

COMMON CONCERNS

ON COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARDS

With November elections looming and school districts rallying to be heard, the New York State Assembly recently held a forum with school officials at the Brentwood Campus of Suffolk Community College on the topic of the Common Core Learning Standards, its implementation by NYSED, and the testing associated with the CCLS.

Sayville's Dr. Walter Schartner and BOE President John Verdone were among the many school district superintendents and board presidents who gave testimony about the problems of launching these learning standards prematurely.

So you can be an informed, please read their full written testimonies that are attached.

TESTIMONY TO THE ASSEMBLY MINORITY FORUM

October 10, 2013 at 4:45 PM

My name is Dr. Walter Schartner. I am the superintendent of schools for the Sayville UFSD. I have just started my 41st year in education in New York State of which 26 have been in various levels of administration. This is my 36th year as part of the Sayville education community.

I believe that the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) have merit as we are always trying to raise the bar for our students. However, the CCLS and supporting curricula was hastily shared and changed causing confusion. Here is an example of how the CCLS and curriculum guides have been rushed: last year in the grade 2 curriculum guide Charlotte's Web was listed as a teacher directed read aloud. On Monday there was an NBC news report that New York City schools do not have resources for books for students and specifically listed Charlotte's Web in Grade 2. Item 1 is that this reading selection was listed as a book for the teacher read aloud.

Item 2 is that the updated curriculum guide removed Charlotte's Web from the list. The lack of communication from SED causes these issues.

My opinion, based on my experience, is that the CCLS should have been phased-in starting with kindergarten. The first assessment based on Common Core should have been implemented when those kindergarten students reached 3rd grade with several years of sample questions to prepare for the rigor. By pushing everything so quickly the SED has broken the spirit of many students, teachers, parents, and administrators and called into question the validity of these measures. The students that were successful in the past, all of a sudden, are no longer successful.

If these exams are not true measures of student learning, as stated by the Commissioner, they should not have been implemented. The completed and scored tests should be available to the teachers and building administrators to perform item analysis. This would allow educators to assess the gaps in the curriculum and improve instruction. It would also create a bank of sample questions. We currently cannot look at the test questions. They are the property of Pearson. We should not be rushing to be first but planning to be the best.

Please look at the Common Core Curriculum Modules placed on EngageNY. The lessons are so tightly scripted with teacher direction that, if followed, the teaching will become nothing less than robotic with no time for creativity and exploration.

NYSED keeps stating that the only mandated tests are the NCLB assessments in ELA and Math in grades 3 – 8. Response to Intervention (RtI) is a New York State mandate. Sayville Public Schools are required to conduct pre-test, monitor progress in January, and post-test using a researched based measure. Sayville uses AimsWeb for this purpose. RtI is a valuable process that takes a snap-shot of student learning and allows the district to target resources to struggling students. We are required to conduct pre-tests and post-tests to complete Student Learning Objectives (SLO) measures that are currently 20% of a teacher's APPR evaluation score.

Something that is not out in the front of this issue is funding. NYS spends a smaller percentage of its budget on testing than most of the other states. This is due to the state placing the burden of printing, implementing, and scoring the test on the local tax payer. In Sayville alone, NYS testing costs the taxpayers one-

quarter of a million dollars. The state should take **full** fiscal responsibility for state testing. If NYS wants statewide testing they should fully fund it. The state should have an independent study on the cost effectiveness of the APPR and State testing related to the goal of increased student achievement.

Sayville UFSD already has students that are leaving high school “College and Career ready”. I personally dispute the measure created by SED and the testing companies such as Pearson that gain business with student “failure”.

An example of why I don’t trust the measures is as follows: 50% of our 8th grade students take the high school Algebra I regents. All easily passed the regents with all but 12 of the 125 scoring 80% or higher. According to NYSED the measure for high school “College and Career Ready” is 80% on the Algebra I regents. It can then be stated that 49% of the entire 8th grade is already “College and Career Ready” on the high school level. Only 31% of those 8th graders were rated “College and Career Ready” on the 8th grade measure. We then have at least 18% of our students meeting the high school standards but not the 8th grade standard in mathematics.

According to Newsweek from May, 2013, Sayville High School is in the top 1.8% of high schools in the nation based on AP scores and graduation rate. We have had Siemens and Intel semi-finalists. Our students attend the top schools in the country and last year’s seniors were awarded in excess of \$4.3 million in scholarships. The state and national governments should not be micromanaging successful districts. If we show success, we should be left alone to grow that success, not waste funds and time on APPR and NYS testing that do not help move our students forward but hinder their growth.

We need to slow down on the implementation of CCLS, the Common Core testing, and the APPR process.