Pulaski Community School District

Department of Learning Services

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"Ensuring All Students Are Successful!"

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Common Core State Standards. My name is Jenny Gracyalny and I serve as the Director of Learning Services for the Pulaski Community School District. I have been an educator for the past 22 years as a middle/high school teacher, middle school associate principal, and elementary principal. I also am a parent of four children ranging in ages from 12-16 years old in the public school system who I feel are gaining an exceptional education which has continued to occur with the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards. I had an opportunity to listen to testimony during the CCSS Hearing in Madison but didn't have a chance to share my testimony with you. Today I would like to address a few of the questions that seemed to be prevalent during that hearing and provide you with specifics related to their implementation in our district.

During most of my educational career, I have worked with the Wisconsin Model of Academic Standards, which were developed for the content areas, fine arts and Career and Technical Education areas in 1998. Although these were developed in Wisconsin, they easily were out-of-date for the majority of my teaching and administrative career. The Wisconsin Model Academic Standards were only developed with standards/benchmarks for Grades 4, 8, and 12 which led to many differences in interpretation and implementation in most districts and even within schools in the same district of what was expected at each grade level. The Common Core State Standards have expectations for each grade level in math and English Language Arts but more importantly a progression of student learning from kindergarten to Grade 12. With the development of the CCSS progressions, it has allowed our teachers to have a more consistent implementation of learning expectations for our students within our schools, surrounding districts and the state. The standards and benchmarks serve as the guidelines of what our students should know and be able to do, however the craft and art of teaching the standards are still left up to our teacher teams working on curriculum development in our district as well as the classroom teachers.

As you have heard previously, the CCSS were really the result of the National Governors Association and the Council of State School Officers. These two groups recognized the need to clearly define the knowledge and skills that would prepare our students for the 21st century workplace and ensure students were truly college, career and community ready. They engaged teams of experts, educators and stakeholders in developing the CCSS. The CCSS are not a national or state curriculum nor are they federally mandated. As we have unpacked them in Pulaski, there has been local control and decisions made by our school board, teachers and administrators on what is best for our students and the district. Professionally, I find it ironic that three years later as a result of the "politics" in this state, we are looking at reconsidering the adoption of the CCSS. The CCSS really represent an instructional shift from just high school graduation to college and career readiness. For example in English Language Arts, the major instructional shifts include:

- Building knowledge through content-rich informational text
- Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational
- Regular practice with complex text and its academic language and disciplinary vocabulary

The instructional shifts in mathematics include:

- A strong focus on going deeper in mathematic concept rather than going a mile wide and inch deep in the curriculum
- Coherence by thinking across grades and linking to major math topics within a grade
- Rigor and relevance with conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency of math as well as true "real-world" application of math

There have been comments recently made that Wisconsin can do better than the CCSS and should have more rigorous standards. PCSD educators would tell you that these are the most rigorous standards that they have encountered and that they have risen to the challenge of ensuring our students to be college, career and community ready. At past hearings, the committee has asked districts how much time and money has been invested for CCSS. We have used several of our professional development days each year as well as release days with substitute costs and summer curriculum days to unpack the standards, align the standards to our current curriculum, adopt resources with a scope and sequence to meet the CCSS shifts and have looked for more authentic ways to assess student learning. Although difficult to put a specific cost to this time, much of our Learning Services yearly budget of $325,000 plus designated Title IIA funds have been used for professional development, training and resources for ELA, math and disciplinary literacy implementation. School building budgets have also been utilized for resources, collaboration meetings, professional development and much more related to CCSS. As this debate continues in Wisconsin, our science and social studies educators impatiently are waiting in the wings to adopt rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards for their content areas.

There have also been many questions in regards to the assessment component related to the CCSS and whether we are "teaching to the test". In our district we have had a major emphasis on "assessment for learning" or what we like to call the "check up or physical" of learning. In other words, what we do day-in and day-out in our classrooms to assess what our students have learned formally and informally is of more importance than the state assessment. We believe that with highly qualified teachers delivering quality guaranteed universal instruction of a progressive curriculum aligned to the CCSS, the "assessment of learning" or "autopsy" such as the WKCE or Smarter Balanced Assessment will show quality student achievement and progress. Last spring, we had an opportunity to participate in the Smarter Balanced Assessment pilot at two of our elementary schools and the high school. These pilot tests in English Language Arts and math required our students to think critically, be problem solvers, persevere through difficult concepts and apply learning in various performance tasks.

I would like to extend an invitation to you to visit the Pulaski Community School District and our classrooms to learn more about the Common Core State Standard implementation, alignment to our curriculum and authentic assessment of student learning. Being an outsider looking inside, there seem to be far more important educational issues that should be at the forefront in Wisconsin rather than the political pressure and money from anti-Common Core groups who seem to be providing you with misinformation regarding the CCSS. Let us work together and collectively focus on doing what is best for Wisconsin students and their learning and not on the politics.

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Yours in Education, Jennifer Gracyalny

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