

Dear Education Committee:

It is remarkable that you have finally bowed to public pressure to discuss education reform, 4 years after our State Board of Education adopted the new standards (CCSS). This should have happened long ago to avoid the fiasco that is happening in many school districts all over the state and the nation.

I believe the CCSS are better than the CT State standards were but they are not perfect. There are some developmental issues in the early years, the fact that they are written so obscurely that they leave ample room for interpretation is a huge problem in implementation, the HS math standards were rushed to completion and are lacking. CCSS puts Algebra 1 firmly in 9th grade meaning that these students will complete their math sequence by 11th grade, allowing them to get only to pre-calc as a senior. This does not prepare future generations for STEM fields which would require students to get through calculus. Most selective colleges look for students to have AP Calc or AP Stats. Schools can get around this by offering a compacted or accelerated track, but not all schools can fund this, further widening the achievement gap in our state. Our State needs jobs, how are we to attract top tech firms to base themselves here if we are not preparing kids with the knowledge to work there?

Implementation is the largest problem we have today. Each school district, due to local control, is recreating the wheel to align their curricula to the new standards and to look for new resources to support the curricula. There seems to be little guidance coming out from **a research-based platform** to help schools properly align themselves to the standards. Crap curricula is everywhere and textbook publishers are slapping Common Core stickers on anything to gain a sale. **We need, at the State level, a committee of EXPERTS in CONTENT and instruction to review curricula and resources and rank them to help guide our districts (a content expert is different from an instruction expert: a mathematician is a content expert who would analyze curricula and text for scope, sequence, depth, rigor, truth of material while an instruction expert would analyze for accessibility and usability on the part of teachers and students, supports, etc).** As you can well imagine, some district leaders are more competent and able than others and it is the CHILDREN of our State who pay the price differential.

If we are truly concerned about closing our achievement gap in this State, we would ensure that all our districts are using top quality curricula and resources, i.e., tested and supported by data (data that is peer reviewed and open for comment). Currently, in Fairfield, in our eighth grade ELA classrooms we are teaching our children argumentative writing. This skill is indeed a CCSS, but we are using very poor content to teach this skill. Children are reading opinion pieces on banning chocolate milk from schools. These opinion pieces contain very little evidence to support an argument and are filled with junk journalism. There is no text complexity here as called for in the CCSS, no depth or rigor. We need to make sure our children are learning CONTENT. Give them original documents that support our history curriculum to write about, give them good literature to argue themes and relevance, give them science content to argue. Our children should be learning content when applying new skills or it is a lost opportunity!!! Shoddy implementation is short changing our kids' potential. The latest research shows that the achievement gap is not fueled by a kids inability to read, but is due to the fact that there is a huge knowledge gap. Kids are lacking the knowledge or content to understand what they are reading. We need to make sure we implement CONTENT.

Of course there are other variables that are also important like funding these State mandates, the duplicative reporting that is going on (please do a red tape review and undo the over reporting) that takes additional time and money from instruction. We need to overhaul our teacher education programs and bring them into alignment with the demand of new skills and knowledge. Please refer to the Massachusetts 1993 Education Reform Act, to see what measures were enacted in Massachusetts to ensure recruitment of quality teachers and that helped close their achievement gap and propelled them to top of the nation status. No need to recreate the wheel.

I would like to comment further but I will restrict my comments today to IMPLEMENTATION.

Thank you for considering the public's comments and please help our children.

Sincerely,

Patricia Donovan

Fairfield, CT