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**Testimony for the Education Committee, Connecticut General Assembly
Public Hearing, March 12, 2014
Re: HB-5078; an Act Imposing a Moratorium on the Implementation of the CCSS**

Dear Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee:

Connecticut adopted the Common Core State Standards on July 7, 2010, almost four years ago. This shift was a clear signal to districts to begin preparation for the implementation of these new learning standards. Standards are nothing new to Connecticut districts; we have been aligned with academic standards defined by the state for years. They have provided a consistent framework of learning expectations for the students of Connecticut for decades, ensuring that every Connecticut student has the opportunity to be taught with the same standards, regardless of zip code.

The Common Core State Standards are a step in the right direction for Connecticut, and we should not pause or curtail their implementation. They are more rigorous than our previous standards and better prepare our students for readiness for college and career.

The issues surrounding the implementation of the Common Core do not stem from inappropriate content, but perhaps two converging forces that have derailed an effective rollout of the standards.

Force #1: There has been a constant erosion of resources and staff at the State Department of Education over the past decade.

Capacity has diminished greatly as the Department has not been permitted to fill vacancies over time. Additionally, compensation packages for key staff have fallen severely behind those within districts, making it more difficult to attract and retain talent. The primary role that the Department has assumed over time shifted from visionary leadership and support of education in districts to overseeing compliance processes for No Child Left Behind and other mandates.

At one time, Connecticut was heralded as a national leader in education. In the mid 90s, I was invited to several other states to share what Connecticut was doing with the BEST Program for beginning educators. Our BEST Program was a national model; CT was respected universally for its cutting-edge work in education. The Department enjoyed a plethora of expertise in its content specialists. If a district were struggling with a curriculum issue, it was typical to first consult with the State Department of Education. Working at the SDE was an honor and a privilege.

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Today we have bare bones staff/resources in many areas of the SDE. While there are truly amazing, talented, and dedicated people who continue to serve the state in myriad of ways at the Department, these individuals' efforts are hindered by the dearth of resources available to them.

In 2010, our state adopted the Common Core State Standards, but we never had the capacity to provide the infrastructure of resources and training to districts at the state level. That implementation silently fell to individual districts for the most part, contingent on local resources and priorities. Stakes were low – no one was being tested on those standards.

Many other states hummed along with robust websites of resources, comprehensive training schedules for district staff, and meaningful outreach. We failed to acknowledge how far we were falling behind until the test became real and then simultaneously teacher evaluation was tied to the test.

Force #2: Overambitious reform agenda that coupled teacher evaluation with the Smarter Balanced Assessment based on the implementation of the Common Core

It simply was not possible to achieve these three goals concurrently when they should be implemented in a sequential fashion: 1) implement CCSS and prepare for the new online assessments, 2) experience the online assessments and work through the issues of the assessment, and 3) develop a system that interfaces teacher evaluation with the assessment outcomes in a meaningful way.

Instead, as a state system, we told our teachers that they had to learn a new set of standards and adjust curricula, ready students for a new world of online adaptive assessments, and at the same time be judged professionally with the incorporation of the results of that testing. It is no surprise that the confluence of this triumvirate created a statewide outcry.

Conclusion: This is all fixable.

I encourage the Education Committee not to “throw out the baby with the bath water” by deferring the Common Core State Standards. We should embrace the standards and provide appropriate resources for the SDE to support districts' work for success in their implementation.

Almost every district in the state has volunteered to participate in the Smarter Balance Field Test this spring. Reinforce the forward-thinking of these districts and encourage the SDE to judiciously communicate with the larger audience of the state that data received on this “test run” of the assessment will have limited reliability and validity given the constraints of it being non-adaptive and a field test. Ensure that those districts that stepped up to participate in this field test are not compared in the public forums of the press in an unfair manner. The SDE can do much to control the message of this field test – let it be advocate for the districts and educators across the state.

Seek other remedies to uncouple teacher evaluation with the Smarter Balance Assessment until Connecticut can regain its national status in education through the collaborative work of our districts and the SDE. We need to master the implementation of the Common Core first, before we can

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expect the outcomes of the assessments for those standards to help define educational quality in our state.

Conduct an audit of the CT SDE for current capacity and resources and map out what it would take to staff and provide an appropriate level of resources for this department to meet the complex education needs of our state at this time. Once that is determined, **fund the gap**.

I thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing my statement.

Sincerely,


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