

RHINEBECK CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Rhinebeck, NY 12572

Testimony to the Common Core Task Force

The Rhinebeck Central School District believes in the value of setting high expectations for its students' intellectual development. As such, adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has informed the development of our curriculum in positive ways. However, this effort to establish broad, deep and meaningful curricula for New York State public schools, an effort we have embraced, has been fatefully flawed by its link to standardized testing and to teacher evaluation, as well as by a hasty, ill-advised State Education Department roll-out. The overemphasis on standardized testing and its use to evaluate teacher effectiveness has undermined the enterprise of creating robust, creative learning communities in public schools.

We propose the following:

1. Curricular standards must be decoupled from standardized tests and teacher evaluations.

2. We believe curriculum is most effective when developed by educators. Local curriculum development, informed by statewide standards, requires adequate time, resources and professional development for teachers. Additionally, developing curricular documents is the means to an end, not an end in itself. Adequate resources must be available to bring standards to life, turning curriculum into a rich daily experience of learning for students. Thus, the Gap Elimination Adjustment and the tax levy cap must be ended to ensure adequate resources for schools to both develop and implement curricula that are aligned with and that support the Common Core State Standards.

3. We applaud efforts to elevate expectations for students. Yet, as all parents and teachers know, young people, in their beautiful uniqueness, develop and grow in diverse ways. Standards are an excellent guide, but they must be developmentally appropriate and allow the flexibility for teachers to respond to the varied needs, interests and strengths of children in their classrooms. Classroom learning must neither be test

driven nor product driven. State policies must support local needs and the organic development of curricula reflecting the varied character of our children, teachers, and communities.

4. Because the CCSS have been linked to teacher evaluations, we are compelled to assert our conviction that such evaluation is not the domain of State legislators but, rather, must be properly developed by educators. Research does not support using complex algorithms to evaluate teacher impact on learning based upon standardized test scores. Furthermore, rubrics developed to improve teaching through the assessment of the pedagogical behavior of educators are being used inappropriately to evaluate teaching, according to the developers of these instruments. We object to the current legislation that guides the Annual Professional Performance Review and recommend an overhaul developed by educators.

Our views and recommendations on the Common Core State Standards, as implemented in New York State, have been informed by diverse members of our community: parents, teachers, administrators and students. We urge the Common Core Task Force to reorient State policies, regulations, and legislation away from a punitive, adversarial stance towards school districts and teachers. We abhor the linking of educational policy to political strategies to pass the state budget. Tremendous resources are expended to develop and administer pernicious testing regimes and evaluation schemes. To reiterate, we support high standards and high expectations. We urge the Task Force to refocus State efforts to support robust curricula that are focused on and honor the complexity and joy of student learning, and teacher professionalism and growth, within vibrant, well-resourced public school communities.

Evaluation of the success resulting from an overhaul of these various policies will be evident by the support they engender among students, parents, teachers, educational researchers and the various other stakeholders in our communities.

- The parent-driven “opt-out movement” in New York State will wither and fade in the face of renewed trust on the part of parents in our school districts and in our State’s approach to standards, assessments, and educator evaluation protocols;

- Student achievement will improve, as measured by the authentic and appropriate assessment of skills and knowledge, and not by corporately-developed testing;
- Educational researchers will laud, not pan, the efficacy of educator assessment protocol that are developed and implemented with a basis in authentic measures of student achievement, as supported by a solid research base;
- More teachers and administrators will enter, and remain, in a profession that respects and supports their skills and their efforts, one in which they are not bashed regularly in the interest of political and corporate interests.

11/24/15