

Common Core Testimony 3-11-14

Anne M. Nguyen

I apologize for my lack of eloquence here. I just found out about the hearing on Common Core and I am unable to attend in person and have literally 30 min. to get you my written testimony by your 2 pm deadline. I will try my best to make my stance felt.

I am a teacher at Sport & Medical Sciences Academy in Hartford, CT. This is my 27th year of teaching. I am disheartened by education and the current direction we are headed. It is wrong for our children, it is wrong for our parents, it is wrong for teaching professionals, and it is wrong for our future.

To think that any high stakes tests can possibly determine whether or not I am a competent teacher is ludicrous. There has never been a single valid study to lead anyone to believe this is true. Students learn best when they have well trained teachers who know their content deeply, know how to plan and deliver content for ALL students in their classrooms creatively, and when those students have a teacher they can connect with on a personal level. No multiple choice tests can assess these skills that our best teachers possess. I challenge anyone to enter my classroom and see what my students can do to even think they should look at the scores my students have gotten on any ill-conceived standardized test. We want to teach 21st Century skills? We want college ready and career ready students? Please come to my classroom, all are welcome any time.

I teach Marketing & Entrepreneurship. Fortunately for my students my class is required for graduation at our magnet school. Do we get the best handpicked students? No, we have a wonderful cross-section of students from Hartford and the suburbs that represents CT. We have academic, honors, Special Education, ESOL students and everything in between. ALL students must take and pass my class to graduate and they do. They progress in ways that are unimaginable to many using authentic assessments. I do not give a single test or quiz ever in my class. However, my students constantly read, write, do math, and perform. They have hands on experiences that are preparing them in incredible ways to become successful in college, careers, and in life. My students have been recognized at the national and global level since 2007 and we have even met and been recognized by President Obama twice in the past 2 ½ years. They earn scholarships, they go on to own their own businesses in the local area or become better employees. Again, they do not take a single test or quiz. My students enter my classroom not having a single business class in their high school career and when they leave my classroom 20 weeks later they are all young business professionals. They will look you in the eye and give you a firm handshake. They can pitch you their business and market themselves with ease utilizing their newfound vocabulary. They can defend their business plan dressed in their business best in front of a panel of business professionals from the local community under timed conditions. They can prove to you their profit margin and show you their first year income statement and take questions from the panel professionally. Yes, they never take a single multiple choice test in my class. Are they garnering 21st century skills? I daresay yes.

So why then are we subjecting them to constant and overwhelming high stakes testing? My students' anxiety levels have risen astronomically over the past 3 years. My students are subjected to 3 rounds of NWEA testing that takes days each time away from content in each of their classes that is critical for their well-rounded education. Our students are losing the education they are entitled to, the parents lose, and the teachers are exhausted and beaten down. Creative lessons and projects are planned with 21st Century skills in mind and then the school pretty much shuts down, the wifi is turned off, and testing happens for days upon days. And then make up testing for days. The laptop carts are taken from teachers to do testing for weeks. Yes, weeks. And now we have the new SBAC upon us; another test that will again take computer access away from our students for class work and activities and the school pretty much shuts down to accommodate for these "important" tests. I have not calculated the days and hours lost to this testing frenzy but if we got honest and did I think parents would be appalled. I know teachers are.

And teachers feel the need to teach to these tests? I certainly do not. I am one of the lucky ones who will continue to teach the way I know benefits my students and I do not concern myself with how I will be viewed when my students' test scores are used inappropriately to evaluate me as a Marketing and Entrepreneurship teacher. Really? They stress, have a bad day or week, may not do well because they are exhausted from the constant testing and then you will tell me I am an incompetent teacher? That is laughable. I again charge anyone to enter my classroom and see what my students do on a daily basis. We are losing focus on what is important and our promise to our children. These high stakes tests are ruining education today. Why are we interrupting the school year constantly and taking precious time away from the content they need? We currently have far less concentrated time to teach our content through which we continue to teach reading, writing, and math as we always have; that hasn't changed but now we find ourselves unable to adequately cover our content because of testing interruptions and the fact that some teachers feel the pressure to take even more time out to teach to the test? Now with the new SBAC teachers are worried that the mechanics of **how** to take the test must be taught? And what of our special needs populations and ESOL students?

No, I am against high stakes testing overall. It should never be used to evaluate my skills as a teacher and it is certainly not adding any quality to the education of our young people today. Bottom line—life is not a multiple choice test.

I must meet deadline in order to be heard, so here it is.

Respectfully,

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