

Testimony for the Senate Standing Committee on Public Education Hearing: The Regents Reform Agenda: - "Assessing" Our Progress

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Senator Flanagan and distinguished members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing.

In any large system CHANGE using a thoughtful process involving stakeholders at all levels can bring about a new shared purpose, increase productivity, cohesiveness, and stability leading to a new order; but CHANGE using a top down implementation without a thoughtful process brings loss of purpose, cohesiveness, stability, and productivity, and often the result is chaos. Unfortunately, we seem to be stuck in the second kind of change with the implementation of the CCLS (Common Core Learning Standards) and the new assessments. School Boards, district administrators, teachers and parents, all are struggling to make sense of the most recent changes affecting them and, most importantly, affecting our students.

We know how we got here. NCLB (No Child Left Behind) with testing determining the status of the district and/or school building, RTTP (Race to the Top) with the promise of federal funds but with strings attached, the partial waiver of NCLB with more strings attached, and Common Core State Standards implementation with assessment (of not only our students but also our teachers and principals) strings attached. It's no wonder that we as board members find it hard to keep up with all the new confusing rules, acronyms and responsibilities. And it is even more difficult for the parents of our students.

Groups are gathering to protest the use of "high stakes testing" in assessing their students' performance and in assessing the effectiveness of the teachers and principals in their schools. These people point to research, including that of Jaek Lee at the University at Buffalo, which shows that high stake assessments have not been an effective tool in education reform. They protest the increase in both the time spent on testing and the quantity of tests required by the locally negotiated APPR (Annual Professional Peer Review) demanded by Ed. Law 3012c. They don't want education that is "teaching to the test".

However, the testing in grades 3-8 implemented by NCLB continues to be a requirement as long as we accept Federal funding. And with the current situation in Washington I don't have any hope that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will be revised any time soon. Our waiver from some of the NCLB requirements is what led us to 3012c, APPR and more testing. We must find a way to move forward without recrimination. We must find ways to reassure our students and their parents, our teachers, and our administrators that their concerns have been heard. We need a different and hopefully better process for the continuing implementation of the CCLS and the design and timing of the new assessments.

The New York State Educational Conference Board, an organization that represents school boards, parents, superintendents, teachers, principals, school business officials and other educators, has endorsed a five point plan that focuses on getting the CCLS implementation back on track. Their suggestions, for state policy makers both in the legislature and at SED (the State education Department), are succinct and make a great place to start our work.

Number one: We need a statewide campaign to build understanding of and support for the Common Core Learning Standards. We need to explain how the CCLS raises education expectations and why our students need to be 'College and **Career** Ready'.

Number two: We need to invest in ongoing professional development to implement the CCLS. Using the CCLS was not part of our teachers' or principals' curricula in college. There needs to be ongoing development of curriculum materials that are easily available to teachers and understandable by parents. We need to ensure that our technology infrastructure across the state is adequate to handle new demands. If we begin the PARRC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) testing we need proper statewide broadband access. We need to listen to and find the answers to the questions/problems our teachers and school districts enumerate **before** we implement PARRC.

Number three: We must ensure sufficient and equitable state and federal funding so that **all** teachers in **all** school districts have the tools, materials, technology, and professional development to help **all** students meet the standards. This funding must also support additional help for those students at risk of falling short of the standards.

Number four: We must reassess the state's approach to student testing and truly address the pressing concerns that have been raised by both parents and educators regarding the assessments. Also, we must consult with stakeholders regarding the timing, implementation, and content of the tests.

Number five: We must establish an ongoing process for engaging stakeholders as we review and refine further implementation of CCLS. I would add that, in the future, when state authorities look at another system of reform, **all** stakeholders should be engaged in the process **before** it is implemented.

We have a hard task in front of us. We must regain the trust of the parents, students, educators, administrators, and board members across the state and bring them in as partners to effect education reform in New York State.

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