

K-12 Education Subcommittee

Chairman Hayes, Subcommittee members,

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you last Thursday, February 16, 2012. I am writing you to clarify certain points of my testimony and other issues that came up during that day.

1. A question was asked what will be the probable effect of shifting Algebra I to the high school, in contrast to current efforts encouraging many students to take it by grade 8. The answer is rather clear: the number of students taking calculus in high school will drop precipitously. A typical student needs four years of mathematics starting with Algebra I to be ready for calculus: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and Analysis/Pre-Calculus. If Algebra I will be deferred to grade 9 as required by the Common Core national standards, only the handful of students that can skip a course may reach calculus by their senior year. In all probability this will impact less the private schools which tend to keep challenging curricula, but will greatly affect South Carolina public school students and their acceptance to elite colleges, which expect their incoming freshmen to have taken calculus in high school.
2. A point was made during the day that having national common standards will assist student moving across state lines. Census data shows that while within-state student mobility is significant at about 12% every year, cross-state student mobility is tiny at less than 2% annually. In other words, the benefit of national curriculum on students due to mobility is minimal.
3. Regarding the cost of national assessment, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) estimates the administration costs to be around \$40-\$50 per tested student per year. This estimate lowballs the cost by making many rosy assumptions such as teacher scoring assessments for free, many of which may not come to pass. Independent of whether they do, the cost estimate does not include computer technology necessary for SBAC assessment. Assuming a minimal one inexpensive computer of \$500 for every 4 students amortized over 5 years, and assuming typical annual costs of maintenance and insurance of 20%, gives another \$50 per tested student per year, for an optimistic total of about \$100 per tested student per year. This is about 8 times the \$10-\$12 South Carolina spends today, which for approximately 400,000 tested students comes to \$40 million for annual test administration instead of about \$5 million today.
4. Finally, to the issue of the rigor of the proposed national standards. I am attaching a newly published debate on this exact topic. If you read it you will note that even the defenders of the national standards do not claim they are at the level of international high achievers.

Currently South Carolina has good standards in English and mathematics, even as they can be improved. South Carolina showed that it can learn from this experience and write excellent standards, and it did—

its new history standards are the best in the nation, and its science standards are also excellent and among the top 5 in the nation. South Carolina showed it can improve the standards on its own if it so wishes and has no need to trade them for mediocre national standards that transfer control out of state to Washington, DC.

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