

Facts by Tommy Bice

John Adams, 2nd President of the United States, is attributed with the following quote, “Facts are stubborn things: whatever may be your wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”

This quote seems most appropriate in the midst of the ever-increasing amount of misinformation circulating throughout our state regarding the “Common Core.” The term “Common Core” has come to stand for all that is perceived as evil regarding the federal government and almost anything else that can remotely be attached to “it” politically. In a recent Alabama State Board of Education meeting “it” was credited with things as obscure as retinal scans being conducted on students to measure their emotions and reported to the federal government to removing classical literature from Alabama classrooms – both simply false.

However, the members of the Alabama State Board of Education and I take our responsibility seriously and have listened to each and every concern, even those without any basis or evidence and, as a result, have taken the following actions:

1. Strategically chose to not participate in either of the federally funded Race to the Top Common Core Assessment Consortia but rather followed the recommendation of the Alabama Assessment and Accountability Taskforce to adopt the ACT and its related assessments for Alabama as it creates an aligned assessment system for K-12, our two- and four-year colleges, and business and industry.
2. Strategically deferred from applying for a federally funded Longitudinal Data System Grant to ensure state control of our student data system. The result is a state-developed and state-owned student data system managed through the Alabama Supercomputer Authority.
3. Adopted a Statewide Data Use and Governance Policy to ensure that not only our internal data system remains secure and meets all FERPA requirements, but that all contracts and agreements with third-party vendors or service providers meet those same privacy expectations.
4. Appointed a State Data Privacy Officer to oversee our internal data system, review all contracts and agreements that include student data, and provide guidance and training to our local school systems on the development of their data use and governance policies.

5. Rescinded the original Memorandum of Agreement between the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association executed for the development of a set of Common Core State Standards. This was the only signed agreement associated with the Common Core State Standards, but it had no binding authority past the development process, yet the State Board felt it important to rescind it in good faith to those concerned that it had governance authority.
6. Conducted a mid-implementation review of Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards based on input from Alabama teachers, leaders, and others. This review was conducted by the same group of Alabama professionals who made the original recommendation for adoption in 2010. Their recommended changes to the standards were completed and adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education in January of 2014 with no permission sought nor needed from any outside entity.
7. Removed, as part of the standards revision process, Appendix B from the English/Language Arts Course of Study that included exemplars incorrectly referred to as a required Common Core reading list. These decisions rest at the local level as one part of the local curriculum and instructional resources development process.

At no time throughout this years-long process of work did the Alabama State Board of Education or the Alabama State Department of Education seek or require approval from the United States Department of Education, the Office of the President of the United States, or any other professional organization or philanthropic foundation. Each and every decision by the State Board was based on recommendations from Alabama teachers, administrators, and professors who are experts in their individual fields of academia.

So it should be no surprise that I continue to be perplexed about this continual debate about federal overreach, indoctrination, data mining, etc., based on the facts that I have just presented that state otherwise. I am equally as perplexed that in recent forums conducted around the state “experts” who have spoken against our work here in Alabama were all from outside our state and have never spent one second in an Alabama classroom, yet they had much to share about what our teachers and leaders were doing?

And, finally, I am most perplexed because the facts as they apply to the state of Alabama are clear – we have not relinquished state control of our public education system to anyone but rather on three occasions adopted a resolution affirming the Alabama State Board of Education as the “sole and exclusive entity vested with the authority, without restriction, to adopt or revoke all academic standards in all subjects for students in the public schools of Alabama, without direct or indirect pressure or coercion by the United States government or any of its subdivisions.” I am not sure how much more direct that could be stated!

Facts are stubborn things and there you have them.