

Connecticut BATs Refute Common Core

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

My name is Dr. Jesse Patrick Turner, I am a Professor of Reading and Language Arts at Central Connecticut State University. I am here today representing Connecticut BAT teachers. We do not believe in a "one size fits all" standard for education, and we do not believe in a top-down federal approach to control education for profit. BATs fight the CCSS for a variety of reasons, but, specifically, we know that the CCSS do not make up good education and will not fix or lower our child poverty rate. This document hopes to clear up a few things: 1) Dispel some of the myths about the CCSS as a superior set of educational standards, 2) give readers a clear vision of what these standards look like from the lens of the practitioners who teach our most vulnerable children - those in poverty, and 3) finally, hope to set a course for BATs to advocate strongly for our children who live in poverty and who must be forced to overcome it without the supports and resources they need in our schools. BATs are committed to raising their voices to advocate for an educational system that helps to provide some relief to children who suffer from the trauma of poverty. We use the words "some relief" in this missive because schools and teachers cannot eradicate poverty, and we feel the government must begin to acknowledge that children in poverty do not succeed in school because of poverty. Poverty will follow children no matter where they are sent to school via charter or voucher. Poverty will follow children no matter who teaches them - TFA or highly-qualified teacher. BATs are firmly committed to exposing that Common Core, charters, vouchers and TFA will not eradicate poverty, and corporate reformers' attempts to divert the conversation from child poverty is nothing short of abuse. The contents of this document will act as a written history in which the voice of BATs dispel the myths of the CCSS and testify to their experiences in high poverty districts in relation to CCSS. All children deserve qualified teachers, safe schools, and recess!

1. THE GOAL IS COLLEGE AND CAREER READY FOR ALL STUDENTS

- A. The CCSS have never been subjected to any research studies linking them to readiness of any kind.
- B. Standard #1 reads "entry-level college" which could mean a 2-year community college or vocational school.
- C. All children are not or will not be "College and Career Ready" for many different reasons.
- D. The expense of implementing and assessing of the CCSS causes electives such as art, music, and sports to be cut from schools, which prevents students from discovering future interests and talents.
- E. Review the types of Common Core work children are doing--how does it reflect what they need to know for the workplace? The CCSS does not even live up to its stated goals to teach real world skills needed for the workplace.

F. Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institute predicted that the CCSS would have little to no effect on academic achievement. He noted that from 2003-2009 states with good standards raised their NAEP scores by roughly the same margin as the states with bad standards.

G. The way that the CCSS is designed is that if a child is chronically transient, they will be behind regardless--even more so with a curriculum two grade levels above a developmentally appropriate one!

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2. STATES LED THE EFFORT TO DEVELOP COMMON CORE, NOT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

A. The groups that created the CCSS--Achieve and The National Governors Association--received funding from The Gates Foundation, and created the CCSS with almost no input from teachers. The only educational experts were board members from publishing companies who will benefit financially from the implementation of CCSS. Teachers learned about the CCSS after they were written.

B. A check of one's State Board of Education meeting minutes will show that states were forced to adopt the standards in order to apply for Federal Race to The Top Funds.

C. States signed onto the CCSS before the standards were completed and unveiled.

E. Many states and districts are already withdrawing from CCSS for financial and other reasons.

F. Race to the Top had a \$5 billion dollar price tag. Arne Duncan set the conditions for the "race." To be eligible, states had to agree to adopt the CCSS and tests.

G. Billionaire entrepreneurs entered the education market due to the \$5 billion, which was up for grabs. Consultants and vendors offered services to districts, and publishing companies hurried to align their products with CCSS. For example, Denver spent 35% of its budget on consultants instead of students, teachers, or schools.

H. The Gates Foundation supported the creation, evaluations, and promotion of the CCSS.

I. States had to agree to Arne Duncan's conditions to receive a waiver from NCLB, and one of those conditions was to accept CCSS.

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3. THE CCSS ARE NOT CURRICULUM AND DO NOT TELL TEACHERS HOW TO TEACH

A. This is true, but the standards were written without the creation of materials, so some states like New York have created “modules” that are curriculum and script teachers.

B. The mandated (expensive and error-riddled) tests that accompany the CCSS will be the de facto curriculum. What is tested is what will be taught.

C. Due to its heavy reliance on testing, schools will feel the need to implement curriculum aligned with the CCSS. Many school districts have neither the time nor the funding to develop these aligned curriculums. The companies that have had the largest input into the CCSS, do have curriculum designed to be aligned to the tests. We see possible conflicts of interest. We ask that all State Department of Education Employees provide proof that they have not benefited from any compensation from companies providing such curriculum products. While the CCSS doesn't directly tell schools what they need to teach, it does make it difficult for students to do well on the test unless they've had a curriculum aligned with the test.

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4. BETTER STANDARDS CALL FOR BETTER ASSESSMENTS

A. Students are tested without regard to accommodations as legally mandated by IEP's.

B. No modifications or adjustments are made for students with disabilities or English Language Learners.

C. Teachers are not allowed to see the assessments in order to diagnose children and to further their instruction of them and the class.

