

COUNCIL FOR A Strong America

Five Voices with One Mission: Winning Investments for Children and Families

Testimony before the Capital Region Regional Common Core Listening Session
November 6, 2015

Remarks by Jenn O'Connor, New York State Director

Members of the Task Force, thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of Council for a Strong America (CSA). CSA is a national umbrella organization that leverages the voices of unique messengers. In New York State, those messengers include business leaders and retired admirals and generals. These members of CSA support the Common Core Learning Standards—for slightly different reasons.

From a business and employer perspective, the Standards are important because they will help raise the quality of our workforce. It is stunning but true that in just five years, 350,000 positions in New York State that require mid-level skills will be unfilled, because we will not have workers with the right skills to fill them. We hear from business leaders every day that they are unable to hire because their candidate pools are unqualified, and the problem is only getting worse.

From a military perspective, we look at two things. One is the importance of consistency for military families, who move around a great deal and want their children to receive a similar education from town to town, state to state. The Standards provide that. Second is the unsettling fact that over 70% of youth are not eligible for military service because they are a high school dropout with no GED, they have a criminal record, or they are physically or mentally unfit. Not only is this a national security problem... it means that 70% of our young people aren't prepared for life, whether it includes military service or not. We need to set them on the right course, and the Standards will help do that.

While we have a number of recommendations (included in this testimony), my main message today is that we cannot allow emotions to sabotage research and data. Evidence tells us that our old way of doing things didn't produce the positive outcomes we sought. Our standards—both literally and figuratively—weren't high enough. Let's move forward together and make the necessary adjustments to implementation to ensure that our children are well-served and that we achieve our desired outcomes.

Therefore, CSA supports continued implementation and echoes the recommendations put forth by High Achievement New York (HANY), of which we are a member. The recommendations include:

- Renaming the Standards as a basic step toward more positive branding
- Increasing public comment and review
- Continuing adaptation to meet new skills and subjects
- Instituting third party review of recommendations and assessments
- Shortening state assessment time
- Increasing the investment in local implementation
- Creating standing leadership councils to review the Standards

In closing, we believe that higher standards are imperative, but that implementation can be improved upon. Your participation in today's session signifies that you feel the same, and we support you in your efforts. Thank you again for your time.