

Public Testimony: Common Core Standards & Teacher Evaluation Implementation

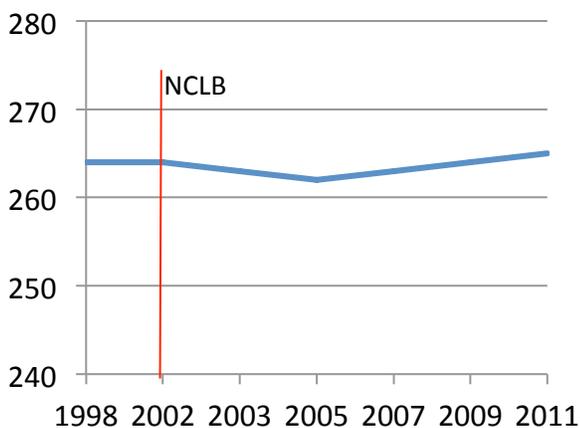
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Legislation such as No Child Left Behind and policies such as Race to the Top (of which includes the Common Core and new Teacher Evaluations) are neither effective nor based on sound research. Educational policy-making is now, more than ever, the preserve of politicians, advocacy foundations, and lobbyists parading as corporate leaders. Teachers have little voice; their role is merely to be held responsible for policies foisted upon them.

– Daniel G. Mulcahy, CSU Professor, Editor of *Transforming Schools*



Effect of NCLB on America's Reading Scores, 8th Grade

After more than a decade of top-down reforms to improve student achievement through increased standardization, accountability, and testing, America's children aren't performing any better. The newest education changes appear to be a more intensified version of 'more of the same,' prompting Dianne Ravitch to refer to President Obama's *Race to the Top* as "*No Child Left Behind on Steroids.*"

Recent changes to education policy in the state and across the nation continue to be based on the false assumption that education problems can be solved by assessing students more.¹

A recent Gallop Poll found that fewer than 25% Americans believe that increased standardized testing has helped the performance of local public schools.²

Connecticut's Achievement Gap

Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the nation, but there is little evidence to suggest that the recent school reforms will make schools more equitable. Why? Because nearly 70% of Connecticut's achievement gap can be explained by the percentage of students on free/reduced lunch with a school.³ Yet, besides the Sheff Magnet schools, CT is doing little to address school segregation and racial isolation. And "reforms" such as charter schools, only reinforce school segregation.

¹ Turner, J., Foshay, J., & Panscofar, E. (2013). Toward a more balance assessment framework. In D.G. Mulcahy's *Transforming Schools: Alternative Perspectives on School Reform*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

² Bushaw, W.J., & Lopez, S.J. (2013). *The 45th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*.

³ Werblow, J. & Longo, L. Addressing the root causes of the achievement gap. In D.G. Mulcahy's *Transforming Schools: Alternative Perspectives on School Reform*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

“Standardized tests can only tell us from 5 to 10% of what our students know, understand, or are able to do...And there are no tests of "genius" to "measure" the child who understands the human condition”

- Carlos A. Torre, SCSU Professor, Author of *Ecology of Education* (Forthcoming)

Over 30 years of Research on Standardization

In 1988, Scholar Linda McNeil coined the term “contradictions of control” to describe her findings that increased regulations placed on teachers (ostensibly to improve teaching) surprisingly resulted in lower quality teaching.⁴ More recently, a 30-year study concluded that increased standardization negatively affected teachers’ ability to meet the needs of diverse student populations and teach multicultural education, among other findings⁵.

Follow the Money Trail

Despite the ocean of research illustrating the negative effects of increased standardization and high-stakes testing and the perspectives of concerned educators and scholars, massive amounts of private capital are being funneled into the ‘education reform’ movement. The following points represent the tip of the iceberg:

- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation gave \$147.9 million to develop and promote the Common Core.
- The Gates Foundation has given \$100 million dollars to *inBloom*, an Atlanta-based firm, to assist schools across the nation (including Connecticut) in managing and housing various types of data, including students’ personal information. FERPA laws were recently changed to allow such an initiative.⁶
- The U.S. Department of Education gave \$175 million in grants to *The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium*.
- *Smarter Balanced* will charge between \$22 and \$27.30 for each of the 19 million public school students to be tested,⁷ raising as much as \$518 million in revenue. The testing fee does not include the cost of scoring the test.

