



Education Advocate

December 2010
Vol. 10, No. 3

A Publication of the Commonwealth Education Organization

This issue...

Common Core Standards Update

Key Education Issues In 2010

CEO Happenings

Parents and Teachers - An Effective Partnership

Legislation Update

Happy Holidays To our Readers

Commonwealth Education Organization

3830 Saxonburg Blvd
Cheswick, PA 15024
Phone 412-967-9691
Fax 412-967-9694
E-mail
ceopa@ceopa.org
Website
www.ceopa.org

CEO is a 501(c)(3) non-profit so your contribution is tax-deductible as allowed by law. The official registration and financial information of Commonwealth Education Organization may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Common Core Standards Update

Since the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officer's (CCSSO) announced in November 2009 the development of the K-12 English-Language Arts and Math Common Core Standards Initiative, the debate continues as to whether these standards will raise or lower the bar for all students. Can a 'one size fits all' set of standards work for a diverse population? The objective is to have all state standards consistent while meeting the needs of students moving on to college and in to the work force. The standards movement also is attempting to increase objectives, so U.S. students are more competitive with other countries' students who are surpassing U.S. students in areas such as math and science. Will national standards drive the curriculum, corresponding textbooks, and assessments? The federal Department of Education has given millions in grant money for the analysis of testing.

Will these national standards give more control to the federal government while slowly causing the demise of state and local control of the schools? How will this impact parental and teacher involvement in the local schools? The NGA Executive Director Raymond C. Scheppach expressed some concern about who will oversee the common core standards process. "There are some key differences in what a final governance structure will look like. One of the key differences for us is the involvement of the federal government in the governing structure. The Common Core Standards is to be a state run effort and needs to remain so." However, the federal government continues to dangle Race to the Top money under the noses of the states. Many wonder how long the Common Core Standards will stay under the control of the states?

In an effort to give an update of the standards, the following is a time line of the implementation process in Pennsylvania.

- After an alignment study comparing the state

standards to the national standards, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education adopted the draft of the Common Core State Standards in English language and mathematics on July 1, 2010.

- Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, the transition will begin to these standards with full implementation by July, 2013.
- During 2010-2011, school districts will continue to work under the current PA Academic Standards while using the existing PSSA tests.
- School districts will attend staff development sessions held by the Intermediate Units and the PA Department of Education on the change in the standards.
- In December of 2010, an institute will be held that will introduce the Common Core Standards and their relationship to the PSSA tests, and the new Keystone (graduation) Exams.
- During the 2011-2012 school



year, the state will provide materials to the districts to help create modifications in the districts English and math programs using the Common Core Standards.

- In 2012-2013, school districts will continue to rewrite curriculum based on the changes in the state standards with July 1, 2013 being the full implementation date.

(The timeline is from the recent PA State Board of Education fact sheet).

It has come to the attention of Commonwealth Education Organization that some districts have already purchased new curriculums this school year based on the national standards. It is not clear as to why any district would be jumping into these changes right now based on the time line from our State Board of Education.

For additional information on this topic, please visit the PA State Board of Education website @ <http://www.education.state.pa.us>

Key Education Issues in 2010

PSERS (Teacher Retirement Issue) - The problems within the teachers retirement system have yet to be resolved. One proposed solution is the profits from the privatization of state liquor stores could help shore up the money issues within the retirement systems. Several of the other solutions presented are to increase the retirement age, increase the vesting from five to ten years, and to establish a unified defined retirement system for new members. However, it was recently made public that with the help of unions - **House Bill 2497** was passed, which will defer pension payments by the districts and the state while increasing future liability by tens of billions of dollars. This is not a true reform effort, and places the burden of debt on our children's and grandchildren's shoulders. The unions and some legislators wanted this passed with the lame duck administration. According to the Harrisburg based Commonwealth Foundation, "Taxpayers paid \$843 million in contributions to PSERS and SERS (state employees retirement system) in 2009-2010. In 2012-2013 contributions are scheduled to increase to **\$5.8 billion**. This represents an effective **\$1360** increase in state and local taxes per homeowner/household."

Race to the Top - Pennsylvania was eliminated from the competition for the federal Race to the Top funds given through the U.S. Department of Education. This in no way eliminated the state's commitment to move forward with the state standards, which have incorporated the federal common core standards. These standards will be phased in during the 2010-2011 school year with full implementation by June 30, 2013. (PA Dept. of Education website).

School Choice - Senator Piccola, head of the Senate Education Committee in Harrisburg, held a hearing this fall related to the topic of school choice. It has been awhile since this topic has been discussed at length at the state level. Two pieces of legislation are being introduced. One will provide for more funding for school choice for lower income families. The second piece of legislation on school choice will be broader in nature. After the holiday recess in Harrisburg more details will be unveiled related to these pieces of legislation. CEO will give updates as the provisions of this legislation becomes public, and as school choice moves through the legislative process.

