



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Senator Oppenheimer Hosts Roundtable to Provide School District Voice on New State Rules for Teacher/Principal Evaluations

SUZI OPPENHEIMER March 15, 2011

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“How can we preserve all that is excellent about schools in Westchester?” was the question presented by Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) at a meeting of educators from the 37th Senate District. This topic was the focus of a roundtable organized by the Senator for school officials to meet with Senior Deputy Commissioner John King of the NYS Department of Education in February.

The timing of the meeting was important because school administrators, board members, teachers and PTA leaders have expressed concern about new – as yet undrafted --

statewide rules for teacher and principal evaluations. These rules are part of the NYS Regents Reform Agenda and implementation of Race to the Top. Senator Oppenheimer was instrumental in New York winning \$700 million in federal education funding aimed at closing the achievement gap among students. Race to the Top is also directed at raising outcomes and college readiness for all children throughout the nation.

Although the regulations concerning teacher and principal evaluations have yet to be drafted, rumors about what they might contain have prompted concerns at many Westchester school districts, which Senator Oppenheimer notes are “among the highest performing districts, not only in our state, but in our country.”

Senator Oppenheimer wants the State Education Department to provide flexibility in the regulations so that districts which already have successful evaluation programs in place will have the flexibility to retain them. The roundtable was a follow-up to a January meeting Senator Oppenheimer held with Board of Regents Chancellor Meryl Tisch, NYS Education Commissioner David M. Steiner and Deputy Commissioner King. Senator Oppenheimer stated, “It was vitally important to have Deputy Commissioner King meet firsthand with school officials to ensure their input before the proposed regulations are developed.”

What followed was an open and frank discussion with Deputy Commissioner King and many key school administrators, school board members, teachers and PTA leaders about education reform and the importance of allowing school districts that have expended considerable time and effort developing their own successful evaluation programs to maintain those existing procedures.

Deputy Commissioner King repeatedly expressed the Department’s desire to hear from all educational leaders and his belief that the regulations that will ultimately be adopted by the Board of Regents will contain sufficient flexibility to preserve best practices in individual school districts. A strong case for such flexibility was made by Westchester educators and Senator Oppenheimer during the session.

Senator Oppenheimer's goal is to have the roundtable promote further discussion with the Department of Education in order to have the Regent's regulations reflect the needs of Westchester school districts.