

Testimony before the Common Core Task Force

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You can not “fix” Common Core. You can’t “tweak” it. For the past five years, some of New York’s most respected education experts have been trying to explain to you that Common Core is a painful, expensive disaster. Many of these experts are people who initially supported Common Core. Some even participated in its development. But now? They oppose it. Some withdrew their support when it became clear that Common Core was being used to restrict and narrow our children’s curriculum, and curtail teachers’ ability to innovate. Others abandoned them because of their lock-step reliance on fanatical, punitive standardized testing. Still other educators abandoned the Standards because of their astoundingly low quality. It is getting harder and harder to find any educators willing to voice support for Common Core. The ones who do support it always seem to be getting paid by those who are making a fortune, profiting from the wholesale degradation of our children’s education. Common Core is harming our children, our teachers, and our schools.

As far back as 2010, the New York Board of Regents’ own standards review and revision commission, led by Regent Saul Cohen, produced a report stating that Common Core was “excessively prescriptive and directive, leaving little room for teacher initiative and creativity”. They also noted that Common Core “While purporting to set challenging standards, is too limited and restricted to items that can be measured by conventional standardized tests”. And most damning, Cohen notes that Common Core “embodies contradiction. While its broad statements often express a rounded view of educational goals and vision, its specifics, again and again, reduce the objectives to what can be measured, to simplistic conceptions of literacy, and to a narrowly instrumental view of language” Does that sound like “Higher Standards” ? Does that sound like the foundation you want for your child’s education? Me either. That report goes on for 10 pages of specific, detailed criticisms of Common Core’s poor development, structure, content, and research base. Seriously. What more do you need?

What more “testimony” is there for you to listen to? Why can’t you just review what we already know? The number of respected, experienced educators opposed to Common Core continues to increase with each passing month. What exactly makes you think you can “tweak” or “fix” this incoherent, incompetent mess? Common Core cannot be fixed.

When one of the Three Little Pigs built his house out of straw, you didn’t say “Hey, it isn’t so bad....It just needs a few ‘tweaks’ ”. You knew that pig was in big trouble. His was the house of a lazy fool. A house made out of straw can’t be “fixed.” It is a failure. From top to bottom. A stiff breeze, (or a Big Bad Wolf), will blow it down, and the pig will be eaten. That house must be torn down and replaced. The strong, secure house is the one made out of bricks. Yes, it is harder to build. Yes, it requires more expertise, more time, and more effort. But it is worth it.

I want a strong, secure education for my children. Like a solid house built from bricks, a solid education is built with teachers and parents, joined together with the cement of a well-designed local curriculum. For a roof, it requires an administration and school board with the autonomy to experiment, try new things, keep what works and discard what does not. It requires the freedom to improve continuously. This is what our children need if they are to have a proper education, one that will truly prepare them for what lies ahead of them, and us.

Common Core provides none of those things, and it never will.