



Citizens Should Use New Website to Comment on State Academic Standards

CABL Commentary
July 9, 2015

Clearly, there's been a lot of attention placed on Louisiana's academic standards over the last few years. But, unfortunately a lot of that attention has been focused on the wrong thing – the heated rhetoric of a noisy few. As a result, what we really need to be thinking about – higher expectations for our students – has largely been obscured by an ongoing political sideshow.

Now, there's an opportunity to change that. As part of its current process of reviewing our academic standards, BESE has launched a new web portal that will allow anyone who wants to weigh in on the standards an opportunity to do so. Whether it's educators, business people or just interested citizens, anyone can participate. From CABL's perspective, we find great value in this for a variety of reasons.

One is that this very public review process is driven by substance not grandstanding. On the website any one can view any English and math standard at any grade level. If they like the standard they can indicate it and have the opportunity to say why they think it's good. If they don't like it, they can indicate that, too, but they have to explain what it is they object to or how they would change the standard.

That's exactly the way it should work. Reviewing academic standards for all of our students is a serious matter and should be treated accordingly. If someone likes a standard and wants to keep it as it is, that needs to be said. But if someone objects to a standard, it makes sense that they point out the problem and suggest a solution or a change.

The naysayers are mad about that, of course, because it requires them to explain what they think is wrong with the standard. But if this is intended to be a substantive and constructive process – as it should be – then the criticisms of the standards should also be substantive and constructive.

Another positive feature of this public review process is that all of the comments are compiled by an independent group, the Southern Regional Education Board. SREB has been around since 1948 and has great credibility and a long history of working to improve public education in the southeastern U.S.

But more than anything else, this new portal is a way that citizens can spend a little time taking a look at the actual standards and get a better understanding of just what it is we're talking about. Many probably expect to open it up and find all kinds of inappropriate things. But, alas, there really is no bogey man.

What you see instead are things like this under first grade language standards: 1) print all upper- and lowercase letters, 2) use common, proper and possessive nouns, and 3) capitalize dates and names of people. Yes, those are the standards we're teaching our first graders and it makes you wonder if we don't teach these, what would we teach instead?

After all the recent noise about Common Core, it would be great if parents and interested citizens take a few minutes at the website and really look at a few standards. Whether one chooses to comment or not, it's worth the time to understand just what these "controversial" standards really are.

It might actually surprise you.

The portal can be accessed at www.louisiana.statestandards.com.