

Northern Kentucky CEO Roundtable:

Kentucky Core Academic Standards Vital to Our Future

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Four years ago, Kentucky became a national leader in advancing educational excellence when it was the first state in the nation to adopt the Common Core State Standards designed to help ensure that our nation's P-12 students are competitive at an international level. Growing out of the Common Core, the Kentucky Core Academic Standards focus heavily on critical thinking and problem solving, particularly in the areas of mathematics, language arts, and science. The result has been that college and career readiness rates in Kentucky rose from 34% in 2010 to 54% in 2013. At a time when talent drives innovation and innovation drives global competitiveness, this progress should be hailed as a major step towards ensuring a competitive future for Kentucky and its people. Still, there continues to be resistance to the Kentucky Core Academic Standards sufficient to cause a bill to be filed in the current legislative session that would repeal the standards. How shortsighted this would be!

The Northern Kentucky CEO Roundtable members collectively employ over 60,000 people. We live daily with the challenge of finding workers who are prepared for the jobs we need to fill. We, along with every other employer in this region, make decisions on whether to expand based on our assessment of the workforce available to support it. Historically, our state and region have fallen short in ensuring rigorous internationally competitive academic standards. The Kentucky Core Academic Standards help ensure that we will never again fall short in our expectations of students and schools.

If the Kentucky Core Academic Standards are producing such strong results, why do pockets of resistance remain? The most common criticism is that the standards represent the federal government's attempt to impose a national curriculum when the constitution makes clear that education is a state responsibility. In fact, there was no federal government involvement in the development of the standards. The standards were developed by the states with leadership from university faculty, teachers, and professional educators. It's been argued that the standards are not research based and are not internationally benchmarked. In fact, the standards grow out of research and are strongly aligned with the performance of high performing states and nations. It's been argued that the standards represent a national curriculum that all schools must embrace. In fact, the standards are NOT a curriculum. They are performance outcomes that must be met but the curriculum used to achieve them is left up to local schools. Some suggest that the standards aren't high enough. In fact, the standards represent a minimum performance threshold. Schools can set standards that exceed the Kentucky Core Academic Standards but not below. Finally, some argue that the standards only include skills and not content knowledge. In fact, the standards have a rigorous definition of college and career ready which emphasizes content mastery as well as its application – for greater depth of knowledge.

New and more rigorous academic standards necessarily involve challenges related to implementation. Teachers must be educated to use the standards effectively. Students and parents must have time to adjust to the standards. Assessment tools must be aligned to accurately reflect the standards. And there must be opportunities built in to learn from implementation and continuously improve. Kentucky developed and employed a model to phase-in the new standards and assessments without

compromising precious time in the lives of our students. To use the challenges of implementation as a rationale for abandoning the standards themselves is shortsighted and dangerous.

College and business leaders have made clear that, if the Kentucky Core Academic Standards are met, students will be well prepared for both college and career. It's time to put partisanship and ideology aside and recognize that the standards help ensure that every Kentucky student will have a chance to compete in the new global economy and that employers will have access to a workforce that allows us to grow and expand. The Kentucky Core Academic Standards are serving their intended purpose and we strongly support their full implementation. To not do so places the commonwealth and its citizens at great risk.

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