

Jori Cincotta, Parent, Pittsford District PTSA President, PCSD Advocacy Team, & Genesee Valley Region PTA Legislative & Advocacy Chair

A review of the standards is needed, but just as importantly, the Governor and those involved with education reform in NYS must work to gain the trust of parents and educators whose students are most affected by the decisions being made. Parents do not want their children being used as political pawns. The policy recommendations of the Commissioner and Board of Regents should be the impetus for any legislative action and must not be affected by any political agenda.

Curriculum is individual to each school and parents place the greatest trust in their own districts teachers and administrators in making decisions on how their children are to be educated and assessed. Educators and curriculum specialists who work day-to-day with the students should be conducting the standards and testing review. More local control and transparency are required for this process to be deemed credible by the parents of NYS.

Teachers must believe in the instructional practice that translates curriculum into student learning. This requires training, trial, reflection and correction to make instructional practice effective. This process needs to be supported with sufficient resources and time.

The Task Force must remember that the tests are presented to children. Children work best when presented with interesting and relevant experiences in a format that is at, not beyond, their instructional or frustration level. Testing must be balanced against the standards, curriculum and performance expectations, yet must also provide timely feedback that serves to improve instruction.

Introducing a teacher/ principal evaluation based on student achievement tests before instructional practice has stabilized has promoted undue stress, student anxiety, and teaching to the test rather than to improve thinking and learning. Teachers and principals do need performance assessments, but those assessments should have the goal of improving instruction and providing valuable feedback to help them become more effective educators. It has not been proven that the current rating system will have any impact on improving instructional practices.

When state test credibility is suspect, parents will not encourage students to do their best and will reject the assessment purpose or the tests themselves as not relevant to their child's learning. Standardized tests do have value. But only when tests themselves and how they are scored are viewed as fair, with timely and understandable results that are perceived to improve learning rather than merely "grade" students and their teachers.

Review of the quality of tests must take time and can only be accomplished through a repeated series of administrations and analysis with feedback from educators in the field. We urge commission members to focus instead on the factors and indicators they

believe should be used by educators, curriculum and child development specialists to judge assessment quality.

Rushing to implement too many aspects of the educational reform agenda has only served to erode trust and diminish the possibility of the potential successes that could come from this process. Therefore, we urge the Governor to support this review of the education standards of NYS by providing the education department with sufficient time and resources to implement and assess the standards and tests in a non-political, transparent way that involves the parents and educators of the State of New York.