

TRANSCRIPT

Frameworks and Adoptions: Instructional Quality Commission Issues

SPEAKER Bill Honig

EVENT TITLE Collaborating for Success: Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California

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CATHERINE WALCOTT (INTRODUCTION)

We didn't want to leave today without talking about the curriculum materials that support this work. And that is a question that came up from many of you as we prepared for the event. So I would like to introduce one of our partners in this event, Bill Honig, who has been a thought leader and cheerleader for this entire process of getting this together. And as you know, Bill is leading the Instructional Quality Commission, and please give us an update on that work.

BILL HONIG Okay we're almost through here, we got—I'm going to keep it brief, but I do want to cover a couple of points building on what the—you just heard from the department people. I am chair of the Instructional Quality Commission, which is the updated Curriculum Commission that was just legislatively reauthorized. And they have expanded its, basically, cache so that it doesn't just do frameworks and adoption of materials but also advises the State Board on accountability and assessment and Common Core rollout in these other areas. So you're going to get passed out during this time a preliminary chart, a draft chart of how all these complex policy groups work together. Don't spend that much time on it; just know that there's a group of us trying to coordinate at the state level so we get a common direction. And as Nancy said previously, we're trying to make it a two way communication, so I'm going to lay out some of the things that are going on that you should be interested in. And we also want feedback on that as we progress.

First, where we are on mathematics is that as was stated there is a—there has been appointed a framework committee which is going to meet in September, and it's going to start designing the new framework and the criteria for adopting books, and I am going to explain what that means because it's changed in California now given the flexibility that you all have as districts. So the names were submitted, but also in July the Board of Education adopted the guidelines and I'm going to highlight two or three big ideas in those guidelines that impact you quite considerably. These guidelines then were

adopted so they are, you know, they have—they are policy. And the other policy is of course, as Deb mentioned, that California has signed on to Smarter Balance, which means their assessments are going to be given in the state starting in 2014, that school year.

So number one, the first issue in the guidelines that I think it's important to go over is the whole area of eighth-grade algebra and eighth-grade mathematics and how we're going to resolve that dilemma, which I get every time I talk to a group or talk to people: "What are you going to do about that?" So I think that's pretty well on the way to being cleared up, and here's the way we've all come out. The standards adopted two paths, so you can take Common Core Standards, which by the way are beefed up. They are not pre-algebra the way we've all known it; they are much more demanding. Phil Darrow never got to this part in his talk this morning. but if you've heard him speak, he talks about the necessity of putting a lot more time in pre-algebra-type issues—ratio, proportion, percentage—those kinds of topics that take a long time to develop among youngsters and we traditionally have not spent that much time in doing that. So percentage sometimes is done with cross-multiplication in two pages; you can't get it that way. It's a very important skill, it's applied proportionality thinking, it takes five-six weeks comparing this to that and that to this in a whole variety of circumstances. It really is complex: easy to teach initially, complex to learn. That's what the Common Core Standards are talking about. They also include the first parts of algebra, so all students will be taking some part of the algebra sequence as you get up from basic algebra in your equations all the way up to algebra 2.

So that's one strand; the other path is to take ninth-grade algebra and take it in the eighth grade. And you heard people from Long Beach and others, and you have all been pushing and getting kids to take that and we've—the numbers have gone quite up in the state and we don't want, we don't want to go backwards from that. But we do want to make sure that students who are in algebra can actually profit by it, and so that there is this kind of pull between give it to the ones who can get it and make sure that there's a strong alternative for those that take the Common Core. So those are the two paths.

The problem then comes for what do you do about the seventh, sixth, fifth—even—grade for those who are going to take algebra in the eighth grade, and there's going to be an accelerated path for those students who want to get into algebra in the eighth grade—STEM students, whoever they are—and that's going to—we haven't really thought through how that's going to happen. I think that's a lot going to be local decision. Do you want to have two strands within a class? Do you want to have two different classes? How do you want to organize that? The framework committee will come out with suggestions about how to organize the material, but as you heard Phil said, these things go up a couple of years and down a couple of years so that even though you're talking

about sixth grade, you can't go up and you can't go down. And the assessments will also be adaptive, as Deb explained. And therefore you can actually assess below grade level and two years above. So if you're a student on this accelerated path, you can take the Smarter Balanced assessments and reach the material that you've been covered in your particular class. So that will solve that problem.

There is also should be some kind of protocols for diagnostics. Who is ready for this—this is the kind of formative and summative evaluation. Who is really can profit by it, because there is research now that says if you're not ready for algebra and you're forced into it and you take the course and flunk it, you are much worse off than if you had not done that. So we really have to be careful; we're short-changing some students who really aren't ready and so they should be taking this beefed-up Common Core.

The final piece of the puzzle is how do you assess these youngsters? Are we going to have two sets of tests? Actually, Smarter Balance is designing its test so that those, every student can take the Common—the Smarter Balance test, whether you're in an algebra strand or whether you're in the Common Core strand. Because it can go up and they will cover above those algebra, the ninth-grade algebra items in the test that everybody takes. So whether you take the Common Core path or the algebra path, you take the same test, which sure makes life easier for everybody and also give us some common accountability.

I am going to stop there for a second, everybody just make—is this clear to everybody? Is this acceptable, is this kind of the right way to go? All right, people. All right because this is what the field has told us, this is what they have told the Board, this is what the guidelines—we had four focus groups in mathematics, this was the number one topic they came up with. The members of the IQC, who are appointed, they support this unanimously. The Board voted for unanimously. So there doesn't seem to be much controversy in the state if we can pull up the details, which looks like we're going to be able to. Okay that's point number one.

