

March 10, 2014

Ed McKeon, Secretary – Middletown Board of Education
76 Pearl St.
Middletown CT
06457

RE: Testimony on HB 5078, An Act Imposing a Moratorium on the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

Chairman and Commissioners:

I am in favor of HB 5078, but only if it is amended to ensure that funds needed for essential educational needs in districts, are not withheld.

This testimony is my personal opinion, and should not be construed as an official statement by the Middletown Board of Education, or to necessarily reflect the opinions of my colleagues on the board, or of the district administration.

I have deep misgivings about Common Core, and the associated set of new evaluations and tests which are a part of a national movement to reform education.

As you will likely hear from others, I believe that Common Core standards were developed in an educational vacuum with little input from actual classroom educators, and is based on a faulty premise that the entire educational system in the country is in dire need of fixing because our students lack 21st century readiness, whatever that is.

There are definitely problems in our educational system, but common sense, and research have identified what the problems are, and where they are.

In general, poor cities with large pockets of dire poverty, and large populations of students who do not use English as their primary language, along with students who do not have preschool or ongoing support have been identified again and again as the places where achievement suffers.

I challenge any assertion that implies that Simsbury and Hartford have the same educational problems, and yet, we are about to roll out a uniform system of standards and curriculum practices, and tests, which make the assumption that what's good for Simsbury is good for Hartford, and vice versa.

The real problems cannot be solved by a new set of standards, though increased rigor should always be embraced in the classroom, and effective evaluations should be used to make sure we have the most capable teachers and administrators.

There is one real solution to the problem of education achievement, and that solution is appropriate, equitable educational funding.

For sixty years, our legislators have failed our students, and have failed the system. The State Constitution, and the courts have demanded that the state provide equitable funding for all Connecticut students. And still, the state has underfunded education decade after decade.

Instead of providing the funding, the State has created complex funding formulas, which it has not fully funded, and created, in law after law, unfunded mandate after unfunded mandate, building a set of perverse penalties which erodes the ability of cash-strapped municipalities to provide quality education.

As cities struggle with eroding grand lists, and inflation of education demands, schools have suffered exactly in the way you might expect. Poorer cities have bigger school problems.

The state has helped create failing school districts by failing themselves to provide funding. In struggling districts this funding necessarily must be in the multiples of what is provided to successful districts because the problems (social, economic, readiness, support) are so severe.

And instead of doing their duty, completely funding education for all students, our state leaders have developed band-aid solutions like magnet and charter schools, schools of choice, alliance districts and Commissioner's networks, none of which has presented evidence which indicates they've solved the problem for all students.

And so No Child Left Behind was foisted on us, and after it failed, Common Core followed on its heels. And of course, Common Core has not come with nearly enough funding to support its implementation in struggling districts.

Common Core demands rigor, advanced technology, many more hours of evaluation and testing, a loss of flexibility in the classroom, and a loss of real instruction time. It demands much, comes with a shortage of funding, and offers no proof that it will have the desired results.

Often the simplest solution is the right one. The real answer, one which has never really been tried, is to provide the needed funding to solve the problems where we know they exist.

That would be the most noble experiment of all. Equal funding for all students.

Start there, and put Common Core on hold until you solve the most basic problem first.

