My Concerns With State Common Core Standards Draft

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Statement of Michael W. Kirst, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University : Draft of State Common Core Standards (September 2009)

My concern is the assertion in the draft that the standards for college and career readiness are essentially the same. This implies the answer is yes to the question of whether the same standards are appropriate for 4 year universities, 2 year colleges, and technical colleges. The burden of proof for this assertion rests with CCSSO/NGA, and the case is not proven from the evidence presented in the draft.

The ELA standards hedge this issue by saying "the evidence strongly suggests that similar reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are necessary for success in both the college and workplace." There is no similar wording preceding the math standards. I have reviewed the sources included in the draft, and cannot follow how the panel deduced that college and career readiness standards are the same.

Some basic underlying assumptions used by the panel are unclear. For example, what level of jobs in the O*NET job zone classifications of 1-5 did the panel use in its deliberations? For example, preparation needed for zone 4 jobs is mostly the same as a 4 year college standards, but this is not true for ONET zone 2 jobs. Another issue that needs to be clarified is whether the panel endorses a multiple pathways concept that a career and technical education in secondary school needs to keep the option open for all students to obtain a 4 year degree.

I have worked intensively with some states in the college/career readiness issue. Policymakers find it difficult to understand why the standards are the same for the flagship state university and their technical college system (e.g. Georgia, Texas, etc.).

For example, if you examine closely the math requirements in Kentucky for specific occupations for a technical program like welding, there are very specific secondary school preparation differences for 3 programs offered in specific community and technical colleges : the Associate of Applied Science (ASS), diploma, or certificate program. The latter two programs may not need to meet the mathematics proposed in the common core draft. Each separate terminal award (A.S.S, diploma, certificate) utilizes a different set of math courses for

completion. I am unclear whether the panel had these distinctions in mind as it prepared this draft.

The methodology utilized for comparing university and career technical standards (cte) can influence conclusions and recommendations. I chaired the National Assessment Governing Board Technical Panel on 12th Grade Preparedness Research. On pages 18-23 of our final report, we present our strategy for funding needed research for discovering the academic standards for workplace preparedness. Our approach seems different from those embedded in the sources consulted for career readiness in the draft.

The NAGB technical panel pointed out that many occupations do not have a consistent training core. Some occupations require substantial geometry, while others may focus more heavily on algebra, or simple numerical computations.

The NAGB panel crafted a research strategy to identify examples of occupations deemed most informative for estimating the entry-level reading and mathematics requirements for multiple sections of the labor force. Then we support identifying job training programs targeting jobs in the exemplar occupations. The next step would be to identify ELA and mathematics training performance standards for entry into each occupation. This would include interviewing personnel who actually prepare CTE workers in the exemplary occupations.

This seems to be a more valid and precise method of discovering CTE standards than the usual methods of employer surveys, test linking, or examining very large clusters of jobs used in the draft standards. Some studies that claim college and CTE preparations is the same start from what experienced workers are doing in their current jobs. This could exaggerate skill requirements to begin the academic preparation needed for an occupation at postsecondary education institution.

I hope there comments will be useful in the next stages of the common core standards.