

Good Afternoon Education Committee Members

My name is Howard Dashefsky. I am a long-time resident of West Hartford where my youngest son attends high school. My wife is a World Language teacher in Farmington. I have been a Bloomfield teacher of students with special needs for the last thirty-five years. I have seen huge programmatic, curricular, and pedagogical changes that have impacted my teaching and my student's learning. I have witnessed the educational landscape go from being child-centered to one that now is test-centered. We have seen especially over the last 10-15 years the narrowing of the curriculum to one of literacy and numeracy that appear has points of data that are derived from endless testing and assessment. My fear now is that with the Common Core Standards and the associated assessments that go with it, not only are we harming a vulnerable population of students, those with special needs, but that these standards and their expression in the classroom may not be compatible with many of the guidelines of IDEA.

In 1975 Congress enacted IDEA to ensure that children with disabilities would have the opportunity to receive a free and appropriate public education. To comply with Federal law, Connecticut and other states, through the Planning and Placement Team developed Individual Education Plans (IEP) for children receiving special education services who often could not work at their own grade level. The IEP is developed to help these children learn outside of standardized methodology and curriculum. It sets reasonable learning goals for the child and outlines the services that will be made available. In that IDEA is based on the rights of a child to receive a free and appropriate education relative to their abilities and disabilities, the application of Common Core Standards may not be compatible with many of the provisions of IDEA.

In my work with students whether they have a learning disability, cognitive impairment, or are on the autism spectrum, I am guided but the dictates of the IEP. It mandates that at times there are modification to the curriculum or accommodations that are needed. With more students working in an inclusion model they are in regular education classes for a greater portion of the day. The support they receive from special education or pupil service staff varies from school to school sometimes as a function of budget or personnel constraints. Thus a greater burden is placed on the mainstream teacher to modify instruction and the curriculum. Again the IEP is a legal document.

With a standardized curriculum, data collection, and test preparation, the concern I have is that the needs of the student with an IEP are ignored. Teachers are focusing on a set of skills that will be on the test to the exclusion of the developmental needs of different children in the class. It is not uncommon for a school to focus on moving students from basic to proficient or proficient to goal, thus targeting some and not attending to the needs of others. This also does not take into account that it is leads to frustration on the part of children who are subjected to a curriculum, concepts, and assessments that are often beyond their grasp. It reinforces their feelings of inadequacy. It is my belief that the money that is being spent on assessments, testing materials, and so called common core aligned curriculum materials, could be used to improve delivery of instruction to all. students especially the most vulnerable.

In closing I am asking at the very least, that this committee and the legislators on it do what some legislators in New York State have done. Require the State Department of Education as it

educates parents, teachers and the community, to dedicate a public forum to the impact of the Common Core and its curriculum on children with special needs. They along with others may be the most vulnerable as Common Core's career and college-ready standards become the standard for high school graduation. As Fair Test put it: "If a child struggles to clear the five feet, she will not become a "work-class jumper" just because someone raised the bar to six feet and yelled jump higher, or her poor performance is used to punish her coach."

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to our children.

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