



State of Arizona  
Department of Education  
Office of Diane M. Douglas  
Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction



December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Dear Legislator,

I wanted to take the opportunity to address concerns that the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics standards review being conducted by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and the Arizona Standards Development Committee (ASDC) has simply resulted in another “rebranding” of the Common Core standards. Having been closely involved in this process from the beginning, I can tell you that those concerns are unwarranted. As many of you may know, it was my campaign promise to eliminate the Common Core standards because they were imposed on our state by the federal government without public knowledge or consent and because I believed (and still believe) that Arizonans are fully capable of producing excellent standards on their own. A major step towards delivering on that promise was achieved when, at my request, the State Board of Education (SBE) repealed its adoption of the Common Core standards, rebranded as the Arizona College and Career Ready standards, so that we could once again initiate our standards review process. This process allowed us to put less strain on our education system by improving the standards we currently had in place and removing inappropriate standards as opposed to putting an additional burden on our schools by requiring them to completely change what they had been doing before, to the detriment of our students.

To assess what exactly needed to change, a public comment period was opened prior to any revision of the standards. During this time, approximately 2,000 comments were collected from Arizonans as a starting point for consideration by ELA and Mathematics working groups. These working groups were comprised of 230 teachers, representing 10 counties and more than 60 school districts from across Arizona. These teachers dedicated in excess of 7,000 hours over a period of more than a year to develop the draft standards and the subsequent revisions. We have conducted many open meetings in addition to the working groups and, since the release of the initial ELA and Mathematics standards drafts, ADE staff has received almost 8,000 additional comments from Arizona parents, teachers, administrators and even citizens without children in our public education system. In addition, my staff and I traveled across the state on my We Are Listening Tour, holding 17 public meetings, to provide Arizonans everywhere the opportunity to share comments and concerns about our education system, including concerns about the standards. Every single comment has been reviewed and considered for incorporation by the committee under their charge to improve the Arizona standards for Arizona’s students.

In response to Jennifer Reynolds’ recent message regarding the thoughts of the technical reviewers, I would first like to note that the reviews conducted by Dr. James Milgrim, Dr. Sandra Stotsky and Dr. Ze’ev Wurman were based on the first draft of the standards. The reviews were conducted at my behest to ensure that the analysis of our new standards was rigorous and that they were properly vetted by outside experts. These three nationally respected critics of Common Core were hired on to review the first draft with the support of Mrs. Reynolds and other active members of parent advocacy groups. All of their recommendations were carefully considered and were incorporated into the second draft where

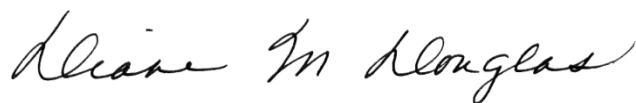
appropriate. The redline documents created by the Department clearly delineate each standard, the technical feedback relating to that standard, and the working groups' notes about decisions made. The remarks selected by Mrs. Reynolds were specifically referring to the first draft and were taken out of context—I therefore do not feel they can be used as an accurate criticism of the second draft of the standards.

I am proud of my staff and the hundreds of teachers who donated thousands of hours to this review process and I know that our new Arizona ELA and Mathematics standards are both definitively different from the Common Core standards and that they represent an absolute improvement. I invite you to come to the ASDC meeting on December 14 at 9 a.m. and see for yourself all of the changes that have been made when comparing the original Common Core standards and the second draft of our new standards, which can be found here: <https://k12standards.az.gov/second-draft-2016-arizona-standards>. We have red-lined the changes to make it very easy to see where the modifications were made and from where the comment that led to the change originated. As a result, the document clearly illustrates how we incorporated all of the comments we have received from the public and from our technical reviewers, which are all housed here for your review: <https://k12standards.az.gov/>.

I suspect that much of the frustration directed against the work of the ASDC and ADE is misdirected as many of the concerns expressed are related to the inappropriate curriculum materials that came along with the implementation of the Common Core standards. Unfortunately, many of those materials are still being used in classrooms across the state. I deeply respect Jennifer Reynolds and the opinions of other parents who are advocating for the education of their children, and I can empathize with their frustration—I feel it myself when I see unacceptable curriculum supplements still being used in the classroom—but that battle cannot be won by attacking this particular process. Once the new standards have been adopted, ADE stands ready to support all of our schools and districts as they work to implement the standards through their curricula and instructional materials and complete the process of permanently removing Common Core from Arizona schools.

We have done our best to make this a very open and transparent process to ensure that these standards have been more than adequately vetted before adoption. I would not support a “rebranding” of Common Core and would speak out against it myself if I believed that this was what the ASDC was proposing. It is a privilege to direct the work of the Department of Education and to represent the citizens who elected me to advocate for the children of Arizona.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane M Douglas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diane M. Douglas

Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction