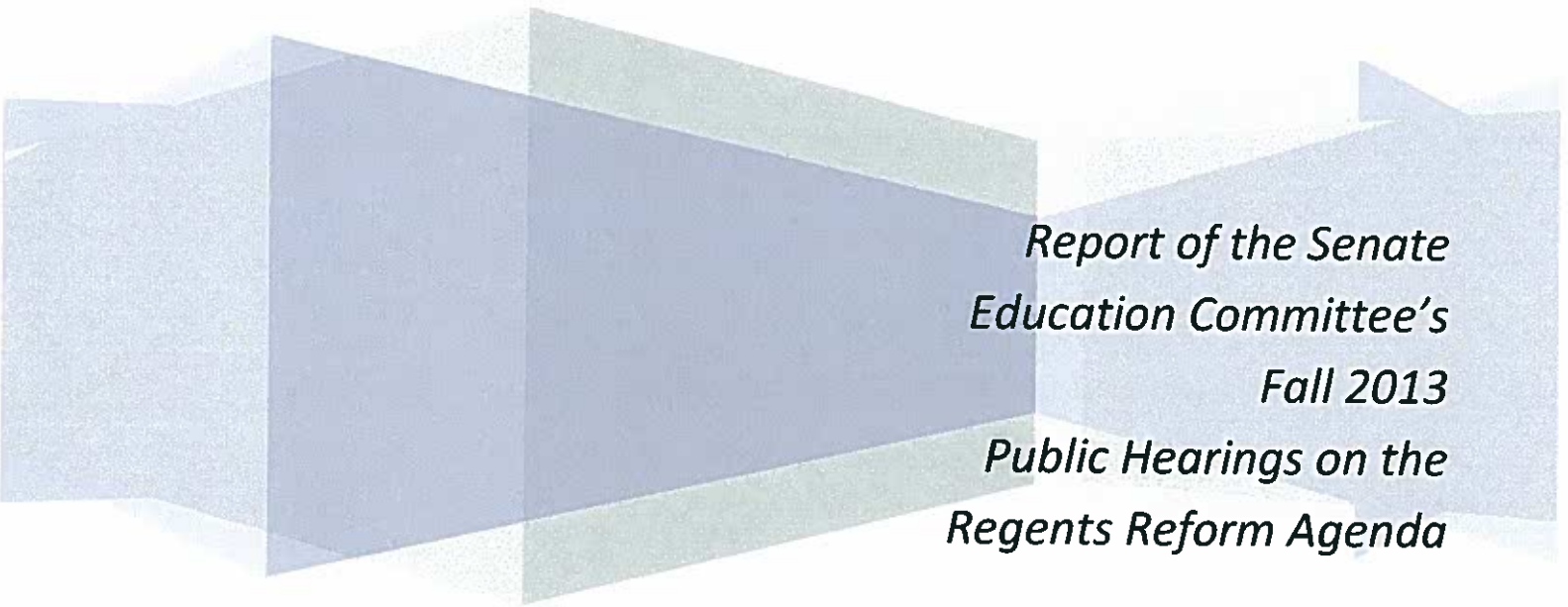


The Regents Reform Agenda: “Assessing” Our Progress

Senator John J. Flanagan

Chair, NYS Senate Committee on Education



*Report of the Senate
Education Committee's
Fall 2013
Public Hearings on the
Regents Reform Agenda*

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SENATOR
JOHN J. FLANAGAN
2nd DISTRICT

ALBANY OFFICE
ROOM 805, LOB
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
(518) 455-2071
FAX (518) 426-6904

DISTRICT OFFICE
260 MIDDLE COUNTRY ROAD
SUITE 102
SMITHTOWN, NEW YORK 11787
(631) 361-2154
FAX (631) 361-5367

E-MAIL
FLANAGAN@NYSenate.GOV

December 12, 2013

Honorable Dean G. Skelos
Temporary President & Majority Coalition Leader
New York State Senate
Legislative Office Building, Room 909
Albany, New York 12247

Dear Senator Skelos:

I am pleased to present you with the Report on the Senate Education Committee's Fall 2013 Public Hearings on the Regents Reform Agenda entitled "The Regents Reform Agenda: 'Assessing' Our Progress." The hearings focused on three general topics: the implementation of the Common Core, the excessive and unnecessary amount of testing, and student data and privacy.

The Committee held hearings in Long Island, Syracuse, Buffalo, New York City and Albany. We heard from teachers, parents, administrators, education activists, and privacy experts, among many others. Throughout the hearings it was readily apparent that the Common Core, testing, and privacy are not unique concerns to any one geographic or socioeconomic region. The concerns we heard on Long Island were echoed with the angst and confusion we heard in Buffalo; the frustration outlined in Syracuse was mirrored by the exasperation of those who testified in New York City. Suffice it to say, the testimony we heard was overwhelmingly candid, passionate and direct.

This Report summarizes the nearly thirty hours of oral testimony we heard, as well as the hundreds of pages of written testimony submitted to our office. In addition, this Report provides salient recommendations for immediate action by the Board of Regents, the State Education Department, the Governor, and the Legislature.

It was a tremendous honor traveling across the State conducting these hearings. Perhaps no other aspect in our roles as elected officials is as important as ensuring all children in all areas of the state are afforded an opportunity for the highest quality education. I look forward to working with you, our colleagues in the Assembly, the Governor, and the Department to ensure the advancement of the recommendations included within this Report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John J. Flanagan".

Senator John J. Flanagan
Chair, Senate Education Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Senate Standing Committee on Education initiated and held five public statewide hearings over the course of two months concerning the Common Core Learning Standards, testing and privacy. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for the public and educational stakeholders to testify about their assessment of the new common core learning standards adopted by the Board of Regents in 2010 and implemented by the State Education Department (SED) in the 2012-13 school year.

All five hearings were replete with heartfelt, emotional testimony about children experiencing severe stress, anxiety and frustration as they struggled to learn the new curriculum while taking numerous, lengthy tests on the new material. Teachers expressed their exasperation over the lack of time for training and resources necessary to adequately prepare lesson plans due to incomplete and missing modules. SED had promised to have all modules for all grade levels available by June 30, 2013. To date, that has not been accomplished, and in fact, is substantially incomplete.

Repeatedly, over the course of thirty hours, 115 witnesses testified and close to 1000 pages of written testimony were received as part of the public record. All addressed significant and deep concerns about testing, privacy, the implementation of common core, and the lack of meaningful communication between SED and all educational stakeholders. The Committee heard from an ample cross-section including parents, teachers, administrators, State Education Department officials, the Regents, union representatives, professors of higher education, charter schools, and advocacy groups.

The report encapsulates the issues and contains specific Committee recommendations for Education Department and Regent action, and State Legislative action. While this has been a very positive beginning, our work is far from complete. The recommendations are summarized as follows:

Action for SED:

- Expedite Federal waivers from mandates on various testing restrictions including those for Students With Disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learners (ELL).
- Produce missing modules immediately
- Align assessments proportionally to curriculum actually implemented
- Delay operation of Education Data Portal (EDP) for one year
- Increase funding for professional development

Action for the State Legislature:

- "P-2" Bill which would ban standardized testing on Pre-K through 2nd grade
- "Unnecessary Testing" Bill which would require the Commissioner to expedite a review of APPR plans **solely** to eliminate unnecessary student assessments
- Privacy Bill which would strengthen protections of personal information stored on the state-wide data portal, establish significant civil and criminal penalties for unauthorized disclosure, and create independent oversight within SED on matters related to privacy
- Truth- In-Testing Bill would require the Commissioner to report on the effectiveness of common core state tests and require an independent audit to review and evaluate the common core testing program

INTRODUCTION

Education is, and has to remain, the State of New York's number one priority and obligation. We demonstrate our commitment to that obligation by the distribution of over twenty billion dollars of state taxpayer funding and support of educational opportunities for every child, in every community across this great state. Every parent wants, and should expect, a great teacher to teach their children. Moreover, every parent wants, and should expect, that the teacher in their child's classroom is teaching with an excellence and a passion for education that is unparalleled. While these goals are lofty and aspirational, we need to strike a balance between our overall goals, what we can achieve now, as well as our long-term plan to achieve those goals. What we genuinely need are people of good will at all levels, who are eager to face the obstacles and challenges presented in all districts such as poverty, English language learners, and children with special needs. The State's obligation is compounded by the complexity of how to allocate money so that a child's background, their zip code, their parents' education and their socioeconomic status is not an indicator of who they may become. There is simply no other aspect of the work we do as a state government that is more important than our commitment to the well-being and education of all public school students.

Commensurate with this fundamental obligation is a corresponding duty to speak about the successes and achievements of tens of thousands of students all across New York. Frankly, for an extended period of time, there has been a barrage of negativity associated with educational accomplishments in our great state, including from some of our statewide educational leaders. Our schools are replete with examples of achievement and success that should make any parent and any local community proud. Our rural schools, despite extraordinary economic and logistical challenges, such as transportation and infrastructure, have maintained a sense of community and purpose that have led to academic successes and continued high graduation rates. Our urban schools have significant obstacles that many do not know or properly comprehend, and yet, they have achieved myriad accomplishments that other communities and states embrace and emulate. The uniqueness of our urban schools encompasses our small city schools as well as the largest of the "big five," which all find ways to enhance the best and brightest through innovative programs like Early College High School. Suburban schools have a diversity that often goes unnoticed, but they foster a continued desire to see that opportunity, in all forms, presents itself to the many and not just the few. The complexities of our communities should be a celebration of the richness of New York. While we clearly have significant issues to address, there needs to be a continued effort-- whether it is an urban, suburban or rural school district-- to never lose sight of the remarkable and individual potential of each and every child.

THE HEARINGS

To maintain a prioritized focus on these fundamental educational goals, the Senate Standing Committee on Education undertook the time to review the Regents Reform Agenda via a series of public hearings entitled “Assessing our Progress”. The Committee announced in July that these statewide hearings would occur, appropriately, when schools returned to session. Specifically, the hearings would focus on the critical examination of common core, testing and student privacy. While each issue is unique, there is an inevitable overlap as it relates to education reform. Contemplating the breadth, challenge and passion attached to each of these issues, the Committee announced that the hearings would be held statewide, spaced two weeks apart, to allow for a clear dialogue on subjects that are profoundly important to education. Initially, hearings were scheduled in Long Island, Syracuse, Buffalo and New York City. A fifth hearing was later added in Albany to maximize the representation of all regional interests.

It should be noted that the Senate is the only organized entity that scheduled hearings and sought extensive testimony to produce a public record in order to advance areas of concern and potential solutions related to the Regents Reform Agenda.

There was no lack of clarity, passion or diversity of opinion at each hearing. The Committee strongly contends that a fair and representative cross-section of many divergent stakeholders testified and framed the debate by outlining and discussing the significant issues. The Committee believes that with a shared focus and purpose, these stakeholders can work in unison to effectuate education reform to substantially improve outcomes for students, if that is truly the goal. While it is adults who will be reviewing the Committee’s work and scrutinizing our recommendations, this effort has been made with the well-being of our children in the forefront.

In conjunction with the verbal testimony gathered at the Senate hearings, the Committee solicited public comments and held the official public record open for two months. During this time, the Committee listened to almost thirty hours of direct verbal testimony, received hundreds of emails and hundreds of pages of written testimony. The hearings have generated suggested actions that can be taken by the State Education Department and the Board of Regents in the short and long term, absent any Legislative or Executive intervention. The Committee also reviewed budgetary considerations to be contemplated by the Executive as he crafts his proposed Executive Budget with a suggested primary focus on the level of overall funding and specifically the funding provided for professional development.

Potential legislative solutions are proposed here to address acute concerns involving student privacy and data, early (Pre-K) childhood testing, as well as the frequency and duration of a

multitude of exams. Issues ripe for possible action include the timing and implementation of Common Core, and its curriculum, as well as inefficiencies related to its implementation. There was a robust discussion and debate on implementation of common core that included words such as "pause," "delay," "high stakes" and "moratorium." All weighty topics that engender significant emotion and dialogue.

The Committee found substance and depth throughout the hearing process to underscore the consternation, frustration and abject annoyance directed to a variety of entities, which if taken in isolation might not be so problematic; however, in totality that frustration represents a growing sentiment that those in charge are not properly listening, or worse yet, do not understand or care.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to recognize that there is a fundamental distinction and friction as to what roles are played by whom with regard to educational policymaking in the State of New York. For many years, the State Education Department and the Board of Regents have set the education direction as well as the educational policy for the State. There is no question that the Legislature and the Governor have not been nor should be the arbiter of education policy of our State. The Senate, the Assembly and the Governor should uniformly recognize, acknowledge and encourage our State's educational policy be set by those with extensive backgrounds and experience in teaching and administration. It is challenging enough to fairly determine budgetary considerations, let alone design and establish curriculum to be taught in our classrooms.

The most prudent course of action that this Committee can recommend is that, as has historically been the case, curriculum and pedagogical decisions are best adopted at the local level. Even a cursory review of the prevailing research, and the public testimony, emphasized the point that a student's teacher is most accurately aware of that individual student's needs and has the best ability to address those needs, in concert with parents and local school district administration. That delicate balance needs to be respected and enhanced wherever possible.

The witnesses at the hearings included parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, academics, business people, educational not-for-profits, State Education Department officials, the Regents, and others both pro and anti-Common Core. The quality of the submitted written testimony was complemented by our participants' willingness to engage verbally, especially when they responded to questions from Senate members who attended the hearings. The Committee is not only grateful for this input, but also very thankful for the hundreds of people who submitted poignant written testimony separate from the hearings – all of which is part of the public record. Witnesses were thoughtful and deliberate while also being assertive and direct. No one shied away from answering questions and, on the whole, witnesses provided their criticism while also offering solutions. While many testified in their professional capacity,

they also happened to be parents and grandparents themselves, reflecting a personal perspective as well.

THEMES OF THE HEARINGS

Overall, there were several consistent themes. Without question one theme was genuine frustration. Given a chance to vent, witnesses did so because they have deeply held concerns about the Regents Reform Agenda. Who is in charge? Is anyone truly listening? More importantly, is anyone really doing anything even if they are listening? Why are things so rushed? How come there is such a desire to amass and share data? Why are there so many tests? Why are they so long? Why do my kids no longer like school? How come teachers are so frustrated? Do we even know whether any of this will work? Why is corporate America involved? How are my children actually going to be better off? These questions are rhetorical for purposes of this report, but the teachers, parents and districts we heard from are actually asking them. They want and are entitled to real answers, especially from the State Education Department and the Board of Regents.

The Department and the Board were represented at each of the five hearings either by the Commissioner, the Chancellor, individual Regents, senior staff from the Department or some combination thereof. Much of the ire and consternation from panelists were directed at the Commissioner and the Department. In each region, the criticism was steady, and punctuated with emotion regardless of the segment of the educational community the witness represented.

It became apparent that the timing of the hearings had a positive impact on the outcome. Starting after the school year commenced and spacing the hearings over two months enabled people to review other hearings and testimony. References were frequently made to prior testimony largely in a complimentary fashion. More importantly, as the Common Core rollout and implementation continued, there was an opportunity to look more closely at what was actually happening – or not – in the field. The acceleration of testing and, in particular of pre-testing, at all levels heightened the sensitivity and frustration of parents on behalf of their children. More homework and less understanding were made worse by a lack of appropriate curriculum materials. Tensions that were already brewing were exacerbated by a rollout that looked more like an unraveling. By the fifth and final hearing in Albany, the witnesses were paying much closer attention and were noticeably more agitated.

While there was certainly no consensus on Common Core itself, there was a consistent, coherent theme that Common Core standards are laudable and accomplish many positive

things for our students.¹ Many statewide major educational organizations stood squarely in support of Common Core as standards and potential curriculum. Where they and many others expressed general support for Common Core, they were also equally clear about their intense frustration with the *implementation* of those plans. Nowhere was this more evident than when people spoke about testing.

1. TESTING

Pre-test, post-test, diagnostic test, standardized test, bubble test, “high stakes” tests-- all these tests described by the witnesses magnified the overwhelming refrain that there is too much testing and not enough learning. A preoccupation with over testing and teaching to the test are very much in conflict with the essence, value and joy of learning. Extensive discussion on testing revolved around things like how long the state-required tests take, and why there are so many in such a short period of time. Even though the Department spoke to modifications of test time overall and to accommodations of time for students with special needs, many in attendance and many of those who submitted testimony countered the Department’s contentions.

While the issue of testing generated significant input, the most strident views and hard-hitting questions centered around the onslaught of additional pre and post testing. Questions arose concerning those who are responsible for the added testing, the added time and the added pressures; there were clear divergences of opinion as to who was responsible. The Department argued that these provisions are a function of local control and are points collectively bargained by the local district with the teachers union. They also added that the Department has stressed to school districts that alternative methods to testing are available and appropriate. Many of the educators essentially claimed they were being forced to administer additional testing because of dictates from the State Education Department and that their Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) plans would be in jeopardy if they failed to do so.

Another significant concern raised at the hearings was age appropriate testing versus developmentally appropriate testing. Currently, students are required to take federal assessments based upon their chronological age and not their developmental age. Thus, for example, a child who is chronologically in the fifth grade but developmentally in the first grade must take a fifth grade assessment. It is incomprehensible to members of the Committee that

¹ The development of the Common Core State Standards was a joint initiative led by the National Governor’s Association and the Council of Chief School Officers. A memorandum of agreement was signed in 2009 by then Governor Paterson and then State Education Commissioner Richard Mills. In July 2010, the New York State Board of Regents formally adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). All grades 3 – 8 ELA and math state assessments were aligned to the common core standards beginning with the 2012-13 school year.

the State Education Department would have to petition the federal government to “seek” a waiver of this federally mandated requirement.

To be clear and succinct, the federal waiver should be sought immediately and expeditiously with a simultaneous call for the repeal of this regulation that virtually, by design, will make children fail. The same applies to our English language learners who, despite their best efforts, are almost relegated to failure because of federal testing regulations that, at a minimum, undermine their confidence as well as their potential growth.

A separate discussion needs to take place about the role of the federal government in education because there is clearly more significant action that our federal representatives can and should be taking. Whether it is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RttT), Universal Pre-K, Federal funding (or the lack thereof), or regulations that may impede our State’s ability to administer a quality education to students, there needs to be more conversation, communication and action. A better partnership needs to be fostered sooner rather than later.

There is an abundance of research, dissertations, and many poignant human stories about testing. An entire separate report could be devoted to testing and assessments. It is evident to the Committee that Department action, Federal action and State legislative action needs to be taken now to avoid rote testing and to focus more on assessments as productive tools to measure and enhance student outcomes.

2. PRIVACY

A no less contentious issue is that of student privacy. The angst generated by this issue is substantial and the Committee heard from many parties on the subject. A straightforward way to describe the concerns related to this issue is to look at this through the eyes of a parent who has a child with acute special needs or a child who might have a history of disciplinary problems. Absent legitimate policy reasons for seeking data, no parent wants to share their child's personal information, especially with third parties, that bears no direct relation to that child’s education.

What are data points and how do you define them? What is a “cloud” and does that mean that at some point that it may “rain”? As a parent, one dwells on the prospect that their child will be the one who suffers because of the inappropriate release of sensitive personal information. How do you provide the requisite important data without having to compromise individual privacy? In this area, many of the concerns were directly related to what could happen. While there was fear and apprehension, the hearings did not produce concrete examples of violations, egregious or otherwise, that have actually occurred. There was recognition that what happens now is a patchwork of local plans, in large part, without any significant

coordination at a broader level. Compliance with federal laws such as FERPA (the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and HIPAA (the Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) are requirements placed on our schools, but how they are applied and enforced, and to what degree, are crucial. Testimony by outside experts at the Syracuse hearing, in particular, underscored the value of FERPA, but also equally highlighted why New York should enact its own enhanced protections.

