

Appendix

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Written Testimony sent to the New Jersey Board of Education Read at the March 17, 2010 meeting

I and my colleagues at the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers have read through the March 2010 public comment draft of the proposed English language arts standards. We are pleased to see literary and cultural knowledge specified in several grade-level standards at the high-school level, and we note with appreciation the strong statements, in the sidebar on p. 31, about the importance of this knowledge. A study of the literary history and literary context for the many culturally significant “illustrative” titles in Appendix B is vital for future generations of American students.

At the same time, we are disappointed to see nothing in the “college-and career-readiness standards” (p. 31) that serves to frame cumulative, graduated learning in literary history, traditions, forms, styles, and significant writers. These standards, not the sidebar, will be the basis for common assessments, and we question the indication of the draft-writers that “college readiness” can be achieved by content-free standards. The contingent content for exercising elementary interpretive and paraphrasing skills in these standards is not adequate. Any other subject would have graduated content, but the drafters of these standards imagine that “college readiness” can be content-free when it comes to “literature.”

We cannot endorse the absence of content-rich *literary* standards in “college readiness” any more than we can endorse just a sporadic and infrequent inclusion in the grade-level standards. This absence in this public-comment draft reflects what seems to us to have been a nearly systematic exclusion of those with expertise in literary study in the development of the standards. No one with expertise in the study of literature as a subject in itself was appointed to the standards-development committees, and those who attended the open forum last December, and then again in February, reported that they were given no way to argue a case that had seemed to have been pre-decided. We are surprised and concerned that the media have failed to note the exclusion of literary study from what are deemed “college readiness” standards. Without graduated, substantive content, adequate preparation for college study in any subject would be seriously compromised. Although there is nothing positive to object to in the statement of standards, we lament the absence of literary study in a necessary, valuable, and vital distinction from “language arts.”

Yours sincerely,

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