

RI Committee of Practitioners

Comments Collected by Parents Across RI regarding Common Core and Assessments August 2016

Submitted by Tracy Ramos, Committee Member

In response to the Committee facilitator's request, I collected responses to the question prompts for a few days from parents via email, in person and telephone conversations and social media and via a google survey. The comments on the following pages are from written responses that people wrote themselves; I didn't edit the words they wrote because I wanted the Committee to see the actual experiences and perspectives parents shared.

My conversations yielded similar responses to the ones written below. In general, parents who spoke to me feel that testing in general is too much pressure especially for younger children and that there shouldn't be high stakes tied to standardized tests at all. A common theme that parents said was that Common Core was developmentally inappropriate for younger children, and many cited the Alliance for Childhood Joint Statement on the Standards.

I was told anecdotes about instruction in grades as low as kindergarten being designed so that students are 'ready' for PARCC by third grade. While I understand that Common Core isn't intended to be a curriculum, because the standards are so specific parents felt that teachers aren't able to be creative in the classroom to teach the actual students they have and instead are teaching via prescribed methods. Parents want to be able to rely on teachers and not tests.

Parents of older children are worried that the Common Core standards aren't designed for elite colleges, but rather will mean that schools will 'teach to the middle' and not have a curriculum that is broad enough to have students compete for places in elite schools.

I also heard some concerns over student privacy, public schools closing and privatization, as well as concerns about blended learning, proficiency based strategies and too much focus on computer learning.

In sum, I'd say parents who share perspective with me are unhappy with Common Core and very concerned about the use of standardized tests.

Questions and Responses:

What are the primary benefits, concerns, and questions inherent in Rhode Island's use of the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards?

Are these standards truly meeting the needs of the curriculum? Too many times students are graduating but still cannot write coherent sentences, compute practical math problems or have common sense skills to be productive independent individuals much less succeed in colleges. As an educator, I see the students that are considered to be advanced and in high level classes not be able to truly study and gain in depth knowledge of the material presented. This needs to be addressed earlier in their education than junior year in high school.

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There is no evidence that these standards were developed from a sound, educational point of view. They were brought to us in violation of common law without parental input, without state or local level review and discussion. The "passing score" is set based though what appears very much an arbitrary process.

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My concern has always been all the test prep and so called 'mandatory participation ' in PARCC, My child and I REFUSED THE TEST in writing. We as a family see NO BENEFIT in this way of teaching and learning.

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Common Core standards are not developmentally appropriate at each grade level and they are too rigorous. It is a one size fits all curriculum void of creativity and not accounting for a variety of learning styles and differences among children. More and more, parents are hold children back an extra year of pre school to give their children an extra year to catch up before entering kindergarten. Consequently, you will see older children in each grade which may increase the expectations. Common core is detrimental to the education of children with special needs and learning disorders and differences.

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Common core is developmentally inappropriate. Trying to teach abstract or conceptual ideas to brains that have not developed the cognitive ability is a set up for failure. There should be a set of standards nationally, however they should be developmentally appropriate. The adoption of "new" math as the

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standard curriculum is and has been proven as inadequate for a firm foundation to advance to higher level mathematics. After several years of constantly being told my son was an average student I took him out of public school to homeschool him. Putting my science degree to use I retaught him math the traditional way, and he will now be taking precalculus and trigonometry his sophomore year. Standards are necessary, but they must be developmentally appropriate. High stakes testing is a ridiculous concept.

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It's good to have standards, something measurable as goals so that we don't just say Johnny is doing fine but are able to see whether he really knows what he needs to know to be successful.

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There has been a lot of controversy over whether the Common Core standards are age appropriate etc. The bigger issue is what we do with them. Do we retain kids because they don't meet them? Do we prevent them from graduating? Do we punish teachers and schools where students don't attain them? If so they are not a good thing. If instead we use standards, even high and aspirational ones, to spur support -- for students, teachers and schools, then standards are helpful.

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I despise the common core standards. It has made it impossible for parents to help children. The children are frequently confused. There are many other ways our resources could be put to use which would benefit our children much more.

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I don't like all the testing. Many children have difficulty with testing and that is not taken into consideration. Bring back wood shop, home economics, finances, current issues, keep music alive and the arts! And add in some behavioral classes that teach self regulation and help develop relationships.

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I don't allow my kids to take those tests...thats way too much for kids...wheres the learning if they're always testing?

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Common core..... What's 'common' about our children? Do we really want to create a cookie cutter mentality? That's what it's about. I also have issues with the degree of difficulty a parent has in exercising their right to parent! Every year there's a new hoop to refuse these tests! This year, I even had to ask the principal to please ensure my child(7th grade) had a CHAIR because they didn't make sure

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everyone did... Well, those that tested did but you get my drift. I'm with the above parents... Let's get back to actually teaching and NOT teaching how to take a certain test. Too much time is wasted on it.

