

LRC Study Committee on Common Core State Standards

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Comments by Tammy Beach

When talking about Common Core it is best to start at the beginning. Training for the Common Core has, for the most part, come from the district level or individual teacher research. While teachers are grateful for the training that they have received, the training in itself has been mediocre at best. Why do teachers feel this way? Well, it feels like we are trying to navigate a jet plane in unfamiliar territory, among cloudy skies. The training has been broad and vague and didn't focus on specific instructional techniques. While we try to put on a brave face and move forward, our stress level is at an all time high, and we are feeling inadequate. Teachers feel inadequate for three main reasons: 1st: Standard VI (which is NC's way of evaluating teachers based on student growth), 2nd: a lack of funding and resources to ensure solid implementation, and 3rd: the gap between North Carolina's (previous) Standard Course of Study and Common Core and the assessments.

First, the biggest obstacle in implementing the Common Core is the lack of appropriate resources. There is a huge push for schools to become One to One schools by having enough computers or tablets for each student to have a device in their hands at all times. However, there is a big flaw with that concept. While students may have access at school, there is no guarantee that they have it at home. Parents often feel helpless and inadequate with this shift. To add to that – we do not have textbooks that are aligned to the CC to send home with the students. Textbooks are still a necessity in the classrooms for parents, teachers, and students, and the fact that we currently do not have any that are aligned to the Common Core Standards is deeply troublesome. Without aligned textbooks, teachers are using their own money to purchase resources and other books in order to teach the students. I know I don't have to remind you that my salary has remained the same since 2008 – so although I have been teaching for 13 years, I am making as much as a n 8th year teacher. With stagnant pay and an increase in the cost of living and healthcare, I can't afford to take money out of my own pocket to pay for resources for my students. But, I do. Because I want to be successful, and I want my students to be successful. The other day I saw a quote that said, "Teaching is the only profession where you steal supplies from home to bring to work." Think about that. Teachers are, also, spending so much time each day to hunt and pull together resources and then construct lesson plans to teach the Common Core that it is eating into their daily home time with family. My typical day starts at 7:30AM and ends at 7:30PM when I leave the school, and many of my weekends are dedicated to work as well. In short, the lack of funding and resources provided for implementation is forcing that burden onto the teachers at a time when our cups are already filled to the brim.

Second, as a result of the creation of Standard VI of the evaluation instrument, teachers will now be held accountable for a new curriculum that they have had only mediocre training on and few reliable resources for implementation. As a result, a teacher may be labeled as an "Ineffective Teacher" simply because their test scores don't reflect enough growth. It is not that teachers do not feel that they should be held

accountable for their work. I want to be held accountable as a teacher, but basing my worth on a test taken by a student at a time when teachers and students are grappling with a new standards, a new curriculum, new assessments, mediocre training and few resources, is not good practice and will not help us to recruit and retain high quality teachers in North Carolina. Most teachers have an internal drive that pushes them to work harder and to find that special way to pull all students up to grade level and beyond. Teachers want students to maximize their potential and every teacher wants to be “The Teacher” that does that and makes that difference in each student’s life. But, a teacher needs the freedom, flexibility and trust to make adjustments in her classroom in order to reach every student effectively. Neither a label nor a set salary will drive teachers to work harder, dig deeper, have higher expectations or strive for better results. Those that believe that paying teachers based upon performance will somehow drive teachers to work harder or do better, fully misunderstand who we are as professionals and as individuals. Testing has gotten out of control and has begun to dictate what we teach, when we teach and how we teach, down to the minute. Tests that are being touted as non-high stakes testing, under a new curriculum will now determine my value and destiny as a teacher. Please work to restore teaching as an art, rather than a prescribed set of steps.

Third, the most obvious issue teachers are struggling with is the gap between North Carolina’s (previous) Standard Course of Study and Common Core. The gap is immense at all grade levels; no teacher has been left feeling otherwise. On top of teaching just their own grade level’s standards, teachers have to go back and fill in the holes from the previous year. The gaps between the two curriculums are felt mostly in my subject area: mathematics. While Common Core is supposed to be narrower thus letting the teachers dig deeper, I have not found that to be true. In math, for instance, teachers are teaching something new every day. If we slow down to investigate or apply the math, which is what needs to be done to facilitate true understanding, then we fall behind. Between the rapid pace with no room for digging deeper or remediating on difficult concepts and the constant assessments, there is little time for students to process and reflect on their learning to gain true understanding. Elementary teachers are feeling the assessment requirements more than other teachers. They have commented that they spend more time assessing than teaching now. Teachers perform formative assessments each and every day and the constant assessments are too much. In math we teach multiple ways to reach the same answer and encourage thinking to find even more ways, yet the assessments do not allow for that. With the assessments students are expected to understand all the different methods and apply them, not just those that work well for their individual learning style. The point of education is to create thinkers and that there are multiple ways to get to the same destination, but the assessments do not support that idea. Also, there is a really big concern over losing Extend II testing and Common Core not allowing for students with learning disabilities. Students and teachers are so overwhelmed that there is true test anxiety – creating health issues for students and teachers alike. I have a student that has such bad test anxiety that he shuts down at the mere mention of an upcoming quiz or test. While I understand that our assessments are not the Common Core – at least not yet – the perception is that the Common Core is driving what we assess and how we assess, and currently, our tests

are not aligned to what we really need to be striving for which is creating problem solvers and critical thinkers.

In closing, most teachers are not opposed to Common Core and we are more than willing to give it all that we have, but WE NEED SUPPORT. We need access to reliable technology, textbooks; we need time. We need space. We need trust. We need feedback. What's critically important is that we have a great principal in every school. If you give us, time, resources and a supportive principal who provides consistent feedback, we will show you gains in student achievement. Gaps between grade levels will not diminish overnight, but they will come. We want to work miracles with our students ,and that will be best accomplished with your support with these three areas: removing Standard VI, providing sufficient and consistent resources, and overhauling the assessment method that measures student learning under the Common Core.