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Rigorous Standards & High Expectations

May 16, 2013 | By Jim Barrett, GLEP Chairman

There is no question our public education system is failing too many children, since less than 20 percent of Michigan's high school graduates are considered college or career ready. To help our students compete and succeed in the 21st century global economy, states and education reform organizations joined together to establish the Common Core State Standards.

Far from the federal takeover of public education described by critics, the Common Core State Standards were developed by state leaders and educators. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers have been working together to create standards for math and language arts that will help teachers prepare our children for success in college and work. Forty-five states have adopted the standards for Math and Reading.

The Common Core State Standards are not a federally mandated curriculum, but a rigorous, streamlined and more relevant framework to prepare students for real world application beyond high school. These internationally benchmarked standards will challenge students to read, write and solve math problems at greater capacity, raising the bar for all students and resulting in a more valuable education.

Our students are competing with others from around the world for the high-wage jobs of the future, and these jobs require a higher level of knowledge — especially in math, science, engineering and technology. It is imperative our education system develop high, rigorous and consistent academic standards for every grade, every school and every state. The Common Core State Standards draw on the best state academic standards in America and were drafted by experts from across the country — a combination of experts a single state would be unlikely to assemble.

While the Common Core State Standards clearly define what our children need to know, they do not tell our teachers how to teach. States, communities and schools maintain flexibility to determine how to help students meet — and exceed — these new expectations. In fact, the Michigan Merit Curriculum exceeds the high school requirements of the common core and should be maintained. The results in Michigan since adopting the Michigan Merit Curriculum have been increased performance and a reduction in dropouts.

Rigorous standards won't improve education quality without careful implementation which includes an aligned curriculum, solid instruction, meaningful assessments and excellent teachers and leaders. There should be more widespread use of technology for teaching and learning, and the next generation of student assessments, called computer adaptive testing, is to be encouraged.

The right testing and assessment tools will not only provide real-time information that can inform classroom instruction — these tests measure both proficiency and individual student growth. This information not only leads to better outcomes for students, it is a much fairer method of evaluating teachers.

At the same time, adopting the Common Core State Standards and implementing next-generation assessment tools will help us move toward a simpler, uniform system to provide A-F grades for individual schools based on student academic performance. Such a letter grading system will increase transparency and accountability for all public schools, further empowering parents to make informed choices.

The Great Lakes Education Project strongly supports efforts to improve academic achievement, increase accountability and empower parental choice in our public schools. Implementing the Common Core State Standards is an important step in this process, and we urge the Governor, legislators and state policy makers to stay the course.

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