

1 **Resolution Concerning Public School Education**
2 **Proposed by the Public Policy Committee and Concerned Youth of the Diocese**
3

4 **Resolved**, That this 82nd Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, recognizing
5 the church’s mission to defend the most vulnerable in our society, especially children,
6 encourage congregations to investigate the effects on public school education of the
7 Common Core State Standards and high-stakes testing based on them; and be it further

8 **Resolved**, That this Convention recommend that members of congregations advocate for
9 changes in their school districts where adverse effects of the Common Core and high-
10 stakes testing are found; and be it further

11 **Resolved**, That this Convention instruct the Secretary of Convention to provide copies of
12 this resolution to all congregations in the diocese for use in advocacy by their members
13 with local school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents, as well as to
14 the New York State Episcopal Public Policy Network (NYSEPPN) in Albany for their
15 use in advocacy with the state’s Board of Regents, Department of Education, legislators
16 and Governor Cuomo.

17
18 **Explanation**

19 New York States’ public schools have participated for the past four years in the Race to
20 the Top (RTTT), which since 2009 requires schools that get federal education funding to
21 implement the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and high-stakes testing based
22 on them. While the aim of the Common Core is laudable in that it seeks to provide a
23 curriculum guide for what all United States students should know to be college and career
24 ready, thereby eliminating inequities of education standards from state to state, several
25 area educators assert one size does not fit all students. Fairport teacher Julie Mitchell
26 claims “the Common Core standardized guidelines run counter to brain-research
27 findings” with “developmentally inappropriate expectations” for younger learners and not
28 enough challenges for gifted older students in this “one-size-fits all approach” (Letter-to
29 the–Editor, *City*, June 12-18, 2013). Three University of Rochester doctoral students
30 who also teach in public schools in Greece, East Irondequoit, and Rochester City
31 Schools, conducted research this past summer, including surveys and interviews, that
32 reveal the one-size-fits-all Common Core Standards and assessments is widening the
33 achievement gap between affluent white students and African American, Latino, and
34 second language learners. Special education students are also negatively impacted as
35 their teachers attempt to cover the required material in the same timeframe as used for
36 other students. Their paper “The Injustice of Corporate Reform,” by Diane Santiago et
37 al., exposes corporations, like Pearson, heavily involved in developing the Common Core
38 materials and the new tests, are profiting financially, while the most needy students fall
39 further behind. Meanwhile the cost to school districts of implementing the Common
40 Core far exceeds the RTTT grants and requires cutbacks in spending on other school
41 programs.

42
43 Other local teachers and administrators point out that the high-stakes testing is causing
44 more time spent preparing for the tests with less instructional time for new learning with
45 children’s test scores now used as part of the teacher evaluation process. William Cala,
46 former Fairport Superintendent of Schools and recent interim Superintendent of the

47 RCSD, observed in a Letter-to-the Editor of *City*, May 29-June 4, 2013, our children are
48 given “an austere, barren curriculum of incessant test drilling that saps the joy out of
49 learning” and then subjected to tests that “have no basis in research and have no evidence
50 they have any value whatsoever.” A Greece grade school teacher wonders, are we to
51 “teach them the skills they need to be successful or do we teach to achieve a test score?”
52

53 This past spring, New York State students in grades 3-8 took the first ELA and math
54 assessments based on the new Common Core Standards. Many teachers and parents felt
55 students were not adequately prepared for these new tests, which State Education
56 Commissioner John King had warned were much more rigorous than previous
57 standardized tests. In August we learned that the results of these tests were, as expected,
58 lower than previous assessments. Statewide, only 21 percent of students met or exceeded
59 the proficiency standard for math and only 31.1 percent met the English standard.
60 Among the state’s largest urban districts, Rochester ranked the lowest with 5 percent
61 meeting the math standard and 5.4 percent meeting the English standard. (Source: Nate
62 Dougherty, “RCSD state testing scores lowest among big 5 districts in N.Y.,” *Rochester*
63 *Business Journal*, 7 August 2013.) While RCSD Superintendent Bolgen Vargas assured
64 administrators and teachers these abysmally low scores “will not negatively impact
65 teacher, principal or school accountability” this year, one wonders how they and their
66 students feel about the results or whether they will be able to improve next year. A recent
67 news report that NYS Education Commissioner John King is pushing for legislation that
68 would allow the Board of Regents to take control of low-performing school districts has
69 educators in Rochester City Schools worried about retaining local control.
70

71 Pushback against the Common Core and testing is growing. The American Educational
72 Research Association (AERA) has called for a moratorium on testing until more research
73 about the Common Core’s impact is performed. Western New Yorkers for Public
74 Education initiated parent-supported student boycotts of the tests this past spring. They
75 provide information about how to go about boycotting the tests and petition forms to
76 circulate within school districts on their website: www.wnyforpubliced.com. Several
77 students with parental support refused these new tests in various places across the state
78 and in school districts within the Rochester Diocese this past spring. The State Education
79 Department has provided no regulations about how schools should treat students who opt
80 out of tests. A student in the Rush-Henrietta School District was disciplined when,
81 encouraged by his parents, he refused a test, but other students who opted out in
82 neighboring districts have not been punished. The parents of the Rush-Henrietta student
83 are appealing a federal judge’s ruling against a lawsuit they brought. Believing that the
84 Common Core and RTTT are having “a detrimental impact on our children,” Assembly
85 Member, Al Graf has introduced Bill 7994 to amend the state education law to remove
86 this state from the Common Core and the Race to the Top. Read the bill at
87 www.fixnyschools.com .
88

89 Jesus admonished his disciples for impeding the children from approaching him to
90 receive his blessing: “It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” As
91 followers of Jesus, we need to raise questions about public education policies that risk the
92 well being of our children, especially those already challenged by disabilities or poverty.