Value Added - This data driven system may well be something that all sides of education issues can agree upon. In a New York Times article dated August 31, 2010, "The use of value added modeling is exploding nationwide. Hundreds of school systems, including those in Chicago, New York, and Washington, are already using it to measure the performance of schools or teachers." Value added is not a new data driven system, and has been used in Tennessee for years. The intent of the system is to show whether stu-

dents are making a year's worth of progress each school year. The current PSSA test used in Pennsylvania rates student and school performance based on their ability to pass the lowest acceptable standards on this test. Many times children at the top and middle appear to be doing well based on the results of taking an assessment like the PSSA, which says less about making a whole year's progress as compared to doing well on this specific test. Used properly value added can help teachers, school administrations, and the public understand better which strategies are working within the individual districts and classrooms. For additional information on value added, please check out <http://www.education-consumers.org>.

Bullying - This has become a hot topic within the media and the schools over this past year. The U.S. Department of Education sent a letter this fall to schools, colleges and universities, which explains their legal obligations to protect students from racial and national origin harassment, sexual and gender harassment, and disability harassment. The letter actually outlined examples along with how the schools should respond in each case. In a news release dated October 26, 2010, the Department of Education and the White House announced a conference will be held in 2011 on the tools necessary to prevent bullying and harassment. This conference is to build upon other efforts by the U.S. Dept. of Education and other federal agencies to spark a dialogue on the ways in which communities can come together to address these issues. The Dept. of Education also intends to hold workshops around the country to help educators understand their obligations and the resources available to take prompt steps that will end harassment and bullying in schools and on college campuses.

There has been some discussion about the possibility of some federal funds being held back from any school that does not address these issues. Some schools spend time each week on the topic of bullying, which lends itself to a number of questions. How effective are programs on bullying, and what data is available to show the programs are working? What are the real causes of bullying? Do any of these programs address staff on student bullying within the schools? Is there a clear distinction between kids being kids, teasing, and serious bullying? Given the math and science scores of our students are far below other countries, how much time do these countries spend on social issues? If the Dept. of Education believes the communities are part of the solution related to bullying, then how are schools notifying parents of these programs, and what efforts are schools making to bring in parents as partners on bullying and harassment issues or programs?

(Information from the U.S. Department of Education website at <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases>).

CEO Happenings

2010 Year in Review for CEO

- CEO has moved our offices to 3830 Saxonburg Boulevard, Cheswick, PA 15024.
- CEO published multiple newsletters this year keeping our readers informed on the latest educational topics. In addition, we've made many updates to our website; please visit www.ceopa.org for more information.
- CEO has expanded our essay contest this year to include more local schools along with inviting homeschoolers to participate for the first time. This year, students are to read the 10th amendment and select an issue today and explain within the context of the 10th amendment if there has been an overreach by the federal government on states' rights.
- CEO hosted a "Forum on the Constitution" in May 2010. Our speaker was Louis Petolicchio from the Constitutional Organization of Liberty (COOL).
- CEO continues to expand our professional development programs for private, parochial and public schools. The newest training includes a program on "writing skills".
- CEO has expanded our speaking engagements and consulting services this year, including more parent groups, local schools and community sponsored groups.

Parents and Teachers: An Effective Partnership

The U.S. Department of Education is seeking input from the public (parents) and teachers on what people think about the role of parents and teachers, as to where these roles overlap and where they are unique. Alberto Retana, director of community outreach at the Dept. of Education was interested in remarks this past year at parent and community outreach events. They were also seeking comments to some of their questions through their blog at <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010>.

Their questions are the following:

- * What do you think teachers want from parents?
- * What do you think parents want from teachers?
- * Where might their interests overlap?
- * What is your perception of an effective partnership between parents and teachers?

It may still be possible to add your thoughts to these questions by sending comments to the Department of Education, or through their blog. (Director of Community Outreach, Department of Education, 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20202)

Upcoming in 2011 for CEO

- Increased professional development programs for teachers with possible writing seminar in March.
- Community Forum in April for students, parents, teachers, and the public on the Bill of Rights. Check our website as details unfold.
- Expanded essay contest with awards being presented in May to the top three 8th grade winners for the 2010 2011 contest. Winners will be posted on our website.
- Continued publication of the *Education Advocate* newsletter along with the continual updating of the CEO website with current and evolving education topics.
- Potential programs on Value Added, and the Science of Gender in learning.



For additional information on a variety of topics, please visit our newly expanded website at www.ceopa.org.

Update on School District Consolidation

PA Senate Bill 1492 ~ dated November 8, 2010.

Each school district identified by the PA Dept of Education, within 90 days after being identified will enter into discussions with one or more contiguous (surrounding) school districts regarding the combining of the school districts to form a single reorganized school district.

No later than three months after the effective date of this legislation, the Department of Education shall issue guidelines to assist school districts in the reorganization process.

No later than six months after passing this legislation, the Dept of Education will list on their websites all school districts with less than 2,500 students for the complete school year.

For more specifics on this legislation, please go to <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/PN/Public/>

Commonwealth Education Organization
3830 Saxonburg Boulevard
Cheswick, PA 15024

**NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PGH PA
PERMIT NO 5239**

*The Executive Board and Staff of
Commonwealth Education Organization
would like to wish you
"Happy Holidays and a Healthy, Happy
and Prosperous New Year".*

*We would also like to thank you for your
continued support of our work. During this next
year, CEO will strive to work diligently to provide
programs and monitor what is happening with
education in the state and across this country.*

*To keep informed on the recent changes in
education, please access our website at
www.ceopa.org.*