Thank you for sharing this testimony - I would encourage you to share it with your colleagues also..

Gayle M Hooker
CEA UniServ Representative

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything we count, counts A. Einstein

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From: mariella luginbuhl [mariella.luginbuhl@somers.k12.ct.us]
Sent: Monday, March 10, 2014 6:14 PM
To: EDTestimony@cga.ct.gov
Cc: Hooker, Gayle [CT]; karen jones
Subject: Testimony - Teacher Eval and Common Core

My name is Mariella Luginbuhl and I teach middle school math in Somers. I believe that current Education initiatives are not well conceived and do not have valid supporting research that will lead to improved student learning.
A teacher's job is to teach children. This means we need the time to develop viable lessons that move children from where they are to where we want them to be. We also need time to develop assessments that truly reflect student learning. This is what we were hired to do.
Current State BOE and legislative initiatives are snow-balling in a direction that is contrary to our desired goals. There are too many initiatives draining teachers' time away from teaching and assessing students. Where's the research that shows that all students should be taught the same material at the same time and that this will improve education? Who is responsible for developing the Common Core? How has child development (especially brain development) been taken into consideration? Where's the consideration for the vast difference in children's abilities at a middle school level? How are we addressing student (and parent) frustration? How are we adjusting a teacher's day to make time to meet the new demands including the new SEED process?
COMMON CORE
The biggest problem with Common Core is its ram-rod implementation. Last year when we were mandated to implement for this year...the newest textbooks weren't "common core aligned." That means that teachers (especially math and language arts) create every single thing used in the classroom. Every lesson, every handout, every test, every PowerPoint, researching every video (if they exist and are common core aligned), every activity has to be researched, created, printed copied and kept track off in some fashion. Because of the lack of resources, completing all the tasks necessary to develop good lessons on a daily basis takes an inordinate amount of time. Good teachers are now required to research, develop and write their own curriculum/texts to support common core (every handout, every project, the class notes, vocabulary sheets, graphic organizers, etc. The whole enchilada! Then, they have to copy/print and manage all that paper before they even begin to teach. It is a paper nightmare especially if you are keeping track of paper for 120 students for 5 days of the week and it is a significant time drain.

Common Core should not have been forced on us without the proper resources to support it. We are just starting to review math textbooks that appear to be properly aligned. We need to pilot

these texts (another drain on teacher time). When the State deemed we needed to be Common Core aligned, there should have been a recommended set of resources to use that would meet the new requirements, not a cavalier "build as you go" approach.

LEGISLATIVE TIME DRAINS

I do not work in utopia. I work in Somers. I arrive at work an hour early in the morning. I spend 1/2 hour most mornings providing extra help to students who are not ready for the practice standards and are struggling to remember all the concepts being thrown at them. I teach during the day and during my 40 minute prep, I

- gather and report data for SST (student intervention team),
- collaborate with parents, teachers administrators on pressing issues
- collaborate with intervention mentors, special education teachers and administrators,
- respond to parent phone calls and emails about concerns that their children are being overtaxed,
- schedule additional extra help for after school
- gather data for the new Evaluation's 6 goals and the 2 related ISADs (each) that now support those goals
- maybe correct papers
- maybe develop test and/or quizzes (or other assessments)
- maybe research and plan lessons and activities

After school, I provide extra help to 2 or more students on a nightly basis (on my own time for 45 min.) that is if I don't have a required school meeting to attend (faculty meeting, curriculum team meeting, Professional Development meeting, Evaluation Committee meeting, Technology Committee meeting, School Climate meeting, Team Leader Meeting, etc.) For me, the earliest I can start on my own work is 3:15 (note that I've already extended my school day by 2 hours and haven't begun to plan meaningful lessons or correct any papers I've collected.) I never leave school before 6:00 p.m. My colleagues and I are drowning in the minutia that does not contribute to student learning.

TESTING

Last year of the 180 days that students attend school, we spent about 25 days on standardized tests. That is one full month of testing. 10% of a student's school year…on standardized tests. We had CMTs (10 days), SmarterBalanced testing (4 days), CBAS testing (3 times per year 2 days each; 6 more days). Then we had special testing days to prepare for the tests. None of time was devoted to student learning. Our students were cheated out of 20+ days (1 month of planned material that we had to squish into the rest of the year). Now, this does not include days for field

trips, barbeques, field days, cultural enrichment, etc. (all integral to developing the whole child!). The point is, it is a great deal of time students are not learning the curriculum.

