



March 6, 2013

Senate Committee on Education
Missouri State Capitol
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Committee Members:

I write today in support of Missouri's current efforts to implement the rigorous Common Core standards. The Foundation believes these standards will ultimately provide greater freedom and flexibility to classroom teachers.

As a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to helping states transform education, the Foundation shares this Committee's belief that great teachers and leaders are key to driving student achievement. We do not believe in top-down mandates from Washington, but do believe that state-driven efforts such as Common Core will provide states better information about what works and ultimately improve rather than detract from local control.

The Common Core standards are rigorous, fewer and deeper. They will challenge students to read, write and solve math problems at greater depth, raise the bar for all students and better prepare them for the global economy. The standards do not dictate what textbooks must be used or how a school corporation's curriculum should be set up, but they will result in better assessments to gauge whether students are where they need to be.

There are some stakeholders who tend to see Common Core as regulatory over-reach. We would suggest that the standards will actually open the door to **de**-regulation. Since there are currently no common standards or accountability assessments across states, it is difficult for policymakers to identify best practices. Washington thus develops a thick set of programs with their own funding streams, rules and regulations because no one can be sure what policies are actually working. Meanwhile American students fall behind.

A common baseline for performance in language arts and mathematics (i.e. outputs) will relieve the pressure to add yet more inputs to the system. Everyone will know how schools are performing – on credible, consistent metrics – so those who wish to add more inputs to the system will have a higher burden of proof for doing so.

When asked, the Foundation does not hesitate to share elements of Florida's approach that have resulted in tangible gains for low-income and minority students. As legislators debate policy, however, educators also need better ways to utilize the expertise of a great resource – their peers – in a timely fashion.

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• P.O. Box 10691 • Tallahassee, Florida 32302 • (850) 391-4090 • (786) 664-1794 fax

In the same way that smart phones have created a baseline for technology applications that can improve lives, common standards can likewise open the door to innovation by breaking down barriers. An educator in southwest Illinois will be able to travel to a great school in St. Louis for professional development, because the underlying standards their colleagues are teaching from will no longer be different. Teacher training programs will have more comparable data across state lines. Mobile students in Kansas City will have less disruption when their family moves across town – either out of necessity or by choice.

Missouri is embarking upon difficult but long-overdue conversations in its 2013 session regarding how to recognize great teaching and provide school performance information that parents can understand. We hope to be in a position to brag about Missouri's efforts in the coming years. Staying the course on common, rigorous standards will only help our ability to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia Levesque". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and larger than the others.

Patricia Levesque
Executive Director
Foundation for Excellence in Education