

ENDNOTE

Common Core standards: common sense

Educational changes have once again come to Michigan and a majority of the United States in an effort to create a set of national standards to better prepare students for college, careers and international academic competition. Called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for K-12 in English, language arts and mathematics, they were developed through a state-led initiative coordinated by the National Governors Association, the National Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, representing superintendents from across the country. Participating states, including Michigan, worked with them alongside a wide range of educators, content experts, researchers, national organizations and community groups.

The federal government was never involved in any way in shaping or mandating Common Core, despite some politicians claims that they are an effort by the Obama administration to wrestle control from individual states or local districts. It has been a state-led and state-driven initiative from the beginning, with Gov. Rick Snyder a strong supporter. The Common Core initiative first began back when President George W. Bush was in office, led by the National Governors Association, a non-partisan organization with a strong Republican bent.

The national initiative began in 2009, and was adopted in June 2010 by the Michigan State Board of Education which began implementing it in the 2010-2011 school year, with full implementation to be complete by the 2014-15 school year. Michigan is one of 45 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and numerous private and parochial schools across the country to have adopted the Common Core, which is a set of standards for English, language arts and

mathematics, not a set curriculum that every district has to follow specifically. Rather, it offers guidelines and benchmarks for where students should be at given grades and levels, and invites teachers to find innovative ways to instruct different types of learners to help them achieve successful results.

Local superintendents and teachers are supportive of the Common Core.

"Traditionally, the reading, writing and speaking was focused on literature classes," Walled Lake Schools Executive Director of Assessment, Instruction and Technology Mark Hess said. "In Common Core, it's emphasized across all classes. Students will write more and there will be less multiple choice. Instead of selecting A,B,C or D for an answer, they will have to articulate their answer. That's a big change for us. The integration of the studies, how the arts, science and humanities connect, teachers are looking at that and working together. It's a more comprehensive approach to educating."

"There is no specific, mandated curriculum. No one is saying you have to use these books. The curriculum we wrote as an ISD are generic enough a teacher can choose their own books and tools," Delia DeCourcy, literary consultant for Oakland Intermediate Schools, explained. "It creates a very student-centered classroom with more discussion in the classroom. There's no more 'sage on the stage.' It's learning by discovery, how you learn in the real world. Administrations are overwhelmingly positive and excited to provide professional support for it."

Yet, Michigan legislators are currently debating whether to support and fund Common Core, held hostage by a Tea Party contingent led by Rep. Tom McMillin (R-Rochester), who sponsored House Bill

4276 which would have Michigan opt out of the Common Core curriculum and deny its funding. He told Downtown his motivation is because "before Common Core, we owned the discussions. I oppose Michigan having their state rights, their authority taken away from them."

He also doesn't like that students will have to take assessment tests on computers because "you must type. Lots of kids don't know how to type." Really? Isn't the point of Common Core to make our students more competitive? One way is to become computer-literate.

Several local legislators, such as state senators John Pappageorge (R-Birmingham, Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills) and Mike Kowall (R-White Lake, Commerce Township, Walled Lake, Wolverine Lake, West Bloomfield), said they were impressed with Common Core, but hadn't made up their mind yet about their vote.

However we applaud state Rep. Mike McCready (R-Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, West Bloomfield) for standing up for his principles, and his principals, when he said, "The Tea Party isn't going to like it, but I'm going to support Common Core. It's a basic skill set for K-12. I have to listen to my educators and the superintendents in Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills and West Bloomfield all support it. I have to support my district, and not the Tea Party."

Common Core makes a lot of common sense to us. Educators and administrators are seeking the best English and math standards for our children, to prepare them for college and careers that will help them succeed. It's time for lawmakers to recognize that, and provide that support. ■

Vote 'Yes' on Walled Lake Schools bond

The Walled Lake School District is coming before the voters this November 5 with a \$67.5 million bond issue to address school safety, security and technology, along with other important district needs. If passed, the millage will pay for numerous important security and technology advances which the district needs in order to protect its students, faculty and staff, and to technologically update its buildings and services. We recommend a **YES** vote on the bond proposal in order for the district to improve and modernize itself while safeguarding its students in this post-Newtown era.

The Walled Lake School District, which has students from nine different municipalities, is the largest school district in the county, and the 10th largest in Michigan. The safety, security and technology bond would allow the district to complete the final phase of a safety and security plan the district began implementing following the traumatic school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in December 2012. The bond also includes technology improvements at all of the district's schools, as well as additional projects at many buildings.

If approved, the bond would generate a maximum of \$67.5 million over no more than 30 years, with an average of .99 mills levied annually to retire the bond, at a rate of .78 mills the first year. The district currently has about \$115.3 million of qualified, outstanding bonds, which they anticipate will be retired by 2024. The last time a bond millage was proposed, and passed, was in 2004.

There are important projects which would be funded by the passage of this bond, which was pared down to only include the most needed in terms of security, technology and other enterprises that administrators, parents and staff all recognized as necessary for safe and functional schools. Included in the proposed project listings if the bond passes are \$4.2 million for video surveillance systems for all district schools, with interior and exterior cameras; \$5.5 million for keyless entry systems at all of the district's schools to require key fobs on exterior and interior doors, including classroom access; \$4.4 million for updated fire alarms and mass notification systems, which would allow for specific messages and alarms to be used for different emergency situations at each building; \$6 million for the replacement of their fleet of

busses; \$2.5 million for the installation of a new VOIP phone system that offers better reliability and communication features than the current analog system.

There is also \$2.9 million allotted for parking lot replacement and \$3.6 million for roof replacements, in order to avert potentially dangerous situations, out of a list of \$30 million in parking lot and roofing needs.

"The need for increased safety and security in our schools is paramount," Walled Lake Schools Superintendent Ken Gutman said. "We have pared down this bond significantly so that it only includes issues related to safety, security, technology and other time-sensitive needs. This bond doesn't represent a wish list; rather it represents needs that offer a safe, secure environment in which our children can prosper."

We agree. While we at first questioned some of this bond issue in terms of actual need beyond the safety issues, we feel more than comfortable recommending that voters back this proposal. The district and parent committees that help devise this bond issue have done their homework and district officials have taken a conservative approach while placing this before voters. ■