

Virginia governor withdraws OBE plan

Virginia Gov. Douglas Wilder on Sept. 15 announced that he was calling for "the immediate disbandment" of the state's Common Core of Learning programs and experiments. The Common Core is the Virginia version of "outcome-based education" (OBE). It has come under increasing attack, as parents realize that it is a means to destroy traditional academic education, in favor of satanic "values clarification" and value-free "multiculturalism." The program has been vigorously promoted by the state Department of Education, but has not yet been approved or funded by the legislature.

A principal opponent of OBE is independent gubernatorial candidate Nancy Spannaus, who has made opposition to the program the focus of her campaign. In a statement, she welcomed Wilder's decision, while pointing out that it is only a first step. "More steps must be taken," she said. "In general, they involve reversing the New Age brainwashing programs called group guidance counseling (such as Pumsy-Duso), the sex education programs promoting homosexuality, and other such indoctrination. These have been going on before Governor Wilder's tenure, I realize, but they are part and parcel of the same noxious program."

The text of the governor's statement follows:

After careful consideration, I have instructed the Department of Education to immediately withdraw the Common Core of Learning initiative for Virginia's schools.

The World Class Education initiative, of which the Common Core of Learning is a significant component, was introduced with the best intentions, and with goals that must be met if Virginia is to achieve educational excellence into the 21st century. I believe that Virginia's students need to be judged on their ability to meet our highest standards of achievement and that current evaluation standards do not go far enough to ensure the result we desire — students prepared for the work force of tomorrow.

Unfortunately, in formulating a new approach to Virginia education, our reform efforts have become tied to other fashionable approaches to curriculum reform. Make no mistake, I do not now, nor have I ever, endorsed changing Virginia's education standards to encompass values-based education. Knowledge and proficiency of basic skills must remain the basis for education in our Commonwealth.

Our students must be prepared for the world of tomorrow — which means being adaptable to different forms and

styles of learning, knowing other languages and appreciating other cultures, and understanding how to grow not only as students, but as human beings. But at the very center of all these goals must be a rigorous curriculum of basic facts, knowledge and information, and from that we can never retreat.

Judging on this basis, I have determined the Common Core of Learning initiative has strayed from our World Class Education goals. Too much time and effort have been placed on concepts with laudable goals, but that may in fact serve to weaken educational standards for Virginia's children.

While much of the opposition to the Common Core of Learning has been based on misinformation and hysteria, one argument made by some opponents has great merit — that our Commonwealth should not interfere with localities' ability to maintain a rigorous curriculum that meets the highest standards. Our role is to buttress the good works of localities, and not to block them.

The opposition has had an impact, and some supporters of the Common Core of Learning have suggested trying a new start, going back to the beginning with our initial goals and coming up with a new proposal. Clearly, not enough public input went into the development of the Common Core of Learning. There were no focused discussions on components of the proposals, and no grassroots consensus for reform was allowed to grow.

But I have concluded that more public input and a better public relations campaign would not be sufficient to make this proposal more acceptable to me and other Virginians concerned about the future of our children.

Of greatest concern to me is the cost of reform efforts and the potential future costs of a re-formulation. This year, of the nearly \$3 million we will spend on our World Class Education Initiative, the lion's share will go toward Common Core of Learning programs. For Fiscal 1994-95, the Board of Education proposes to spend nearly \$4 million for model schools, assessments of programs, and the development of staff, and these costs would increase to \$6.7 million for Fiscal 1995-96.

This is too much money to be spending on experiments when our state faces another fiscal crunch. Our educational dollars must be spent more wisely today than ever before. Teachers need adequate pay, facilities must be kept in top condition, and school books and equipment must be of the highest quality. Our job is to focus our spending on the most basic needs and to ensure that local efforts to improve standards are rewarded and emulated.

I would hope that the support for our World Class Education Initiative that members of the business community have shown can now be rechanneled to the communities. Reform must come from the bottom up, and parents must be concerned about how their children are taught — not just to block the ideas of some, but to offer solutions that we can all benefit from.