



SOUTH DAKOTA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
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November 21, 2022

To the Board of Education Standards,

My name is Ryan Rolfs, and I am the Executive Director of the South Dakota Education Association. I'm here on behalf of professional educators across the state of South Dakota today because they — the experts in education — are in their classrooms teaching our students which denies them the opportunity to make their own voices heard on this critical issue in person. I will note up front, that our organization has sent a request to this Board to move one of these hearings to a weekend so that our educators and our parents can better be part of what is supposed to be a collaborative process — our request has yet to be responded to by this Board.

Most of you who are in this room, know that our organization stands firmly in opposition to the proposed social studies standards. Before we get into our opposition, I want to emphasize — OUR educators — whether they're here in this room after using their personal leave to do so, or whether they're in a classroom with their thirty plus students — are deeply committed to providing a full and comprehensive social studies education, while at the same time helping students develop the critical thinking skills that are essential to being productive citizens who are committed to the great promise of our Country: that all men are created equal.

When I sat down to write these comments, I thought of all the things we have heard from educators regarding these standards.

I could talk to you about how the rote memorization in these standards will not result in learning for our state's early learners, or about how the events these standards are asking them to memorize are often extremely violent and bloody. However, you've already heard that from educators.

I could tell you how geography is underrepresented, or how removing South Dakota History from a specific class is a disservice to our state, or how regulating much of our state's Native American History to an elective class will provide less, not more, exposure to the history of our tribes. However, again, you've already heard that from educators.

In fact, you have heard overwhelmingly from educators that these standards are not the right fit for their students, whether they're a Kindergartener, a 7th grader, or a senior in high school. My question to you this morning as a Board is: Will you listen to our state's professional educators?

Will you listen?

Our organization spends all our time listening to educators. That's our mission. It's because we listen that we know our educators are stretched to a breaking point right now. Late career teachers are

looking to get through that one or two more years until they can retire. Our middle career teachers are asking themselves if they can teach for another ten years in the current environment, and so many of our early career educators are leaving before they even get their feet under them. In that environment, how can we be turning a deaf ear to the voices of our educators?

Educators overwhelmingly believe this process has intentionally discouraged their voices from being heard. The work of educators who served on the original committee for the first look at these standards was tossed out and replaced by work from a committee with very few educators from our state. Educators who do sacrifice personal time to attend these hearings may not have an opportunity to speak, and if they do — they're regulated to a maximum of four minutes, while proponents receive untimed and unregulated opportunities that demean our state's educators. We have heard a great deal about Hillsdale College during the discussions on these standards. Have you ever stopped to see what Hillsdale College says about educators? On June 30th, it was reported that Hillsdale College President, Dr. Larry Arnn, said the following about educators during a reception in Tennessee:

“People in those positions have education degrees because they are easy, and you don't have to know anything.”

“The teachers are trained in the dumbest areas of the dumbest colleges in the country.”

“You will see how education destroys generations of people. It's devastating. It's like the plague.”

In the face of a statewide educator shortage, I ask you, how can you look educators in the eye and tell them that we as a state respect them as professionals, that we as a state value their contributions in our students' lives and in our society, while silencing their voices and while allowing these standards to be facilitated by an individual with ties to a college who's own president makes his toxic opinion on educators crystal clear.

We, as an organization representing thousands of those voices who feel like they're not being heard, ask you to reject these standards.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Rolfs', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ryan Rolfs
Executive Director
South Dakota Education Association