

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
"ESEA Reauthorization: Standards and Assessments"
Steve Paine, West Virginia State Superintendent and CCSSO President

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to speak today about the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and National Governors Association (NGA) common core standards initiative and state cooperation to develop related high quality assessments. My name is Steve Paine, I am the State Superintendent of Schools in West Virginia and the current President of CCSSO.

As the committee continues to examine the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, I appreciate this opportunity to talk about the states' extraordinary leadership in a voluntary effort to ensure that all students are held to college and career ready standards. The state-led common core development effort will conclude next month with the release of the final grade-by-grade standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. This work is representative of states' commitment to leading the way on education reform. Given this bold state action, we hope the federal government will respond in kind by ensuring that the updated ESEA supports a new state-federal partnership. A partnership that provides states with greater authority to innovate and appropriate incentives and supports to help them not only implement college and career ready standards, but also improve teacher and leader effectiveness, strengthen longitudinal and instructional data systems and turn-around low performing schools.

Summary

CCSSO and the NGA launched the voluntary state-led common core standards initiative to provide a coherent foundation for ensuring that all students leave high school ready for college and career. The forth-eight states, including West Virginia, two territories and the District of Columbia who worked collectively to develop the common core standards in English language arts and mathematics were guided by several core principles. The common standards must be: (1) higher, clearer and fewer, (2) internationally benchmarked, (3) include content knowledge and skills; (4) evidence and research based; and (5) prepare students for college and career. As the development phase concludes, state adoption and implementation of the common core will help to ensure that all students are called upon to satisfy college and career ready standards and will enable fair and accurate performance comparisons between states, while catalyzing and enabling unprecedented state collaboration to address the nation's most pressing educational challenges.

Participating states developed the common core standards in two phases with the support of leading standards experts, who collaborated with a range of interested stakeholders

from across the country. The transparent development process, included numerous opportunities for public comment and benefited from constructive feedback provided by individual school teachers and leaders, national education organizations, higher education representatives, civil rights groups, and other interested parties and individuals. The initiative's phase one work concluded in the fall of 2009 when CCSSO and NGA published common college and career readiness standards, illustrating what students should know at the end of high school. Since that time, the initiative's second phase of work has focused on back-mapping the college and career ready standards on a grade-by-grade basis for Kindergarten through Grade 12.

As the standards development work draws to a close and participating states begin the voluntary adoption process, several exciting common state assessment collaboratives are begin to take shape, including a group co-lead by West Virginia. State cooperation to develop common, high quality assessments is possible because of the common core standards initiative and will be furthered by the \$350 million Race to the Top Assessment competition. These advanced assessment systems will measure student knowledge and skills against the full range of college and career ready standards and will represent the next generation of summative, formative and interim assessments, which will significantly improve teaching and learning in the classroom by providing unprecedented insights into student's status and growth.

Even as this important state led standards and assessment work continues, we are pleased to have this opportunity to make recommendations to Congress about how the Elementary and Secondary Education Act might be updated to support state led education reform. The nation's chief state school officers believe the new ESEA should continue and expand the federal government's strong commitment to supporting state assessment development, support movement toward voluntary state college and work ready standards, and fund the creation of aligned, and enhanced assessments systems. New instrumentation should be fully representative of the richness of standards and allow for students who learn at different rates.

Common Core Standards Development Principles and Transparency

As mentioned earlier, even before state development of the common standards started in early 2009, the initiative was driven by four fundamental principles designed to ensure the integrity and quality of the standards.

First, the common standards are higher, clearer and fewer. Each design element was crucial to the development process. Higher standards raise the bar to prepare students for international competitiveness. Being committed to higher standards ensures that no state would lower its standards by adopting the common core. Clearer standards allow parents, students, and teachers to understand exactly what is expected of students as they advance through the system. Fewer standards allow teachers to more deeply focus on topics. One challenge that state leaders consistently hear from educators is that current standards are too numerous to cover in the school year. To overcome this challenge, we raised the bar and focused the standards to maximize student learning.

Second, the common standards are internationally benchmarked. American students are entering a global economy that requires competition with students from around the world. Through states' development of the common standards, we evaluated other high achieving countries' standards to ensure that the common core represented world class standards. As a result, the new standards will prepare American students to be internationally competitive when they leave the nation's public schools.

