

By: Roger Tilles – Member, New York State Board of Regents

Let me say first that I have found that being a Regent representing Long Island has been a very rewarding, even though oftentimes, frustrating endeavor. In 8 ½ years, I have been able to visit with over half of our 125 school districts. I have found the input I've gotten from students, parents, administrators and teachers to be very useful in making my deliberations on the Board. As the only Regent for seven of those years with kids in our public schools, I've also been able to gain an insight in the vital interactions that go on day by day. As one who has now been selected by two States for their state education boards, I have developed a tremendous respect for the important work that our teachers and administrators demonstrate on a daily basis.

I have supported much of the Regents' Reform agenda. I believe that our public schools provide the common bond among all citizens and am worried about those who would break these bonds. Our agenda should serve to strengthen our public schools.

Improving the recruiting, professional development, retaining and rewarding our teachers and principals and treating the profession as a valued one in our society is an ongoing part of that agenda.

Building diagnostic assessments that measure student success, informing teachers and schools how they can improve their practices, and differentiate student instruction, while safeguarding privacy of the information is another of the important goals of the agenda.

Focusing and using best practices to improve low performing schools is an ongoing task, which in an environment of poverty, needs to have the whole community as partners to be effective. Lastly, the development of the Common Core Standards and developing curriculum and assessments to measure those standards is a goal not yet implemented or attained. As a member of the Regents Task Force to develop English Language Arts standards, before the adoption of the Common Core, I saw the benefits of a deeper, more thoughtful learning process. Much of what we did in New York was included in the Common Core Standards now adopted by 40 plus states.

Following the adoption of the Common Core Standards by the Regents, New York took an innovative step to have curriculum materials developed to assist the implementation of these standards. Being put online, most have been well received but won't be fully online until next year. Even though the state announced almost 3 years ago that students would be tested last spring and some materials were available online, many teachers and schools were waiting for the full curriculum availability to be able to create the kind of teaching that these tests, created from the Common Core, required. That is why it was widely anticipated that scores would drop substantially. Indeed the Commissioner predicted to Newsday before the tests were given that the drop would be about 30%, almost exactly what the results would eventually show, but that the scores should be taken "with a grain of salt." These results were determined by the State Education Department creating the cut scores, ostensibly to match the NAEP results which allegedly determine college and career readiness. Most Long Island students and others around the state, received the 30% cut in scores moving from about 90% passing to 60-70%.

I have opposed the use of a standardized state test score to evaluate teachers or principals. As a member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, I have been a part of the most rigorous evaluation of teachers that there is in this country. We support the use of measures of student growth in all evaluations, but not on a state assessment that needs mathematical algorithms to attempt to recreate a growth measure. The loss of morale of the teaching community and the great reduction of applicants to our education schools are strong evidence of the unwise use of unreliable measures.

While it might be that the teacher evaluation results, which includes these scores, would be relative and, therefore, not out of line with what higher scores would bring, it is not clear that the results would be even across the spectrum of students and districts. As time goes on, as a Newsday op ed piece detailed, the gap between high performing and low performing districts will grow, as those that can get extra resources or have an enriched social environment, will succeed in greater numbers.

I also don't see how our districts here, who have graduated almost 90% of kids who attend and complete college, can be seen as not producing "college or career ready" graduates. To me, the cut scores producing the results have proved for Long Island schools arbitrary. This, in turn, results in parents and the communities losing faith in schools that have persistently produced well equipped youth. Yes, there are students in these districts and some schools as a whole who don't meet up with the "ready" test. Much needs to be done to help these districts by correcting dysfunctional leadership and creating viable alternatives to ensure the kids in those districts get the education they deserve. Such would include the appointment of a master educator, BOCES or university to operate the district. However, the damage done to constantly

succeeding districts and, especially to students who are told they don't measure up, is substantial. When it comes to the harm the rushed implementation of the tests do to children, never underestimate the power of low self-esteem. I've seen it up close and it can be devastating.

Long Island's schools have had great advantages because our population has overwhelmingly supported our schools, offering rigorous courses with strong creativity enriched by art, music and enrichment. One of the inevitable by-products of the emphasis on high stakes testing of core subjects has been the narrowing of the curriculum, cutting out art, music and extracurricular activities, thinking that this has little or no detrimental effect on students. We all know better! The arts not only allow students to use their minds to create, but also to learn the literacies that allow for greater citizenship. In addition, the arts cause students to perform better on the very tests that are effectively eliminating them from the curriculum.

As one who believes Common Core is, on its own, a very positive effort to improve our learning, I have been afraid for some time that an improper implementation with assessments that aren't measuring what teachers were prepared to teach and evaluations based upon the scores on these assessments, would have the inevitable effect of destroying the bountiful effects that Common Core Standards can bring. Much of the discussion has indeed had the wrong target of the Common Core itself.

As one who has been involved in real estate development for many years, I had the opportunity to have many entrance and exit interviews of business leaders. Obviously, it is not the low energy costs, low taxes or easy transportation that causes

business to come and stay here on Long Island. It is the quality of life, with the number one factor being our schools. I wonder if we are going to be able to keep this advantage if tax caps and increasing pressure to narrow the curriculum continue to erode our fabulous schools. I certainly hope that we can turn this around and let shine the excellence of our schools and our students.