

Support of proposed bill No. 5078 & bill No. 5331

Thank you members who have expressed your concern regarding the appropriateness of common core standards in the earlier grades. I am a parent who chose to send their child to a "play" based model nursery school. I believe in the power of play to teach but not many decision makers do. I have no doubt my son will learn to read. What does make me fearful is next year. My son begins kindergarten along with the common core and its focus on testing and academics. I don't want my child to be a guinea pig in this process. The love of learning is too great a price to pay as is my son's self esteem and mental well being as it relates to test taking anxieties and burn out.

I am further concerned by the states inability to close the current achievement gap with the standards already in place. I feel we have put the "cart before the horse" so to speak and should be looking at what methods are working to successfully teach our children (i.e., magnet schools, flexible grouping, team teaching, smaller class ratios, extend school day) before we put more rigorous standards in place. Not only as a means of decreasing the achievement gap but to have all children reach their fullest academic potentials. Furthermore, as student assessments are tied to teacher evaluations we should ensure that students begin with the same educational foundations to be fair which should include universal pre-k.

In terms of developmental appropriateness, the common core's "one size fits all" approach deserves reconsideration in our state. I am speaking to the fact that CT allows children who have not yet turned 5 to begin kindergarten some without any preschool experience. These children are being set up to fail. Rather than introduce new rigorous standards to children who may not have the basic skills of attention, or social/emotional self regulation, offer these children a 2 year transitional kindergarten program as California does for late birthdays. Give these children the opportunity to succeed rather than face the insurmountable obstacles of catching up throughout their academic careers which may not have developmentally appropriately as a 4 year old entering kindergarten. Also, there exists the possibility of children needing to repeat kindergarten with the implementation of common core should the standards be too great for unprepared preschoolers or those with no preschool experience.

Consider again increasing the age of kindergarten admission as CT expands its school readiness programs so children are age appropriate for these new standards. There are also communities where there is a shortage of pre-k programming. Let's not implement common core until there is appropriate programming available to all.

Please also develop a framework for CT's nursery schools to determine what has

been both successful from both an academic and social/emotional perspective so that schools can implement best practices to develop literacy while also encouraging play based learning. Fortunately, we live in a state whose home to the Yale childhood center who should be consulted. They are an invaluable resource to the question of common core in the early grades and potential need for reform prior to its implementation.

Should CT continue to roll out common core grades k-2 unchanged, I would ask at the very least that parents be allowed to opt out of assessments grades k-2 without detriment to both the student, school or district. If possible, limit assessments (k-2) and/or use observational checklists or portfolios of student work to measure student performance. Assessments should not be the sole focus of a kindergarten teacher's valuable time. Consider piloting common core initially before it's full implementation in grades k-2 in various communities as well.

Please also mandate play based exploration as part of the state's adoption of common core in kindergarten otherwise academics will become the only focus. As a community who has witnessed increased bullying and violence in schools we have a responsibility to ensure that our children's emotional/social growth is just as important as their academic. We should be confident going forward that the academic focus of common core does not negatively impact the equally important social/emotional development of children especially in grades k-2. Play should be of equal importance to a child's overall development in kindergarten as well.

In terms of our economic future, setting up children to succeed from the very beginning and nurturing their academic, social and emotional growth is a greater investment than the implementation of the standards themselves. We face different challenges than other states and should take a different path rather than accepting these standards in their current form. Please wait and do the work that needs to be done to determine what is right for our children. If not, the state may potentially face an ever widening achievement gap where many will continue to be left behind in the "race to the top".

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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