

To those concerned about quality education in Connecticut,

I am writing to request your consideration of the bills regarding Common Core State Standard rollout, and new state teacher evaluation procedures.

These past two years, my colleagues and I have been working tirelessly to unwrap and digest the new standards, research approaches in other districts, gather new materials (many purchased at our own cost) and write the new units to deliver in our classrooms.

While our district has provided some professional development and time for this process, it is not nearly enough for such a huge undertaking. We've been doing our best, but with little guidance overall, and we are far from completion. Last year, we piloted one math unit, and are piloting two more math units and one LA unit this year. The operative word here is "pilot".

I am in favor of the new standards and have very much enjoyed teaching these new units. I believe whole heartedly in "depth over breadth", "real world" learning, and the shift in emphasis to non-fiction reading and writing. My students have been highly engaged and I have learned many new strategies as an educator. Change is good! However, too much change, too fast is not good for anyone. As we pilot these new units, we are learning that we need to revise lessons and activities to meet our students' needs, and considerably modify pacing.

For example, right now, I am in the midst of piloting a third grade math unit on multiplication and division. A strong foundation has been laid and my students are building their knowledge of these operations. Their enthusiasm and progress is inspiring. The problem is that the unit has taken longer to deliver than originally anticipated. We are now being directed to chop off the last two weeks of the unit to move on to another so we can "get it all in" by the end of the year. I feel like my students and I are being cut off at the knees. It just so happens that this unit includes the standard that I chose for my Student Learning Objective this year. Even though it is not my decision to prematurely end this unit, I may be penalized if my students do not demonstrate the expected growth laid out in my SLO.

Our students will be taking the SBAC in late April. Though we are told that "the scores do not matter this year" and "it is just a pilot", we are also told that we must stuff everything that might be on the test in before that time. Why can't we have a few years to work deeply with these new units, learn from them, modify and adapt them to meet students needs, be sure they are developmentally appropriate and well paced?

I also implore you to leave high stakes testing out of the teacher evaluation process, and let's not gage our children's value this way either and send their poor parents into a fervor. A few hours out of a year is no way to truly measure a child's academic growth, nor is it a measure of teacher efficacy.

Thank you for your consideration. Please make the best decision for our children. And remember, teachers are human beings too. Is your objective to support us so we can be our very best for your children, or do you want to tear us down by pressuring us to death and making us feel inadequate no matter how hard we work or how much progress our students make?

Sincerely,

Cornelia Doak-Brown

A dedicated and hardworking teacher