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Testimony for a Hearing on Indiana Senate Bill No. 373

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I thank Senator Scott Schneider, Chairman Kruse, and members of the Indiana Senate Committee on Education and Career Development for the opportunity to speak in favor of Senate Bill No. 373, a bill Senator Schneider and Senator Kruse have co-sponsored that voids any action taken by the state board of education to adopt the Common Core standards as the state's standards.

My professional background: I draw on much state and national experience with K-12 standards, curricula, and assessments. I was the senior associate commissioner in the Massachusetts Department of Education from 1999-2003 where, among other duties, I was in charge of the development or revision of all the state's K-12 standards. I reviewed all states' English language arts and reading standards for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in 1997, 2000, and 2005. I co-authored Achieve's American Diploma Project high school exit test standards for English in 2004. I served as a reviewer and advisor to Indiana on its 2006 Academic Standards and its 2008 Core Standards. I served on Common Core's Validation Committee from 2009-2010. Finally, I am the author of *The Death and Resurrection of a Coherent Literature Curriculum: What Secondary English Teachers Can Do*, to be published by Rowman & Littlefield in June 2012.

I will speak to the following points:

- 1. The mediocre quality of Common Core's English language arts/reading standards, especially in grades 6-12, and what its lack of international benchmarking means.**
- 2. The very high quality of Indiana's 2006 and 2008 English language arts/reading standards.**
- 3. The non-transparent process that was used to develop Common Core's standards**

Point One: Common Core's "college readiness" standards for English language arts and reading do not aim for a level of achievement that signifies readiness for authentic college-level work. They point to no more than readiness for a high school diploma, if even that, because we do not yet know the reading level of the passages to be used on tests based on these standards, and where the cut score will be set. Common Core's "college readiness" standards are not content standards but simply empty skill sets. To judge by the reading levels of the high school examples of "complexity" in Common Core's Appendix B, the average reading level of the passages on the common tests now being developed to determine "college-readiness" may be at about the grade 7 level.

Thus, not surprisingly, despite claims to the contrary, Common Core's standards are not internationally benchmarked. As empty skill sets, they do not strengthen the high school curriculum and they cannot reduce post-secondary remedial coursework in a legitimate way. Common Core's "college readiness" ELA/R standards were deliberately designed as empty skill sets to enable a large number of high school students to be declared "college ready" and to enroll in post-secondary institutions that will have no choice but to place them in credit-bearing courses. These institutions will then likely be under pressure from the USDE to retain these students in order to increase college graduation rates even if they are reading at only middle school level.

Point Two: I draw on the Fordham Institute's 2010 review of Indiana's 2006 Academic Standards for English language arts/reading and its 2008 Core Standards for English language arts/reading. Fordham gave Indiana's ELA standards **A** and Common Core's ELA standards **B+**. Fordham's overall rating is as follows: Clarity and Specificity: 3/3; Content and Rigor: 7/7; Total State Score: 10/10. This is a score that can't be topped. And, as indicated by the comments (below) from the Fordham review, Indiana's own ELA/R standards were far superior to Common Core's. It is not clear why Indiana's board of education chose to trade in a silk purse for a sow's ear--that is, to give its secondary English teachers an inferior set of standards to aim for.

"Indiana's ELA standards are clear, specific, and rigorous, and include nearly all of the critical content expected in a demanding, college-prep curriculum." For **Clarity and Specificity**, Fordham said: "Indiana's standards are exceptionally clear and detailed. Many grade-specific standards include helpful examples that clarify purpose and intent." For **Content and Rigor**, Fordham said: "The Indiana standards are outstanding with respect to content and rigor. The expectations for grammar, spelling, mechanics, and usage are clear and rigorous."

"In addition to providing helpful lists of exemplar texts, the standards make numerous references to outstanding works of literature. What's more, these are almost always related to a particular grade-specific expectation, and often in the context of an interesting question or idea." ... "Similar examples provided throughout are not only vivid but inspiring. They set high expectations and outline rigorous works of literature to be read across grade levels."

"The Bottom Line

Indiana's standards are clearer, more thorough, and easier to read than the Common Core standards. Essential content is grouped more logically, so that standards addressing inextricably linked characteristics, such as themes in literary texts, can be found together rather than spread across strands.

Indiana also frequently uses standard-specific examples to clarify expectations. Furthermore, Indiana's standards treat both literary and non-literary texts in systematic detail throughout the document, addressing the specific genres, sub-genres, and characteristics of both text types. Both Indiana and Common Core include reading lists with exemplar texts, but Indiana's is much more comprehensive."

Point Three: After the Common Core Initiative was launched in early 2009, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers never explained to the public what the qualifications were for membership on the standards-writing committees or how it would justify the specific standards they created. Most important, they never explained why Common Core's high school exit standards were equal to college admission requirements without qualification, even though this country's wide-ranging post-secondary institutions use a variety of criteria for admission.

Eventually responding to the many charges of a lack of transparency, the names of the 24 members of the "Standards Development Work Group" were revealed in a July 1, 2009 news release. The vast majority, it appeared, work for testing companies. Not only did CCSSO and NGA give no rationale for the composition of this Work Group, it gave no rationale for the people it put on the two three-member teams in charge of writing the grade-level standards.

Another seemingly important committee, a Validation Committee, was set up with great fanfare on September 24, 2009. The 25 members of this group were described as a group of national and international experts who would ensure that Common Core's standards were internationally benchmarked and supported by a body of research evidence. Even though several of us regularly asked to examine this supposed body of research evidence, it became clear why our requests were ignored. In December 2009, the Parent Teacher Association indicated the real role of this committee--more like that of a rubber stamp. The PTA predicted that: "both sets of standards will be approved simultaneously in February 2010 by members of the Validation Committee." Why did it think so? The final version of these standards didn't come out until June 2010.

After submitting many detailed critiques from October 2009 to May 2010 in a futile effort to remedy the basic deficiencies of Common Core's English/reading standards, I, along with four other members of the Validation Committee, declined to sign off on the final version. Indiana should return to a coherent set of content standards in secondary English that teachers can use to guide all students towards a meaningful high school diploma, whether they aim for a career or college.