

State board chair defends common core standards and integrated math

2:00 am June 26, 2010, by Maureen Downey

Here is the other side of the common core debate by [Wanda Barrs](#), chair of the Georgia Board of Education, a teacher and environmental educator. (You ought to read this in tandem with the blog entry prior.)

By Wanda Barrs

The Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association, co-chaired by Gov. Sonny Perdue, recently issued a common set of English language arts and mathematics standards that states can adopt.

Through these Common Core State Standards, students, teachers, parents, [colleges](#) and employers throughout Georgia, and indeed much of the United States, will have a first-class guide to what our children must know and be able to do to succeed [in college](#), the 21st-century workplace and as contributing citizens in our democracy.

Will implementing the Common Core State Standards in Georgia reverse or shut down the implementation of our Georgia Performance Standards? Is this a federal mandate to "take over" education? The answer to these questions is a resounding "no."

The Common Core State Standards is a state-led initiative — not a federal mandate. Georgia teachers and other [experts](#) in standards setting have been at the table since the process began.

When the expert development groups — that the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association pulled together — began to write the standards in mathematics and English language arts, they built off of the rigorous [college](#)- and career-ready standards that some states had already developed. Georgia was one of these select states.

When reading the new core standards, one can see elements of the Georgia Performance Standards throughout. Therefore, while adopting the Common Core State Standards in Georgia will be a [step](#) forward – and give our teachers more refined [tools](#) to better prepare our young people for work and college – it will not be a drastic change for either our teachers or our students.

Some of the standards are introduced at different grade levels, but teachers have, essentially, been implementing the Common Core State Standards while they've been teaching the Georgia Performance Standards.

Without question, there has been much conversation about the integrated approach of our Georgia Performance Standards for mathematics. While all of us want our students to succeed, unfortunately, for too long, Georgia has lagged behind the nation and other countries in mathematics achievement.

An integrated approach to math is one way that states can help students master the skills and knowledge outlined within the Common Core State Standards. We look forward to continuing a conversation with parents, teachers and the community on how to help our students excel.

Once our mathematics curriculum is fully implemented, I have every confidence that our students will be the winners. Our state's mathematics standards, supported by the Common Core State Standards, will help Georgia's students rise above the rest. In the simplest terms, standards set the goal for what students should know and be able to do by the time they [complete](#) a grade level and then ultimately graduate high school. Curriculum, on the other hand, guides how a teacher teaches the standards.

Since 2004, we have been overhauling our state's curriculum.

The new curriculum is the product of a lot of hard work by classroom teachers, parents, businesses and curriculum experts. Our award-winning curriculum is nearing full implementation with great results. So, if our curriculum is already good, why join this initiative?

While our standards give our teachers an excellent tool to prepare our young people, we are always looking for opportunities to improve. The Common Core State Standards integrate much of the Georgia Performance Standards, but benefit from the best and latest research allowing them to advance the groundwork we have laid.

The Common Core State Standards will allow for a meaningful comparison of our students' achievement with students in other states. Currently, states operate with different standards, making it impossible to accurately compare data nationally or internationally.

Our students will be competing for jobs with students from all over the world. We must be able to compare ourselves to the rest of the U.S. and other countries to ensure that we are providing students with the tools they need to be globally competitive. And, the initiative will allow for better purchasing power.

Since 48 participating states will have a consistent educational framework, textbook and instructional resource companies will be able to develop and target resources to one set of standards. This will help to reduce prices and ensure that funds are spent wisely. In these difficult economic times and beyond, it is essential that we maximize resources and invest wisely.

I am proud of the work done by teachers, parents, administrators and others to improve education in Georgia over the last few years, and we are excited to share and leverage our efforts with other states. By collaborating on the Common Core State Standards, working together we can take the next step to move Georgia's schools from great to world-class.