

SHOREHAM-WADING RIVER HIGH SCHOOL

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November 6---Common Core Task Force Listening Session

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at today's listening session. My name is Dan Holtzman, the Vice President of the Suffolk County Principals' Association and the Principal of Shoreham-Wading River High School, Shoreham, NY.

First, I would like to acknowledge that raising the standards for student learning and instructional practice is a positive step in ensuring that our students are prepared for life after high school. However, there is more to the student than an assessment and there is more to teaching than a score.

If we examine the key tenets that are driving reform, we should look no further than organizations such as the Middle States Association and the Tri-State Consortium. Each organization's mission is focused on ensuring that a high quality education is being provided, resources are shared, collaboration is paramount, and that our students are engaged in meaningful and thoughtful activities, dialogue, research, and authentic assessment. These are the core principles of our adoption of the Common Core Learning Standards and shifts in instruction.

The performance consortium as an example, began in 1997 with the mantra that "1 size does not fit all".....however, this is an area of the education reform that has seemingly been overlooked, and perhaps even more concerning to many educators and parents, **dismissed**. The performance consortium developed assessments that exceeded the scope of what a state examination would assess and yet, we do not allow schools to participate and we have not yet invited these consortiums to the conversation to dialogue and work together to create the highest quality and most authentic approach to assessing student learning and achievement possible. We understand that the collection of standards-based data is critical to driving improvements in our curriculum and instruction; however, we should not narrow our focus to the detriment of preparing students for the myriad of experiences they will encounter in our world. As educators, we will continue to support the state in assessing student growth and we will continue to assess our programs for continued improvements where it is apparent that changes are necessary. However, assessments must be age-appropriate, fair, timely and transparent in the data they garner. This means considering other means to authentically assess ALL populations of students in our state, based upon their life's path, [not a narrow perspective of what success in our world is supposed to look like.

One size does not fit all.....We cannot overlook the prevailing inequalities that exist in New York State, nor can we ignore the emotional, familial, or environmental obstacles that students in every community face....the Common Core does not level the playing field, it serves to further exacerbate these divides by restricting a school's ability to tailor instruction and assessment to meet individual learning needs....For example, a student, in the country for 2 years should not be expected to pass a state assessment that is lexile leveled up to college-level text reading with no other option to meet graduation requirements.

Our job as educational leaders is to provide professional development to our teachers, resources to our students, and authentic learning experiences that foster creativity, critical-thinking, and collaboration. Teachers have changed their practices, but I believe they have done so in terms of taking fewer risks, reducing creativity in their classrooms, and shying away from authentic assessments because that is not what NYSED is asking students to do on current state assessments, nor are these approaches tied to teachers' APPR score. I can say this because I have seen it happen, and I can see the detrimental effect this is having on students' creative spirits, motivation to learn and passion in the classroom. It is not necessarily the Common Core Standards in and of themselves that is having this impact, but the fear-factor of the assessments and APPR on the classroom environment.

Life is not multiple-choice, and there isn't always one right answer, so let's structure the standards and assessments that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning through multiple pathways.....we allow some students to graduate from high school in this manner, why can't all students be provided with differing options to fulfill graduation requirements? We should celebrate the diversity within our schools and communities, by setting high expectations and remaining open to the notion that success in life takes many forms.

We are imperfect and working in an imperfect system..... It is our mission as educators to do what is in the best interests of the students in our care.

The answer is not more testing or testing in the current format. One answer comes from authentic learning experiences that excite and ignite passion for life-long learning, provide meaningful feedback, and prepare students for life after high school....

Thank you for your time and consideration.