

SENATE BILL 311 RAMIFICATIONS

On January 3, 2007, outgoing Governor Bob Taft signed into law Senate Bill 311, known as the “Ohio CORE Curriculum Bill.” The bill was conceived, introduced, lobbied, and eventually approved through the ongoing efforts of higher education (colleges) and the Ohio business community. While I am in favor of higher expectations, as well as the need for higher level thinking skills for students, this bill appears to go way beyond that. And, for this reason, I was against it. Please allow me to explain my dissent with this bill.

I have served public school children for 32 years. Not only did I personally support the idea and goal behind the federal No Child Left Behind law, as a practicing educator, I was already engaged in this process before there was such a law as NCLB. Other than the lack of financial support from the federal government to implement NCLB, the law itself is largely a good one. Many districts, including ours, struggle to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress aspect of this law. However, the law itself has brought about notable positive results.

Now, along comes Ohio’s SB311 (CORE Curriculum). It may look and sound great, as we want and need to develop higher level thinking skills in our students. Plus, we want all students to learn to the highest level of capability. However, like NCLB, SB311 appears to be yet another largely “unfunded mandate” dumped into the laps of the local taxpayers. Beyond the funding aspect, I have other serious concerns with this law. One concern would be the ability of school districts to find the Highly Qualified Teachers required to teach these additional requirements.

Another concern I have is that the CORE curriculum treats children as if they are simply a blob of cookie dough. Some people seem to believe that we can simply roll out this dough, use one

cookie cutter or design, and think that all of our cookies/students will look the same and be able to do the same things in the end. Oh, how I wish it was that simple! I read just last week that with the passage of the CORE Curriculum Bill, Ohio is now the tenth most difficult state from which to earn a high school diploma. The question that comes to my mind after 32 years as a public educator is whether it is humanly possible to make one size fit all. Different students have different strengths and learning styles. We need students to succeed to the best of their ability to assure a healthy economic future. People are all different. Many of us are needed in fields of work that require different aptitudes and different levels of mastery, which are also necessary for all of us to be productive members of society. Under the terms of SB311, students who do not complete the CORE curriculum requirements would be denied entry to a four-year state college in Ohio. Instead, that student would have to first attend a two-year community college and take remedial work there before being admitted to a four-year state college.

This leads me to another concern. At a time when many school districts find themselves challenged to meet the graduation rate indicator, I am concerned that SB311 might actually lower the graduation rates of many districts. I can certainly see where some students could eventually become so frustrated that dropping out of school will become their educational option. Others may elect to go to on-line schools, thus staying away from our school buildings across the state. This is already occurring, and it is costing local school districts millions and millions of dollars in state funding. At the very least, we must have a revised math curriculum that pulls strands or pieces of Algebra II curriculum down to the 5th grade level.

Finally, what has happened to local control? Seriously, aside from hiring/firing decisions, establishing tax rates, and electing board members, there's not much else left. Perhaps, since the state and federal governments want so much control of school districts, let's eliminate wording

on buses that reads the Adams County/Ohio Valley School District, the Manchester Local School District, and the Hillsboro City School District. Instead, the buses should read, “Ohio Public Schools.” Wait a minute, the legislators voted to cut transportation funding a couple of years ago, leaving it up to the local districts to pay the overwhelming majority of the costs associated with purchasing a new school bus, which by the way is approaching \$80,000.00 per bus! Expectations continue to increase while the state and federal funding continues to decrease.

Go ahead; see how your legislator voted on SB311. I can tell you that Rep. Dan Bulp and Rep. Todd Book both voted against this bill. Furthermore, I was contacted by Rep. Bulp for my views before the House voted on it. I very much respect the fact that he contacted me, that he listened to what I had to say as someone who is actually in the trenches everyday, and that my feedback was important to him. He also contacted several other superintendents in his district, choosing not to just listen and roll over to the “lobbying machines” in Columbus. Go to the ODE website or contact your high school principal for a copy of the language contained in this bill. Please don’t interpret this article the wrong way. Anyone who knows me knows that I am all about higher expectations for students and staff. I also believe that expectations sometimes need to be seasoned with a dash of practicality and a pinch of realism. As always, feel free to contact me at 544-5586 regarding this article.

SCHOOL BOARD RECOGNITION MONTH

January is the month set aside each year to recognize school board members across Ohio. Our school district is fortunate to be served by individuals who are so caring and conscientious about serving the public, the students, and the staffs that they represent. Serving as a school board member in any district is a tough job in this day and age. I know of no former board members

who upon leaving the position believed that it was what they thought it would be when they were elected to serve.

Our Board of Education works hard to promote the growth and academic improvement of this district. There are always tough decisions to be made, and everyone will not always be happy. Yet, that is part of their job description. They accept this and do the best that they can for the largest number of people while being ever aware that they are the guardians of the taxpayers' dollars. I encourage you in joining me in congratulating and thanking Mr. Hughes, Mr. Bauman, Mrs. Jenkins, Mr. Naylor, and Mr. Ryan for their efforts. Thank you.

Charles P. Kimble

Superintendent