests are voluntary.

Pam Atkins, AP and Senior English teacher at Borah High School, testified **in support** of the standards, as they guide creation of daily lessons and units, and give a common language among colleagues, including with the College Board, AVID, and BSU. In response to Committee questions, Ms. Atkins stated she was still able to develop her daily lessons and units.

Dr. R.T. Duke, ELA Supervisor in the Boise School District, testified standards promote rigor, depth, and complexity, and honor students and teachers as individuals capable of deep thinking. Dr. Duke testified of the benefits of benchmarks and shared counterpoints to common complaints of overloaded informational texts vs. literature. In the face of massive curriculum expenses and improved SBAC scores, abandoning the standards does not make fiscal sense.

Tammy Stefan, ELA Instructional Specialist in the Nampa School District, testified **in support** of the standards, stating they were based on sound research, reviewed by Idaho teachers, and 85% of public feedback (2015) was positive. Ms. Stefan asserts the standards are high, but honor local control in teaching and choosing curriculum. She stated the curriculum committee has not felt pressure from the board to choose specific texts.

Janelle Kincheloe, Instructional Coach in the Nampa School District, testified **in support** for the standards. They are not a curriculum and are not focused on a test, but allow for confident decisions about individual students. The standards, in her view, are vertically aligned, can diagnose gaps and intervene as needed. SAT scores have steadily increased, there is a greater focus on problem solving and inquiry, as well as freedom for intentionality for teachers.

Gina Davis, high school teacher, Nampa School District, testified when she started teaching 17 years ago, she received a set of books instead of standards. Now, with Idaho specific standards, teachers focus on skills so STEM students can write about things of interest to them. Standards are not assessed one at a time, but together. Her view is the increase of nonfiction material reflects an important part of the SAT.

Andrew Scoggin, Chairman of the Board, Idaho Business for Education, testified **in support** of standards, stating the members of his Board were allowed to weigh in on the standards and voted unanimously to support them. He reminded the Committee standards are used in business and are critical for accountability and achievement. He emphasized opposition to educational standards indicates "conflation" of curriculum, content, funding, and standards. Mr. Scoggin observed how nobody has proposed superior standards, but is open to reviewing specific concerns about line items in the standards.

Laura Knutson, ELA Coordinator, West Ada School District testified **in support** of the standards, citing clear vertical alignment for instruction across grades, test score averages on the rise, and fiscal resources already spent by the school districts to train teachers and acquire curriculum. In response to questions, Ms. Knutson explained each district has the authority to create its own curriculum through committees, and teachers can explain where to find curriculum online when parents want to access it. Intra-district collaboration is possible with remote and rural schools.

Karen Echeverria, Executive Director, Idaho School Boards Association, testified **in support** of the standards. She reminded those present the decisions being made impact children. If changes must take place, it must be done at the appropriate time and through the appropriate process, especially in light of the consequential expense in money, time, and data. In response to Committee questions, Ms. Echeverria responded ISBA provides courses about curriculum in school plans. The majority of districts come to the conference but ISBA also offers individual trainings.

Lori Gash, Curriculum Instruction for History and Social Studies, West Ada School District, testified **in support** of the standards, explaining the new literacy standards for her classes take students from memorization to deep understanding. Ms. Gash oversees writing curriculum and adopting textbooks, and because of common standards, can share curriculum online. Elementary teachers teach all content areas, so the removal of all standards would be very difficult as they would have to learn new standards all at once.

Aaron Antram, 7th and 8th grade Language Arts teacher, Boise School District, testified **in support** of the standards, stating they are challenging and give more freedom and autonomy as a teacher to adapt to the needs of students. The removal of the standards would be disruptive to learning and teaching.

Katie Donahue, mother of an 8th grade student, testified the standards are not rigorous enough; once students reach those standards they are not pushed ahead, just held back until the next year.

Vice Chairman Kerby turned the gavel over to **Chairman Clow**.

ADJOURN:

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:08 pm.

Representative Kerby
Vice Chair

Erica McGinnis
Secretary