

Lawmakers urged to repeal Common Core standards

By Marc Kovac
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COLUMBUS -- Conservative think tanks, a member of the state school board and others urged lawmakers Wednesday to repeal Common Core standards in place in Ohio schools.

And a business group urged the Ohio House's Rules and Reference Committee to do the opposite, touting the benefits of those standards.

So ended a third day of testimony on HB 597, a new attempt by some Republicans in the Ohio House to change math and language arts standards already in place and used to shape curriculum decisions and lesson plans in classrooms.

Reps. Matt Huffman (R-Celina) and Andy Thompson (R-Marietta) hope to complete committee deliberations on the legislation by early next month, setting up a potential floor vote in November.

Hearings on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday gave Common Core critics a chance to voice their concerns. Speakers echoed many of the same themes offered during previous days' hearings -- the standards represent an overreach of the federal government and corporate interests into local classrooms, with resulting textbook lessons so convoluted or awkwardly phrased that students and their parents don't understand them.

"Ohio has ceded its authority to make decisions about the standards and about testing," said Kathleen McGervey, a member of the state board of education. "We've ceded our authority to private organizations -- the National Governor's Association, the coalition of chief state school officers. These organizations are private and not accountable to the public."

Jason Bedrick, a policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, said the Common Core favors "greater centralization, standardization and uniformity."

"... The conformity induced by Common Core undermines the very diversity and innovation that give parental choice its value," he said in submitted testimony. "While Common Core does not directly mandate a specific curriculum, its testing regime will drive what is taught in the classroom."

, when it is taught and even how it is taught."

Ze-ev Wurman, a visiting scholar at the Hoover Institution and a former senior policy adviser at the U.S. Department of Education, said the Common Core standards are not rigorous enough and are "geared toward making students into technology consumers rather than technology developers."

Common Core promises "not too much, they deliver much less," he said.

And Jim Stergios from the Pioneer Institute in Boston said Ohio should consider standards in place in other states and countries but should develop its own standards, via a public process, to better represent its history and citizenry.

"You should not adopt Massachusetts' standards," he said. "You should do better, create your own stuff but look at what's really good there."

Opponents and other interested parties will get a chance to offer testimony on Tuesday and Wednesday, with an additional hearing in early September.

Wednesday's hearing did provide a preview of opposition testimony to come, with two representatives of the Ohio Business Roundtable offering comments in support of the Common Core.

Paolo DeMaria and Susan Bodary, both educational consultants, offered a history of the development of the Common Core standards and countered many of the assertions made by opponents.

They said districts make the ultimate decisions about instructional materials, schools can exceed the standards that are in place, and the federal government did not develop the standards.

Repealing Common Core now, they said, would cost more money and frustrate and confuse teachers and students.

"Our children -- all of the children across Ohio -- deserve the best we can give them, and they deserve our commitment to getting here as quickly as possible," Bodary said.

"Delaying what has been started for three years is unlikely to serve students better than if we continue to focus on teaching and learning in our classrooms. ... Continuing to let the current work started so many years ago provide for a better education for our children is likely not only a better return on investment but the best path possible to serving the students throughout our state."