

Deborah Escobar, Retired Teacher / Grandmother

"I am a retired teacher, also a grandparent . I am an education activist, committed to ending the disastrous Common Core that threatens the future of our children.

When I first began teaching, we helped students discover the joy of learning, so they would become lifelong learners. We kept in mind that the learning styles and development of children were different. Now all students are expected to learn at the same time and at the same pace. Now we have scripted lessons, dry Engage NY modules, and a de-emphasis of differentiated, creative teaching. Common Core, high stakes tests, and VAM have been proven to be the real failure. Yet there is nothing done by those in power to address this failure. This leads me to the conclusion that our education policy is being railroaded to advance the political agenda of hedge fund investors and charter operators. Our children are the pawns, the "sacrifice zone" for the projected profits that can be made.

Common core standards for young children ask them to use abstract reasoning that does not develop until about the age of 11. Kindergarteners like my grandson are forced to sit and write, complete worksheets, and learn by rote memorization. Young children learn best by play and through instruction that connects to their background knowledge and has real-world connections to their lives. It takes time to develop background knowledge in children. Today, humanities, music, art, and yes even science are crowded out to make room for English and Math, the only two subjects that matter on the almighty tests. We are not developing thinkers who understand and appreciate their world.

Tests are impossibly hard, with cut scores calibrated to a 1630 on the SAT. Even our governor acknowledged this, and put a moratorium on using the scores for students, but not for our teachers. We face the prospect of losing a large percentage of our teaching force within the next two years. We are in trouble when we lose these educators, because student enrollments at teacher preparation programs in NYS are down 20-50%. So where are our teachers going to come from to replace those we lose to a faulty evaluation system?

I ask for a return to state standards that were developed by educators, to state testing in (only) grades 4 and 8, to tests that were transparent and informed instruction. I ask for an end to test and VAM-based APPR. I ask that you provide resources and help for schools that are struggling, instead of receivership and criteria that does not allow them to demonstrate success. I ask for respect for all of our students, including special needs and ELL students. I ask for you to return the joyful and zestful learning that best provides a successful future for our children, that best prepares them to truly be "college and career ready."