The Committee recognizes how sacrosanct adults believe their privacy is; it also recognizes how parents will fight with even greater fervor to protect their children. Should there be enhanced civil and criminal penalties? Should we discuss a parent's bill of rights? What about all of the "what ifs"? How do you jealously guard privacy, when regardless of protections ascribed by InBloom, or the Education Data Portal (EDP), potential problems already exist on a daily basis. The Assembly has passed several pieces of legislation in this area and the Committee looks forward to fruitful discussions in the Senate about proposed legislation in this area to achieve a delicate balance of the appropriate collection of data, as required by federal law with the need for privacy protections.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON CORE

It is apparent that Common Core implementation has been an ongoing challenge, not yet surmounted, or a failure, depending on the perspective of the witness. Who is in charge of curriculum? Why now, more than ever, do people know who the Regents actually are? In the past, references of the Regents would conjure images of tests and not people. Now, many more are focused on the individual Regents. Regents actually implement education policy so one would expect they would understand the realities of the classroom in conjunction with what actually happens at home.

There appears to be a significant disconnect between those who propose policy (Regents) compared to those who have to actually implement it in the district, the school, the classroom and even the home. The Department acknowledges shortcomings and recognizes that the rollout has been less than optimal. The people in the field deeply feel that their concerns are being given short shrift – even though all claim to have the same ultimate goals in mind. After synthesizing much of the testimony in this area, a fair assessment is that the Department recognized the complexity of a new challenging curriculum and they offered to assist Districts with curriculum, guidance and, in certain cases, funding. In some respects this was a considerable departure from past practice where curriculum was largely if not exclusively developed and implemented at the local level. Local professional development, district-wide teams of professionals steeped in pedagogy and individual teachers were the norm, not the exception, for determining what was being taught and how.

Then, a new somewhat unknown endeavor is undertaken, Common Core, with great promise and expectation. The State Education Department steps in and offers guidance, and more importantly, creates a set of expectations that are well-intentioned but very difficult to meet, even though advanced in good faith. Districts were nervous but hopeful that the shift to a statewide curriculum would be successful. Districts embraced the idea that the State could provide much more in terms of guidance and input than they had in the past. It was a ray of hope - especially when Districts were already grappling with APPR implementation, funding issues and a new curriculum designed to make us an educational leader in an international economy.

Schools waited for the promised support and even surrendered a level of local control so that they could potentially save money by working with the State. Why buy curriculum and spend local resources when the promise was that all would be well if they followed and embraced what was being advanced by the State? The Department set out an aggressive timetable for implementation of “modules” to assist local school districts, working with independent vendors and the results were mixed. Failure to meet contractual deadlines were exacerbated by suggested curriculum being doled out as if being rationed. Again, it is important to note that many felt the Department, and by extension the Regents, were actually attempting to assist, but fell woefully short. The theory of adopt, adapt or ignore would in large respects only be properly understood by those who pay close attention to these issues. When the Department stresses that they are only providing guidance and not mandates regarding curriculum, that message does not resonate with educators because they feel that, in their view, they have had to acquiesce to be in compliance with other policies they feel bear almost no relation to the proper education of a child. The expectations were created, the frustrations have risen, and the goals seemed to have gotten lost in the mix.

A perfect example is modules. Modules are intended to assist in a profound capacity with the seamless implementation of Common Core. Modules appear to be like chapters in a book. Part of a potentially great story that is beset by problems because the publisher promised a delivery date of June 2013, but can only produce several chapters at a time, with a possibility of not even knowing the date of the release of the last chapter. Imagine that you are a voracious reader and you have a book club that wants to have an energetic discussion and debate on substance. If your leader does not have the proper tools to lead the discussion (i.e., the whole book) at an appropriate time, then you as a reader, and that leader as a facilitator, are at a distinct disadvantage to prepare for the rigor of “the debate.” Even as a participant you may be frustrated since you want to be given the tools to succeed and to be able to demonstrate your prowess on these measures to your colleagues (in this case assessments) so that you measure up. As such, teachers need to have access to the entire curriculum in order to effectively teach.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

How do you ask educators and, most importantly, students to work hard to achieve success if they do not possess the proper tools to compete? The Committee firmly believes that the majority of children will rise to the challenge and master the curriculum when it is fully offered. Correspondingly, the tools must be available so that if a child is going to be tested or assessed they have the requisite opportunity to succeed. Hence, a dilemma arises. Should the mindset be full speed ahead based on the assumption that all will be well even if there are those who just cannot adapt regardless of the pace? Or is it prudent to take that proverbial deep breath and say that the Department must fairly define the challenges and appropriately modify the course? Should a frenetic pace be more important than a diligent reasoned approach to ultimately achieve a much broader level of achievement? Hopefully, there is a middle ground that will raise the chances of ultimate success of all students.

Common sense appears to have played a far less significant role than it should have in the context of these debates. If the average person were asked if they wanted to be tested on things that they did not know or had not seen, their visceral reaction would be – “of course not”. That same person would probably give a similar answer if asked to guide others and then be evaluated on their success based on the students’ scores when, in fact, they could not properly prepare their students. It is unfair to examine a student on one hundred percent of new material when they have only received instruction on twenty percent. It is inadvisable to ask educators to teach their students without possessing appropriate course material. Part of the challenge is to determine the right timing without jeopardizing the potential upside of implementing rigorous standards which are primarily intended to enhance academic success. The pushback on any modification or delay is that we are hurting children by waiting and by depriving them of their personal individual chance for a better future. There has been plentiful use of the term “cohort” – who makes up a cohort, how big is that cohort and how do we particularize learning to each cohort so as to maximize their potential. A “relaxation” of implementation could hinder the long term prospects of any given cohort, which the State would do well not to forget is actually made up of children. Listening to and reading the extensive input the Committee received could lead to an equally fair conclusion that we do a disservice to children if we push them along at breakneck speed and do not recognize that while they are resilient, they are also not robots.

How do we find that elusive balance? Three terms that arise constantly in the written record are "implement," "align" and "assess." These words are fairly easy to comprehend individually, but when combined, they can create vastly different challenges and vastly different outcomes. What has been occurring, and there is a wealth of information to substantiate this, is that Common Core is not being properly implemented by using those terms in their most important

order – IMPLEMENT, ALIGN and then ASSESS. A profound and distinct feeling exists that ASSESSMENT is occurring before implementation and/or alignment. That sets the stage for things like precipitous declines in test scores even while there is general agreement on the value of what is being taught. Why not seek a middle ground that revolves around properly acknowledging the missteps that have transpired to date and determining an efficient and timely way to address them? Apportioning blame or castigating educational leaders makes for a good sound bite but it does not correct the problems.

