

Kathleen Neuffer, Teacher

Hello. My name is Kathleen Neuffer. I live at 21 Cleveland St. Albany, NY. My purpose tonight is twofold. First, I wish to discuss the testing of special needs students and secondly express my concerns regarding the teacher evaluation process.

I was a special educator for 40 years in the Greenville Central School district and retired in June of 2014. I am very concerned about the negative impact the roll out of the Common Core has had on students across all grade and academic skill levels. However, tonight I wish to focus on how the Common Core has negatively affected students with numerous handicaps that require IEP's. The needs of special education students are most near and dear to me both on a personal and professional level. I have a sister born 49 years ago with Down's Syndrome. Given that background, I believe I speak to you tonight with the knowledge of one who has lived the life, walked the walk and talked the talk of this issue.

I have been very active in speaking and reaching out to our local legislators regarding how the Common Core issue has negatively impacted the students I taught on a daily basis. I, along with many others, have no problem with having rigorous standards that will allow all children the right and the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to prepare them for our world but it needs to be done in a way that assesses students on their current level, not at the level that we eventually hope to achieve. I have said at numerous forums on this issue, it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that asking a 5th grader, reading and writing on a 2nd grade level, to take a 5th grade level test is not only unfair but it also will not provide any information that we do not already know about the child. In the mean time, it puts the child in a situation that both degrades them and serves to shatter their self-esteem. I have had students try very hard to sound out every word of a lengthy document and look up at me with tears running down their cheeks- Mrs. Neuffer, this test is SO hard.

One short aside, unfairly testing special needs students on levels way above their current skill level, is not just an issue that has come to light due to the Common Core issue. This has been a concern of teachers and parents of special need students ever since yearly state mandated tests in Lang. Arts and Math began decades ago.

The purpose of a test is to assess if a student has learned what has been presented and taught and there- by advance in skill level. My students progressed and learned many new things but not at the speed and level of their regular ed classmates. I had one student who I tested on the nationally used and recognized Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment who began with me as a 4th grader reading at a kindergarten level and advanced in 1 ½ years by 10 levels on this assessment as a student in mid 5th grade reading on a beginning 3rd grade level. THIS WAS PROGRESS and it assessed the student from where he began, not at the level of his grade. I could give you many other examples of students progressing and being tested at their current level but there is not enough time.

My second concern is evaluating the skills and success of a teacher based on student test scores on the state tests. The student I just used as an example, made close to 3 years growth in 1 ½ years but still was 2 grades below his 5th grade level. He made phenomenal progress and yet as a teacher I would be considered ineffective because he was not performing on grade level. Is that reasonable? Is that a fair assessment?

I hope this dialogue tonight may change and improve the process of putting into place a way to more fairly and appropriately evaluate students, particularly those with special needs and to use fair and appropriate measures to evaluate teachers.