

Testimony of Kristen Keska

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

HB 5331 An Act Concerning the Implementation of the Revisions to the PEAC Guidelines

March 12, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee on Education:

I have been teaching Social Studies at East Hampton High School for eight years. With the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the new SBAC testing, and the new CT Teacher Evaluation System, I now feel like a juggling circus clown, not a professional teacher. I struggle on a consistent basis to keep a structured and successful classroom where I know the students are growing as future leaders, learning our core history, and improving their writing skills. With or without CCSS, this has always been my professional goal. Our classrooms have been broken into and the robbers are taking everything away that we teachers value and know works.

I support parts of the HB 5078. I understand why CCSS was created. I do not oppose rigorous education standards that are aligned across the states. What I do oppose is the process that was used to create and implement these standards. Teachers, the ground troops of the classroom, were not utilized as the anchor and professionals that we are and this has been a point of contention since the creation of the CCSS. We are professionals and do not have a "job" or a "career," but a passion. Yet, teachers' voices and critiques have been stifled in every step of the national and state process. Our collective voices have been saying: slow down the implantation of CCSS, fix the testing and technological problems with SBAC, and evaluate us, but in a way that does not take hours upon hours collecting data that does not prove our merit as professionals. I should not have to spend two hours creating a universal screen that is not related to classroom content, 14 hours reading and scoring these essays based off the CCSS rubric, three hours putting the data together, an hour with my department analyzing the data, and over an hour meeting with my supervisor about said data for my midterm evaluation. With the time it takes to give the prompts and then create a lesson to help the students understand what they were missing and why it matters, we are now almost at 24 hours of time, most of which is my own time, beyond the ringing of a school bell.

Many politicians who have been quoted in the press are stating that their goal is to make the rollout of CCSS smoother for next year, but in reality, the rollout started at the beginning of this year. This is why teachers and administrators are scrambling, without any assistance, to comply with these standards overnight, verses gradually and effectively. Professional development and the creation of a curriculum that would elevate the CCSS was not created by most schools before September and new aligned, tested, vetted, curriculum cannot be completed in one single year.

The chaos of this speedy implementation of CCSS, SBAC, and the evaluation system has not only impacted the teachers, but has impacted our pride and joy, our students. My students are stressed. They might not be able to explain why, but their stress parallels my stress. What once used to be coherent lessons created using the backwards design model are now choppy, with random data checkpoints such as universal screens and snapshots, which are often not tied to the unit or curriculum. The students know this, and some get visually or argumentatively upset about it.

I do not support the portion of HB 5078 that takes away the Department of Education's ability to spend appropriated money to assist districts while CCSS is being investigated. Districts still need the funds to upgrade their technology for SBAC along with many other services that support stronger student learning and outcomes. I agree with Superintendent Charles from Middletown; their district, as well as many others, relies on every penny that our state and federal government can contribute to create the best learning environment for their students.

Please amend HB 5078 to remove the appropriation halt. If this bill is passed, please make sure teachers have the majority voice in any CCSS research and investigations panels. We have spent our lives focused on the success of children and we will not jeopardize that. Trust us as passionate professionals.

Thank you for your time,

Kristen Keska
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