

March 2, 2020

Dear Governor Little, State Board of Education and State Superintendent Sherri Ybarra,

We, the undersigned, believe it is time to replace the Idaho Content Standards sometimes referred to as “Common Core Standards”. The Idaho House Education Committee voted on February 6, 2020 to reject the English Language Arts, Math, and Science Standards. We want standards which work for students, parents, and educators. We seek compromise and agreement in creating new content standards.

The purpose of this letter is to give direction to the State Board of Education and the State Department regarding what the House and Senate Education committees would like to see happen going forward. These recommendations are based on input from hundreds of parents and educators across the state since Common Core was implemented.

Our concern is that any new standards developed by the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education may not be accepted by parents, educators, administrators, the public, and therefore the legislature. Stating with clarity what the House and Senate Education committees would deem appropriate will avoid wasted time, effort, and manpower of the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education during any standards rewriting process.

Following are specific recommendations of the Education Committees. We would appreciate a written response to address each of these issues.

Content Standards

A. Math

- a. Explicitly state grade levels at which students should demonstrate mastery of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts. Integrate these basics with critical thinking and real-life problem solving throughout the standards to ensure more connections to science, business, and other related disciplines.
- b. Reduce the number of standards, use less complex verbiage, and prioritize the more important concepts without marginalizing the accuracy of the standards.
- c. Ensure the standards are age and grade level-appropriate especially in the early grades, emphasizing the concrete nature of young minds.
- d. Make certain that standards requiring problem solving are age appropriate and do not exceed the knowledge standards accepted for each grade level.

B. English Language Arts

- a. Idaho Standards should have explicit, systematic and sequential approaches to teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension.
- b. Provide better balance between fiction and non-fiction reading materials, emphasizing value-rich, historically important, and uplifting literature (particularly American and English literature).
- c. Reduce the number of standards, use less complex verbiage, and prioritize the more important concepts.
- d. Renew Idaho’s focus on content-rich English Language Arts standards by prioritizing the basics of reading and writing, with less emphasis on analysis, style, and complex writing forms in the lower grades.

C. Science

- a. Please remove the supporting content (curriculum) from the incorporated by reference document immediately. Local school districts are responsible for curriculum.

- b. Provide balance in standards that have been politicized. (E.g. Include both positive and negative aspects of energy sources.)
- c. Focus on age appropriateness for science, ensuring that these basic concepts are understood before delving deeply into theoretical science. Additionally, please ensure that standards requiring problem solving are age appropriate and do not exceed the knowledge standards accepted for each grade level.

D. ESSA Assessment

- a. Use some items (questions) on the assessments that have been written or approved by experts in Idaho, and that all items to be used on the new Idaho assessment reviewed by a complement of experts and others in Idaho.
- b. Ensure that this test is not based on Common Core. Please explore assessment options including removing Idaho from the SBAC consortium and cancelling the SBAC contract.

Process

We believe the process of rewriting the content standards should take place beginning immediately and be completed as soon as possible while creating excellent standards. We expect schools will use current standards during the rewrite process.

In reviewing/rewriting the standards, we would like to see the Board and the Department look at nationally recognized quality standards from a variety of sources, including states such as Florida, Massachusetts, Texas and Nebraska, and compare and contrast these standards with Idaho's. From this work, develop what Idaho teachers, parents, and administrators believe to be the best set of standards considering age appropriateness, readability, quality of content, and sequential nature.

Please provide estimated costs such as requirements for a new test, and fulfilling federal accountability requirements. However, the first priority should be the needs of the students, secondly parents and teachers, and third, accountability to the federal government.

When selecting the committees to rewrite the content standards please include people who understand current issues with Common Core, retired teachers who have used previous standards, parents from across the state who have expressed interest, administrators with a variety of perspectives, as well as experts from other states. Bring together experts from across all grade levels to evaluate sequencing of concepts and grade level appropriateness.

Please embed traditional American civics throughout K-12 standards.

We would like you to develop a clear progression of content from one grade to the next that is aligned from early learning to post-secondary education to continue increasing student knowledge and skills over time.

While rewriting the standards, keep in mind the professional development needed to implement them.

Please address financial literacy in all grades at appropriate places in the standards.

Curriculum, Instruction, Student Assignments

While it is not in the Legislature's purview to be involved in curriculum, instruction, and/or student assignments, we do request that the State Department of Education utilize the appropriated resources to provide enough support to schools and teachers so the standards can be implemented in a suitable fashion. Engaging instruction, meaningful assignments, and interaction with parents are each critically important, and hopefully will be accomplished in every classroom across Idaho. Please work with school boards and district administrators to ensure they understand their roles in choosing curriculum, using the best instructional techniques, and giving students meaningful assignments.

