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Good evening and thank you for coming out to listening to the people that are the most affected by the Common Core and the subsequent education reforms. I have spent hundreds of hours away from my family to help organize rallies, and provide information sessions because the reforms are bad for our students, our communities and ultimately bad for our nation. As active as I have been, I have always spoken as a parent. I shared the stories of how my son refused to write creatively at home because "I might try to creatively write in school and I would get into trouble". My son now in 7th grade, has for the first time this year, had a creative writing assignment. In fourth grade, my son's teacher informed the class that the entire class would fail the state exams because he was refusing the test. As a board member on a local children's museum, I interact with children from a variety of schools and backgrounds. I am mortified at the lack of imagination, curiosity and problem solving skills. Since I live in a college town, many of my friends and colleagues are college professors they report a shortage of the same skills in their students. We utilize many college students as volunteers at our children's museum, the amount of time that we spend guiding our volunteers step by step through tasks is staggering. As a whole, they lack the ability to initiate, recognize what needs to be done or problem solve. These were all problems that the Common Core were supposed to address, but in practice has actually magnified.

Tonight though, I may finally speak as a professional. Prior to the detente of the last 2 months, sharing stories of what was happening in my place of employment, to share knowledge, or expressing my concerns could have lead to a 3020a insubordination charge or at least that was the threat. Clearly, a culture of silence and compliance was expected. In this climate, you can not understand the relief that I feel that we can finally speak as professionals.

For years I have watched as our work loads steadily increased just to comply with a variety of reforms. My teacher colleagues and friends are tired, stressed and demoralized. I have truly felt that a component of the reforms was to work us into submission. Tired stressed and demoralized teachers are compliant as they can not muster the energy to speak out. However, I will speak out tonight for the children that are being hurt the most, our special education students. It is my hope that you will see through the eyes of this population just how detrimental the reforms have been and how the Common Core standards leaves our students behind. Please know with any generalities there are exceptions some students are thriving with the Common Core.

Are we teaching what is needed?

I first came to the district where I work because the director of special education wanted to develop a community based life skills program. Since this program was not required by mandates, my district could in effect poach students from neighboring districts. If this program wasn't of high quality, neighboring districts did not have to send their students. Students in this program interacted in their community, visited business, toured local town governments and performed volunteer work. At each business the students would ask, 'how can I get a job here'. They learned employability skills by volunteering at a

local non-profit tourist railroad, some students cleaned while others shoveled ballast stone, jacked up the tracks and removed rotten ties. During one trip into the community we went to the dollar store where one of the students began putting things in his pocket. While this student dressed and acted tough he had a good sense of morality. When I confronted him- he asked "where am I supposed to put it?". I pointed to a hand basket. For a student that struggled with managing anger, this could have ended very differently had he been confronted by a store clerk or police officer. This is the type of education they needed. This community integration program was dropped because "your students will need to pass tests".

When we are teaching what is needed, are we being evaluated on it fairly?

At the middle school and high school level one of the most important roles a special education teacher can perform is teaching students how to overcome their disability by adapting the environment or using technology. Content should be delivered by a content specialist, special education teachers make the content accessible to students with disabilities. Yet all but the most basic accommodations, are banned from the year end assessment tests. In other words, what we teach is banned from the assessment process. Most egregious, is preventing students from having tests read or when appropriate directions or content explained. You are here today to have information explained so you can perform your job. Yet, this basic courtesy is not being extended to our students with special needs.

How are we teaching it?

Students with special needs learn differently. This is why we have a team of experts on that child develop a learning plan for them. Yet the assessment process for them is the same, with the exception of those with alternate assessments which have their own set of problems. The most common needs for students with disabilities is a consistency of approach with multiple exposures and opportunity to respond. For example, a student that is learning addition may be taught to count up with their fingers. This should be consistent and for this student used across environments, and practise should be the same. Yet the Common Core requires this student to use numerous strategies including, number bonds, ten frames, and various count up methods. Each of these methods are evaluated in the assessments. As a special education teacher, I must now choose; either select a process that I believe will work for that student consistently, recognizing the fact that they will never score well and thus wrecking my evaluation; or expose them to each of the methods so that they can perform for a test, understanding that each and every time they are asked to do this task they will be confuse the various methods in order to solve the problem.

Additionally, the module worksheets at the first grade level are extremely confusing. Equal signs shift from the front of the problem to the back of the problem, number bonds are presented top to bottom, side to side with squares and with circles. Students with disabilities often have difficulty understanding which stimulus to focus on. Does the answer change because of the shape, placement of the equal sign or the numbers? The layout of these sheets are not well thought out for our students. Our students often can not determine what numbers go with what problems. In the attempt to teach the

relationship between addition and subtraction they leave addends blank requiring students to subtract. For our students this is confusing, adding is subtracting and subtracting is adding.

Assessing students with significant disabilities with alternate assessments

Students with disabilities must be assessed to demonstrate that they are being exposed to the same curriculum as their age peers. However, these content is modified to such a degree as to render them barely recognizable. Yet students with significant disabilities students that may be working on making selections via eye gaze, are asked to find details in texts, be able to identify phases of matter. These assessments assesses the teacher's abilities more than it assesses the students. These assessments have changed yet again this year, we are now requiring students with the greatest challenges to interact with a computer rather than a person. These tests are now to be completed on line. The administration date for these assessments have already had to be moved back as no one has been trained in this new method of assessment. Since these assessments are not completely ready we are having to mix old portfolio system assessments with new computerized assessments. We are spending more time, money and energy to determine how to assess students than we are actually teaching them. We know that the future is going to be about who can innovate the fastest. A former Superintendent told me that we need to intuitively know how to use technology, by the time someone offers a class the technology has moved on. Our students need to learn to self assessment, develop self motivation and develop drive. None of these skills are addressed in the Common Core Learning standards nor the assessments that have attached themselves to them. Thank you.