The Department must determine exactly what has been delivered in terms of curriculum and align and assess based on those proportions. If twenty percent of the curriculum has been delivered to districts, and taught to the students, then align and assess on that twenty percent, not one hundred percent. If a teacher has received a module or modules midstream, is it advisable to expect that they be adept at teaching it after a weekend of review, in the middle of the school year (which is essentially where we are) with the specter of April assessments? This of course recognizes that there has been a gap; if all the teaching materials were available in advance (that does not mean issuance at the end of August for September instruction) then we would have a slightly different story. Even a seasoned veteran teacher needs an opportunity to properly prepare.

If many of the stakeholders acknowledge that Common Core is not being fully implemented overnight then there should be an opening to rationally lay out a plan that may look something like this – Common Core is implemented over four years (i.e., twenty-five percent a year) and the assessments are implemented the same way. Our previous standards, the New York State Learning Standards, were considered appropriate for many years and should not be discarded gratuitously. Move from the old standards to the new ones while incorporating the value of both as we keep our long term goals in mind. Which is why it is important to reiterate the mantra – IMPLEMENT, ALIGN and then ASSESS.

Like testing, there could be lengthy reports or discussions on proper implementation of Common Core. A valuable sub-component of that debate is professional development. With all the rhetoric and angst and even hyperbole, a legitimate consensus exists about the value and efficacy of true professional development. The Department has been a strong proponent of professional development for educators, through Race to the Top (RttT) funding as well as through Departmental transfer of funds to support that development. The Committee strongly supports additional funding for professional development for our academic professionals now. The time is right, the need is acute and the value is without debate.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

Recognition is a precursor to recommendations in a number of areas. The Committee is grateful for the extensive input from so many interested parties. The Committee also recognizes that this is an ongoing debate that did not begin yesterday and will certainly not end today or tomorrow. Potential action items include changes that can be implemented by the Department and the Regents without any immediate Legislative or Executive action. For example, any and all waivers from federal government regulation or policy that can protect and advance the interests of students should be sought immediately. There should be no delay on things like the Algebra exam, English language learners and students with disabilities. Action should be undertaken seeking the full support of our Federal representatives. Waiting for several months to submit these requests is inappropriate and sends the wrong message to the people in the field. Redeploy resources necessary to achieve those goals now.

Seeking additional professional development funding from the Executive and the Legislature should also be a priority as part of the Department's and Regents budget request. A statewide equitable distribution should be an underpinning of that request. The Committee will recommend that the Legislature advocate aggressively for that funding by earmarking appropriations for professional development. The timing and the efficacy of that funding, at this juncture, is a wise investment in our long-term goal. If there is consensus as to the inherent value of properly preparing our classroom teachers, then achieving this should be one of our smallest challenges.

Working with our Federal representatives needs to be a constant, not an isolated occurrence. They play a significant role in funding and educational policy. Whether it is No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or Race to the Top (RttT), the State needs to partner with them to protect and enhance our interests and we need to create a more consistent and productive dialogue as to how we achieve our mutual goals on behalf of New York's students.

Legislatively, many people are clamoring for intervention and swift action. As previously noted, the Legislature and the Executive should tread lightly when intervening in educational policy-setting, as that has not been our role historically. It is eminently reasonable to expect the Legislature to introduce and act on legislative items like protecting privacy while not disrupting the efficient operations of our schools. Addressing subjects like Pre-K through second grade testing, so as to avoid unreliable and unnecessary testing is a priority that can be readily achieved if those who set policy are willing to listen, to seek input and to compromise. There is also a distinct possibility that the issue of testing and the prevalence of pre and post testing can be fairly addressed without losing the legitimate value of proper and timely assessments. In addition, there is justification for seeking an objective, timely and independent review of

Department and Regent activity on the reform agenda – in other words – assess the assessors. The goal is not to impugn or malign, but rather to seek a fair review of the theory as it intersects with the reality.

Finally, the most complex and challenging issue is the timing and implementation of these new standards. Independent of Committee hearings, the Committee has continued to seek extensive input from educational professionals at all levels to determine what is the necessary course of action for this Committee to take, if any, on potential modifications to the Common Core. Individual input has been keenly augmented by efforts of groups like the Educational Conference Board, which is an umbrella group comprising seven major educational organizations across our State. Seeking their guidance, as representatives of a variety of interests including parents, has been illustrative and helpful. At the same time, given their divergent opinions, it has been a challenge to achieve consensus on the most vexing issues. The Committee will continue to monitor and study the implementation, recognizing the extraordinary responsibility that we all share on behalf of millions of students across this wonderful state.

To reiterate what was stated at the outset of this report, it is our State's most basic obligation to ensure that whether a child is from Plattsburgh, Tioga, Auburn, Yonkers, Buffalo, Montauk, Watertown, Long Island or the City of New York, the State must strive to give all students the best chance at success that anyone would desire for their own children.

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



SENATOR
JOHN J. FLANAGAN
2nd DISTRICT

December 11, 2013

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(518) 455-2071
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FAX (631) 361-5367

E-MAIL

FLANAGAN@NYSENATE.GOV

Chancellor Merryl H. Tisch, New York State Board of Regents
Commissioner John B. King, Jr., New York State Education Department
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Chancellor Tisch and Commissioner King:

As you are aware, the Senate Standing Committee on Education held five statewide hearings over the past several months concerning the Common Core Learning Standards, testing and privacy. The Senate was the first official body to provide the public and educational stakeholders throughout New York with an opportunity to testify about their assessment of the progress being made by the State Education Department (SED) in implementing these new learning standards and to hear their suggested recommendations for moving forward. A copy of the official record, including the hearing transcripts and all written testimony is being provided for your thoughtful review and consideration.

At the outset, you should know I fully support establishing rigorous academic standards for all students in New York State to ensure they are properly prepared to enter college and/or the workplace, and to ultimately compete in a global economy. In New York, there has always been – and continues to be – a level of expectation that the residents of this State will rise to meet any challenge with the understanding that through hard work and perseverance excellence can be achieved. This sentiment is best reflected in our motto on the official seal of the State of New York – “Excelsior, Ever Upward”.

However, the successful execution of any plan is almost always preceded by good – if not excellent – preparation, which was glaringly deficient in the planning, preparation and execution used by SED to implement Common Core. During the Senate’s hearings, the Committee heard from dozens of educational stakeholders including parents, teachers and administrators – all of whom had no shortage of opinion or passion in the testimony they presented. While it seems clear from the testimony that there is broad support for the Regents’ decision to transition to a more rigorous set of learning standards, it is equally clear that the overwhelming consensus is that the implementation of these new standards and its associated components have been poorly administered and mismanaged by SED.

