

Dear Education Committee members,

I am a mom of two children in Westport, CT, and we have moved to the USA one year ago after living and experiencing school systems in Germany and Great Britain. I have followed the rollout of the Common Core very closely. I therefore have a number of grave concerns about the CCS, and my concerns are representative of numerous parents in Westport, across our state, and beyond.

The Common Core was the impetus for a disturbing revamping of our kindergarten program, which includes 7-hour days for 4- and 5-year-olds, the elimination of library and story time (kindergarteners have 10 to 15 minutes to choose from pre-selected books on a cart. Forget the joy of exploring the library and listening to stories), reduction of story books in favor of "informational text" the drilling of math and reading at an age-inappropriate level and intensity, and devaluing of free play—which is shown overwhelmingly in research to be the key to learning for young minds and key to their long-term social and emotional well-being and academic success. Not to mention that it seems obvious to me that kindergarten first and foremost should be about instilling a love of learning and school, not an initiation into an exhausting, dull, and inappropriately rigorous experience that is turning off children before they can barely read.

When I heard the administration presenting their Common Core based curriculum changes for all grades, I realized kindergarten was the least of our problems. High school language arts classes to be composed of 70% informational text and 30% literature? What do you remember from high school? What has stuck with you, perhaps formed your world view and influenced your hopes and dreams? For me, great literature, no question.

Some more concerns, I'll put in bullet points, as I'm sure you are swamped with testimony:

- Implementation of the Common Core and Smarter Balance tests have been rushed through in other states and the results have been disastrous. By now, everyone has read about the fallout in NY. If CT follows suit, it will basically be like following NY straight off a cliff even though we can plainly see the mess below.

- No one is listening to teachers, who are the people on the front lines. The complaints, blog posts, articles from disgruntled—even irate—teachers are everywhere. We need to respect and listen to teacher's input and act accordingly, especially in districts where teachers are already clearly doing a great job.

- There are many questions about who created the Common Core Standards, and how and why. Companies are making vast profits from new text books, tests, and study guides. What's the motivation here, \$ or our kids' best interests? It's not clear. At all. One example of how misguided the creators were: No early childhood experts were consulted in developing the CCS for elementary schools. Not one. The new tests also are untested; our children are the guinea pigs. This is outrageous. What is the rush?

Here are SOME RESEARCH LINKS AND EXPERT QUOTES to back up my points:

From long-time school psychologist: William R. Horn, Ph. D. BCBA-D, Psychologist, Greenwich Public Schools:

"There are many of us in the field of child development who are concerned with the increased formal 'academic demands' on young children which is squeezing out time for opportunities for 'play/recess' and often increases stress in the children. Developmentally, time on the playground and activities that do not have such a traditional 'academic' focus are important to the development of creativity and social problem solving especially with young children. As an aside, with most people who are not successful in the 'work place,' the problem is a lack of 'people skills,' not a lack of knowledge!"

The Crisis in Early Education

http://allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/crisis_in_early_ed.pdf

"The pushing down of the elementary school curriculum into early childhood has reached a new peak with the adoption by almost every state of the so-called common core standards. They call for kindergartners to master more than 90 skills related to literacy and math, many intended to get children reading in kindergarten. Yet there is no research showing that children who read at age five do better in the long run than those who learn at six or seven.

For many children the outcomes of this hurried curriculum are unhealthy. Educators and physicians report increasing incidents of extreme and aggressive behavior in preschools and kindergartens and link these to the stress children experience in school... TheHartford Courant reported that Connecticut students in the earliest grades, including kindergarten, are increasingly behaving in ways that pose physical threats to themselves and others. Connecticut schools suspended or expelled 901 kindergartners for fighting, defiance, or temper tantrums in 2002; this was almost twice as many as in 2000. One New Haven school official attributed the spike in violence among young children to the increasing emphasis on standardized testing and the elimination of time for recess, gym, and other chances to play."

The Wisdom of Play: How Children Learn to Make Sense of the World (Most pertinent: the intro, history, and p. 12. Author Biographies at the end)

<http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/RoomPlanning/WisdomOfPlay.pdf#search=Elkind>

"Policymakers and school administrators push early academics as a way to give children a competitive edge in a global economy, and to help children from low-income backgrounds catch up with their middle-class peers. But those arguments are based on assumptions not supported by well-designed research. The federal government has invested heavily in on early literacy, with disappointing results. The federal Reading First program, for example, significantly increased didactic, phonics-heavy reading instruction but had no effect on reading comprehension scores. Intensive test-driven programs may produce short-term gains in scores, but long-term research indicates that these gains fade away. Studies of Germany's experiment with academic kindergartens showed that play-based early education produced better results in reading and math, social and emotional adjustment, creativity, intelligence, oral expression, and "industry."

My view: Obama, Romney need to know one thing about early childhood education – start over
<http://schoolsofthought.blogs.cnn.com/2012/08/29/my-view-obama-romney-need-to-know-one-thing-about-early-childhood-education-start-over/>

As one teacher said recently to Defending the Early Years (DEY), “I feel disrespected as a professional, my students feel the pressure and the parents are confused. I see kids with eyes glazed who are simply overwhelmed by being constantly asked to perform tasks they are not yet ready to do. I finally had to leave my classroom and retire early.”

Why Kids Hate School

<http://www.parenting.com/article/why-kids-hate-school>

Gutowski's class was deep into Charlotte's Web, but they had to cut the lesson short. "The kids were dying to know what was going to happen, but we had to start prepping for an assessment and memorize lists of vocabulary words, such as 'crop rotation,' just because they were on the test," says Gutowski. "When we were reading Charlotte, their heads were in the book, they were talking about their feelings and the words they love. It was electric. As soon as we pulled out the test workbook, they shut down. The way we have to teach is anti-kid, anti-learning, and just plain boring."

I could continue with numerous links to outraged parents and teachers' insights, but I'm sure you've seen them. The welfare of our kids is in your hands. Please reconsider very carefully whether the CCS will serve the best interests of our children or of corporations and those with a political agenda.

Best regards,
Susanna Sachau