



Statement of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

ON: The Regents Reform Agenda: “Assessing” Our Progress

TO: Senate Standing Committee on Education

BY: Cheryl Oldham

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The Chamber’s mission is to advance human progress through an economic,
political and social system based on individual freedom,
incentive, initiative, opportunity and responsibility.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations. The Chamber is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and defending America's free enterprise system.

More than 96% of Chamber member companies have fewer than 100 employees, and many of the nation's largest companies are also active members. We are therefore cognizant not only of the challenges facing smaller businesses, but also those facing the business community at large.

Besides representing a cross-section of the American business community with respect to the number of employees, major classifications of American business—e.g., manufacturing, retailing, services, construction, wholesalers, and finance—are represented. The Chamber has membership in all 50 states.

The Chamber's international reach is substantial as well. We believe that global interdependence provides opportunities, not threats. In addition to the American Chambers of Commerce abroad, an increasing number of our members engage in the export and import of both goods and services and have ongoing investment activities. The Chamber favors strengthened international competitiveness and opposes artificial U.S. and foreign barriers to international business.

Positions on issues are developed by Chamber members serving on committees, subcommittees, councils, and task forces. Nearly 1,900 businesspeople participate in this process.

Chairman Flanagan, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to support the Common Core State Standards and share with you why the business community has rallied around this important step in the education of our future workforce. I'm Cheryl Oldham, vice president for education policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce—the world's largest business federation, representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses and organizations of every size, sector, and region. The Chamber has long been in the business of education reform, as our members' most important asset is their human capital.

I'd like to begin by sharing with you where our nation stands today. Among the 34 leading industrialized countries, the United States comes in 14th in reading literacy, 17th in science, and a dismal 25th in math. For 40 years, 8th grade reading scores have negligibly improved. Half of all undergraduates and 70% of community college students take at least one remedial course. Of the community college students who enroll in remediation, only a quarter will graduate within eight years, often because they never advance to credit-bearing prerequisite courses. And even as we have enrolled millions of new students in postsecondary education, the percentage of young adults receiving a college credential has remained relatively flat. It should surprise no one that we've fallen from No. 1 in the world in the percentage of young adults with college degrees to No. 10.

We know the jobs of the 21st century are becoming more specialized and technical. In fact, there are more than 3.9 million jobs, up from 3.1 million last year, going unfilled in this country in part because there aren't enough qualified candidates.

Ninety percent of the jobs in the fastest-growing professions require postsecondary education and training. And by 2020, there will be 120 million high skilled and high wage jobs. If we don't have the workers to fill them, we will risk our economic leadership in the world.

To the Chamber and our members, this looming national crisis requires urgent action, and that action must begin with the K–12 education system.

These data points suggest that the current system is not adequately preparing our students to succeed in college or the modern workforce. It's not delivering the skilled workers that businesses need to drive stronger economic growth. It's not helping advance America's ability to compete and lead in the global economy.

Although there are exceptions, American public schools are generally producing fewer students with the skills they need for long-term success.

We believe that one major answer to this challenge is the Common Core State Standards. For the U.S. Chamber and the business community more broadly, there are three things that are important to know about Common Core and why we support it.

First, Common Core is an elevated set of standards. It focuses on the building blocks of learning, such as reading and math, and is designed to be applicable in the real world—namely, college or career. It is not a curriculum. Common Core Standards are the “what.” Curriculum is the “how.” That distinction is important to an organization like the U.S. Chamber that values local control and a limited role for the federal government—in most issues—but especially in education. Curriculum has always remained within the control of districts, local school boards, school leaders, and teachers—and will continue to do so under the Common Core. That does not change.

Not only is the rigor of the standards important for ALL students, but the second key attribute of Common Core is nationwide clarity and consistency. Under our current system, the United States is a patchwork of disparate state standards and uneven expectations. An ‘A’ in one state may be equivalent to a ‘C’ in another. But states that opt into Common Core adopt a consistent set of goals that puts them on equal footing. For a country that is as mobile as we are today, for employers that in many cases have interests in multiple states, it’s critical that students—wherever they live—are ready to enter college or career training upon graduation. Operating a high tech piece of machinery is the same whether it takes place in Oklahoma or Oregon; coding is the same whether in New York or North Carolina. It’s not easier to be an engineer in Montana than it is in Massachusetts. The education and skills needed by industry to fill the more than 3 million open jobs do not change from state to state.

The third important piece for our members and for the nation is the Common Core is on par with international standards. Currently, our young people are being outperformed by students in countries like South Korea, Finland, Canada, Poland, and Australia. Common Core raises our education standards, which will enable Americans to compete with global peers.

To the employer community, Common Core is really just common sense. Who wouldn't want rigorous standards, comparable across states, internationally benchmarked—all designed to ensure we're all on track for success? However, there are a number of myths and misunderstandings about what Common Core is, and I'm happy to lend my voice in an attempt to set the record straight.

Here's what Common Core will NOT do:

- 1. Bureaucratize education or centralize authority over our schools.** This is NOT a federal takeover of education or a top-down effort to indoctrinate students with slanted ideology. Common Core was created at the state level—where our most innovative policies often originate—by governors and state officials. And no state is required to participate.
- 2. Dumb down existing state standards.** The Thomas B. Fordham Institute has been analyzing state standards and evaluating their rigor for years, and in almost every instance, the Common Core is more rigorous than what existed prior. In the case of New York, their last review of your standards found your math standards generally strong but overall were graded a 'B' as compared to the Common Core Standards that received an 'A-.' In English/language arts, your standards were rated a 'C' versus 'B+' for the Common Core.
- 3. Allow big government to snoop on our children and collect and even sell sensitive data.** Common Core standards don't change data privacy policies. Data collection is at the state-level, based on laws having nothing to do with the Common Core. There is *nothing* about the Common Core that requires a particular data collection. Federal law prohibits creation of a federal database with students' personally identifiable information, and federal workers have no access to student-level information housed in state data systems.

The bottom line is this: we have for decades been telling students “you're on track,” yet the facts tell a very different story. Twenty-five percent of students entering four-year institutions in New York have to take at least one remedial course; for community colleges, it's *almost 50%* of students. That statistic alone should tell us all we need to know—we're not providing the level of rigor necessary for students to be successful. Those that do have to take remedial courses have a much higher likelihood of not completing their postsecondary work. The ramifications to those

individuals are life altering—in today’s economy, employers need workers with a higher level of skill than ever before. A high school diploma is not enough.

You all recently experienced the impact of raising your standards and assessing against those higher standards. And the result was a 30% drop in proficiency. While that’s difficult to hear, it’s a more truthful representation of where your students are and whether they are prepared to be successful in college and career. I urge you not to retreat. Is the appropriate alternative to go back to lower standards and higher test scores so we’ll all feel better? Absolutely not! In the end, what we all want for our children is what we should aspire to for ALL children—a quality, rigorous education that prepares them for success in life. What it means to be successful in life and work has changed over time, and we have to change with it. Successful implementation of Common Core is a critical piece to that change, and whether its promise is realized depends on whether leaders and educators are able to look past the politics and make decisions that are in the best interest of the students.