The Committee heard very heartfelt, personal and emotional testimony about children experiencing severe stress, anxiety, frustration and feelings of hopelessness struggling with the new more difficult curriculum, while also trying to understand the skills necessary to think about learning in a whole new way. There were stories shared with the Committee about how children would spend hours upon hours trying to complete homework assignments leaving little time for them to do anything else – oftentimes being left with a sense of failure and apprehension. Parents described how children would exhibit signs of extreme anxiety about having to go to school, particularly when having to sit for numerous hours and days to take annual assessments; which many argued contained questions that were neither age-level nor developmentally appropriate.

Teachers expressed exasperation about the lack of time for professional development training and resources necessary to adequately prepare lesson plans. They complained about incomplete and missing modules which the State Education Department had promised to be one hundred percent developed for all grade levels and one hundred percent available to all school districts by June 30th, 2013 – but which are still woefully incomplete and clearly short of hitting that benchmark even now more than five months later. Testimony was advanced that teachers felt like robots, reading from scripts and “teaching to the test,” rather than providing their students with a rich diversity of educational instruction that would encourage their students to develop a life-long love of learning. All of this was occurring at the same time that scores from annual assessments were supposed to be used in evaluating the progress of a student’s growth and proficiency, while simultaneously being used as a component of a teacher’s overall effectiveness rating under a new teacher evaluation system (APPR) agreed to by the Governor, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) and the Legislature.

Further testimony was provided to the Committee by privacy advocates and school administrators expressing grave concerns about the sharing of student, teacher and principal data on the soon-to-be operational statewide Education Data Portal (EDP). Many legitimate and serious questions were raised about the need for school districts to provide up to 400 data points on students, the potential uses and abuses of an individual’s personally identifiable information (PII) (including medically sensitive information and/or disciplinary actions that may have been imposed), and the potential for all this information to be shared by third-party vendors with others for the purpose of tracking, marketing or selling. Moreover, genuine concerns were raised about the security protections in place to prevent the statewide system from being compromised by computer hackers.

Communication

A repeated complaint and concern heard by the Committee was that there was very poor communication from the State Education Department (SED) to all educational stakeholders, including administrators, teachers and **especially parents**. While we certainly appreciate the efforts of Commissioner King in scheduling his recent statewide listening tour to hear directly from the public

about these concerns, the Department must continue to do more. State education officials need to have an ongoing clear line of communication with the public at large on all aspects and initiatives related to the implementation of new state learning standards. This should include deploying state officials to all regions of the State on a regular basis to address any concerns or problems that arise and to provide each region with periodic updates concerning administrative actions being taken by the Department on module development and availability, on changes to testing requirements and/or accommodations and progress or changes being made on the development and launching of the EDP. Equally important, this should also include an immediate and thorough review and analysis of SED's EngageNY.org website to determine its efficacy, accessibility, relevancy and clarity for everyone who visits the site – **most importantly, parents. If improvements to the website are needed, they should be done immediately.**

State Administrative Action

1. Expedite Federal Waivers

With respect to administrative actions the Department can take immediately, without involvement from the Legislature, we urge in the strongest terms possible that waivers from federal mandates on various testing restrictions be sought immediately, including those for Students With Disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learners (ELL). While we are pleased that the Department has taken recent steps to file a waiver with the US Department of Education (USDOE) to prevent the "double-testing" of 8th Grade Algebra I students, these additional waivers and any others determined to be necessary must be fast-tracked for immediate approval by USDOE before the next administration of annual assessments. It is hard for us to explain to the public why statements from the Department in early November would require ten more weeks for submission on issues of critical importance. The timeliness of these actions is on the merits and they underscore why delay, of any kind, thwarts progress.

2. Produce Missing Modules Immediately

In addition, the Department must immediately accelerate the development and availability of missing modules in both ELA and Math for all grades. SED promised school districts to complete and provide one hundred percent of the modules by June 30, 2013. That was more than five months ago. While school districts in New York have long-maintained local authority and control in developing their own curriculum – and continue to maintain that control under the newly implemented learning standards – SED created an expectation that districts reasonably relied upon when it agreed to develop and post the appropriate curriculum online in an effort to assist districts with implementation and to avoid added costs. In effect, that broken promise is a breach of public policy and trust that must be repaired and remedied immediately. Teachers need, and are entitled to, a sufficient amount of time to review and prepare lessons before providing instruction to their students.

3. Align Assessments Proportionally to Released Modules

There were ongoing complaints that children were being tested on material they had never seen before, due in large part to SED's failure to produce modules in a timely manner. The question kept coming up: "Why are they 'assessing' before 'implementing' and 'aligning' the curriculum?" Instead, it should be: "IMPLEMENT", then "ALIGN", and finally "ASSESS."

So, in an effort to fairly align annual assessments to those modules (i.e., curriculum) that have been provided by SED so far, the Department is strongly urged to administer test questions **only** in proportion to the number of modules that have been released for each subject (ELA or Math), in each grade level, up to and including September 1st, 2013. For example, if SED has only provided 40 percent of the modules in 4th Grade ELA by September 1st, then only 40 percent of the test questions should be aligned to the modules. Given the Department's delay in providing curriculum now more than five months late, students and teachers should not have to rush through newly released modules after the beginning of the school year with the added stress and anxiety of having to demonstrate proficiency on the new more difficult material.

4. Delay Operation of Education Data Portal (EDP) for One-Year

Given the legitimate issues and concerns raised by parents, teachers, administrators and privacy advocates regarding the uploading of student, teacher and principal data to the statewide Education Data Portal (EDP), the Department should impose an immediate one-year delay in launching the full operation of the EDP until school districts have sufficiently assessed all the ramifications surrounding this newly designed computer-based technology. In addition, this one-year delay will give the State Legislature and Executive an opportunity to work on closing the gaps that exist in the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) by strengthening protections of personal information stored on the state-wide data portal, establishing significant civil and criminal penalties for unauthorized disclosure of personal information, and creating independent oversight within SED on all matters related to privacy.

While the vast capabilities of the EDP appear to be a worthwhile endeavor for any district, there are still too many unanswered questions about the security measures put in place to protect data being stored on the "cloud". Also, it continues to baffle so many why the Department would need to potentially collect up to 400 data points of information on a student that is uploaded to the EDP. Even a modicum of justification on the "need" for these individual points might actually help to quell some of these concerns. Ultimately, school districts should be given the local authority to decide for themselves whether to participate in the EDP or to continue managing district services through their existing local contracts with third-party vendors.

5. Increase Funding for Professional Development

To ensure that teachers have the necessary resources and training to properly and effectively implement the new learning standards, the Department must immediately identify and direct additional departmental funding to professional development programming. As the Chair of the Senate Education Committee, I am also deeply committed to partnering with Legislative leaders and the Executive in identifying existing multi-year budget appropriations that can be repurposed to help fill gaps in professional development funding necessitated by the implementation of Common Core.

