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My name is John Bestor and I have written to many of you on this subject of education reform before and have also spoken directly with some of you at open forums. I have been a practicing school psychologist for 40 years in the State of Connecticut and have worked with public school students – of all ages – as well as their parents and teachers. Most of my career has been with the elementary school population, from preschool to age 11.

In my opinion as an educator, there is so much wrong with this current education reform that is hard to know where to begin. I believe that the basic premise, the underlying assumptions that set forth this systematic, determined, and undemocratic reform effort is faulty. These reforms were initiated by politicians who in cahoots with “big money” corporate interests (aka donors), funded by wealthy philanthropists, and developed by professional lobbyists posing as educators.

The basic premise is incorrect because our public schools are not failing. In fact, historically on the NAEP tests, which provide a snapshot of how our students perform on academic tasks across our diverse school communities, they perform reasonably well. Now, the NAEP test results are rarely cited by the reformers because the findings do not send the message that the reformers want and need communicated. So, instead, for over 20 years or more – even before NCLB – the reform interests continue to cherry-pick data that supports their message that America’s schools are falling far behind those of other developed nations, thereby jeopardizing our competitive position as the economic leader of the world. It is ludicrous to compare our public school students to those in Finland or Singapore or Shanghai or anywhere other than here. Recent information has come to light that Shanghai PISA test results are not what they had seemed. In a recent report from Andreas Schleicher of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], the same Mr. Schleicher who served on the CCSS validation committee, admitted that the Shanghai PISA results were skewed toward the elites and not truly representative of its diverse population because Chinese law prohibits the children of migrant workers to be evaluated outside their rural communities. The initial report made headline news while the follow-up disclaimers went essentially unmentioned, only to be teased out by persistent researchers and objective reporters well after the fact. The misrepresentation of this information does not happen by accident.

To the reform movement, the ongoing drumbeat of school failure is continuously messaged because facts do not matter – “stay on message” is the mantra. For a movement whose hallmark is the incessant collecting of data, it is highly selective as to which data to promote which is essentially dishonest at best. I ask that you be suspect of the misguided messaging by self-interested stakeholders who dominate this education reform movement at all levels. An excellent example of this took place two weeks ago at the Education Committee’s Information Forum where Stefan Pryor and Chris Minnich, Executive Director of the CCSSO, spoke without any opposing viewpoints and purposefully misrepresented the teacher involvement in the development of CCSS. Mr. Minnich cited reports that reflect teacher involvement in

the feedback and validation processes and promised to forward that information to you. Since I asked to have that information shared with me as well, my district representative, Mitch Bolinsky, was kind enough to do so. I read through the reports thoroughly with particular interest as to their claims. One of the reports was from the Office of Legislative Research [OLR] that had been researched and written by Marybeth Sullivan; it was a highly polished and professional-appearing review of second-hand information, probably provided to her by the reformers themselves. The second report was a joint statement from the NGA and CCSSO entitled Reaching Higher: The CCSS Validation Committee providing in their own words a “summary of public feedback on the draft college and career readiness standards for ELA and Mathematics” which purportedly reflected all the comments and suggestions made by those who completed the on-line questionnaire. They claimed that 28% were completed by teachers (53% by educators and another category), but who knows for sure. Again, it is a highly polished, professional-seeming document. But, of course, this report is an attempt to summarize all the collected data by an organization that has a vested interest in the outcome. I am incredibly distrusting of any report that has summarized data without allowing an independent, objective appraisal of the actual data and I hope you will as well.

I am concerned that the rhetorical claims of “rigor” and “high academic standards” are merely words without substance. There is really no proof that these CCSS meets this lofty criteria, other than their say-so. In fact, two of their own hand-picked validators declined to endorse the CCSS and have been vocal – both in their speaking engagements and in published articles – as to their concerns and objections. I cite two articles for your personal review: How CC ELA Standards Place College Readiness At Risk [Pioneer Institute White Paper # 89] and Lowering the Bar: How It Fails Math [Pioneer Institute White Paper # 103]. In the first, Dr. Stotsky feels that the ELA CCSS will diminish the development of critical thinking skills because the proposed increased use of informational texts are generally not as challenging as good literature where actively-engaged readers must bring inferential thinking to their reading. In the second, Dr. Milgrim – who refused to sign off on the Math standards – is particularly upset that the proposed math standards fall far below college readiness expectations. His contention has been substantiated by Jason Zimba, one of the co-chairs of the initial development committees. I would venture to guess that there are others who jumped on the validation bandwagon who wish they had taken a more critical look, but because of signed confidentiality agreements and professional integrity feel that it is safer to remain silent.

If – as I assert – the CCSS are as misguided and ill-conceived as I have indicated, then the implementation process which includes “one-size-fits-all” teach-to-the-test instructional practice, never-ending and highly expensive “high stakes testing”, and the maintenance of confidential test scores on fallible computer schema should be totally re-considered. And, I personally believe, that there needs to be careful thought given to:

- Do we really believe one instructional approach will meet the educational needs of all learners? That’s not what the research supports.
- Do we really believe that it is more important to test student progress continuously rather than actually excite, motivate, and instruct students in learning? That is also not supported in the research.

- Do we really believe that confidential test data on students from kindergarten through high school should be stored somewhere – in a cloud perhaps – for eternity. I don't believe any thoughtful parent thinks that their child's early learning test results have any business being recorded, maintained, and put at risk of future disclosure.

And lastly, the new teacher evaluation process serves no purpose other than to discredit and demoralize teachers who everyday put their hearts and energies into their work with students – sometimes against seemingly insurmountable odds. Repeated studies (and I cite 6 here: Haertel et al, 2013; Nye et al, 2004; Rockoff, 2003; Rowan et al, 2002; Goldhaber et al, 1999; Hanushek et al, 1998) show that teacher input on student test performance is 10-15% at best. The most recent Haertel study “refutes the popular and misguided perception that teacher quality is a primary influence on student test scores”. As a result, it is “an error to evaluate teachers by test scores” he concludes.

The purpose behind this education reform movement is nefarious at best. It is Rupert Murdoch who announced that America's K-12 public education system is a 500 billion dollar untapped market. Since then, there has been a proliferation of for-profit charter schools with CEOs earning nearly half-a-million dollars a year which is more than double what most district superintendents make. The philanthropic giving of multiple millions from Bill Gates, Eli Broad, Sam Walton, and many others all have strings attached.

No one pretends that there is not work to be done in education to equalize opportunity and level the playing field. But, let's focus on what can be done to effect real change and not pour precious tax-payer dollars into a highly controversial education reform movement that avoided asking teachers who understand how students learn best – from a developmental perspective, from an experiential perspective, and from a real-life perspective.

Thank you once again for affording me this opportunity. If any of you would like further discussion on this topic, I would be pleased to speak with you.

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