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Common core is a joke. Schools spend too much time preparing for these tests. How about teaching kids how to balance a checkbook, vote, or build a house?! That was part of our public high school curriculum but sadly these things don't get taught anymore. Our kiddos aren't even taught cursive writing. America needs to wake up.

Or how to WRITE, write a rough draft then a final paper. Edit, debate, think. Stop all these useless cca's and just let teachers teach and engage students. Stop using computers and start using brains.

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CCSS have not been proven! Where is the research showing that these standards are coherent, reliable, and honestly what our children should know and be able to do to become successful citizens in a democracy - not workers. RIDE has not provided an organized program of professional development for educators on either the CCSS or NGSS. This has led to much confusion and misunderstanding. There are no structures in place - either financially or professionally for districts to incorporate either in their curricula.

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I think its ridiculous. I cannot see the point of doing that much work to solve a simple math problem. What is wrong with the "old math" with all the issues with education today, Why change something that didnt need to be fixed?

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Question~ how do they really help our students? Concern ~ these standards are driving education funding into the hands of the standardized test makers, rather than keeping that funding in the hands of the school districts who need it to support programs.

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The NGSS are actually quite exciting. But, where is the time time to teach science? The emphasis on math and reading is making it very difficult to find an adequate amount of time to devote to these new standards.

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I have heard that the CCS are being used as a curriculum, and it was never appropriately tested for use as a curriculum. I am concerned that the CCS are just a money making scheme to benefit a few companies, without regard for the children's education. CCS are not common sense, why make math and writing so complicated?

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What are the primary benefits, concerns, and questions inherent in utilizing the PARCC exam (in K-9th grade) and the SAT (in high school) as the Rhode Island State Assessment Program?

How will the SAT be used as a graduation requirement? What plans and changes to the teaching methods and curriculum will be made for the students to reach to meet the standard of the SAT without reducing the rigor of the SAT?

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We have given up teaching time and resources for our children to address the testing needs of adults.

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Years ago, I took the SATs in H.S. because that was the thing to do to go on to college, my question is " Are SATS tied to PARCC ? "

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I do not believe in State Assessment Programs as they are not indicative of how a student will succeed in life. If anything, they hold students back from reaching full potential. Some kids do not test well. The assessments also do not account for children with special needs, learning disorders or learning differences. They are not modified for these children which means the results are not accurate.

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The real issue is whether you use them in a punitive manner or a diagnostic/supportive manner. The first punishes the victim who hasn't received the resources, training etc to overcome educational barriers (poverty, disability, schools with high concentrations of poverty), the second uses the test to cast a spotlight on need and address it proactively with educational supports, wraparound services, college bound mentorship etc. Getting high school kids to take SATs is great -- if you pay for them and pay for the prep courses and help kids with

families where no one has gone to college do well on them. It stinks if you use the test to prevent them from graduating or to label them on their transcript as deficient.

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PARCC testing is ridiculous. This needs to stop. There's a reason why most of the other states have stopped using this testing. We need to do it also. Use the SAT as a baseline testing for high schools. It will give the students time to prepare for the appropriate testing for graduating. It could unify all the testing into one format. Less confusing for everyone. More consistent results throughout.

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PARCC does not inform instruction! Plain and simple! It's only purpose is to inform decisions at the district level - for instance, math scores are consistently low - perhaps we need math coaches or our teachers need better PD. PARCC is a waste of valuable instructional time, resources - computer labs for many of us, SPED teachers who must proctor make-ups and whose students suffer, disrupted school schedules for up to 6 weeks, students who have not been exposed to the CCSS for enough years to justify torturing them with a test they are not equipped to take and pass. SAT is great for those middle class and upper middle class students but it totally segregates out our neediest population.

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Children are alot more than their ability to take a test. Prepare are children for the world, not a damn test.

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Benefits ~ well, the word is the SAT will be free. Concerns ~ We all know that a high school student's grade point average is the best indicator of future college success... much better than ANY standardized test; so why the waste of \$\$ on PARCC, etc.; the waste of instructional time throughout the school year for all the testing; the loss of electives as schools focus on standardized testing; the lack of real-time information on the results for students; or as Peter Greene said "Unnecessarily complicated, heavily favoring students who have prior background knowledge, and absolutely demanding that test prep be done with students, this is everything one could want in an inauthentic assessment that provides those of us in the classroom with little or no actual useful data about our students."

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PARCC significantly alters student schedules during the month of May. Depending on how districts schedule testing, students lose not only classroom instructional time, but also fine arts instruction. It comes at a terrible time in the instructional year when teachers and students are working to finish projects, do final performances and art shows, and wrap up portfolio work.

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I am against teaching to the test. The tests should be used as a measure, not towards any grades that the students or teachers achieve.

