

Educators Support West Virginia's Next Generation Standards, Benefits To Our Classrooms

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West Virginia students have been guided by the strongest academic standards in our state's history –West Virginia's Next Generation Standards. Students are engaged and learning higher-order skills that are needed in all college courses and professions. Now, after years of teacher professional development on the standards and a full implementation at all grade levels, a small group wants to jeopardize our hard work and our standards that, for the first time, are truly aligned to the skills West Virginia's students need for success in jobs and, most importantly, in life.

As a high school social studies teacher, I can attest to the strength of these standards, particularly in English Language Arts. Three years ago, I integrated Next Generation Standards into my classroom teaching to reinforce the knowledge and skills students learn from other classes. Skills needed in social studies overlap with those needed for math and literacy. All students need to know how to read and analyze information, how to conduct research, how to form their own opinions and support their ideas with evidence. These skills are emphasized in the Next Generation Standards, and promoted across all subjects and grade levels to help students strengthen their skills and apply knowledge. Yet, the biggest benefit of having these rigorous standards is that students are thriving and excited to learn now more than ever.

The standards have been a catalyst for improving my teaching and foster creativity in the classroom, both for the teacher and the students. For example, recently one of my classes discussed the issues and events surrounding World War I. By integrating the Next Generation standards for English language arts with my social studies curriculum, I was able to develop a new lesson that really engaged the students and made them excited about history. Instead of giving a lecture or assigning a report, my students had to research and analyze information and write editorials justifying their opinions about the war. Students then had to create press materials to use for a campaign that supported their stance. The results were phenomenal, and students exercised critical skills such as research, analysis, debate and creative writing while completing their projects. This is the type of hands-on, relevant, deep learning that happens in classrooms because West Virginia adopted stronger standards for academics. Most importantly, my students were engaged and excited to learn.

As a high school teacher, I feel particularly compelled to ensure those engaged in the debate are armed with facts, not propaganda. There are many misconceptions and, frankly, lies being told about what these

standards mean for our students and how they are applied in the classroom. It is critical that parents and policymakers understand that standards serve as a guide to ensure all students graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed and be productive members of society. The standards don't tell me how to teach or require I use certain lessons, text or materials. These decisions are up to the education expert – local teachers. Teachers across our state have spent countless hours in trainings and in planning sessions with our colleagues to prepare ourselves to teach using these standards as our guide. We have been teaching with the standards for years, and we're making incredible progress in the classroom. Trust your local education experts, your teachers, when we say we believe the Next Generation Standards are best for ensuring West Virginia's students succeed and our state prospers in the future.

Let's all learn from my students and do our research on the Next Generation Standards before jumping to conclusions. I encourage parents and policymakers to visit their local schools, speak with teachers, and see the incredible, deep learning occurring in our schools. Let's ensure our students have paths to successful lives through quality education and strong standards. Our charge is to embed the skills necessary to prepare our students for colleges and careers. Anything less is educational malpractice. For the first time in my career over 40 states are consistent in holding students to the same high standards. Whether they live in an affluent suburb or a rural community, students are accountable for mastering the same skills and concepts. Let's keep the Next Generation Standards in our classrooms.