State Legislative Action

In addition to the immediate administrative action requested, the Department is being asked to assist in advancing several pieces of legislation to address deficiencies in current law that exacerbate some of the problems associated with the implementation of the new learning standards. The following is a brief description of each legislative proposal:

1. "P-2" Bill

Recently, the Department responded to NYSUT/UFT's call for a ban on Pre-K through 2nd grade standardized testing by publicly stating that there are no standardized tests administered or required by the state for this very young student population. The Department also strongly discouraged the use of standardized or "bubble" tests for these students, and instead urged districts and their bargaining units to identify other ways to assess learning progress for these students in the future. During the hearing process, the Committee received extensive testimony that a number of school districts and bargaining units opted to use standardized tests at the last minute for students in Kindergarten through grade 2 in order to meet the statutory deadline for local APPR plans to receive department approval.

I have introduced legislation that would prohibit the use of standardized testing of students in Pre-K through 2, other than for diagnostic purposes or as required by federal law. The bill would prohibit the Commissioner from approving any future APPR plans containing such language, while respecting local control by not interfering with existing collective bargaining agreements.

Codifying the prohibition of standardized testing for students in Pre-K through 2nd grade is an essential step to reducing the over-testing of our children.

2. "Unnecessary Testing" Bill

School district and union representatives also contend that the filing deadline for submitting APPR evaluation plans forced them to make quick decisions on establishing student growth measures

for those teachers being evaluated in non-assessment subject areas, and that the districts were directed by the Department to use pre- and post-testing as their appropriate measure of student growth. Now, districts are attempting to address parent concerns about the use of over-testing of their children by reassessing their APPR plans and seeking changes that would reduce or eliminate any unnecessary tests.

I have introduced legislation that would require the commissioner to expedite a review of annual professional performance review (APPR) plans that are submitted **solely** to eliminate unnecessary student assessments. The commissioner's review would be limited to the issue of unnecessary testing of students and districts would have to certify that no other material changes have been made to their APPR plans.

Enactment of this legislation is a critical component to reducing the number of tests that are currently being administered to all students.

3. Privacy Bill

As stated previously, there are still too many unanswered questions at this time about the security of student, teacher and principal data that is to be uploaded to the statewide Education Data Portal (EDP). In conjunction with a one-year administrative delay to the full launching of the EDP, I have introduced legislation that would strengthen protections of personal information stored on the state-wide data portal, establish significant civil and criminal penalties for unauthorized disclosure of personal information, and create independent oversight within SED on all matters related to privacy.

The enactment of this bill prior to the uploading of personal data and the full operation of the EDP is critical for closing privacy gaps and protections that currently exist under the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

4. Truth-In-Testing Bill

Lastly, while a wide variety of educational stakeholders and organizations, including the New York State Educational Conference Board (ECB), continue to support the Regents' 2010 decision to adopt and implement the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) as a more rigorous set of academic learning standards necessary for preparing our children for college and career readiness, it is appropriate that we continue to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of these standards and the impact that annual assessments aligned to these standards are having on our children.

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I have introduced legislation that would require the Commissioner of Education to report on the effectiveness of common core state tests in enhancing student learning and performance, and that an independent audit be conducted to review and evaluate the common core testing program in New York State.

The enactment of this bill is essential for producing a fair and reliable assessment of the Board of Regents' decision to adopt Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in New York State, and for determining the effectiveness that the State Education Department's implementation of these standards is having on our children. **Most importantly, it is needed to restore the public trust and ensure the integrity of our educational system in New York State.**

It is my continued hope and commitment to work in partnership with all education stakeholders, the State Education Department, the Board of Regents, the Assembly, and the Executive on these and other recommendations for the purpose of addressing the concerns of parents, teachers and administrators and for making improvements to the education system in New York for the benefit and success of all our children and for the ongoing success of this great state and nation.

I look forward to your prompt action on the recommendations enclosed herein, and your response to the legislative proposals being advanced.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John J. Flanagan". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "J".

John J. Flanagan

cc: Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor, NYS
Hon. Dean G. Skelos, Temporary President and Majority Coalition Leader, NYS Senate
Hon. Jeffrey A. Klein, Temporary President and Majority Coalition Leader NYS Senate
Hon. Sheldon Silver, Speaker, NYS Assembly
Hon. Catherine T. Nolan, Chair, Education Committee, NYS Assembly

SUMMARY OF "THE REGENTS REFORM AGENDA: "ASSESSING" OUR PROGRESS" HEARINGS

DATES AND LOCATIONS:

September 17, 2013

Suffolk Community College
Crooked Hill Road, Grant Campus
Health, Sports and Education Center
Brentwood, New York 11717-1017

Senate Members Present:

Senator John Flanagan - Presiding

Senator Philip Boyle
Senator Kemp Hannon
Senator Kenneth LaValle
Senator Carl Marcellino
Senator Jack Martins
Senator Lee Zeldin

October 1, 2013

Syracuse City Hall
Common Council Chambers, 3rd Floor
233 East Washington Street
Syracuse, New York 13202-1421

Senate Members Present:

Senator John Flanagan - Presiding

Senator John DeFrancisco
Senator Elizabeth Little
Senator Thomas O'Mara
Senator James Seward
Senator David Valesky
Senator Cecilia Tkaczyk

October 16, 2013

Buffalo City Hall
Common Council Chambers, 13th Floor
65 Niagara Square
Buffalo, New York 14202

Senate Members Present:

Senator John Flanagan - Presiding

Senator Michael Ranzenhofer
Senator Mark Grisanti
Senator Patrick Gallivan

October 29, 2013

Senate Hearing Room
250 Broadway, 19th Floor
New York, New York 10007-237

Senate Members Present:

Senator John Flanagan and Senator Felder - Presiding

Senator Martin Golden
Senator Elizabeth Little
Senator Jack Martins
Senator Brad Holyman
Senator Toby Ann Stavisky
Senator Cecilia Tkaczyk

Also present:

Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel

November 13, 2013

Van Buren Hearing Room A
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12247

Senate Members Present:

Senator John Flanagan - Presiding

Senator James Seward
Senator Patricia Ritchie
Senator Cecilia Tkaczyk

SUMMARY OF PEOPLE WHO PROVIDED ORAL TESTIMONY

LONG ISLAND HEARING

Ken Wagner – New York State Education Department
Nicholas Storelli-Castro – NYSED, Director of Governmental Affairs and Special Projects
Dennis Tompkins – NYSED, Chief of External Affairs

Regent Roger Tilles – New York State Board of Regents

Jeanette Deutermann - Parent

Marianne Adrian - Parent

Nadia Resnikoff – New York State United Teachers, Middle Country Teachers Association,
Selden, NY

Stephen Allinger – New York State United Teachers

Robert Vecchio - Board of Education President, William Floyd Union Free School District

