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STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS RECOMMENDATION
November 18, 2010

The concept of a common set of high-quality and well-developed standards in English and Mathematics was brought about by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)—not by the federal government. The NGA and CCSSO knew that if 50 states had 50 different sets of standards that some would be strong and some would be weak, and some students and teachers would be at a disadvantage, not only within a state but nationally and internationally. Working together, the idea of developing strong standards in English and Mathematics was born and work begun. On May 14, 2009, 18 months ago, the Alabama State Board of Education adopted a resolution to participate in the development stage. The Board approved the resolution so as to give Alabama a voice in the development. The standards were written, and one of the writers, Dr. Susan Pimentel, came to Alabama and met with the State Board of Education on September 23, 2010. I asked Dr. Pimentel a very direct question at the meeting with the State Board—“Did anyone from the White House, the U. S. Department of Education, or anyone connected with the federal government ever direct or suggest to you or any of the writing committee what to write, what to include, and what to omit?” She firmly answered “No.” She did say that the public reacted, offered suggestions for improvement, as did educators, and that many of the suggestions were good and incorporated into the final two documents. Now we are at the point in time where each state is making a decision to voluntarily adopt the standards or not to do so. Of the 50 states, plus Washington, D.C., to date, 40 have adopted. Of the Deep South States of Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina, all have adopted the Common Core State Standards. Alabama is the only state in the Deep South that has not adopted them and only one of two states east of the Mississippi River that has not adopted them.

To get to the point we are today, the original members of the Math and English Courses of Study Committees were reassembled, along with others recommended by State Board members to review the Common Core State Standards and the existing Alabama courses of study. The folks on the two committees worked for days comparing the documents, grade by grade and line by line, and, at the end of the work, recommended that the Alabama State Board of Education adopt the Common Core because, quite simply, they are better than what we currently have. An email I received this morning from a Dadeville High School math teacher in Tallapoosa County had the following comment—“Reading the Common Core was like a breath of fresh air.”

We have conducted four regional meetings and invited the public to have discussions on the Common Core State Standards. The meetings were held in Mobile, Montgomery, Birmingham, and Decatur.

Oddly, the standards themselves no longer seem to be contested. Many suggesting that the State Board not adopt them acknowledge that they are of high quality. The worry of some now is governance and federal control. On October 28, 2010, I shared with the State Board a news release from the NGA and CCSSO on governance. It clearly stated that "CCSSI is a state-led effort and needs to remain so." They have no intention of giving control to the federal government.

We have heard today comments from those who support the adoption of the Common Core and those who oppose adoption. I fully support everyone having his/her voice heard, and I am glad we had the public input session today. I must say I was most struck by the supporters, including the school boards of Alabama (elected local people), the teachers (those who will execute any standards, be they Common Core or not), the principals of Alabama's schools, the Deans of Education (those who train future teachers), the private sector (those who employ high school and two-year and four-year college graduates), and last, but by no means least, those patriots who serve in our armed services. If our men and women in military service feel this is best for their families why would anyone be against it? It's hard enough to be overseas fighting in a war much less having to worry about your family and your children's education.

Governor Riley, Mr. McKinney, and Members of the State Board of Education, for these and other reasons too numerous to mention, I recommend adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics as identified in the resolution before you.