



NASSAU-SUFFOLK SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION, INC.

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CUOMO COMMON CORE TASK FORCE  
"LISTENING SESSION"

Friday, November 6, 2015  
Stony Brook University

Center of Excellence in Wireless and Information Technology

Testimony on behalf of Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association  
(time limit - 3 minutes)  
Lorraine Deller, Executive Director

Good afternoon -

Senator Marcellino and Superintendent Evelyn, I thank you for your presence here today and trust that the concerns voiced by Long Islanders will both help inform your own decision making and be transmitted in some tangible manner to the Task Force as a whole.

I am Lorraine Deller, Executive Director of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association. I address the Commission on behalf of those school board members who are precluded from participation because, in the true tradition of citizen government, their daytime hours are spent tending to their livelihoods.

For too long, our boards of education have been the buffer between an increasingly confused public and state leaders who, amidst the self-created chaos surrounding New York's admittedly flawed implementation of Common Core, have managed to evade any personal or collective accountability.

It has been left to locally accountable school board members to find funding within tight budgets for questionable New York State reform initiatives. It has been locally accountable boards of education that have taken on the struggle to convince skeptical voters of the need to support the additional costs in what are already mandate-ridden school budgets.

The strategy of marginalizing elected school trustees has proven to be shortsighted and counter-productive.

Governance authority must be restored to those who are held directly accountable for maintaining the educational and fiscal integrity of their communities' schools....locally elected boards of education.

Yet, whether by design or indifference, the haphazard and last-minute scheduling of this event conveys a continuation of a disregard of the governance role of locally elected boards of education. A disregard evidenced from the very beginning of New York State's quest to win for itself the federal monies attendant to the contest that was Race to the Top.

The last-minute delivery of New York's Race to the Top application to school boards, accompanied by a politically orchestrated sense of urgency and an implied threat of loss of federal funding , established a pattern of "don't question-do it or else" state directives that has since marked Albany's strategies for enforcing its Common Core commitments. Most troubling is New York's perfection of the insidious "or else" threat over the years, to where we now find ourselves this November.....facing the seizure of state aid due our communities unless their school boards, teachers, and now even parents and students, do what they are told by the governor and state lawmakers.

New York's lawmakers should cease the practice of holding education funding hostage to force compliance with other political agendas.

Long Islanders, virtually on their own, have built and struggled to sustain some of the most highly regarded public schools systems in the nation. This region's well-earned reputation for quality public education is due to a demanding and supportive public...a demanding public that has refused to allow its schools to become comfortable with complacency.....a supportive public that continues to pass school budgets because it knows the value of public education. On Long Island, public education has delivered and on Long Island tests were never feared. By every single measure maintained by the State Education Department, Long Island students out-perform their counterparts in the rest of the state.

One would think that in New York's reaching for higher learning standards, our achievements would have been recognized and rewarded with encouragement and an investment of resources to both enable continued momentum as well as assistance for schools in struggling communities. Instead, Albany leaders have embarked on a campaign of vilification that has enveloped our schools in a narrative bent on convincing New Yorkers that their public schools have failed them.

In these trying economic times, New York's public schools should not be forced to waste time, effort and dwindling resources needlessly. Our taxpayers deserve confidence that their ongoing investment in innovation and the enhancement of education is framed by solid, evidence-based research that is developed, not by politicians, dilettantes and profiteers, but by respected educational leaders and professionals.

Although experience has taught us otherwise, we hold some hope that the new members of this reconstituted Common Core Task Force will bring to its deliberations a sense of urgency that the public will not tolerate yet another round of political maneuvering and sound-bite "corrections". You are laboring under an impossible timeline, something with which we are all too familiar. This is a last chance to salvage whatever has proven to be of value in order to assist New York's schools in moving forward in what should be a constantly-advancing goal of improving educational standards.

Thank you for your consideration.