

Stacey Holmes- Educators 4 Excellence  
Testimony in opposition to HB 5078

My name is Stacey Holmes. For the past 7 years I have taught high school and middle school English in New Haven, West Haven, and Bridgeport CT. This year, I left my school to serve my fellow teachers as an outreach director for Educators 4 Excellence, a teacher-led organization that works to place teachers at the forefront of the decisions that shape our classrooms and careers. The goal of E4E is to bring the voice of educators into the decision-making process to narrow the gap between legislative hearings like this one and the classroom.

I'm excited to be here today to share my personal feelings about the Common Core State Standards as a classroom teacher – even though I've only been out of the classroom for 8 months – I will always think like a teacher.

As a teacher, I could never understand why we didn't hold all students to the same high expectations. I didn't understand why it was okay for my 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in Bridgeport who were reading at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level, but were graduating with the same accredited diploma as their 10<sup>th</sup> grade peers down the street in Fairfield. I also couldn't understand why I had to take a break from real teaching and learning to spend countless hours preparing my students for a CAPT exam that didn't test their critical thinking or deeper understanding of grade level materials.

As a teacher, I'm excited about the potential of standards and an assessment that finally aligns with what all teachers and parents actually want their kids to be able to do: think critically, solve problems, and analyze information to draw conclusions that they can support with evidence. These are the skills that are required to work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to succeed in college, and these are the skills that are called for under the common core standards.

In addition I am excited to share the ideas and feelings of some of our members. As an outreach director, it is my job and my privilege to meet with, listen to, and discuss critical issues like this one with teachers all over the state. I can tell you that teachers want to be successful as professionals and they want their students to be successful. But they need support. The common core standards will not improve teaching by themselves. If we want the standards to translate into greater student learning, if we want them to better prepare students for college, then our teachers need support to align their curricula and instruction to these higher standards.

After talking to our members, I cannot understand why the standards are so demonized. Some of our members have had the opportunity to begin to align their teaching to the standards and they appreciate that they promote rigor, require a deeper understanding of content, and focus on the development of critical thinking skills. Some have not yet had the chance to integrate the standards into their day-to-day lessons, but are excited about the opportunity to improve the teaching and learning that happens in their classrooms. Specifically, I'd like to point you the

testimony submitted by teachers Victoria Perez, Sean Phillips, Christine O'Neil, Bri Altieri, and Ryan Bell, who could not be here to read their testimony themselves because they are currently doing the important work that we're here talking about – teaching our children.

As a teacher and in my role as an outreach director, I know that there are many different opinions surrounding the standards, and I believe that all voices have the right to be heard. Unfortunately, the rational and moderate voice is not always the loudest, and is therefore not the one that is heard. Please remember that when some shout, "Down with Common Core," they are really saying, "I need support in my classroom." When they shout, "Testing is bad," they are saying, "Please create a test that is reflective of what I teach and meaningful for me and my students." Please remember that our goal is to raise the bar for all students and the Common Core is an important step in that direction. We need to focus on how to help teachers make the transition to these new standards so that all students regardless of where they live can receive the education they deserve.