



Recommendations for Ending the Common Core/Florida Standards in Mathematics and English Compiled by Karen R. Effrem, MD – Executive Director

Introduction:

The following list of recommendations is offered to help fulfill Governor Ron DeSantis' bold and highly commendable executive order 19-32¹ to "eliminate Common Core and return to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic." They were compiled after extensive discussion with professors and standards and education policy experts in Florida and across the nation. Those participating respectfully, but strongly urge the consideration and implementation of these to avoid the damaging result of another rebrand of Common Core, which is what Florida has endured since 2014, as Commissioner Corcoran so correctly pointed out on January 31, 2019, with no relief for Florida students, teachers, and families.

The Florida Stop Common Core Coalition is grateful to Dr. Sandra Stotsky, Dr. Mark Bauerlein, and Dr. Duke Pesta for their direct involvement and recommendations on ELA, as well as Dr. Louisa Moats for her seminal work on phonics and literacy education. We are also grateful to Ze'ev Wurman, Dr. Ted Rebarber, and J.R. Wilson for their direct work on the math portion of this document, as well as to Dr. James Milgram for his long and seminal work on math standards as a mathematician across the nation. Finally, we wish to acknowledge Emmett McGroarty's involvement and advice from a policy perspective.

Executive Summary

The recommendations common to both subjects are offered first, followed by those specific to math and then to English language arts (ELA). Discussion of each recommendation accompanied by references follows after the recommendations in the full document.²

Recommendations Common to Mathematics and ELA:

1. The best solution would be for Florida to review and adopt one of the best pre-Common Core sets of standards for English Language Arts and math as discussed for the subject specific standards³ This would fulfill Governor DeSantis' executive order, prevent another rebrand, and stop the academic decline seen in Florida, the other states, and for the U.S. in international comparisons.
2. To comply with the executive order, any statewide Florida standards review should reject efforts to "tweak" or "fix" the current Florida Standards/Common Core, but instead remove the entire set of these systemically inferior, deficient, and in some cases experimental standards and use the standards of one of the high performing states or countries listed in the subject-specific recommendations below as the basis for a review.

¹ Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, "Executive Order 19-32," Jan. 31, 2019 available at https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/orders/2019/EO_19-32.pdf

² Extensive documentation is offered in the full document at <http://www.flstopccoalition.org/files/E0AB8B1E-5539-452A-88C4-CC7BE080FF20--970AB8BA-A96E-48B2-8497-8E0AA8DF44C3/recommendtions-for-fl-common-core-executive-order.pdf>

³ Theodor Rebarber and Neal McCluskey, "Common Core, School Choice & Rethinking Standards-Based Reform" Pioneer Institute (Sept. 2018) available at <https://pioneerinstitute.org/download/common-core-school-choice-and-rethinking-standards-based-reform/>, p. iii

3. The premises of the Common Core are fundamentally defective. Having the public comment on individual standards implies that the standards need to be tweaked, or adjusted, at specific passages. It will thus likely lead to a repeat of the rebranding that occurred in 2014, and is an implicit rejection of the Governor’s directive to “eliminate Common Core and return to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.” Public comment on individual standards will not fix the systemic sequential flaws of the current math standards nor address needed content that is not present in the standards for either subject. Intentionally or not, constraining comments in this manner limits the ability of parents and other citizens to make broader points about the standards and gives the impression that public input is not really welcome.
4. Completely reject “social-emotional learning” or “21st Century” psychosocial skills in the standards, such as “grit/perseverance” or a “growth mindset.” Both the math and the ELA standards are supposed to be and have been portrayed as rigorous academic content standards, and should focus on subject-matter academic content.⁴ The research supporting such fuzzy standards is unreliable and some of it borders on fraudulent.
5. Prominently include, especially for review of the high school standards, content experts (*e.g.*, professors of mathematics, engineering, and physics as opposed to professors of mathematics education) in the subject matter standards for final review. Some of the experts reviewing the standards for younger students should have strong abilities in child development to make sure that new standards are developmentally appropriate, a glaring problem with Common Core.

Recommendations for the Mathematics Standards:

1. Standards that could be reviewed and offered include those of high performing states prior to Common Core - California (1997),⁵ Indiana (2006),⁶ Minnesota (2007),⁷ or Massachusetts (2000-2004)⁸ - or countries, such as Singapore and Japan. The Washington Exemplary Math Standards⁹ (WEMS), developed by a group of Washington math educators, parents, mathematicians, and science professionals, although not adopted by a state, could be offered as well, since they are a sterling example of high quality standards development after a consensus of the most important stakeholders in math education.
2. Math standards should promote the actual performance of math problems in a much higher percentage than understanding, thinking about, or communicating about mathematical concepts, especially in the earlier grades, as is done in high performing nations like Singapore and Japan and in high performing states prior to Common Core, such as Massachusetts and California.
3. To be of high quality, math standards must include necessary math content standards that Common Core fails to include, discussed in the full document.

