

Lisa Kollmer, Parent

Good evening. My name is Lisa Kollmer. I am a parent of a kindergartener and third grader and I am also an educator. I have witnessed how the Common Core affects my own children, and I have also administered State exams to special needs students. Common core is hurting our children.

Common core standards are developmentally inappropriate because they assume that all children develop at the same rate. They devalue the importance of play, art, music, science, and physical education. Skills like “using data” and “reasoning” do not match how young children think or learn, and result in students being exposed to dull, dry lessons which sap the enjoyment of learning. Experts tell us that young children learn best through hands-on, play-based activities and that they need lessons that foster social-emotional development, but Common Core leaves little time for such experiences.

Common Core math is especially difficult. I have watched my own child scribble out answers and break down in tears over common core math homework. Students are expected to make abstract conjectures about problems, and plan their solutions before they learn the necessary math skills. Child development specialists tell us that abstract thinking does not develop in most children until the age of eleven. These standards were written without the input of early childhood educators. The result, is an entire generation of children who hate math and have lost their self-confidence.

And then there are the high-stakes tests, with questions that are grade levels beyond the capability of students. Special needs students are especially hurt. I have witnessed students with IEP’s cry, shake, and run out of the testing room red-faced and sweating. Their experiences can only be characterized as traumatic. These students are labeled as failures, instead of learning that they can succeed. The same can be said of children from impoverished communities and our English language learners. These are the children who suffer the most.

In fact, the tests are engineered to produce failure. Cut scores are adjusted after scoring, guaranteeing that the majority fail. They have no direct effect on improving instruction, because teachers cannot see the tests and there is no item analysis provided. The common core has sacrificed this benefit of testing so that testing companies can improve their profit bottom line by recycling questions. The gag order also makes it difficult to criticize poorly written questions.

The teacher evaluation law has further affected our children as teachers fear for their careers and are forced to spend even more time on test prep. This is crowding out creative and authentic instruction and formative assessment. The emphasis on nonfiction and close reading leads teachers to believe that fiction should be abandoned, and has produced a generation of children who believe reading is only for tests. Our children are losing their love of reading, as well as their imaginations.

My suggestions for change would be to immediately return to testing only in grades 4 and 8, and not tie the results of those tests to teacher evaluations. I would also ask for a return to pre-common core State standards, which were highly praised and developmentally appropriate because they were created by educators.

And please keep first in your mind that our children are more than a test score.

Thank you for your time.