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TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*

DATE: June 22, 2010

SUBJECT: Common Core Standards

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this item is to request your adoption of the Common Core State Standards.

BACKGROUND:

In a collaborative effort 48 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia committed to developing a common core of state standards in English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. This state-led effort has been coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with input from ACT, College Board, Achieve Inc., NASBE and State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). Maryland's commitment to be a part of this effort was made public in a press release in June 2009.

The work for Common Core Standards began with the college and career ready (end of high school) standards. The first draft version for the college and career ready standards was available for feedback in July 2009. MSDE invited representatives from higher education to participate in the initial review and provide feedback to the Common Core writers. In October 2009 there was an opportunity for public feedback and the resulting document was posted in draft version on the common core website, <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

The K-12 Common Core standards with grade by grade breakdown of the standards had two formal opportunities for feedback from MSDE curriculum staff and other invited organizations. The writers have been very responsive to the feedback that was provided and have now finalized the documents based on feedback obtained during the public reaction period. The standards:



- Are aligned with college and workforce expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by standards in other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Common Core State Standards provide Maryland an important opportunity to address updating our State Curriculum to ensure all students are college and career ready. MSDE content staff, in collaboration with local school district English and mathematics supervisors have completed an initial review of the document and find the “Common Core is very doable and vastly improved over the initial draft.” The organizational structure of the grade K-8 Common Core in mathematics includes standards and domains, while the high school level includes concept, domain, cluster and standard. While this nomenclature is somewhat different from the Maryland State Curriculum, the transition to the new structure is not viewed as a major problem.

In mathematics, the precise vocabulary using mathematical language such as rectilinear or bivariate data may be unfamiliar to some teachers and will require excellent online tools and professional development. The overarching change in math will be the change from a spiraling approach where a concept is introduced in one grade level and taught with increasing complexity and rigor over several grade levels to a grade level mastery approach. For example, addition and subtraction of whole numbers are completed in grade 2 and multiplication and division in grade 3 in the Common Core framework. Previously those skills were introduced at these grade levels but instruction continued through 4th, 5th and 6th grades. Probability is introduced at the end of middle school where in the State Curriculum it was previously begun in elementary grades. High school mathematics is organized as a block of concepts in grades 9-12 with two pathways – course by course (algebra I, geometry, algebra II) or integrated with modules taught in these content areas at each grade level.

The reading/English language arts Common Core is organized into strands: reading (text complexity and growth of comprehension), writing (text types, responding to reading and research), speaking and listening (flexible communication and collaboration), and language (conventions, effective use and vocabulary). There is a high level of rigor with a well-balanced approach across all the skill areas. The Common Core does an especially good job at defining college and career readiness and yet defining the skills necessary at each grade level. Additionally these standards define literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects. With the Common Core ELA Standards, English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary non-fiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelmingly focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in social studies, science and technical subject areas. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines are also focusing on reading and writing to build knowledge within their subject areas.

Next steps include convening teams of higher education, local school system and MSDE staff to complete a mapping process to identify where the current State Curriculum aligns to Common Core and where adjustments are called for. Work began on this process June 18th and a twelve month plan to complete the Maryland Common Core Curriculum will be provided to the State Board in July, 2010.

ACTION:

Recommend that the State Board of Education adopt the Common Core Standards.

NSG/cps