

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an English teacher at Haddam-Killingworth High School with nearly 23 years of classroom experience. Since I will be at work during the public hearing on Wednesday, I would like to submit my personal testimony to be included during the public hearing for HB 5078 and HB 5331. The following is a copy of a column I had posted on Feb. 4 on www.ctnewsjunkie.com in regards to the Common Core State Standards:

Little did Elizabeth Natale know that her Hartford Courant opinion piece would not only go viral, but also set off a chain reaction that essentially put Connecticut's education reform on hold.

Natale's op-ed appeared on Jan. 17 under the headline "Why I Want To Give Up Teaching." The piece has been read by nearly 500,000 viewers, according to the Courant.

Ten days after Natale's op-ed appeared, veteran Connecticut politico and blogger Jonathan Pelto published a comprehensive post summarizing the reactions of politicians and pundits.

The real bomb was dropped on Jan. 29 when Gov. Dannel P. Malloy effectively put the brakes on education reform in Connecticut.

Shortly thereafter, Madison Superintendent of Schools Thomas Scarice pled with state legislators to "listen to the teachers, administrators, parents, and even the students, to make the necessary course corrections" to school reform.

In truth, the issue of education reform has been smoldering for a while. Connecticut, however, has been slow to react because most Nutmeggers — especially parents — had not truly contemplated the "Common Core" until Natale's personal and lucid reflections brought CCSS to the forefront.

Veteran teacher Stan Karp has written perhaps the most comprehensive and informative article on the issues surrounding the Common Core State Standards, starting with the hasty implementation of its untested principles.

"These standards have never been fully implemented in real schools anywhere," writes Karp.

"They're more or less abstract descriptions of academic abilities organized into sequences by people who have never taught at all or who have not taught this particular set of standards."

As a high school English teacher for the past 23 years, I consider myself, well, experienced. But not even my own professional experience could prepare me — in one year's time — for the voluminous standards which, under Connecticut's plan, comprise 22.5 percent of my performance evaluation.

Take the English Language Arts Standards for 9th and 10th graders as an example. There are six "strands" such as "Reading: Literature" and "Reading: Informational Text." Within each strand are standards, many of which have numerous sub-standards.

The strand of Writing, for instance, has four categories: Text Types and Purposes, Production and Distribution of Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, and Range of Writing.

This last category has just one standard, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10: "Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences."

All of the other categories in the Writing strand, meanwhile, have multiple standards. Text Types and Purposes alone has 19 standards and sub-standards, including CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1c: "Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion,

and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.”

All told, there are 75 standards and sub-standards that I must teach my students to prepare them for the computerized Smarter Balanced test — the final details of which are still being worked out.

It’s not that I haven’t been teaching “standards” for the past 23 years. In fact, that’s exactly what I’ve been doing in a personalized and creative fashion — all within the framework of my school’s English curriculum.

For example, I have always infused my personal knowledge of history, media, and music into many of my lessons for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. While still requiring students to read, write, and listen competently and critically, such lessons also include elements of my own personality.

Now, however, the process of planning lessons encourages English teachers to first consider the 75 codified CCSS principles before making the lesson “their own.”

Supporters of the Common Core contend that the methodology is still a teacher’s choice, so long as the standards are met. But will I really have the flexibility and time to address 75 standards while simultaneously planning unique, innovative lessons? Truth be told, I’m already feeling squeezed as I attempt to “align” with the Common Core.

The requirement of teaching 75 Common Core standards in order to prepare students for a standardized test feels, quite simply, like formulaic teaching.

Is this really how Connecticut wants to “reform” education? I believe the answer to that question is embodied by the impassioned reaction to Elizabeth Natale’s op-ed: “No!”

Thank you,
Barth Keck
Haddam-Killingworth High School
English Teacher