

Talking about Oklahoma education

By Steve Fair
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On Monday, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Oklahoma's waiver from No Child Left Behind had been reinstated. This comes just three months after the DOE had pulled the waiver in retaliation of Oklahoma being the first state in the country to repeal Common Core standards. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan reconsidered the earlier decision after Oklahoma higher education officials appealed and said the state's existing academic standards were sufficient.

“On behalf of Oklahoma educators, parents, students, lawmakers and all Oklahomans invested in better schools, we are grateful for this decision to reinstate the state's flexibility waiver,” said state Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet Barresi. “The ramifications of losing the waiver would have been significant and with potentially disastrous consequences. Instead, Oklahoma now has an opportunity to build upon the innovations and successful reforms of recent years.”

The disastrous consequence Barresi was speaking of was the potential loss of millions of federal education dollars for Oklahoma's schools. The federal Department of Education holds the money over the head of state leaders and educators and if they don't comply with their wishes, they withhold the money. When Oklahoma legislators took the courageous stand to say no to Common Core, they knew they were taking the risk of losing federal dollars in education.

Senate President Pro Tempore Brian Bingman said the reinstatement of Oklahoma's No Child Left Behind waiver will ensure the state's education reform efforts will continue. Bingman said, “With the federal government's politics now out of the way, Oklahoma can take the next step and develop high standards that prepare our students to compete in the new global economy. Speaker of the House Jeff Hickman said, “Despite the relief and flexibility this decision provides, I again strongly encourage the State Board of Education to continue moving forward in earnest in the creation of our new rigorous and superior education standards.”

Oklahoma is in the process of establishing our own standards for common education, but not all Rs agree on who should be involved in that process. Corey Holland, a former Republican state representative from District 51(Marlow area) and current principal at Cache High School, wrote this on a conservative blog after the waiver was announced: “First of all, we do not need business helping to write standards for education - unless you think the primary purpose of a school is to create a workforce. Secondly, how ironic that the state chamber wants legislators to “set politics aside” when it was the chamber who went guns a blazing to oust Senator Brecheen – and not because he was anti-business but because he was against Common Core. Here's a suggestion

State Chamber, why don't you practice what you preach and "set politics aside" by keeping your nose out of education standards writing. Leave that to the education experts. If you do, we agree to not tell your members how to run their companies or use their transferable tax credits."

Holland is absolutely right. Workforce readiness is one of the Common Core's main goals. The biggest fishhook in Common Core is progressivism. Progressivism is a philosophy based on the thought that advancements in science and technology are a means to themselves and the goal of education is to make everyone the same. Progressive educator John Dewey argued for standardized curriculum to prevent one student from becoming superior to others and envisioned a workforce filled with people of "politically and socially correct attitudes" who would respond to orders without question.

It has been proven time and time again that centralized, common standards don't work. Since the late 1950s, the federal government has rolled out dozens of federal education programs with little or no success. Reading and math scores are just slightly improved in the past 30 years. In 2011, the Cato Institute found that the achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds has not improved since the beginning of federal education spending in 1958. Oklahoma should establish high standards and enforce them in our public schools, but with the input of educators like Corey Holland. This is a great opportunity for our state to be an example to the nation.