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Don't miss your chance to chime in on Common Core standards: Editorial

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If you want to understand the academic standards your child needs to meet, have suggestions for improving them or just want to see what all the fuss over Common Core is about, now is your chance. After months of debate over whether Louisiana should keep the new standards, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education moved up the first review period by a year.

That includes an online review that was launched this month and is open to anyone. People with school age children are most directly affected by the standards. But the strength of public schools affects all of us, so it is important for a broad range of people to participate.

After months of anti-Common Core **rhetoric from Gov. Bobby Jindal**, this review provides a way to bring attention back to the substance of the standards. As the Council for a Better Louisiana put it in a recent commentary: A lot of the attention on Common Core "has been focused on the wrong thing – the heated rhetoric of a noisy few. As a result, what we really need to be thinking about – higher expectations for our students – has largely been obscured by an ongoing political sideshow."

Having all sorts of people – parents, grandparents, educators, business people – look at the standards is a valuable exercise. For one thing, the process will be "driven by substance, not grandstanding," as CABL said.

If you agree with a standard as it is written, you can explain why but don't have to do so. If you think a standard would more appropriate for another grade level, you will be asked to choose which grade. If you think a standard should be rewritten or broken into multiple standards, you will be asked to offer suggested rewrites. And if you think a standard should be deleted, you will be required to say why.

That is as it should be. Without those explanations, the reviews wouldn't be meaningful. "If this is intended to be a substantive and constructive process – as it should be – then the criticisms of the standards should also be substantive and constructive," CABL said.

The more people who weigh in, the more helpful it will be for the committee charged with assessing the strength of the standards.

The state Department of Education provides tips for reading the standards, background material and a link to the review portal at www.louisianabelieves.com.

There is basic information to fill in: Whether you are a parent, student, school employee, member of a group that is focused on education or fit another category. Where you live. Your name and email address, although those are optional.

The Southern Regional Education Board, a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational research organization based in Atlanta, is administering the online process. That should give people comfort that it is fair.

The standards committee will meet for the first time Aug. 19, and members will get the first batch of comments at that time. To make the cutoff for that meeting, you'll need to make your online comments by Aug. 5.

There is plenty of time after that to chime in as well, though. The online review portal will be open through next spring.

In an effort to make the review process less intimidating, CABL put a guide explaining how to get started on its website (www.cabl.org). The nonpartisan group also suggests some specific standards that might be of interest to business and civic organizations.

One good tip is to start by looking at standards for the grade level of a family member who is a student. That should make it easier to get a feel for whether the standard

matches your expectations. And it might make you realize that there is nothing scary about these standards — despite all of Gov. Jindal's attempts to make you think there is.

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