

Testimony Before the Common Core Task Force November 9, 2015

Submitted by Robert J. Mackey, Superintendent at Unadilla Valley Public School District. Educator since 1987 in NY State public schools. The school can be found at 4238 State Hwy 8, New Berlin, NY 13411 and the contact information is (607) 847-7500

I read the purpose of this task force:

The Common Core Task Force is a diverse and highly qualified group of education officials, teachers, parents, and state representatives convened by Governor Cuomo to perform a comprehensive review of learning standards, instructional guidance and curricula, and tests to improve implementation and reduce testing anxiety.

The Common Core Learning Standards were first available in 2010 for schools in NYS. By now all school districts have implemented them in ELA and Math and we are on our way in Social Studies. www.EngageNY.org is filled with resources to guide local curricula choices that, quite frankly, I wish I had available in 1987 as a first-year teacher.

You will hear many negative comments about the “Common Core.” These will nearly always stem from testing, privatization of public schools, or teacher evaluation; rarely are they ever focused on the actual learning standards. The standards are appropriate for students; they stimulate investigative thinking and problem solving, and when implemented in a classroom by teachers and leaders with good pedagogical skill, they foster a growth mindset. I can’t help but wonder why anyone would question whether kids should be able to:

- ✚ Prekindergarten ELA: Exhibit curiosity and interest in learning new vocabulary (e.g., ask questions about unfamiliar vocabulary).
- ✚ Kindergarten ELA: Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.
- ✚ First Grade ELA: With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.
- ✚ Second Grade ELA: By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, in the grades 2–3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- ✚ Grades 9 & 10 ELA: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- ✚ Grades 11 & 12 ELA: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- ✚ Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12:
 - Grades 6-8: Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
 - Grades 9-10: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims.

- Grades 11-12: Evaluate an author’s premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.
- ✚ Reading Standards for Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects 6-12:
 - Grades 6-8: Distinguish among facts, reasoned judgment based on research findings, and speculation in a text.
 - Grades 9-10: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claim or a recommendation for solving a scientific or technical problem.
 - Grades 11-12: Evaluate the hypotheses, data, analysis, and conclusions in a science or technical text, verifying the data when possible and corroborating or challenging conclusions with other sources of information.
- ✚ Prekindergarten Math: Demonstrate an understanding of addition and subtraction by using objects, fingers, and responding to practical situations (e.g., If we have 3 apples and add two more, how many apples do we have all together?).
- ✚ Kindergarten Math: Understand addition as putting together and adding to, and understand subtraction as taking apart and taking from.
- ✚ First Grade Math: Use addition and subtraction within 20 to solve word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions, e.g., by using objects, drawings, and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.
- ✚ Second Grade Math: Use addition and subtraction within 100 to solve one- and two-step word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions, e.g., by using drawings and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.
- ✚ Grade 4 Math: Solve multistep word problems posed with whole numbers and having whole-number answers using the four operations, including problems in which remainders must be interpreted. Represent these problems using equations with a letter standing for the unknown quantity. Assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies including rounding.
- ✚ Grade 6 Math: Apply the properties of operations to generate equivalent expressions. For example, apply the distributive property to the expression $3(2 + x)$ to produce the equivalent expression $6 + 3x$; apply the distributive property to the expression $24x + 18y$ to produce the equivalent expression $6(4x + 3y)$; apply properties of operations to $y + y + y$ to produce the equivalent expression $3y$.
- ✚ Grade 8 Math: Solve real-world and mathematical problems leading to two linear equations in two variables. For example, given coordinates for two pairs of points, determine whether the line through the first pair of points intersects the line through the second pair.

 Social Studies:

Social Studies Practices	K	1	2	3	4
Comparison & Contextualization	Identify similarities and differences between home and school.	Identify similarities and differences between neighborhoods.	Identify similarities and differences between communities.	Identify a world region by describing a characteristic that places within it have in common.	Identify a region in New York State by describing a characteristic that places within it have in common, and then compare it to other regions.
Comparison & Contextualization	5	6	7	8	
	Identify a region in the Western Hemisphere by describing a characteristic that places within it have in common, and then compare it to other regions.	Identify a region in the Eastern Hemisphere by describing a characteristic that places within it have in common, and then compare it to other regions.	Identify a region of colonial North America or the early United States by describing multiple characteristics common to places within it, and then identify other, similar regions (inside or outside the continental United States) with similar characteristics.	Identify a region of the United States by describing multiple characteristics common to places within it, and then identify other, similar regions inside the United States.	

o 9-12 Social Studies:

Comparison and Contextualization

1. Identify similarities and differences between geographic regions across historical time periods, and relate differences in geography to different historical events and outcomes.
2. Identify, compare, and evaluate multiple perspectives on a given historical experience.
3. Identify and compare similarities and differences between historical developments over time and in different geographical and cultural contexts.
4. Describe, compare, and evaluate multiple historical developments (within societies; across and between societies; in various chronological and geographical contexts).
5. Recognize the relationship between geography, economics, and history as a context for events and movements and as a matrix of time and place.

6. Connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes and draw connections to the present (where appropriate).

These are just a few of the learning standards that schools have implemented since 2010 in NY State. Teachers and leaders are free to use the resources provided to guide curriculum decisions or develop their own local curriculum as we have been since I began my career in public education in 1987.

Some say SED made their mistakes with rollout of the Common Core Learning Standards, the Common Core Modules, and Annual Professional Performance Review, and others say local schools made mistakes not implementing the Common Core Learning Standards in 2010. These aren't the real issues though. If we take our blinders off, seeing the real elephant in the room isn't all that hard. Bureaucrats attempting to regulate an institution they don't understand through overly burdensome, rapid-fire mandates have fueled the public outcry over testing and the "opt-out movement" in this state. Most of these mandates erode local control and contribute to school cultures of compliance and fear while destroying cultures of commitment and capacity.

It is glaringly evident that around 2013, the 3-8 grade testing started the rebellion our state now faces. However, the testing causing such outcry has been in existence since the late 1990's, and the outcry hasn't been anywhere near the level it rose to in 2013. We are now asking, "Why has 3-8 testing suddenly caused such public ire?"

Coincidentally, our governor and legislature forced a new teacher and principal evaluation system to be implemented by January 17, 2013, or districts would lose their state aid increase. A key factor in the overall ratings teachers' and principals' is student growth on 3-8 tests and other state assessments. Our state government has gone on to make three more major legislative changes to this Annual Professional Performance Review law, most recently increasing the weight placed on state assessments in the overall evaluation of teachers and principals, making it much more difficult to receive an overall rating of effective or higher.

It seems to me that it is poorly thought out mandates from our State government, such as Annual Professional Performance Review, that have accelerated "test anxiety" and the "opt-out movement" across this state. In turn, these mandates have given the Common Core Learning Standards a black eye. A mantra of great educators is that mistakes and failures provide the greatest opportunity for continued learning. If our elected officials learn lessons from these last few years of poorly thought out mandates they can help lead school cultures in the direction of commitment and build capacity. Richard DuFour and Robert Marzano state in their book, *Leaders of Learning*, "Creating the conditions to help others succeed is one of the highest duties of a leader." Abandoning mandates that breed compliance and fear and committing to working together, we can create an enduring growth mindset among teachers, school administrators, and most importantly students.