

## Prepared Notes for House Rules and Reference Committee

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Chairman Huffman, members of the committee, good morning. My name is Marc Schare and I am the Vice President of the Worthington City Schools Board of Education now serving in my ninth year.

We in Worthington are confused by this legislation. Perplexed really. Baffled might be the right word.

You see, the State told us back in 2009 that our “Excellent” rankings didn’t mean much anymore because Ohio’s academic content standards and cut scores were too low and that too many kids statewide were having to take high school all over again once they got to college. Fair enough, so Ohio responsibly adopted new academic content standards and recommended that we develop a curriculum based on those standards. For the next three years, teams of teachers representing over 20% of our total teaching staff met in small groups to write Worthington’s **local** curriculum. It was an enormous undertaking. The teams would methodically, standard by standard, define learning targets, compile lists of resources, determine best practices and associated professional development on a subject by subject, grade by grade basis<sup>1</sup>. The result of this effort according to preliminary reports from ODE is that Worthington students using our new curriculum performed at their highest level in years.

While all this was going on, our Information Technology department was preparing to implement the PARCC assessments. This was also an enormous undertaking. Following guidance from the Ohio Department of Education and PARCC, our community passed a bond issue partially to secure technology funding, we increased the bandwidth in each of our buildings, bought PARCC compliant equipment and created a plan for implementation. You can understand why, on the eve of the administration of these assessments, we are baffled that you want to repeal them and replace them with tests that assess a set of standards that are no longer even being taught.

Which brings me to HB597. Under this proposal, all the work accomplished over the last 3 years, hundreds and hundreds of man hours, a curriculum which our administrators and teachers believe is right for kids and which our students thrived under last year, assessments which we’ve spent years getting ready for, professional development and a teacher evaluation rubric aligned with our curriculum, untold dollars spent just in Worthington, a parent base who by 70% to 15%<sup>2</sup> believe our new curriculum is academically challenging and all of it – all of it just goes away for no discernable reason. You can understand why our Board, our Superintendent, our curriculum director, our entire administrative staff, our building principals and, of course, our teachers are quite concerned and absolutely baffled by this.

We could understand it if there was a groundswell of community opposition, however, in Worthington, there is not. As recently as last week, I surveyed our elementary school and middle school principals and the subject has rarely even come up. Last year, we had a hotly contested school board election and even though I personally knocked on many doors, Common Core came up perhaps a half dozen times, an experience shared by my fellow candidates. You can understand why we’re baffled.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.worthington.k12.oh.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=109>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Worthington City Schools 2014 Culture Climate Survey.

We could understand this legislation if the standards represented a one-size-fits-all approach to education as alleged by repeal proponents. Indeed, this would seem to be the most serious criticism and would be alarming if true, but it's not. In Worthington, teachers chose to focus on vocabulary acquisition as a consistent theme across content areas while designing our **local** curriculum but honestly, there were a dozen different ways to go. Our high school math curriculum, for example<sup>3</sup>, is radically different than that in our neighboring districts of Dublin<sup>4</sup> and Westerville. Don't take my word for it – just check out the links in the footnotes and you'll see that Worthington teaches an integrated math curriculum while Dublin favors the traditional Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2 path. Not only is Common Core not one-size-fits-all, it's not even one-size-fits-all in my zip code. You can understand why we're baffled by the criticism that Common Core is "one size fits all".

We could understand this legislation if the standards were developmentally inappropriate or inflexible, however, our gifted kids continue to receive appropriately differentiated services, our struggling learners continue to receive appropriately differentiated instruction and our parents, by 67% to 17%<sup>5</sup>, agree that their child receives the academic support tailored to their child's **individual** needs. You can understand why we're baffled.

We could understand this legislation if we felt the heavy hand of the federal government in the standards. I've read that somehow, we were incented to adopt the standards with Race to the Top money. Mr. Chairman, my district received \$125K/year in Race to the Top money, or around 0.1% of my budget. Essentially, it was a rounding error. Frankly, that wasn't enough to incent me to do much of anything. We embraced Common Core because it was the right thing to do for kids and we took the money because it was for things we were going to do anyway<sup>6</sup>. Let me be clear here. Personally, I believe the Federal Government should have no role in education policy. Currently, the United States Department of Education serves as a giant redistribution mechanism where Worthington taxpayers send money to Washington in hopes that some of it gets redistributed back with all kinds of strings attached. This model makes no sense to me, yet, I can comfortably support Common Core because the Federal government has nothing to do with it.<sup>7 8</sup> If members of the Ohio General Assembly are concerned with Federal involvement in our schools, "No Child Left Behind", "IDEA" and the First Lady's school lunch initiative should be the target of your legislation, not Common Core.

We've heard the concern that student data privacy was at stake, however, Ohio law already prevents the dissemination of personally identifiable information and if necessary, those laws can be strengthened without destroying years of work. We could understand this legislation if all the stuff you've heard about textbooks and ridiculous teaching methods and impossible to decipher homework and the inability to read the great works of literature was true, but it's not true<sup>9</sup>, at least not in Worthington and since it's not true in Worthington, it doesn't have to be true anywhere. So much of what we've heard from Common Core opponents – things like federal government intrusion, indoctrination, Bill Gates coercing

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.worthington.k12.oh.us/cms/lib02/OH01001900/Centricity/Domain/55/Math%20I.docx>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dublinschools.net/SecMath.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Worthington City Schools 2014 Culture Climate Survey.

<sup>6</sup> [ftp://ftp.ode.state.oh.us/RTTT/045138\\_yr3\\_SOW\\_Worthington%20City.pdf](ftp://ftp.ode.state.oh.us/RTTT/045138_yr3_SOW_Worthington%20City.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2014/jul/25/joe-leibham/federal-government-required-states-adopt-common-co/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2013/oct/24/sondy-pope/how-much-federal-government-involved-common-core-s/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2013/oct/21/sandra-stotsky/common-core-expects-english-teachers-spend-half-th/>

districts to buy more Microsoft products, giant databases with student biometric information<sup>10</sup> and on and on<sup>11</sup> seems like more appropriate fodder for the new season of Dr. Who than a serious discussion of education policy.

Truth be told, I'm not so much pro-Common-Core as I am pro-stability, but even if we in Ohio collectively decide that Common Core has got to go, the plan as outlined in the legislation cannot be implemented in my district with fidelity and it would cause massive disruption to teaching and learning for years to come. We would need to create curriculum from old Massachusetts standards, try and find appropriate materials that align, redo all the professional development at great cost on an accelerated timeline only to redo the entire process two years after that.

The inevitable result of this mandate (and it is a mandate) is an academic purgatory for current students while the legislature continues its educational churn, year in and year out based on the political winds. A better solution would be to adjust the Common Core standards based on real-life experience. Let the current standards cycle play out and see if the standards really result in curriculum that is "college and career ready". Then we can make adjustments as necessary in a controlled, non-panicky and non-political fashion in the next curriculum cycle. No entity can survive 180 degree swings in direction every few years, and public education is no different. I urge you to reject this legislation and I thank you for taking the time to listen to my comments.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.politifact.com/georgia/statements/2013/jun/17/angela-bean/common-core-opponent-goes-too-far-claim-about-data/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2013/oct/21/florida-stop-common-core-coalition/common-core-instills-religious-political-views/>