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Testimony Bill 5078
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My name is Jason Bestor; I am the parent of two young children and an IT specialist by profession. My oldest child is a kindergarten student at the Darcey School in Cheshire and my youngest will have another year of preschool before entering kindergarten.

I am concerned on three major issues all associated with the Common Core State Standards, the SBAC tests, and the expectations for our children in the public schools.

The first has to do with the teaching of mathematical reasoning. As an IT specialist, math is a subject with which I am familiar and comfortable to discuss. I recently received the March 2014 Darcey School Newsletter. In it, the principal of the school who I respect and believe has the children's developmental readiness capabilities in mind, forewarns parents to prepare for math instructional methods that will be "very different from when we were young children. The world has changed and children need different skills to be successful." She tried to re-assure us though math learning in this data-driven information age will look different than traditional instructional methodology. As an IT specialist myself, I can respect that math learning demands may emphasize different analytic capacities, but it is hard for me to understand that the development of practical computation and problem-solving skills will not serve our children well – especially young ones as they move beyond the concrete to more abstract algebraic thinking. However, that is why there is a developmental continuum because young, developing minds are not ready to grasp complicated, abstract (and often excessively wordy) real-world math problems. Even in this computerized information age, it seems foolhardy to embark on an un-researched and untested developmentally-inappropriate change in math instruction that will prevent parents from helping their children learn math concepts and – in all likelihood – will require a very different skill set in less than ten years.

The second major concern that I have has to do with the incessant testing practice that goes on in our schools today. Testing and the preparation for testing takes time away from actual classroom instruction throughout the school year and is wasteful and counterproductive as far as my child's personal learning is concerned. I have informed my daughter's school that I want to opt her out of any high stakes testing and plan to do so in the future as well.

Thirdly, I am very concerned that my daughter's test scores and the amount of additional personal information that may be shared with third-party testing services as part of the SBAC. I've asked my district superintendent about privacy policies and have not received satisfactory answers. In fact, he does not seem as well informed as I would expect of the recent changes in Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations. I personally see no reason why anyone other than my wife and myself, her teacher and other pertinent building support staff should have any access to her test results or other information. I see this as an intrusion of our privacy and worry that the information which I hold as confidential could leak out and be used by others for commercial purposes. As a practitioner in this business, it is a very real possibility.

The lack of transparency about what information will be shared and with whom, how that information will be protected, and what policies and procedures will be in place on an ongoing basis to keep children's information secure, should be a concern of everyone.

In closing, I feel that there are too many problems inherent in this current education reform movement and request that you move cautiously before you undo public school programming that has done this community, this State, and this Country proud.

Jason B. Bestor

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