James Gounaris - Board of Education President, Herricks Union Free School District

Dr. Donald James – Superintendent, Commack Union Free School District

Dr. Tom Rogers – Nassau BOCES

John Hogan – Superintendent, West Hempstead Union Free School District

Claudine DiMuzio – Elementary Principal/Facilitator of Hauppauge Parent Advocacy Group

Michelle Marino – Principal, Southdown Primary, Huntington Union Free School District

John Nocero – Council of Administrators & Supervisors

Arnold Dodge – Professor, CW Post, LIU, Chairperson of the Department of Educational Leadership and Administration

Lisa Rudley – Autism Action Network

SYRACUSE HEARING

Commissioner John King – New York State Education Department

Vice Chancellor, Regent Anthony Bottar – New York State Board of Regents

Richard Longhurst – Executive Administrator, New York State PTA

Aimee Rogstad Guidera – Data Quality Campaign

Reginal Leichthy – Partner, EducationCounsel, LLC and Nelson, Mullins, Riley and Scarborough, Washington, D.C.

Kevin Ahern – President, Syracuse Teachers' Association/NYSUT

Stephen Allinger – New York State United Teachers

Corliss Kaiser – Superintendent, Fayetteville-Manlius

Diane Bowers, Ed.D. – Superintendent of the Hamilton School District

David Syracuse – Science Teacher from Tompkins, Seneca, Tioga BOCES

Sharon Contreras – Superintendent, Syracuse City Schools

Jennifer Pyle – Deputy Director, Conference of Big 5 School Districts

Michael Cohen – President, Achieve, Inc.

James Viola – School Administrators Association of NYS

David Little – New York State School Boards Association

Bill Phillips – President, Northeast Charter Schools Association

Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi

BUFFALO HEARING

Nicolas Storelli-Castro – New York State Education Department

Chancellor Emeritus, Regent Robert Bennett – New York State Board of Regents

Dr. Pam Brown – Superintendent – Buffalo City Schools

Linda Hoffman – Member of the Erie 2 Chautauqua Cattaraugus Board of Education and Serves on the Erie County Association of School Boards Executive Board and is the Area 1 Director for the New York State School Boards Association

Jim Sampson – Board Member, Buffalo Board of Education

Dan Drmacich – Retired Teacher, Principal, Rochester City School District

Naomi Cerre – Principal, LaFayette High School, Buffalo City School District

Eric Mihelbergel – Parent

Carrie Remis – Executive Director, Rochester’s Parent Power

Deann Nelson – Parent/Grandparent, Former School Psychologist for Erie 2 BOCES

Todd Hathaway - East Aurora High School, New York State United Teachers

Stephen Allinger – New York State United Teachers

Scott Martzloff – Superintendent, Williamsville Central Schools

Preethi Govindaraj – Co-Founder, Minerva

Dr. Paul Vermette – Professor of Education, Niagara University

Mark Beehler- Vice-President, Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association

James Spanbauer – Principal of LaSalle Preparatory School

Ryan Schoenfeld, Ed. D. – Principal, George M. Southard Elementary School, Lockport, NY

Dr. Bruce Fraser – Executive Director, Rural Schools Association

Cheryl Oldham – Vice- President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Dr. John McKenna – Education Chairperson, Niagara Region PTA

David Hursh – Professor, University of Rochester

Tamara Alsace, Ph.D. – Director of Multilingual Education, NYS Federation of School Administrators – Buffalo Council of School Administrators

William Boatwright – Elementary Principal, Buffalo Council of School Administrator’s

Kevin Eberle – Secondary Principal, Buffalo Council of School Administrator’s

Genelle Morris – Assistant Superintendent, Office of Shared Accountability

Crystal Boling-Barton – President of Buffalo Council of School Administrator’s

NEW YORK CITY HEARING

Chancellor Merryl Tisch – New York State Board of Regents

Ira Schwartz – Assistant Commissioner, Office of Accountability, New York State Education Department

Michael Mulgrew – President, United Federation of Teachers

Shael Polakow-Suransky – Chief Academic Officer, New York City Department of Education

Karen Sprowal – Parent

Lisa Shaw – Parent

Nancy Cauthen - Parent

Deborah Rayow – Vice-President, Core Curriculum and Credit Recovery, Edgenuity

Tenicka Boyd – StudentsFirstNY

Nathalie Elivert – StudentsFirstNY

Leonie Haimson – Executive Director, Class Size Matters

Zakiyah Ansari – Advocacy Director – Alliance for Quality Education

Dr. Monty Neill, Ed.D. – Executive Director, Fairtest

Marco Battistella – Member of the Steering Committee of Time Out From Testing

James Merriman – CEO, NYC Charter School Center

Sheila Kaplan – Founder, Education New York

Ernest Logan – President, Council of School Administrators

Mark Cannizzaro, Executive Vice-President, Council of School Administrators

Tracy Pyper – Co-Chair, New York Alliance for Public Education

Rosalie Friend – NYS Information Coordinator, Save Our Schools

John Owens – Teacher and Author

Fred Smith – Retired Member of the NYC Department of Education, Testing Department

Nicholas Lawrence – 8th Grade Teacher and Educators 4 Excellence Member

Stephen Boese – Executive Director, Learning Disabilities Association of NYS

Dr. Ruth Powers Silverberg, Ed.D. – Associate Professor, College of Staten Island

ALBANY HEARING

Ken Slentz – Deputy Commissioner for P-12, New York State Education Department

Kathleen Ferguson – New York State United Teachers, 2012 NYS Teacher of the Year, Elementary Teacher from Schenectady City School District

Stephen Allinger – New York State United Teachers

Sheila Kaplan – Education New York

Margarita Garcia-Notario, PhD – SUNY Plattsburgh, Parent Representative of North Country Schools

Heather Briccetti – President and CEO, New York State Business Council

Tim Farley – Principal, Ichabod Crane Elementary School, Kinderhook, New York

Kathryn Brown – Teacher, Morrisonville, (which district?) New York

Doug Selwyn – College Professor, Plattsburgh

Wendy Richards – Doctoral Student at D'Youville College

Bill Wolff – LaSalle School, Albany, New York

John Yagielski – Chair, Educational Conference Board

Claire Sylvan – Internationals Network for Public Schools

Dr. Brenda Myers – Superintendent, Valhalla Union Free School District

Ms. Judith Johnson – Interim Superintendent, Mt. Vernon

Mark Schneiderman – Software and Information Industry Association

Stephen Jambor – Vice-President, Westchester-Putnam School Boards Association

Robert Reidy – Executive Director, NYS Council of School Superintendents

Robert Lowry – Deputy Director for Advocacy and Education, NYS Council of School Superintendents

Sheena Hervey – Chief Academic Officer, Generation Ready