What other comments can you share with us on state testing and academic standards?

Please remember that while technology is all around us and has some benefit, it should not be the only method used in the classroom. All students learn in different ways and as such should have the ability to learn using the methods that compliment their learning style. That is truly the only way for every student to succeed.

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we need to find a way to protect our kids from the maniac business/pseudoscience politicians pretending to be educational experts. Give control to the parents not the politicians.

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We need to present all the negative to Gina Raimondo and Ken Wagner and apply pressure !!! Children are stressed out! Parents are stressed out! School is not a fun and happy place for children anymore. Teachers are unhappy with the standards as well but do not speak up out of fear of retaliation or loss of jobs....at least that's what is going on in our town of South Kingstown.

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Some testing, the right testing and the right testing for the right purposes is good. It helps objectively monitor progress. It helps address unaddressed needs and neglected student populations. It's all in the details: what purpose is the test used for, is that its design, does it help or hurt the student succeed. Don't ever use the tests to punish students. DON't use it to punish schools and teachers dealing with disproportionate need. Use it to identify the needs and address them with intensive resources. Then the tests are helpful. Same for standards. Our children are doing too much testing. This needs to be fixed.

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Waste of meaningful instructional time! Educator-developed classroom assessments inform individual student instruction. Let's put our money and our time into helping teachers learn to develop assessment that help us help our students.

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Spend some money on the future of this country. We need all our schools, academic plans, homework everything to be centrally organized one one system. Parents need more access to their childrens daily and yearly educational agendas.

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Standardized testing- bleh. Again, we all know that a high school student's grade point average is the best indicator of future college success. So, keep the money wasted on the testing industry in the school districts. Let the teachers come up with their own assessments. They would be authentic and provide real data they could use to help their students be lifelong learners.

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At the elementary level, reading and math instruction take up 3 hours of the instructional day. After lunch, recess and specials, that leaves 90 minutes for science, social studies and any other district initiatives such as PBIS, social think, and so on. This makes the pace of the instructional day very stressful for students. During testing in May, instruction grinds to a halt. The testing is rigorous. Students do not have the stamina to test and then attend to instruction. There is no way to make up that lost momentum in June with the end of the year closing in.

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Testing is fine as long as it does not put undue pressure on students and teachers, or take away from the joy of school and learning.

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PARRCC AND NEACAP.. put all that stress of testing on everyone and we get a follow up a YEAR later? What does that do? You're child is already past any intervention to assist and in this area..the population is so transient..you will never get a true picture of how the district is actually doing!

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Spent too much time out of the days to do the testing. Has to be done on computers. Schools have minimum number of computers so it takes longer and add any technical issues and it falls apart. Why can't it be done on paper with the fill in sheet, then there could be fewer days spent on testing due to the ability of the whole school taking it at the same time.

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Is the state or Parcc people going to provide dependable computers for our children. It should not be a burden on the local schools. Their funds are already strength out

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Common core = lack of common sense ! Have you tried the math and after 15 minutes, you start to get angry because it could have been solved in less than 30 seconds?

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I understand what Common Core is but don't agree with the methods used to teach our children. It's taken them longer to understand the process and do the work. Common core isn't for every child.

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Q to parent: Have you talked about that with your school? How much leeway do teachers in your district have regarding methods? Parent response: I have tired but like everything I hit a wall of excuses or we will look into it and never see change or hear back.

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So many are worried about independent thinking and not following our so called leaders.

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Teachers are scared of repercussions if they disagree and parents think their children will be targeted if they speak up

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When my daughter was in the 3rd grade she was so stressed out about the Parcc. Since then she becomes so stress with any testing that she doesn't do well. The teacher are pushed about test,

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test,test, must do well. Teachers stress out and it is reflected onto the student. We need to stop teaching for a test and start to teach for a life time. As far as common core, not the best experience there with both my children. When my daughter brought home double digit multiplication I was confused. So I said to her I was not taught this way. I showed her how I was taught, the traditional way. All she said was how it was so much easier and she was able to finish her homework in a timely manner. I also expressed to her I would contact the school to get help in understanding this process and she has to learn it. She was not happy. That was fourth grade. My son in the first grade with double digit adding. I looked up how to do it and boy was it dumb. So if the problem is $47+51$.. This is how I understand it to work, because I never received help from the school which makes me wonder if they even understand. So back to the problem... Take $51+7=58+10=68+10=78+10=88+10=98$ Again I showed my sone the traditional way and he was able to do his homework. What is wrong with the traditional way.. $51 + 47$ ---
--98

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"Teachers in Middlesex County were surveyed about their views of PARCC testing. New Jersey is one of the few states that continues to participate in PARCC. Originally, there was a consortium with 24 states. Now there are five." <https://dianeravitch.net/2016/08/16/new-jersey-survey-of-teachers-shows-negative-impact-of-parcc-testing/>