Growing Opt-Out Movement

There is a growing concern among both parents and teachers that the new standards and their high-stakes assessments are not in the best interests of children. “Districts are now reporting greater numbers of parents desiring to remove their child(ren) from participation in the statewide testing program.”⁸ This concern has prompted the state to issue ‘suggested protocols’ for school administrators to attempt to convince parents that they have no choice. In addition, the Malloy administration recently announced plans to spend \$1 million this year to promote the new Common Core standards.⁹

An Alternative to High Stakes Standardized Testing

Under the leadership of then Principal Rob Travaglini, the CCSU-Naylor Leadership Academy, a public neighborhood school in Hartford, implemented an assessment model that exemplifies ‘best practice.’ While most of the public schools in Hartford were (and likely still are) experiencing a dismal turnout at parent-teacher conferences, Naylor had roughly 90% of parents participating, and it was *because* of their assessment. Why? Students at Naylor were required to develop and maintain an assessment portfolio throughout the year and present an interdisciplinary set of their work to their parent and teacher. A balanced assessment portfolio provides a clear picture of the whole child’s learning experiences and, ironically, it’s the type of assessment that teachers have advocating for over 20 years. *Isn’t this what all children deserve?*

⁴ McNeil, L. (1988). *Contradictions of control: School structure and school knowledge*. New York, NY: Routledge.

⁵ Skerrett, A. & Hargreaves, A. (2008). Student diversity and secondary school change in a context of increasingly standardized reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45, 913-945

⁶ Retrieved from: www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/pdf/parentoverview.pdf

⁷ Retrieved from: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/resources-events/faqs/>

⁸ Retrieved from: <http://blogcea.org/2013/12/10/more-ct-parents-opting-out-of-state-testing/>

⁹ Retrieved from: <http://www.nhregister.com/social-affairs/20140106/connecticut-considering-offers-of-private-money-to-implement-new-education-standards>

**RESOLUTION: ALTERNATIVE TO HIGH-STAKES STANDARDIZED TESTING
AND THE COMMON CORE IN CONNECTICUT**

WHEREAS, Connecticut has one of the most rigorous k-12 curriculum standards in the nation, having gone through multiple revisions by educators and administrators working collaboratively with the State Department of Education, and;

WHEREAS, The Gates Foundation has given nearly \$150 million for the development of the CCSS, yet this national curriculum was written by only 27 representatives of testing companies and one retired professor (no Connecticut teachers or scholars were involved in writing the standards¹⁰), and;

WHEREAS, Connecticut teachers do not have jurisdiction to modify the CCSS based on the needs of their students or based on their own professional opinion because the CCSS is copyrighted material and owned by the Penguin Group, McGraw-Hill, and the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, which are private non-profit agencies, and;¹¹

WHEREAS, a recent Gallop Poll found that fewer than 25% Americans believe that increased standardized testing has helped the performance of local public schools.¹²

WHEREAS, nearly 70% of Connecticut's achievement gap can be explained by poverty alone, not school quality.¹³

WHEREAS, the SBAC will charge between \$22 and \$27.30 for each of the 19 million public school students to be tested,¹⁴ raising as much as \$518 million in revenue over the next year. The testing fee does not include the cost of scoring the test, which will likely cost significantly more. In addition, Connecticut tax payers should expect to pay hundreds of millions of dollars for new software, computers, textbooks, training, and technological infrastructure for these tests,¹⁵ and;

WHEREAS, the SBAC is planned to be administered each Spring, but parents and teachers will not receive SBAC results until the Fall, and;

WHEREAS, high-stakes standardized testing has negative effects for students from all backgrounds, and especially for low-income students, English language learners, children of color, and those with special needs; and

WHEREAS, countless experts in the field, including Harvard Professor Howard Gardner, David Perkins, and Linda Darling-Hammond (Stanford), advocate for performance based assessments as more appropriate measures of student learning, and;

WHEREAS, a the Performance Assessment Consortium, representing 27 public schools across New York, have already replaced high-stakes standardized tests (including the Regents' exam), with authentic performance assessments¹⁶, and;

WHEREAS, be honest, nearly all children hate standardized tests, and;

¹⁰ http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title_common-core-state-standards-k-12-work-and-feedback-groups-announced.html

¹¹ <http://www.corestandards.org/public-license>

¹² Bushaw, W.J., & Lopez, S.J. (2013). *The 45th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*.

¹³ Werblow, J. & Longo, L. Addressing the root causes of the achievement gap. In D.G. Mulcahy's *Transforming Schools: Alternative Perspectives on School Reform*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

¹⁴ Retrieved from: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/resources-events/faqs/>

¹⁵ <http://jonathanpelto.com/2014/01/27/common-core-costs-instruction-time-opt-movement-takes-hold/>

¹⁶ <http://performanceassessment.org>

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, in a democratic society, the people should have the right to determine the curriculum standards to be used in their local public schools and to decide whether they would maintain the Connecticut State Curriculum Standards, or replace them with national standards, such as the CCSS, which were written almost exclusively by representatives of testing companies.

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we the people call on Governor Malloy, The Connecticut State Legislature, the Connecticut State Board of Education and the Connecticut State Department of Education to reexamine Connecticut's public school accountability system, and to offer local school districts the option of refusing punitive, high-stakes standardized tests in exchange for developing or joining a Performance Assessment Consortium, focused on: active learning, the multiple intelligences, graduation level performance, external evaluation of student work, and a focus on professional development.