



JerseyCAN

GREAT SCHOOLS CHANGE EVERYTHING

JerseyCAN statement of support for the Core Curriculum Content Standards and the Common Core State Standards

June 4, 2014

New Jersey State Board of Education
New Jersey Department of Education
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear members of the State Board of Education,

On behalf of JerseyCAN: the New Jersey Campaign for Achievement Now, we strongly support the readoption of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, which include the Common Core State Standards for mathematics and English-language arts. We applaud the State Board of Education's continued commitment to the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English-language arts since 2010, as part of efforts to raise the bar for all New Jersey's students. The Common Core State Standards for mathematics and English-language arts, coupled with the other Core Curriculum Content Standards will ensure that every student in New Jersey can graduate high school ready for college and career.

About JerseyCAN

Let me begin by quickly giving you some background on JerseyCAN. JerseyCAN is part of 50CAN: the 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now. We are a nonprofit organization that launched in March of 2013, and we advocate for a high-quality education for all New Jersey kids, regardless of their address. JerseyCAN is working to create learning environments that best meet every child's needs by focusing our work on starting earlier, expanding choices, aiming higher, cultivating talent and reaching everyone. Former Governor Tom Kean is the co-chair of the JerseyCAN board and has played an instrumental role in guiding our work.

Why high standards are important

JerseyCAN supports higher standards, and we believe the Common Core State Standards will better prepare New Jersey's students for college and career. For too long, students were allowed to move from grade to grade without developing the analytical skills they needed to succeed in college-level coursework or enter the work force. In 2008, 70 percent of first-time, full-time college students had to enroll in remedial reading, writing, math computation or basic algebra courses at New Jersey's community colleges—all

without earning college credit.¹ In a 2005 survey, employers estimated that 39 percent of recent high school graduates were unprepared for entry-level jobs, and 45 percent were not prepared to advance beyond those positions.²

Now more than ever, higher, consistent standards are needed to help ensure that students have the knowledge needed to succeed in college and careers. The Common Core State Standards incorporate the expectations of both colleges and employers to ensure students are prepared to meet the demands of a 21st century workforce. Furthermore, the Common Core State Standards are internationally benchmarked so that students can compete with their peers in the United States and in countries across the world.

Transition Challenges

As with any large-scale transition, change can be difficult. Despite the NJDOE's work to ensure that each school and district is prepared to fully implement the Common Core State Standards, JerseyCAN acknowledges that parents, teachers and policymakers have some concerns about the implementation of the standards. However, we strongly believe that many of these concerns are fueled by misinformation.

In a recent public hearing for A3081—a bill to develop an Education Reform Review Task Force, delay the use of Student Growth Percentiles based on PARCC for teacher evaluation system—parents, teachers and several school leaders expressed apprehension about the feasibility of transitioning to the standards.³ However, it is important to recognize that the majority of school districts have taken steps to successfully transition to the Common Core State Standards. Since 2010, the NJDOE and school leaders have worked towards aligning curricula, provided professional development for teachers and shared information with parents and the community. To help inform curricula development in districts across the state, the NJDOE developed a model curriculum for both English-language arts and mathematics. The NJDOE has also held webinars and more than 500 trainings, which have reached tens of thousands of educators in New Jersey.⁴ Earlier this year, the NJDOE also developed the New Jersey Educator Resource Exchange, an online database of classroom materials where educators can find and share resources.

¹ "The Report of the Governor's Task Force on Higher Education," The New Jersey Higher Education Task Force, accessed May 13, 2014,
<http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/documents/GovernorsHETaskForceReport.pdf>.

² "The Final Report of the New Jersey Department of Education College and Career Readiness Task Force," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed May 13, 2014,
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/readiness.pdf>.

³ "A3081" New Jersey Legislature, accessed May 30, 2014,
http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2014/Bills/A3500/3081_S1.PDF.

⁴ Senate Budget Committee Testimony from the Department of Education, Delivered by Acting Commissioner Dave Hespe," New Jersey Legislature, accessed May 13, 2014,
http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/budget_2015/DOE_Hespe_testimony.pdf.

As a result of the efforts of school leaders and teachers, the NJDOE found that 88 percent of districts have a curriculum that is fully aligned to the new standards.⁵ Delaying the standards at this point would penalize districts, schools and teachers for their hard work and dedication to meeting the timelines set forth in 2010.

Opponents of the standards often claim the Common Core State Standards are a one-size-fits-all approach to education and that the Common Core State Standards encroach on local control. However, these are unfounded assertions. The Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum, and they do not dictate lesson plans; they are merely learning goals for each grade level that are based on what skills and knowledge students need to acquire to be successful in college or careers. All decisions about how to teach to meet the goals of the standards will continue to be made by educators at the school and district level.

Recently, JerseyCAN interviewed teachers to learn more about their experiences with the new standards. Teachers shared that the Common Core State Standards have encouraged them to redesign their lessons to better integrate technology, media and non-fiction. As a result they have found improved student learning and higher levels of engagement amongst their students.

Questions have also been raised about the quality of the standards as compared to New Jersey's previous standards. According to a report issued by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in 2010, which compared New Jersey's previous Core Curriculum Content Standards for English-language arts and mathematics, the Common Core State Standards are more rigorous and more clearly written than the previous standards.⁶ Teachers that JerseyCAN recently interviewed also shared this sentiment, expressing that the Common Core State Standards allow them to dive deeper into content and push for true mastery of concepts rather than rote memorization.

JerseyCAN strongly believes that with the proper focus and attention, this misinformation can be addressed and significant challenges will be resolved in a timely manner so schools and districts can fully implement the standards. New Jersey has been and should continue to be a leader in education. Where other states have stumbled, we should learn from their mistakes and forge ahead.

Next Steps

Addressing misinformation and resolving barriers to success are critical first steps, but to ensure the new standards have their intended impact, school leaders and teachers will

⁵ "Senate Budget Committee Testimony from the Department of Education, Delivered by Acting Commissioner Dave Hespe," New Jersey Legislature, accessed May 13, 2014, http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/budget_2015/DOE_Hespe_testimony.pdf.

⁶ "The State of the Standards," Thomas B. Fordham Institute, accessed May 30, 2014, http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/NewJersey.pdf.

need ongoing high-quality professional development to learn more about how to unpack the standards. Also, more information must be shared with parents so that they understand how the new standards will impact their children in the classroom and how they can help their children succeed. JerseyCAN believes that these concerns can and should be addressed by the State Department of Education within the upcoming weeks and months.

For the reasons outlined above, JerseyCAN strongly believes it is in the best interest of New Jersey students to readopt Core Curriculum Content Standards, which include the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English-language arts.

I appreciate your work on this critical issue in education. Please contact me at (973) 420-2400 or at Janellen.Duffy@jerseycan.org if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Janellen Duffy
Executive Director JerseyCAN