

Senator Tomassoni,

After teaching humanities, history and English in Worthington for 30 years, I was named 1995 Minnesota Teacher of the Year and 1996 National Teacher of the Year. I also spent from 1997-2000 as Teacher In Residence in the Department of Education in Washington. I am now consulting with the Saint Paul high schools in the creation of small learning communities.

I have many concerns about the content and process of the proposed standards. But I want to highlight seven.

1. The speed with which this is being moved does not give credit to its importance, its implementation and its potential impact on students and teachers.
  - a. We have some moments with kids in our schools to help them discover learning and themselves. Those kids are precious and the moments are precious. Why would we hurry without the thought necessary in the face of such valued young people?
  
2. As I study the language arts standards, I am very concerned about coherence and flow. The 'cut and paste' nature of the document becomes obvious as standards are repeated with little or no explanation or plan.
  - a. Any good teacher knows that we build onto what kids already know. We take kids where they are and reinforce past learning while connecting new learning. To not take kids where they are is to lose them in favor unenforceable political rhetoric.
  
3. The high school standards are almost non existent in their vagueness.
  - a. As a high school teacher, I know that high school is where we can truly engage kids in their own learning in an effort to both understand themselves and the world which they will enter.
  
4. The relevancy and practicality of 50 some pages of line by line language arts standards is a concern. A top businessman in Minnesota told me that as he looks for employees he looks for the ability to work together, to think carefully, to learn in a variety of ways and to problem solve.
  - a. I began teaching in 1966. In those days it was easier to justify opening the book and testing the details. We simply can't afford to think that that kind of teaching and testing promotes good learning in 2003. We are understanding that learning is a complex, multilayered process. To belittle that understanding is to underestimate our students and teachers.
  
5. The testing which follows the standards has not been explored in detail in the conversations. We know what the costs of high stakes tests are for the state, for students and for teachers.
  - a. A good test allows schools and teachers and students to get a good picture of where students are. That test along with other methods helps determine the needs of students. The philosophy of testing behind the standards is missing in the current discussions.

6. The dramatic and rapid shift to these standards belies the reality of the classroom.
  - a. Teachers can't be viewed merely as the purveyors of the next political educational move. They must be a part of the process both in the preliminary discussions and in the planning for implementation. The plans for professional development to elevate the role of the teacher in implementation has not been discussed.
  
7. Much work had been done to refine what we already had in place. That work has merely been boxed and shelved without an attempt to take advantage of the valuable work.

I thank you for your attention to my concerns and hope that we err on the side of thoughtfulness and students in the ensuing discussions.

Mary Beth Blegen  
1996 National Teacher of the Year