

JOHN A. LAWRENCE
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
13TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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April 4, 2013

Secretary Ronald Tomalis
10th Floor, Harristown 2
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dear Secretary Tomalis,

We trust all is well.

We write concerning the proposed implementation of Common Core Standards as it relates to basic education in the Commonwealth. Over the past few weeks, several constituents have contacted us with concerns related to this issue. We would appreciate your thoughtful review and response on the following points.

It is our understanding that over 40 states have agreed in principle to establish a framework influenced by the Common Core to guide statewide education standards. It is also our understanding that moving towards the Common Core is a de facto eligibility requirement for federal "Race to the Top" funding.

There is little doubt that additional funding for education would be welcomed by most every school district in the Commonwealth, and most everyone would agree that education standards for Pennsylvania students should be robust and meaningful. With this in mind, we are concerned about increased federal mandates upon our local school districts in any form. We are also concerned that any potential additional federal dollars will come with so many strings that the cost to implement new proposals will far outweigh any benefits.

We would particularly appreciate your thoughts concerning how this proposal may affect students enrolled in private schools or who are home schooled. We have received conflicting information in this regard.

Could you estimate the costs that may be borne in the foreseeable future by the Commonwealth to implement the Common Core, assuming that we do not receive anticipated federal funding?

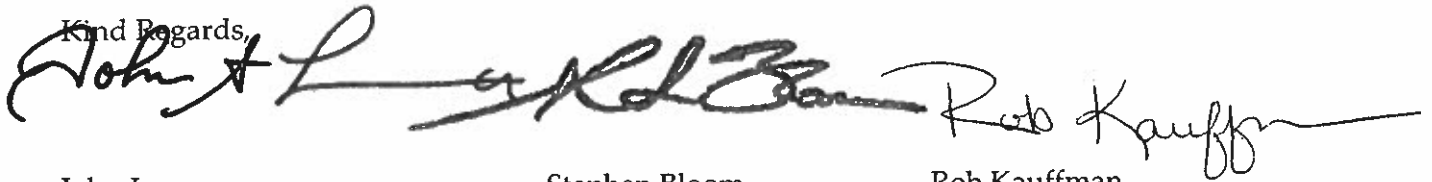
Please comment on the curriculum standards outlined by the Common Core. Again, we have received conflicting information, with some sources claiming the standards are rigid while others suggest the standards are merely recommendations. For example, specific books are listed for each grade level – are these texts mandated or optional? If they are optional, at what point does the state lose federal funding for abandoning these texts? If they are mandated, at what point does the state (and local districts) lose the ability to set curriculum standards as we see fit, as opposed to those mandated by a federal program?

Our understanding is that one of the premises of Common Core is to establish a baseline standard for students across the country. If this is the case, can you advise how the standards, particularly in mathematics, compare to national standards in countries that consistently outrank the United States in terms of quality of education?

In our view, the federal government has no authority to dictate educational standards to the states. Education is a matter left to each state, plain and simple. While this view is perhaps not that of the majority, without a doubt the tenth amendment to the US Constitution speaks clearly on this point.

Thank you in advance for your review and opinion on the aforementioned points. We appreciate your continued service to the people of Pennsylvania.

Kind Regards,

The image shows three handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature on the left is 'John Lawrence', the middle one is 'Stephen Bloom', and the one on the right is 'Rob Kauffman'. Each signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Lawrence
13th Legislative District

Stephen Bloom
199th Legislative District

Rob Kauffman
89th Legislative District