So the State BOE has decided that the CMT tests will be replaced. Our district is supporting Smarter Balanced. I so wanted to be part of the people that vet materials for this consortium. I was to develop at least 2 lessons, units, or professional development items to submit. I was psyched to do so. The problem was, I had to find who originated any materials I felt were of value to submit, get signed copyright releases AND have appropriate research prior to submission. RIGHT! I am not a college professor with graduate students at my disposal to get this kind of material. What were they thinking? Do they think the classroom teacher has time to do research on the materials we use on a daily basis? Are you kidding? I submitted: NOTHING because I couldn't meet the requirements.

What about the SmarterBalanced test itself? I recommend the legislators try to take this test. Try the middle school level math test. Most of our legislatures have college degrees. TAKE THE PRACTICE MATH TEST! Have your aides take the test and report back to you! It is not intuitive! The questions are difficult to understand. This test does not test math knowledge, but a student's ability to read and their ability to figure out how navigate the screen. We all agree students need to be able to read, but what are we testing in math; reading ability or math ability? Remember, middle school students are just developing their ability think abstractly (brain research). If they are just learning to think abstractly...who is developing the questions on this test? Where did they come from? Why aren't they allowing a broader set of teachers to rate the questions for grade level and ability? Why all the secrecy? Aren't we all reaching for the same thing, improved student learning? Teachers should be driving the makeup of this test! They should be setting the requirements for the materials that are being used to vet the materials. As I see it, teachers are being asked to submit materials and to vet them, but not to help define the vetting requirements.

Ask teachers what they need in technology assessments. We need resources that will assess student learning and give (teachers) immediate feedback on student performance on each standard on an as needed basis (which is at least weekly). That's where our money should be spent. Let my students take an online assessment today so that I can group them tomorrow for lessons that are differentiate based on the results of what they just did. This is the most difficult thing for teachers to do on a regular basis; give students an assessment, correct it and analyze it in a timely manner so that I can use the results immediately. Spend State education dollars to develop this tool for us. All children would benefit.

Who benefits from testing that teachers can't see the questions and where feedback doesn't come back to the teacher until the end of the school year? Do all school districts have the money to support the technology needed for online testing? Isn't this online testing being driven by private industry? Who is benefiting from these new tests; students or the industries that create them? Again, I'm not against using technology, I'm against using it to perpetuate an industry, and deflating students math self-confidence.

As for the evaluation process, have you seriously looked at it? Common sense tells you that there aren't enough administrators to conduct all of the evaluations required by the document.

Teachers are being evaluated on some 47 different points. Most of us have always had a professional goal each year. Now I have 6. I've always had to document whether or not I achieved my goal. Now I have to have so much data and I have to know how to figure out (before I know the students) what percent I will raise student performance based on standardized tests that I never see! Does it not seem that private industry is setting up public educators to fail? Are all teachers being treated fairly or is this system meant to tax language arts and math teachers more than others? Why is that? The new SEED eval system is attempting to turn our teachers into statisticians! We aren't trained for that. We're trained to teach. Doctor's aren't evaluated to the minute detail that our teachers are being examined at. Think about our students. What would parents think if we brought them into school with their children in the fall and explained that we have a new method of evaluating their students. We would explain that we believe that the majority of the student population is mediocre and that the highest rating they will earn that school year is a C. Then further explain that if a student does in fact excel, that the student would have to gather further documentation to prove that a teacher did not over-rate them; that they can further support an above average rating. How would parents react? How would you react if that was your evaluation document?

How would you react if every aspect of your work live was being scrutinized? This document is paralyzing our teachers. SCRAP it and start again. Be reasonable.

Teachers aren't against change. Let us help to define our destiny and the destiny of tomorrow's citizens. We've master's degrees in children and how to educate them. We want to do the best for our students. Call for CEA to prepare and present a viable document in cooperation with administrators. We'll provide a document that doesn't cost our districts in time and money and a document that makes sense for today's teachers.

Sincerely,
Mariella Luginbuhl
Middle School Math Teacher - Somers