

Christine Duffy, Parent

"In New York, tensions between stakeholders in education are at an all time high. When teachers leave their classrooms; parents leave their jobs and, young children have to stay home in protest we need to find in school solutions to address the tension and conflict which high stakes testing creates. We need an Education Ombudsman modeled after the NYS Office of the Aging's Ombudsman program. NYSED is the only quasi-administrative agency without an Ombudsman. If you ask people throughout NYSED you will hear too many people saying "that's my job." An Ombudsman is a neutral, confidential resource that bridges the gap between parents, schools, school boards and NYSED when problems arise. Education Ombudsman serve as school bellwethers. Ombudsman help NY taxpayers because not all miscommunications become lawsuits but, every lawsuit begins with a miscommunication.

Ombudsman help School Boards. School Boards are tasked with managing the school budget, setting school policies, hiring and personnel issues. An Ombudsman keeps the School Board informed by way of reports and trends. Ombudsman are bellwethers for School Boards. For example, the Education Ombudsman in the State of Washington informs the School Board on bully reports. We need reporting on school bully reports which save student lives. In 2015, New York media is reporting that New York has had zero school bully reports. We have a law about school bullying but no independent reporting? An Education Ombudsman as a bellwether would have been able to tell the school board about unique issues such as Principal conflict before national news was made when a NYC principal dumped teacher's desks (some of which contained medical emergency tools) outside the school sidewalk before the event with viral on social media. An Education Ombudsman is the bellwether for NYSED and the Governor such as the problems in East Ramapo School District which now appear to have caused money to be spent on litigation and, investigations.

For every stakeholder in education that claim it is "their job" it is only their job to a certain point and then, the frustration for the problem holder begins. Education Ombudsman move beyond the certain point and get right to the point.

For those of you that are new to the Ombudsman concept, The Office of the Aging Ombudsman works like this: there is an Independent Administrator that reports to the Governor. The Administrator contracts with a resource in each county to implement and train volunteer Ombuds. I was an Ombudsman. I know this solution works. I served as a confidential resource to a nursing home fielding problems from patients, their families and even administrative staff. The problems ranged from "someone took my mother's sweater" to, "we are having a hard time reaching family members."

Best practices are the NYS Office of the Aging and, the Education Ombudsman programs created by former Mayor Corey Booker and the Governor in the State of Washington. The education stakeholders in their states understood the value of an Ombudsman. It is time for a solution that works. Education Ombudsman is that solution. Lets make this work. Lets create an Education Ombudsman to report to the current Ombudsman Director at the Governor's Office. There is money for an Education Ombudsman which is an investment with an easy measurable return."