

'Common Core' foes present case

By Tom Morphet

A group opposed to federal education standards known as the "Common Core" gave a presentation at the public library Tuesday, characterizing the standards as an infringement on rights and an attempt by President Barack Obama and the United Nations to water down education and moral standards.

Common Core violates the U.S. and state constitutions and usurps parental rights, attorneys Nathan MacPherson and Brent Winters told a crowd of about 20 residents, including several homeschool parents. No school district officials or public school teachers were present at the presentation titled, "Teach Freedom, Not Bondage: Exposing Common Core."

Winters and MacPherson said their trip here is part of a swing through Southeast they're paying for themselves. It grew out of efforts by state Rep. Lora Reinbold, R-Alaska, to shine light on the federal standards, MacPherson said.

Among their claims is that the new federal standards would put U.S. students two years behind their peers in other high-achieving nations, that it would delay proficiency in addition and subtraction until fourth grade and delay Algebra 1 until ninth grade, as well as take an "experimental" approach to geometry.

Parents at the meeting expressed concern with school curricula under the federal standards and fear about federal government "data mining" information from standardized

tests. MacPherson and Winters encouraged parents to work at the local level to build resistance to Common Core.

The two men said the new standards promote humanism and that textbooks written to meet it favor Islam over Christianity.

Homeschool parent Stacey Clark said she's been homeschooling her children through a state-sanctioned program, but she'll homeschool independently next year. "I'm concerned with where this testing is going with collection of data that is not traditional."

Tammy Hotch said she's independently homeschooling after 12 years with a state-sanctioned homeschool program based in Galena, due to the federal standards and changes in curriculum like homework assignments to rewrite the constitution and sex education for kindergarteners. "There was a lot I found offensive."

Haines School Principal Cheryl Stickler said the district's reading, writing and math programs are aligned to Common Core

standards, which she said are aimed at adding rigor to classes. She said the school here is not indoctrinating students. "We're most interested in helping kids be fluent mathematicians and readers and writers. Their personal beliefs are between themselves and their families."

The district's standardized tests don't ask personal questions of students, but an anonymous Youth Risk Behavior survey in upper grades does ask about sex, drugs and alcohol. Also, benchmark test results forwarded to the federal government don't include the name of students or other personal information, Stickler said.

School board president Anne Marie Palmieri said all the district's textbooks are vetted by teachers and must be approved by the school board. "We teach kids how to think critically. We talk about that in our mission statement. It's not indoctrination. We're not teaching them to think a certain way. We're teaching them to think critically and make up their own minds."