

My name is Brooke Harris, and I teach 10th grade English Language Arts at an EAA high school. I am here today to share an experienced teacher's assessment on the online platform, called Buzz, being used by the EAA. Buzz is not the answer to the achievement gap. Buzz has been touted as a student centered, individualized learning platform, but my experience with Buzz has shown it to be anything but.

Buzz is composed of a "one size fits all" purchased curriculum. Instead of differentiated activities and lessons being created by their teacher - a certified professional who lives and works in the city of the students, who has taken the time to get to know each of them on a personal level - the limited activities and lessons have already been mapped out without any knowledge or regard to the students' background, culture, needs, strengths, or interests. This consideration would be the true essence of student centered learning - tailoring instruction to the individual learning needs, interests, and background of the students, and this consideration is exactly what is missing in Buzz. Every city and every student across the state is not the same and should not be required to learn the same, uniform online lessons.

Buzz is labeled as individualized, another misnomer, at least at the high school level. Buzz does not meet students where they are; it is not tailored to their needs. All of my students are placed in 10th grade online courses, despite that fact that many of them read far below the 10th grade reading level and the fact that the EAA's full inclusion model places special education students in classrooms without adequate support from an illegally overworked special education department.*

Many, if not most, of my students cannot access the material on Buzz without significant scaffolding and accommodations. Scaffolding and accommodations that are not provided by "the professor" who narrates the informative videos that predominate the learning activities in Buzz. Instead of being taught by a real, live instructor who can gauge students' reactions and be flexible and adaptive to their needs, students are being taught by videos on a computer screen. That is not student centered. Students are not being placed at the center of instruction, a curriculum is.

This aforementioned professor is also inadequate to teach my particular subject area - English Language Arts. Reading literature is not a black and white, right and wrong activity. The only part of ELA that is so structured is grammar and mechanics, which is also conveniently one of the few parts of ELA that Buzz never addresses. Reading literature should not be reduced down to watching a man tell you everything you should have gotten out of a short story or novel then repeatedly taking a multiple choice test on his views, knowledge, and opinions until the student achieves "mastery" of that concept. That is how Buzz handles literature in its curriculum.

Literature should be a subject of discovery - of discovering *for* oneself the meaning and mystery *in* the texts and of discovering *in* oneself similarities and empathy *for* the texts. Literature should be a subject of engagement. Where the teachers' passion for the subject and for reading and writing are just as valuable as the reading and writing itself. Where this passion and excitement should be contagious and spread throughout the classroom.

Literature is a subject of intangibles. A subject where all 45 students in my classroom can have different opinions, and all 45 students in my classroom can be right, as long as they can support their answers with evidence from the text. Who would want to take away a student's, especially a struggling student's, right to be right? To take away the ability to engage in class discussions; to work and think with their peers?

Critical thinking cannot be taught by a computer. Critical thinking is an area where many of my students are lacking, and they cannot afford to be left to languish before a computer screen. My students, the children of Detroit, are not a group of lab rats on which we should test a detrimental curriculum that is not even fully functional or completely developed. They have been let down in the past, and I cannot stand idly by as they are let down once again in the future.

On behalf of my students, thank you.

*The special education teachers at Mumford High School have caseloads of 30-32 students each. This is 10-12 students above the legal limit, and 5-7 students above the case exemptions limit from the state. The full inclusion model demanded by the EAA is also in violation of the laws of IDEA, stating that students should be placed in the least restrictive environment. Students are also not receiving services required by their IEPs because the EAA has not made arrangements for the personnel to teach some students, such as those who are hearing impaired, visually impaired, or homebound. Students requiring social work services, which are very common, are also not being serviced because the private company, Futures Health, contracted by the EAA to provide school social workers, is trying to share one social worker amongst three or four schools.