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I am an Assistant Superintendent representing one of the largest districts on Long Island, over 9,000 students, and we support high standards. We have always supported high standards and enjoyed high achievement in a variety of areas, from science to music to athletics.

We know as educators that high standards matter. High standards yield higher achievement. We also know as educators that children develop at different rates, they develop different traits and strengths. We need to nurture all areas of their development, and we need to set their learning goals in individualized ways. Students and their needs are not standardized.

Although there are some issues with the common core learning standards that should be addressed, particularly at the early literacy stages, and we appreciate having a forum to be heard about the common core standards, this focus on the standards is a red herring. A diversion from the real issue.

Educators love high standards. They know that a high standard for one student may not be high enough for another. Or it may be too high for yet another student, and they work tirelessly to differentiate. To find a child's zone of proximal development – the sweet spot where they can push each child's learning further. The problem isn't setting high standards, it's with the high stakes for children and their teachers that come with the high standards.

The testing and accountability that comes with high stakes testing has put a target on teachers' backs. All year, this arrow is being aimed at them, and the people releasing the arrow are not trained marksmen, they are not trained educators, and we know from experience that the arrows land in unpredictable places. A teacher or principal can have great variations in their state APPR scores from year to year – despite their consistent work performance. And these scores have consequences.

After witnessing this unpredictable and untrained marksmanship, I have seen the resulting fear play out in lamentable ways. Test participation has plummeted, and so has the focus on play time. So has the focus on science and social studies instruction. Music teachers get greater pressure not to pull students out of class for lessons. Student and parent frustration levels have reached an all-time high.

Real educational leadership doesn't focus so heavily on testing children and scoring teachers. We need educational leadership that focuses on teacher training, innovation, creativity, science, technology, engineering, civics, health and wellness, and the arts and not just language and mathematics.

Take away the high stakes nature of the tests and you can make the standards as high as you like. But what we should really be doing is making education exciting,

innovative, and comprehensive, not narrowly focused and oppressive, which is what current high stakes testing is doing.