



RICK SCOTT
GOVERNOR

September 23, 2013

Mr. Gary Chartrand, Chair
State Board of Education
6600 Corporate Center Parkway
Jacksonville, Florida 32216

Dear Chairman Chartrand:

Please allow me to express my appreciation for your work to make Florida the best state to find a great job, get a quality education and build a family. Because of your work, we know that for Florida students to compete with their peers around the world, we must provide them the highest academic standards to achieve more in-depth understanding of concepts in reading, writing and math. We remain firmly committed to providing these standards, recognizing that it is a fundamental duty of our state government, while the operation, control and supervision of our schools remain, as the Florida Constitution directs, best decided by local school boards.

Article IX, Section 1 of the Florida Constitution stipulates that, "(t)he education of children is a fundamental value of the people of the State of Florida," and that, "(a)dequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education." Certainly upholding this constitutional duty was the intention of the State Board of Education when it adopted the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2010, after a process modeled on the development of Florida's Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. This process began under former Governor Jeb Bush and continued in legislation that came from former Speaker Marco Rubio as an effort to make sure that all of our students in all of our schools were given the tools to succeed. The result has been the development of the highest academic standards that can move our students and teachers away from "teaching to the test" and toward a more independent, analytical approach to reading, writing and math. It is the application of these analytical skills that will lead them toward the type of problem solving they will need to do to be successful in college and in their careers.

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In recent months however, the debate over how to best accomplish this has devolved into whether Floridians are simply “for Common Core” or “against Common Core.” Unfortunately, what “Common Core” has come to mean in the minds of many in our state is less about a set of high academic standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics and more about an effort to institute federal control of the policy decisions of state and local governments. To be clear, as Governor, I support Florida’s high academic standards and strongly reject overreach into those standards and other areas of our education system by the federal government, including state assessments, curriculum and instructional materials. The State Board of Education must ensure that these issues are and continue to be the Constitutional purview of Florida’s state and local governments – not the federal government.

I am as confident today as I have ever been that Floridians believe in providing our students the highest academic standards. However, preparing our students to succeed in college and careers while competing with their peers from around the world will require much more than simply drawing a line in the sand between “for” and “against.” This complexity was clear in your work at the Education Accountability Summit in St. Petersburg, when a broad spectrum of voices on education issues widely agreed that our students deserve the highest academic standards to ensure that they have the skills to be globally competitive. However, issues surrounding how we best accomplish that for students were more difficult and will require all interests to work together to find reasonable solutions. This is important so that we do not unfairly disrupt the work of our students’ teachers who have been trained on Florida’s current English Language Arts and Mathematics standards and are using them today in their classrooms, while being careful not to ignore the very real concerns that Floridians have raised over federal intrusion into our state and local education decisions.

It is my hope that the spirit of the conversation from the Summit, where people with many different points of view worked constructively to discuss what is best for our students, can continue to mark this conversation as we move forward. What Floridians need to know is not whether our leaders are “for Common Core” or “against Common Core.” Instead, they need to know that we are going to provide our students the highest academic standards and reject the intrusion from the federal government that does not serve students, parents or our teachers well. To do this we must do two things: First, we have to demonstrate that we remain absolutely committed to providing our students the highest academic standards, which our teachers are already working hard to implement; and second, we must make clear that implementing those standards cannot come at the expense of Florida maintaining our independent control over those standards or protecting local control over decisions on curriculum and instruction.

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To achieve these things, I respectfully request the State Board of Education's assistance with the following items to build public input and confidence in Florida's academic standards and to clearly reject the federal intrusion that many are concerned about:

- (1) Direct the Commissioner of Education to end Florida's fiscal agent relationship with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and to issue a competitive solicitation to select Florida's next state assessment, consistent with Florida Executive Order 2013-276 and my enclosed letter to United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, released today. It is important that we select an assessment that best meets the needs of Florida students, parents and teachers, not the needs of the federal government or other states and does not involve overreach by the federal government.
- (2) Direct the Commissioner of Education to immediately initiate a process to obtain public input on Florida's currently adopted English Language Arts and Mathematics standards to identify any opportunities to strengthen or risks for federal intrusion in Florida's standards. The process should provide opportunities for public comment on ways to strengthen specific Florida education standards via web site, email and no less than three public meetings throughout the state prior to November 1, 2013. The resulting actions by the State Board of Education should clearly codify the Florida Plan standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics.
- (3) Direct the Commissioner of Education to publicly notice any State Board of Education actions to be taken following the hearings to strengthen Florida's academic standards or to eliminate federal government intrusion into our classrooms by rejecting federal mandates related to Common Core-based curriculum, assessments or instructional materials no later than December 1, 2013.
- (4) Immediately codify through State Board of Education action that Florida will not adopt the Common Core State Standards appendices, including: Common Core State Standards text exemplars (pieces of literature, informational text, poetry, etc.), Common Core Sample Performance Tasks, Common Core Samples of Student Writing, and designed high school math courses, which should all remain the decisions of local school boards.

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- (5) Codify through State Board of Education action the Florida English Language Arts and Mathematics standards to be used in classrooms and on student assessments for the 2014-15 school year.
- (6) After December 31, 2013, continue to periodically review, accept public comment on and revise Florida's Sunshine State Standards as necessary for future school years per section 1001.03, F.S.

Thank you for your commitment to protecting the interests of Florida students. I am confident that we can continue our good work to help our students achieve success in college and careers.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
Governor

cc: The Honorable Don Gaetz, President, Florida Senate
The Honorable Will Weatherford, Speaker, Florida House of Representatives
State Board of Education Members
Commissioner Pam Stewart, Florida Department of Education

Enclosures (2)