Common Core Standards - *One Size Fits All?*

The *one-size-fits-all* model is the single greatest threat to the successful implementation of the common core standards.

Forty-six states have adopted the new, more rigorous common core standards. I also support the standards and testified in favor of them, but they are not perfect as some might have you believe. The common core standards have a great deal of support, but they are in fact a pilot. There are many questions that still need to be addressed, districts and states must provide honest feedback, and modifications will need to be made.

Your kids will probably not reap the benefits of this work because these standards are being required for *ALL* students. While as a soundbyte, that sure sounds great, the reality in the classroom is very different, the devil is always in the details.

Imagine your kid being in an algebra class, maybe they are deriving the equation of an ellipse. While the concept behind the derivation is relatively simple, there is some math the teacher and students have to do. Now, also imagine in that same class, there are students who don’t come to school regularly, there are some who are disciplinary problems, and then there are more that have IEPs, special education and students with a 504. The ability to implement the common core standards with students who have made other choices, what we might consider bad choices, will have a negative impact on your child’s ability to get the benefit of a more rigorous curriculum.

Teachers can not teach students who do not attend school regularly. Yes they can do make-up work, but will never replace being there. For students who have little interest and are being forced into a college prep class, the disruptions and distractions they create can take its toll on the rest of the students in the class.

But in today’s world of educational bureaucrats, it is stylish to say *one-size-fits-all*.

For example, before the common core, students would be given a definition of an ellipse, the formula, then asked to recognize in different forms of the equation and rewrite it, graph it and been asked to solve problems. That still occurs, but the common core typically asks students to derive the following formula:



Here’s what that derivation would look like.

The sum of the focal radii is 2a. By definition;

d(P, F1) + d(P, F2) = 2a

Substitution 

Isolate the radical 

Squaring 

Expanding x2 + 2xc + c2 + y2 = 4a2 – 4a+x2 – 2xc + c2 + y2

Subtracting x2, y2, c2 2xc = 4a2 – 4a– 2xc

Subtracting 2xc 0 = 4a2 – 4a– 4xc

Divide by 4 0 = a2 – a– xc

Isolate the radical a= a2 – xc

Squaring a2{} = a4 – 2a2xc + x2c2

Expanding a2{x2 – 2xc + c2 + y2} = a4 – 2a2xc + x2c2

Multiply by a2 a2x2 – 2a2xc + a2c2 + a2y2 = a4 – 2a2xc + x2c2

Add 2a2xc a2x2 + a2c2 + a2y2 = a4 + x2c2

Subtract a2c2, Add x2c2 a2x2 + a2y2 – x2c2 = a4 – a2c2

Commutative Prop a2x2– x2c2 + a2y2 = a4 – a2c2

Factor x2(a2 – c2) + a2y2 = a2(a2 – c2)

Substitute b2 = a2 – c2 x2b2 + a2y2 = a2b2

Divide a2b2 



This is an equation of an ellipse with center at the origin with x-intercepts *a* and –*a* and y-intercepts *b* and –*b*.

We can move the center as we did with the circle by using ~



(h, k) is now the center, the *a* and *b* represent the distances from the center (h, k) on the major and minor axes, respectively.

The common core standards create a national curriculum that requires student understanding and application in mathematics. Rather than just having students memorize, they are being taught the “why” behind the math. That is clearly a good thing.

The idea that *one size fits all* model is typical of people who are not responsible for delivering the instruction. The university people from Arizona and Michigan, the authors of the common core, clearly have no idea what it is like to teach in Las Vegas where the typical algebra class has between 37 and 42 students.

Students who belong there, who want to be there are not getting the instructional time to have concepts more fully and appropriately developed, nor are they receiving the one-on-one time with their teachers to get their questions answered because their teachers are dealing with non-proficient students, trying to remediate non-attending students, and addressing discipline issues that typically arises when students become frustrated because they are misplaced.

Teachers are then asked to provide *interventions* for those students who are not successful in their classrooms. Which means, secondary teachers who already have between 180 and 200 students per day in a fifty-minute class are also expected to take time out, an intervention, to address non proficient students and give them special work to get them up to speed. Really, the only people who support this are people who have never taught or people who only taught two or three years and did not have the opportunity to teach all segments of a student population.

While I agree with most of the common core, I certainly do not agree with the *one-size-fits-all* model. There are segments of the student population that are not served well by these standards. Why can’t we agree that it is okay to become an electrician, a plumber, or a carpenter? Can’t we respect people who have chosen a route different than college? Does everyone really have to go to college to have value in our society?

The students who want to be in college prep classes, who have the knowledge and skills, should not have their education diminished or jeopardized because their teacher is distracted, taken off task to address the needs of students who don’t have the knowledge and skills to be there or dealing with students who don’t want to be there.

The one-size-fits-all model is just area of the common core adoption that will need to be addressed. There are many other issues that will pop up when the tests are administered. Will the results of the tests developed by the two consortia be consistent? Will they be consistent with the results of NAEP, the nation’s report card? Will the universities change their curriculum so it is aligned with the common core? Who is going to approve materials that publishers always say are aligned to whatever is out there? Is the pacing