D. Assessments will be moved to computer assessments. Children will be required to do this without keyboarding skills and little contact time with the teacher. Prolonged computer use can lead to vision problems and carpal tunnel syndrome.

E. The claim that CCSS assessments are better than other standardized tests is fallacious. For example, they were tested in 2013 in NYS and 70% of children failed them.

F. CCSS Assessments like PARCC/SBAC do not take into account the special issues of rural schools, many of which do not have enough computers or server space for the information. **MANY SCHOOLS WILL BE FORCED INTO MAKING DIFFICULT BUDGET CUTS IN ORDER TO AFFORD TO THESE TESTS!**

G. National standards and tests have been purposely designed to create a national marketplace for more curriculum and testing products, not to better public education. This reveals a disingenuous agenda.

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5. THE CCSS FOCUSES ON 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

A. The implementation of Common Core has already begun to eliminate vocational and technical education in many districts and states. These massive cuts restrict our students' options to explore 21st century careers.

B. The cost to implement and assess the CCSS have caused huge cuts in music, art, and hands-on science. Research overwhelmingly validates the positive effects of music and the arts for improving learning, social skills, and, ironically, test scores. Cutting hands-on science makes no sense given the importance being placed on STEM.

C. Problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity are skills needed for the challenges of the 21st century, but they won't be taught because they aren't part of the CCSS assessments.

D. As the world changes rapidly, our students must be taught to be flexible in how they think. The CCSS emphasizes rote memorization and teaching to the bubble/computer tests instead of preparing them for the future.

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6. THE CCSS CREATE CONSISTENT LEARNING GOALS FOR ALL STUDENTS REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY LIVE OR GO TO SCHOOL

A. A check with the Department of Education in one's state will show the percentage of children affected by transiency. Does this percentage warrant a standardized curriculum for all children?

B. Public school students are a highly diverse group which includes many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and learning difficulties. This tremendous range of needs and accommodations must be considered. No single education plan (especially one designed by mostly non-educators) is capable of meeting the needs of all children across the U.S.

C. The way that the CCSS is designed is that if a child is chronically transient, they will be behind regardless--even more so with a curriculum two grade levels above a developmentally appropriate one!

7. CCSS ARE ALIGNED TO COLLEGE AND WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS

Research the authors of the CCSS to determine if they are authentic leaders in higher education. Google their curriculum vitae to determine the breadth and depth of their contributions to research and literature on domain-specific knowledge as it relates to future success. What are their contributions towards ensuring a free public education for all children?

8. CCSS ARE BENCHMARKED AGAINST ACADEMIC STANDARDS FROM THE WORLD'S TOP-PERFORMING COUNTRIES

A. The CCSS were not benchmarked against other countries' standards. CCSS were created in a "top down" approach with no regard for the primary grades. Many countries do not set standards for their youngest learners.

B. If states are satisfied with their existing standards, why would communities want anything different? For example, Maryland's schools are excellent, so why would they be forced to change their standards?

C. The world's top performing countries don't place much, if any, emphasis on testing. Finland has one of the best education systems in the world, and it relies on teacher autonomy and less testing in order to achieve this. These tests are nothing more than the precursor for national standardized testing. They are culturally biased, incapable of measuring non-verbal learning or complex thought, and will ultimately cost more than they're worth .

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9. The CCSS CALL FOR CHANGES IN LEARNING FOR ELA AND MATH

A. Students are not being asked to explain their thinking; they are having strategies forced upon them, and they are being tested on test strategy not thinking skills.

B. The CCSS math places students an average of two years behind math programs that exist currently. In a technological society, having less access to higher forms of math is detrimental to student advancement post high school, and places them behind for college expectations.

C. The CCSS in math are so lacking, that the only mathematician on the CCSS validation committee refused to sign off on them.

D. School districts' budgets will be stretched so tight, there will have to be program cuts in order to buy the materials and equipment needed to teach and assess the CCSS. The economic burden on districts will be to the detriment of programs that kids need and love.

E. The companies that had the greatest input in designing CCSS will be the ones selling the textbooks and presenting (for hefty fees paid by taxpayers) at teacher training seminars.

F. Standards call for changes in testing, which means changes in learning opportunities. Most important to the CCSS are testing outcomes; therefore, learning will be restricted to what is tested.

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10. CCSS DELVE DEEPER INTO CORE CONCEPTS

A. The CCSS places more emphasis on reading informational texts (government pamphlets, heater instructions, technical manuals) than on classical literature.

B. The CCSS presents historical text out of context (or with no context); therefore, students will not gain a broad understanding of the text.

C. The CCSS gives historical text isolated from the event in history from which it came. It is a shallow reading, a reading that doesn't encourage students to question what the author may have meant, a reading that doesn't teach them how to recognize symbolism, motivation or multiple meanings, and takes the flavor out of the text. **Having just returned from the Sunday Bloody Sunday Education Summit at the Selma Alabama 49th Jubilee, many at the summit find this aspect extremely disturbing, and fear potential distortions of Black history.** We find David Coleman the key architect of the Common Core State Standards demonstration of close reading using the Dr. King's "Letter From A Birmingham Jail" as insensitive and offensive.

