

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

The Common Core: How's It Going?

The **Southern Regional Education Board** (SREB) released in March the first of a series of reports that provided a comprehensive look at the implementation of the Common Core Standards throughout 15 states, the SECA states and the additional states of Delaware, Maryland, Colorado, Pennsylvania and New York. This first look comes on the heels of significant controversy in many states concerning the implementation of the standards and the assessments that are being field tested in many of those states.

The SREB project includes four key components:

- 1) Develop key indicators of successful implementation of the standards.
- 2) Conduct in-depth research into the level of implementation in each state.
- 3) Publish reports on practice, status and progress of the implementation.

- 4) Convene policy-makers, educators and others to discuss each set of reports.

The initial reports provided these insights.

- ⇒ As of the 2013-2014 school year, the standards are being taught in classrooms in all 15 participating states.
- ⇒ Of the 15 participating states, leaders in implementing the standards are *Kentucky* and New York. Other strong states include Delaware, *Alabama*, Colorado, *Georgia*, *North Carolina*, *Louisiana*, and Maryland.
- ⇒ All 15 states provide educators with online, on-demand access to at least some instructional resources and materials that are aligned to the Common Core. The states with the most comprehensive array of resources are Colorado, *Georgia*, Maryland and New York. Other strong states are *Alabama*, *Florida*,

Kentucky, *North Carolina*, Pennsylvania, *Louisiana*, and *Tennessee*.

- ⇒ States that are leading overall in **alignment of both their teacher and leader evaluation systems to the standards** are *Louisiana*, Colorado, and *Tennessee*.
- ⇒ States showing strong alignment of their **teacher evaluation systems** to the standards are Colorado, New York, *Louisiana*, *North Carolina*, *South Carolina* and *Tennessee*.
- ⇒ States showing strong alignment of their **leader evaluation systems** to the standards are *Louisiana*, Colorado, and *Tennessee*.

Source: *State Implementation of Common Core Standards*, SREB, <http://www.sreb.org/>
1600

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Inside this issue:

<i>Common Core: A Bumpy Road in Some SECA States</i>	2
<i>New Education Leadership</i>	3
<i>Teaching Cursive Writing</i>	3
<i>From the SECA States</i>	4

Did You Know?

The Governor of Kentucky, Steve Beshear, is serving as Chairman of the Southern Regional Education Board for 2013-2014. The Southern Regional Education Board was created in 1948 by Southern governors and legislators who recognized the link between education and economic vitality and works with every education level, pre-K through Ph.D.



Common Core: A Bumpy Road in Some SECA States

Although implementation in the SECA states is well underway, it's not without drama. In several SECA states, politics has entered the fray and discussions about whether to retain the standards as benchmarks for the states and how assessments will be conducted are continuing in state legislatures and within the agencies and groups that control education.



Governor Jindal John White

In **Louisiana**, a debate over the Common Core Standards and the test developed by PARCC (the consortium developing tests aligned to the standards) has been underway since 2013. The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted the standards in mathematics and language arts in 2010 and joined 44 other states in officially adopting the Common Core.

Since that adoption, Louisiana has moved forward vigorously to implement the standards with the support of the State Superintendent of Education (formerly Paul Pastorek and, since 2012, John White), and until recently the Governor.

Governor Jindal has now expressed his concern that the federal government has been too involved in the development of the assessments that are designed to provide comparability between states and has announced his intention to attempt to

withdraw from the assessment consortium, PARCC.

State Superintendent White has opposed that move and told the Senate Finance Committee on April 21, 2014 that “moving away from testing plans tied to Common Core would be at significant financial cost.” In regard to school systems, he stated that “They’ve made sizable investments.

They’d have to go back and redo those investments.” Local school systems would be put in the position of buying new curricula and doing new teacher training on different standards. *Source: Eliminating Common Core test would cost the state money, school superintendent says, 4/21/14, <http://blog.nola.com/politics>*

The legislative debate continues and the Senate Education Committee voted 6-1 on May 8th to kill a bill that would have repealed the Common Core Standards, a bill similar to one rejected by the House Education Committee in April.

The opponents of the standards, led by Representative Brett Geymann (R-Lake Charles), did score a victory in the House of Representatives on May 8th by passage of an amendment to a budget bill that would require the state Department of Education to widen its search for a standardized test beyond the Common Core assessment it plans to use next year. The bill is now on its way to the Senate for review and the provision faces an uphill battle in the Senate. *Source: Common Core opponents score a victory in the Louisiana House, 5/9/14, <http://blog.nola.com/politics/>*

In **Tennessee**, companion bills are

on their way to the desk of Governor Bill Haslam, a supporter of Common Core. The bills, **HB1549/ SB1835**, state that “no educational standards may be imposed on the state by the federal government and that any adoption of educational standards for the public schools of the state must be done freely by the state board of education which, may change, adjust or recede from a standard at any time.” The legislation states that:



Governor Haslam

Assessment of Progress will be used for 2014-15.

- The state will use competitive bidding to select a new assessment for school year 2015-16; the legislature’s fiscal review committee will review all contracts.
- Field tests for the new assessment will be conducted before 2015-16.

