

## Abstract of Senate Testimony

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Professional focus: Learning and Assessment in the Humanities in the K-12 and College Levels

Background: Fulbright Scholar to Singapore, SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence

This testimony will compare and contrast English Language Arts Learning at the college level and the K-12 level by examining the method of analysis of critical texts, selection of texts, support for textual analysis, collaborative learning and scholarship development, performance assessments, and development of further scholarship. Additionally, this testimony will also explore the role of cumulative assessments and their use at the college level as compared to the K-12 level by examining the diagnostic information collected and its impact in informing teaching practices. Finally, this testimony will compare the various modalities of information shared with relevant constituents regarding learning outcomes and results at the college level and the K-12 level, and its influence on abilities to generate decisions, informed practices, and support services.

## Details of Testimony

### **COMPARISON OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS LEARNING AND ASSESSMENTS AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL AND K-12 LEVEL**

When engaging in central texts at the college level, the method of analysis combines a variety of literary and rhetorical devices, prosody, contextual words, and other elements frequently explored in works of scholarship and criticism. Teachers have been requesting opportunities in the K-12 sector to explore these elements in order to prepare students for college-level scholarship, however standardized tests serve as an impediment to such scholarship and analysis because of the narrow examination of passages and lack of deep textual analysis in the current assessment models. Additionally, the textual analysis performed in college level assessments is based on the texts students studied throughout the year. This includes the central text, works of scholarship and criticism that further engage students in the text, collaborative discussions with peers and professors, and other supplementary resources that promote deep engagement with the text. At the K-12 level, elements are missing in the current format of standardized tests, and moreover, the texts used in the cumulative assessments are not the same texts students studied throughout the year, creating a disconnect between the content knowledge and skills application, as well as discouraging the simulation of the college level rigor expected of the students. Finally, the supports in place for K-12 level practitioners do not match the supports for college-level practitioners, particularly around subject of content support. While college-level practitioners are frequently given development opportunities to further their understanding and scholarship in their respective content areas, K-12 practitioners are not given such opportunities. This missing support impacts the level of deep textual analysis on the part of the practitioners, which in turn impacts the student's ability to engage in and create a deep textual analysis. At least one solution is to align the K-12 assessments with the content studied throughout the year as this more closely simulates the assessments used in

college. Further, given that the bulk of time spent in college is on textual analysis, the 16 weeks of instructional time in K-12 that is lost due to test preparation, administration, scoring, and other test related activities could be reallocated back to textual analysis and learning.

Moreover, if K-12 practitioners have opportunities to engage in the scholarship used by college-level practitioners through targeted professional development, and if the assessments align more closely with the content knowledge of the textual analysis, many of the impediments to deep text engagement and literacy would be mitigated.

Additionally, the assessments should be more closely aligned with the method of text analysis used at the college-level, and to achieve this, the nature of the assessments requires reexamination. At the college level, such performance assessments and scholarship work are created to help the practitioners understand specific elements of textual analysis students need extra support with, such as prosody, rhetorical analysis, narrative devices, literary techniques and other technical elements of writing that inform the analysis and interpretation. These are examined through the student's work and scholarship through a variety of means including research papers, presentations, and other multiple measures of demonstrating argumentative and persuasive thought. This provides a diagnostic framework for the college level practitioners to assess not only how well the student has interpreted the substance of deep textual analysis, but also how well the student can articulate the independent arguments and scholarship based on the text analysis. The timeliness of such assessments allow immediate feedback from practitioner to student in a clear, organized fashion that provides the student with opportunities to revise, improve and expand upon the work created. In the K-12 level, there is no focused, diagnostic approach to help both the practitioners and the students identify

specific textual elements that require further support and examination. Further, the timeliness of K-12 assessments do not allow either the student or the practitioner opportunities to examine and evaluate the areas of needed support for children in a prompt manner. Some solutions include reexamining the timing of assessments, the nature of the assessments, creating assessments that are diagnostic in framework, and using various measures of assessing how well the deep textual analysis informs the student's ability to generate independent thought with persuasiveness and scholarship.

Finally, in the interest of public involvement and support, the diagnostic framework of such assessments should be used as a means to inform not only the K-12 practitioners, but also the parents, of the specific supports students need with respect to deep textual analysis. This involves sharing the nature of the assessments with parents, as well as sharing the nature of the results. The current format of assessments does not inform the public on K-12 practitioner effectiveness as measured by tangible, text-related work and scholarship. This leaves parents confused rather than informed. If the K-12 practitioner's professional development, instruction, and assessment were more closely aligned with the college-level practitioner's professional development, instruction and assessment, the public would understand tangible data to make informed decisions that affect our public educational policy.

These solutions have been discussed in various forums, including parent-teacher groups; university academic forums; corporate partnership groups; humanities-related workshops; and most recently, the Summit for Smarter Schools in Buffalo, NY, which was attended by parents,

college humanities professors, and other stakeholders who have vested interests in aligning the K-12 work more closely with college-level work.