D. The CCSS insistence on reading in isolation does not encourage students to develop life-long love of reading, which is critical for developing higher-level thinking and analytical skills.

What might Connecticut teachers expect as we move deeper into the CCSS implementation? New York BAT teachers are already report back to us.

Here are their experiences of teaching in high poverty communities with Common Core.

1. Since Common Core has been implemented in our school, I cannot run our music program.
2. Since Common Core, no seat time can be lost for students to participate in choral groups; getting string and band lessons started was delayed.
3. I cannot jump into the Common Core lessons via Engage NY because my students are so far behind.

4. My students already feel inadequate, and now they are more frustrated. They often ask, "Why do we have to keep taking all these tests?"
5. All the data that has come with Common Core, testing, and new reform and the entering of that data by teachers has taken me away from the kids.
6. Instead of thinking how to make lessons fun and interesting for kids, I have to think of how they apply to Common Core. Shouldn't education be about the kids?
7. Engage NY math modules are impossible to finish with students who come to us behind in their academic ability to do math. We don't have the materials required to teach, and we have no time to remediate if the kids need time.
8. We are expected to get our students on or above grade level, but they come to us below grade level.
9. I have students who are attending school for the first time in their lives and cannot read or write the language.
10. My average class size is 30-35 students, and I have a complete lack of resources to teach Common Core to kids who are working behind their grade level.
11. I have students who are 15 years old and in their first year of high school. They cannot read or write English but are expected to deal with "complex text" in Common Core.
12. I am teaching, demonstrating, and acting out vocabulary for our core reading stories. For most of my students, the higher thinking activities are not where they are academically.
13. Common Core expects projects, but students are unable to work at home.
14. Common Core packs my schedule with math computer lab, language computer lab, writing program, and word study; we have no time to work on projects.
15. Common Core has caused me to miss out on creating learning opportunities due to testing, testing, testing to the Common Core.
16. My students hate school because they are frustrated and bored; Common Core has "turned them off."
17. I cannot teach the 2B modules for 3rd grade ELA because I have none of the books. 2B was supposed to be out in November and is still not out.
18. My kids find the math confusing, and the tests don't test what they expect us to teach. The kids take the tests after working so hard to learn the concepts, fail the tests, and get frustrated.
19. I have been a teacher in a high-poverty district for 13 years; I have never seen anything like what my kids have had to endure this year under Common Core and NCLB waivers.

20. We have spent the first 2 1/2 months of school testing; the kids are already burnt out.
21. I have a class of 27 students. Five parents are incarcerated, 3 students are homeless, 4 have no winter clothing, and 21 are on free/reduced lunch. They have bigger issues to worry about other than being "college and career ready."
22. Since implementing Common Core, I have noticed an increase in anxious and aggressive behavior. Students are chewing the erasers and metal off their pencils and eating it. They are chewing on their pants, shirts and sleeves and making holes in them. They are using pens and markers to write on themselves.
23. Since implementing Common Core, I have noticed an increase in suicidal statements - Why? Because we are giving them 8 different learning targets each day. We've cut recess and crammed more kids into the cafeteria for lunch to maximize learning time. We are making them self-regulate with a gazillion transitions and center activities while we test and re-test and differentiate.
24. What does "text complexity level" mean and who gets to decide? There is a huge body of research that confirms teaching children at frustration reading levels is harmful.
25. They cancelled art at my school because it cuts into test prep.
26. The Common Core is too much for children who were never exposed to early childhood classes.
27. They removed all the blocks, housekeeping, play-doh, puzzles, and art centers from my 1st grade classroom.
28. The curriculum for my 1st grade class is similar to 2nd and 3rd grade. My students feign illness and act irrational as a direct result of the testing and Common Core.
29. Here is what I cannot do any more: plays, celebrations, holidays, show and tell, student-led learning, performance assessments, service learning, class meetings, gardens, and arts.
30. Common Core is not the answer to urban education. I struggle teaching my 1st graders the basics they need. My students come to me far behind. I feel as if I am teaching far over their heads.
31. The students I teach don't get the abstract; they get the concrete. Explaining multiplication and division to students who are still counting on their fingers is very difficult. Getting them to see the connections between reading and writing is very difficult.
32. I find the Engage NY math modules poorly crafted and inappropriate for the age I teach. It is causing my students so much stress.

Concluding Statement

That being said, BATs and other educators who fight the corporate takeover of our public schools need to think what will happen when we do defeat corporate "reform." What will schools that educate our most vulnerable children - those in poverty - look like? Child poverty will not magically end with the defeat of Common Core, charters, vouchers or TFA, so BATs will commit their voices to making sure the government be held accountable for not addressing this main reason for children's not succeeding in school. BATs will commit their voices to the argument that schools in high-poverty communities must be reworked to meet the distinct needs of all their children. BATs will commit their voices to make all schools respites from poverty for children and to hold those who continue to dismiss it as the leading factor of why children don't succeed in school accountable.

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