The second one for a couple of other—I won't spent too much time in what these focus groups came up with. You can get the guidelines on the materials that Barbara was talking about—they're right there—and see what the basic points are. But for high school, for example, one point that came out: it's not just the transition to the next course. It's also a kind of revisiting some of the math, like percentage or use of decimals or rate and ratio, in more complex situations. Smarter Balance is going to test in the eleventh grade, not just the materials you took in high school but kind of the culmination of things you took—take beforehand and can you use it and apply it in a whole variety of situations. So that's important to know because when you get into college,

when you get into your life and work, you use a lot of those skills or you should be using a lot of those skills. So that's another point.

The other final point I will make is if—on that mathematics page that Barbara was pointing to there is something called Bill McCallum blog or math progressions; you can look it up on Google if you don't get it that way. That's what the framework, that's what the department is using and the IQC is using to base—to basically develop the framework, and so it is very well thought through. These are the kind of progressions that Phil was talking about, and you can see the logic in them; it's very helpful for both staff development, materials development. You can see how they're doing it; they're coming out with all the different topics are being covered. And they basically have taken the standards and put them into clusters, so even the standards are whittled down so that they're deeper and more powerful, but they've taken the next step. They tried to organize standards within a cluster and so that you have like ratio or proportion is a good example, over a period of years, a couple of years or a year, you can see the development of that. And that's laid out in these progression documents. And the framework is going to be based on that, and that's inherent in the implicit—not implicit, explicit in the guidelines that the Board adopted.

Okay, that's—that's math. The English language is a little—oh, I should say about the materials, about math materials. The Board, the governor, the Department, the field, people we've talked to are saying, "Hey, we're going to have to have this test going into effect in the 2014-2015 school year and we're not going to have materials necessarily available for that. What do we do?" Part of that's a financial issue, which we can't resolve and hope that that will build up over time. But part of it is, is there going to be availability of these types of books? So they've asked for an accelerated adoption schedule. Barbara referred to and Deb referred to the interim adoption, supplemental adoption. The problem with that is there wasn't enough resources, so they couldn't get panels, so they only reviewed existing books and the changes to the existing books. And you heard this morning those changes are pretty superficial in a lot of cases, so the question is what are we going to do about getting books more in tune with what the changes are that the framework—that they're talking about.

So the first thing that they're going to do is we're going to try and get publishers' criteria to the Board from the Instructional Quality Commission by January, February of next year so that we can have an adoption ready for the 2014-2015 school year. So the criteria will go there, they'll adopt the books, they'll probably be ready sometime later that year, and that would be, you know, helpful for you. I do have to mention the adoption of books means something different nowadays. There used to be an instructional material fund; you could adopt only—you could only pay for adopted materials from

that instructional material fund and then supplementary. That's all gone; there's very little funds now in the instructional material funds, and even though the legislation says if you use what's left in the instructional material funds it's got to be for adopted books, all you have to do is basically spend other money for that and use that first. So practically, the adoption at the state level is a review and recommendation to you. It's your call on what materials you want to buy, and many districts have said, "We want you to do that because it sure helps our process going forward." So we are going to go through that and will make those recommendations.

The final element there is a little complication. There is something called the Williams Act where you have to show that there—minor little, well, it's really not that big a deal because nobody pays that much attention to it. But there's no really enforcement mechanism, but it is law and you have to basically relate the books to standards so that if you follow, you know, if you basically can show that you've based your adoption on this criteria and on the Common Core Standards, then you'll be home free.

So that's that. I want to make one final comment here and that's about accountability. There is a very close working-out of the accountability changes in the state by Senator Steinberg, the Board of Education, the Department; it will be a much more flexible system. This comes up all the time of "What's going to—how are we going to be held accountable in this interim period?" As Deb said, assessment's going to change, accountability has to change along with it. There's going to be a different system, different assessments, how much—what percentage those assessments are going to be of it. There's dropouts, which is already in the law. There is college attendance or performance or who gets into, who doesn't have to take remedial, those kinds of things. There are ideas about local feeding back information through peer review, the governor's idea, some kind of inspectorate; that might be in there. So it's a combination of state and local information. How many kids participate at the school, like the high school, in sports or drama; that's a good measurement. So you have a variety of measurements that are on the table now, and this is going to be a discussion we hope you all will be part of because we have a chance now to redesign how you all are held accountable in the state in the next few years.

So that's kind of where we are. I think the only other point I'd like to stress, I want to give you two websites that I think—I gave you one, the other one is I'd like to reinforce the point that's been made several times here that, not on the content, but on the strategic support necessary to make this happen. This whole idea of professional learning communities or team building or capacity building at the school site level is crucial. I don't know—I don't think there's any way of pulling this off over the next period of time unless that becomes part of the strategy. And that means, as you just heard, training principles and

how to do this and however it's done is to build those teams, so you try this out, and comment on it, and come back and keep making it better and better.

There's a great website on that for those that—probably already many of you have seen it, called Learning Forward. I think its dot org. You can just basically look it up on Google and you'll find it. It has—those people are smart, they're on top of this, you're looking for advice, you're going to get it.

So that's where we are. We look forward to the continuing communication. All of this is online. These meetings are public; you want to find out which way the framework both ELA—I forgot to mention that. Language arts is a slower timeline; that committee is not going to get going until this fall, when the guidelines are produced and go to the Board, so there's time to comment on that; they have been in the focus groups. They are very consistent with the standard; you make sure you get the foundation skills, make sure you have an independent reading program, as was mentioned, make sure you have the course reading and so forth. And the other major point that was made, that came out of the focus groups: make sure that the literacy part, the informational text is not just scattershot but is also part of a developmental sequence like civics, or the ones they have nationally is the body, or health, or environmentalism. So that there's some kind of organized strand that meets that need. And we will be suggesting, hopefully we will be suggesting some ideas about how to do that and put you in contact with them.

So thank you for the time, and good luck on this.