

Remarks of Beth Horler
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed changes to Common Core State Standards Implementation
and Teacher Evaluation

March 12, 2014

Good afternoon. My name is Beth Horler and I'm a Kindergarten teacher in Groton Public Schools.

I have been a teacher for twenty-six years and I have found this year to be the most stressful and daunting of my career. This has been an extremely stressful year, not because of my students, but because of what we are asking of the students. While I understand the premise of the Common Core State Standards and corporate America's need for college and career ready students, I cannot fathom why no one understood the need for a solid foundation that includes children who are ready to learn. The standards do not reinforce skill readiness or school readiness. These inappropriate standards that are now being applied to the curriculum I teach are snuffing out any joy of learning and replacing it with frustration and holes in that foundation all Kindergarten children should have. While my district has been very supportive and has done multiple crosswalks to compare our current curricula to the standards, I have discovered as we delve deeper into these standards that they are highly inappropriate for our youngest learners. This is what happens when the standards are written from grade 12 and then backwards. Whatever was left over was pushed down. Early childhood educators were not involved. Kindergarten curriculum is no longer guided by developmentally appropriate practices but by highly academic standards. Brain research proves that many of the skills in the CCSS are inappropriate. No matter how much we push, if a child isn't ready to learn, they are not going to acquire these skills because a set of standards deems it so. One issue that needs to be addressed in Connecticut is the Kindergarten cut off age. We are the last state with such a late cut off (December 31st). This means we can have 4 ½ year olds and 6 year olds begin Kindergarten on the same day. The age gap at such a young age is exponential! Yet, we are asking four year olds to be the same as six year olds. Our four year olds are at an immediate disadvantage with CCSS and this is compounded further if they have not had any preschool experience or a quality preschool experience. I have witnessed students (even my brightest) become more and more frustrated by the tasks. Imagine trying to fluent for addition and subtraction for number families to five when you just turned five. Children do and will shut down. They are children. They are human beings. They are NOT data points. They are NOT

in college – they have just begun their education. They are NOT in a career. At five, most children are still using their imaginations but the CCSS is slowly snuffing that out also. We need to slow down. We need to look at the standards and see what works for our children. We need to honor childhood. They are not miniature adults. We are testing more and more – even in Kindergarten. My students take the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress). It is a computer based test. Many of my students don't have a computer. These children also do not have the necessary computer skills to take these types of tests. Again – they are children. By pushing inappropriate standards onto them and testing them even younger isn't going to make them smarter. Again, let's honor childhood. After all childhood is a journey – not a race.

I am frustrated by the new teacher evaluation plan that Connecticut teachers have faced this year. Valuable time is taken up by more and more paperwork that isn't student related. This means less time for teaching and researching innovative education practices. Imagine preparing for an observation. In my district, the average time on the pre-observation paperwork is five hours. This is for a 30 minute observation.

Administrators are no longer present in our rooms to check in and see how the teacher and students are. They are not making connections with their populations. They are now locked away with their computer or sitting in an observation with a computer scripting the lesson. While I applaud the temporary changes that were offered up during this election year, I fear that atmosphere of de-moralizing teachers will return with even more vigor than before. Imagine your career being summed up with one word and it isn't something like 'dynamic', 'engaging', 'thoughtful' or 'diligent'. The ratings are words like 'below standard', 'developing' and 'proficient' which in Connecticut doesn't have a good connotation because of the CMT ratings. We have been told that there cannot be too many exemplary teachers on the summative rating. If there are too many then the implication is an audit by the state. Also the rubric is set up the same for all teachers – elementary, special education and high school. One would think that makes sense but when delving into the rubric, it is immediately evident that certain teachers will never make proficient or exemplary in certain categories just by the nature of their job. I encourage you to take a look at the rubric and think about a special education teacher who works with non-verbal students compared to a high school calculus teacher. The very nature of their job is different yet they are expected to be exactly the same. This may work in corporate situations but not in education. Teaching is not filled with cookie cutter positions and people – nor should it be.

Please bring some common sense to education in Connecticut. Please listen to educators – to those in the classrooms not in corporate boardroom. Please listen to educators with true experience. We need to slow down the CCSS implementation. We need to make sure that teacher evaluation serves a purpose other than demoralizing teachers and is supportive, not punitive. Thank you for your consideration.