Third, the common standards development process was informed by evidence and cutting edge research. Historically, standards were often based largely on personal judgment. By allowing personal judgment to determine what concepts are in or out of standards, the process often became a negotiation, rather than a reflection on what evidence and research tells us about the connection between K-12 experiences and success in higher education and promising careers.

Lastly, the common standards are aligned with college and work expectations. By preparing all students to be both college and career ready, all students are able compete in their post-secondary education and/or career choice. Preparing all students to be college and career is absolutely critical to the long-term success of the country. By providing a set of expectations that are clear to students, parents and educators about what it takes to be college and career ready, the states have taken a major step forward in producing students who are ready for later success.

Common Core Standards Development Process

CCSSO and NGA committed to participating states, territories and the District of Columbia that the standards development process would be open and transparent. In April 2009, over forty states met to discuss the possibility of creating common core standards in English language arts and mathematics. Following this meeting, 48 states formally agreed to join the common core standards development effort and begin a two phase process. Phase one: develop college and career readiness standards. Phase two: create college and career standards through K-12, grade-by-grade by Spring 2010. Using experts and practitioners from across the nation and throughout the world, the states completed the college and career readiness standards in September 2009. The standards were reviewed by states, the public, and a range of national organizations and outside experts. Based upon the college and career readiness standards completed late last year, participating states and the expert development team immediately began development of the grade-by-grade K-12 standards, successfully releasing the standards for public comment in March 2010. Public comments were due on April 2 and the final K-12 expectations will be released next month, allowing states to begin the adoption and implementation process.

States are responsible for demonstrating that within three years they have fully implemented the standards by developing instructional supports and aligning assessments. Kentucky has already formally adopted the common core and we expect a significant number of states to follow Kentucky's lead later this year.

Benefits of Common Standards: Students, Parents, and Teachers

Common standards are a positive development for all students. The standards will help equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and careers. The new standards will also set high expectations for learning across the nation, ensuring that all students must meet a high bar regardless of where they live. The standards will allow students to more easily transition from one state to another without losing valuable learning time adjusting to different standards. Given the mobility of the student population in the United States, common standards are essential. Also, higher, clearer, and fewer standards makes the student's responsibilities clear, so that they can take charge of their own learning.

For parents and other care givers, common standards will delineate exactly what their student needs to know and be able to do at each educational stage. With clearer and fewer standards, parents will be better positioned to facilitate conversations with their child's teachers about what they should be learning and how they can reach their goals creating even more accountability in system.

Finally, common standards will make student expectations clear for teachers from year to year. The new standards will also enable more focused educator training and professional development. Effective, targeted teacher training is paramount, and common standards allow for teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development to be focused on key objectives.

Common Assessments Development

Fewer, clearer, higher common core standards are only the first step in a longer reform process. The new standards lay the groundwork for states to collaborate on other key education reforms, including the development of next generation assessments. As states begin the standards adoption and implementation process, they are also beginning the process of developing voluntary shared assessments, which will increase assessment quality, while also providing tremendous cost savings and other benefits. Aligned standards and assessments will allow states aligned teacher preparation and other supports designed to improve overall student achievement and close achievement gaps. Teachers from participating states will benefit from high quality instructional supports and materials that are aligned to the core standards.

CCSSO and NGA are providing support to two independent state assessment collaboratives and are working with several organizations to make sure that materials related to the common standards will be produced in an effective and open way to allow access to all teachers and schools. With common core standards and assessments, participating states can, as appropriate, continue collective reform efforts in nearly all facets of the education system.

The Federal Role

To preserve the project's integrity, it is imperative that the common standards initiative remains a state-led process. There are appropriate steps, however, the federal government can take to support state and local leadership. The revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act should reward state leadership and innovation, not just with funding for assessments, professional development, and other inputs, but also by codifying a new state-federal partnership that promotes innovation and values state judgment on accountability. The current accountability system established under the No Child Left Behind Act will undercut movement toward high standards and must be updated to reflect the evolution of standards based reform since the law was signed in 2002. By adopting the college and career ready common core standards, states are voluntarily raising the bar for all students and the federal government should acknowledge their leadership by providing greater flexibility to help states ensure that all students meet these new higher expectations particularly as they transition their state accountability systems to the common core.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Committee. I look forward to responding to any comments or questions you may have about this historic state-led effort.