



Guest opinion: Montana's Common Core will upgrade K-12 learning

October 08, 2013 12:00 am • By MARY SHEEHY MOE

As Montana Teachers of the Year, our lifework has been dedicated to engaging Montana students in learning experiences that prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the future — as individuals at home, work, service and play and as members of local, state, national and international communities pursuing the common good.

We proudly reflect the good work that some 10,000 Montana teachers do every day and every year.

Collectively, the 21 of us have more than 500 years of teaching experience. We've taught at the elementary, middle, high school, college and graduate school levels in Montana. We teach English, math, language arts, social studies, science and other subjects, but mainly we teach kids.

Our experience has taught us that Montana's students are best served when:

- The expectations of the state are expressed in relevant and rigorous standards.
- Local communities, relying on local teachers' professional expertise, map out a sequence of courses and course curricula that meet those standards within the context of community values.
- Classroom teachers have the latitude to design learning experiences that challenge, excite and intrigue students as teachers deliver the community-approved curriculum aligned with state-approved standards.
- In our classrooms, schools and communities, all students feel respected for who they are and are encouraged to explore what they could be.

Standards in all professions change over time. As individual professionals, we have watched Montana's Board of Public Education adopt new accreditation standards throughout our careers. We have watched the development of Montana's Common Core Standards for English language arts and mathematics. We have never connected with one another to weigh in on them collectively. We do so now to say this: We support Montana's Common Core Standards because they:

- Are more rigorous, more specific, and more comprehensive than the standards they replace.

- Prepare students to make smooth transitions into colleges, careers and citizenship.

- Help kids who move out of Montana or kids who move into Montana enter their new school with the skills and knowledge they'll need to stay at grade level.

- Honor Montana's long-held tradition of local control of our public schools, as well as our constitutional and statutory obligations to understand, recognize, and preserve the cultural heritage of Montana's American Indians.

- Infuse English and math competencies into other subject areas, just as processing information, solving problems, and communication are infused in all aspects of adult life in the 21st century.

- Specifically, and most importantly, establish goals that guide teachers in their design of instruction without limiting their professional judgment in how to deliver it.

Implementing Montana's Common Core Standards will require much of Montana teachers. We'll need to develop new skills, design new learning experiences, and ensure that assessments play a relevant, but appropriate role in students' learning experiences. We know that Montana teachers are up to the task and that our students and our state will be better for our efforts.

Mary Moe of Columbia Falls, was Montana Teacher of the Year in 1987 and subsequently served as dean of the Great Falls College of Technology and then Montana deputy commissioner for two-year college education. Twenty other Teachers of the Year concur with her guest opinion, including Eileen Sheehy, Steve Gardiner, Nancy Stucky and Jack Johnson of Billings; Paul Andersen, Debi Biegel and Anne Keith of Bozeman; Kim Girard of Glasgow, and Kay Brost of Broadus.