Governor Haslam can sign the bill, veto the bill or let it become law without his signature.

In **South Carolina**, a similar debate is raging between School Chief Mick Zais, who favors flexibility in testing and wants to withdraw from the Smarter Balanced Consortium, and the Chairman of the State Board of Education, Barry Bolen. *Source: State Political Rifts Sap Support for Common-Core Tests, Education Week, 5/7/14*



Bolen
Zais

Education Chiefs: New Leadership in Your State?

With the end of the 2013-2014 school year approaching, some states in the SECA region will see or have experienced a change in the education leadership at the top level. According to the Council of Chief State School Officers, the average tenure of a state education chief was two years and 7 months....a reflection of the political and stressful nature of the job.



In May, **Tom Kimbrell**, the Director of the **Arkansas** Department of Education announced his resignation. He will be leaving at the end of June to assume the

position of Superintendent in a school district.



Mick Zais of South Carolina (who was featured in the article on page 2 of this newsletter) is not seeking reelection, so the state will elect a

new School Chief.

Dr. Steven Staples of Virginia was appointed by newly elected Governor Terry McAuliffe in March to replace retiring Superintendent Patricia Wright.



John Barge of Georgia is a candidate for Governor of the state and is not seeking another term as state superintendent.



The state of **West Virginia** is currently advertising for a new Superintendent.

Each state has a different method of selecting the education chief. These positions can be filled by gubernatorial appointment, selected by the state board of education or elected by the citizens of the state.

Teaching Cursive Writing: The Common-Core Standards Are “Silent”

In several of the SECA states, the issue of teaching cursive writing has surfaced in the state legislatures and boards of education. With enhanced use of computers and tablets, cursive writing instruction has taken a backseat and the Common-Core State Standards are silent about whether cursive writing should be included in the curriculum.

In **Tennessee**, **HB1697** was enacted by both houses and sent to Governor Haslam on April 15, 2014. The bill “requires the state board of education to include **cursive writing** in the course of instruction in all public schools through the curriculum stand-

ards, at the appropriate grade level, as determined by the board.” *Source: Bill information, <http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov>*

In **South Carolina**, **H3905** passed the House and was referred to the Senate Committee on Education on 4/15/14. This bill “amends the code of laws of South Carolina, 1976, so as to enact the ‘Back to Basics in Education Act of 2013’as to add **cursive writing and memorization of multiplication tables** to the required subjects of instruction in public schools, to require students demonstrate competence in each subject before completion of the fifth grade, to pro-

vide the State Department of Education to assist the school districts in identifying the most appropriate means for integrating this requirement into their existing curriculums, and to make the provisions of this act applicable beginning with the 2013-2014 school year.” *Source: www.scstatehouse.gov*

In **Florida**, the State Board of Education amended Rule 6A-1.09401 in February to add **cursive writing** as part of the current 4th and 5th grade standards. “Printing standards building to cursive writing added as part of current 2nd and 3rd grade standards.” *Source: www.fldoe.org*

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"A Voice for Southern Children"

How to Use Public Policy Notes

If you're interested in advocacy, one of the most effective tools that you can have is access to information. This newsletter is provided as a service to locate and share information that we think will be helpful to you in your work at the state level and to keep you updated on what's happening in public policy.

You'll find information that:

- **Compares your state to other SECA states**—how you're doing, what issues you have in common, what the hot topics are in your states.
- **Brings the national scene to your fingertips** and gives you a perspective on how national events might impact you... You'll also receive information about where to find additional information.

We hope you'll find it helpful. Children need you to be their "voice" in your community and state.

This monthly newsletter is produced by Glenda Bean, SECA Executive Director.

SECA strives to provide non-partisan and non-biased information

that is of interest to early childhood educators. Sign up at

http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/policy_newsletter_sign.php

to receive notice of its availability each month.

From the SECA States

Georgia



On April 23, 2014, **Governor Nathan Deal** signed into law Act 604, the ***Safe Carry Protection Act***.

Among other things, this law will allow a person with written authorization from a public or private school or higher education institution to carry a gun on school property. According to Deal, it will allow "people who follow the rules [to] protect themselves and their families from people who don't follow the rules....The Second Amendment should never be

an afterthought. It should reside at the forefronts of our minds." *Source: Georgia Law Oks Guns in Schools, Churches, Scott Neuman, 4/23/14, www.npr.org/blogs/the-two-way*

Florida

On May 12, 2014, **Governor Rick Scott** signed **Senate Bill 1642** into law. This bill overhauls the **state's school grading system that awards an A-F grade** and delays by one year any potential sanctions that might arise from 2015 grades. The state is transitioning to a new grading system as well as a new standardized testing curriculum. The intent is to utilize



2015 as a baseline to evaluate school performance. *Source: Scott signs one year delay of Florida school grades, Sarasota News, 5/12/14, www.mysuncoast.com*

Arkansas

President Obama visited tornado ravaged Vilonia and Mayflower on May 7th. For Vilonia, this was the second major tornado within 3 years and, during this storm, a new \$12 million intermediate school that was scheduled to open this fall was destroyed. Safe rooms that were created after 2011 in many of the schools saved many lives this time.

