



WOMEN'S LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

of Utah County

Nov. 19, 2013

Program Topic: "TWO YEARS INTO COMMON CORE UTAH: ARE WE WHERE WE WANT TO BE?"

Presented by: Education Committee

Director: Carolyn Wright

Co-Chairs: Leslie Oldham & Johanna Flynn

Speakers: Dixie Allen – Utah State Board of Education

David Wright – Co-author of the 2007 Utah Math Standards; BYU professor

Alyson Williams – Utah Mothers Against Common Core

Mark Clement – former member of the Alpine Board of Education; BYU professor

Dixie Allen supports Common Core while acknowledging some problems associated with it. She believes the standards it brings are good ones. There is an American Institutes for Research (AIR) test that measures individual growth with regard to Common Core. She is especially pleased with the math section, as it teaches algebraic “messaging” in the lower grades. Many state universities’ math departments are expressing approval of Common Core Math standards.

Although some of the testing assessments are problematic, Ms. Allen believes Utah has taken an important step forward since implementing Common Core. Utah will also be re-evaluating it after approximately 5 years.

She does not believe teacher pay should be completely tied to student testing and teacher evaluation. Variables need to be factored in, to be fair.

Ms. Allen and David Wright then engaged in a friendly exchange, agreeing to have three members of the State School Board meet with a number of BYU math professors in order to discuss ways to improve Common Core Utah’s standards.

For more information, go to Utah Education Network www.uen.org/core/ or Utah State Office of Education www.schools.utah.gov/core/

David Wright said that in 2006 Utah received a D+ rating in math from the Fordham Institute (a nonprofit education policy think tank). Eventually the state agreed to re-write the standards, subsequently receiving an A- rating.

He also generally supports Common Core, while acknowledging some problems. There is a real need to push for all students to reach a higher level of math achievement. More girls and women should be entering the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs. School counselors, Mr. Wright said, have already discouraged many from pursuing the STEM programs.

He believes the Utah Core standards were generally well written. However, he does have concerns regarding its implementation. Utah math textbooks themselves contain too many mistakes. Better access to test results by students would also be very helpful.

Mr. Wright favors the following changes in Common Core Utah:

1. Do away with Honors standards. They are poorly written.
2. Do away with the integrated math program. Integrated math has been rejected by more than 90% of the states. It keeps motivated students from taking geometry and algebra 2 concurrently.
3. Find a way to support students who are well above grade level.
4. Take pedagogy (entirely discovery-based teaching) out of Utah Math Core.
5. Stop supporting curricula like the Math Vision Project. It will not prepare students for college level courses. Math College Ready is also a lower standard program.

Allyson Williams urged caution regarding Common Core Utah. It claims it is “just setting higher standards” that have been agreed upon by state governors. However, no national gathering of governors has constitutional authority to do this. Utah constitutional authority for school standards resides with the only State School Board. The federal Dept. of Education has overstepped its authority in involving itself in this issue, as have unelected special interests such as the Gates Foundation.

Ms. Williams stated that her opposition to Common Core Utah is not only about education standards, but also about liberty itself. Referring to Thomas Jefferson’s observation that “if a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be,” she said if we are to guard against ignorance and remain free, it is the responsibility of every American to be informed.

She also noted that there are still problems with the tests used to identify and improve lower performing schools. Common Core Utah put the emphasis on “equity” rather than individual achievement. A diversity of pathways should be available to students who learn differently. She believes Utah should not be grading students or teachers on these particular tests. Research doesn’t support them as an effective way to make assessments. Ms. Williams believes that these uniform standards and tests will be, in reality, used for data collection, comparison, and conformity. For more information, go to www.UtahnsAgainstCommonCore.com

Mark Clement said he has tried to come to sound conclusions about Common Core Utah after having looked at it closely. He appreciates the concerns of those opposed to it, but does not believe it to be a plot hatched by special interests groups. He believes it to

be a good replacement for *No Child Left Behind*. He does not believe *Race to the Top* money influenced Common Core. He also believes we should welcome, rather than suspect, investment from private corporations

The state needs stronger math and science education. Mr. Clement said the new standards raise the bar on student performance in language arts and math in an effort to enable Utah students to compete globally.

The collaboration between states, he stated, also provides continuity for students who move to a new state. The Common Core standards will always be under review. Mr. Clement believes adoption of these standards will not threaten the ability of parents, teachers and local school districts to control curriculum.

The Common Core required data reports are only provided in the aggregate, meaning only state, district, school and grade level data is provided, not student level data. This is an important distinction, as it means data is not tied to any specific student. Mr. Clement emphasized the federal government did not create the standards, and they are not federally controlled.

Mr. Clement believes there should be “open” tests available to parents after students take them. In this way, he said, transparency will quickly weed out bad teachers and bad tests.

Reported by Wendy Braithwaite

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