⁴ Karen Effrem and Jane Robbins, “Social-Emotional Learning: K-12 Education as New Age Nanny State,” Pioneer Institute (March, 2019), available at <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/social-emotional-learning-k-12-education-as-new-age-nanny-state/>.

⁵ The California math standards were approved in 1997. The latest framework based on them was in 2006. See http://www.lausd.net/Corona_EL/PLC_files/mathfrwkcomplete.pdf

⁶ See <http://web.archive.org/web/20090806121758/http://dc.doe.in.gov/Standards/AcademicStandards/PrintLibrary/index.shtml>, which are the last adopted Indiana pre-Common Core standards. This link also contains an excellent 2009 framework that was not adopted in the run-up to Common Core adoption.

⁷ Minnesota Department of Education, “Minnesota Academic Standards - Mathematics K-12 2007 version”, available at https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=005247&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestRelease&Rendition=primary

⁸ The original 2000 Massachusetts standards were updated in May of 2004 to include standards for grades 3, 5, & 7.

⁹ See <https://app.box.com/s/aoj3bqshb2i8nsyxpi1qky8nysopp32h>.

4. The basic math operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division should be taught as early as is developmentally appropriate using the standard algorithms, not delayed for up to two years, as is done in Common Core.¹⁰ Once children fall one or more years behind the optimal progression, it is very, very difficult for them to catch up.
5. There should be no requirement for specific instructional strategies, especially some of the experimental ones used in geometry, with the exception that the standard algorithms for the basic arithmetic operations in the early grades should be mastered by all students.
6. Ensure that new standards provide a reasonable progression of skill and knowledge attainment to the completion of a full Algebra 1 course by the end of 8th grade at the latest as is done in other high performing countries.¹¹ One of the reasons other countries are able to accomplish this acceleration is that they focus more exclusively on arithmetic and other skills referred to as “number sense”, including problem solving as well as computation, at the elementary grades and less skipping from one unrelated topic to another. This allows high-performing countries to spend less time reviewing skills because they are not forgotten as easily. This acceleration should be universally available to allow all students that want to pursue a STEM degree, but not universally required for those that do not want this college focus or simply need a little more time to truly master the content.
7. All standards should be coherent because math is a sequential discipline and failure to teach the basics at the developmentally appropriate time will create confusion, frustration, inability to move on to higher levels of math, and loss of the love of learning.

Recommendations for the English Language Arts Standards:

1. Standards that could be reviewed and offered include those of high performing states prior to Common Core, including Massachusetts, Indiana, California and Texas as the basis for the review.¹² Dr. Sandra Stotsky, a national standards expert and member of the Common Core validation committee who refused to sign off on the final version of the standards, has made a version of the exemplary Massachusetts ELA standards available to states for free.¹³
2. Require a full, intensive, systematic program of phonics in the early grades.
3. Craft standards that require a rich literature curriculum, with a heavy emphasis on the classics of Western civilization as the texts for the various ELA and literacy skills and knowledge in the standards, and ensure that the literary historical knowledge of students is assessed.
4. Ensure that students read texts that prepare them for the complexity of college readings.
5. Do not emphasize writing over reading.
6. Teach entire works of literature instead of just excerpts.
7. Ensure that the standards are developmentally appropriate.
8. Decouple ELA standards from literacy in science, social studies and technical subjects.

¹⁰ James Milgram and Sandra Stotsky, “Fair to Middling: A National Standards Progress Report” Pioneer Institute (March 2010) available at http://www.edweek.org/media/fair_to_middling.pdf, p. 7

¹¹ As also promised in *Benchmarking for Success* (p. 24), the Common Core foundational document, available at <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/0812BENCHMARKING.pdf>

¹² Sandra Stotsky, “Steps for States to Follow to Replace Common Core” Pioneer Institute (Dec. 28, 2014), available at <https://pioneerinstitute.org/education/steps-for-states-to-replace-common-core/> and Milgram and Stotsky, *supra* note 9, p. 1. The 2013 Massachusetts ELA framework by Dr. Stotsky based on the pre-Common Core ELA standards she helped to write for Massachusetts is available at http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2000/01/Stotsky-Optional_ELA_standards.pdf.

¹³ Massachusetts Framework, *ibid*.