



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Urges State Education Commissioner to Reverse Decision to Cancel Community Forums

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY | October 15, 2013

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**

*State Education Commissioner canceled series of town-hall meetings that were scheduled across the state, including one in WNY.*

*Kennedy wants Commissioner to follow through on the previously-promised meetings to ensure parents have the chance to learn more and ask questions.*

*Kennedy: Our children deserve a high-quality education, and local families deserve a say on how to improve our schools.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, is urging New York State Education Commissioner John King to reverse his decision to cancel a series of town-hall meetings that had been planned for communities across the state. Commissioner King was scheduled to appear at one such community forum in Western New York on October 24. Senator Kennedy wants the public forums put back on the schedule to ensure parents in Western New York and across the state have the opportunity to hear more and ask questions about the state's new Common Core standards.

In Buffalo, parents have long expressed an interest in meeting with Commissioner King to share their children's first-hand accounts of their educational experiences. Kennedy believes the State Education Department needs to follow through on their previously-planned

meetings to give parents and community residents the chance to raise concerns with senior education officials about their local schools.

“Our children deserve a high-quality education, and local families deserve a say on how to improve our schools,” Kennedy said. “Western New York parents are concerned about their children’s education, and they were eager to discuss those concerns and ask questions at the upcoming forum. It is extremely disappointing that the decision has been made to cancel the community meeting. I urge the State Education Department to reverse their decision and ensure parents, educators and community leaders are heard when it comes to the future of schools throughout the state.”

Concern over the impact of high-stakes testing has been growing across the region and state. Earlier this month, Kennedy teamed up with Assemblyman Sean Ryan and Senator George Maziarz to host the Summit for Smarter Schools at Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo. About 2,500 people turned out to participate in the Summit – which brought together parents, community residents, education professionals and public officials to discuss needed reforms to ensure schools in Western New York and across the state are gearing children with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century global economy. The discussions largely focused on the use and impact of standardized testing in an effort to help de-emphasize the high stakes nature of these tests.

“Every day, I hear from parents and teachers about the damaging effects of high-pressure, high-stakes tests,” Kennedy said. “Children are losing out on instructional time in all subjects, from science to foreign languages. There’s no question that testing has its place, but we need to it right. Appropriate, reliable testing will help us ensure students are learning the skills they need to achieve academic success without over-testing and over-stressing young children. As a state, we need to devise and pursue solutions to the challenges our schools face.”

In his letter, Kennedy urged the NYSED Commissioner to reverse the decision to cancel the previously-promised series of forums focusing on the new Common Core standards. He wrote, “I hope you will once again agree to come to Western New York and other areas throughout the state to discuss the changes being implemented to our education system statewide and to hear the concerns and comments of local parents and families as they deal with these and other local educational issues. I believe it would be enormously beneficial for local parents to be able to discuss these issues with you in person.”

You can read Senator Kennedy's letter in its entirety below, or [view a copy of the letter at this link](#).

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*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate’s 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*

**Full text of Senator Kennedy’s Letter to the NYSED Commissioner:**

October 15, 2013

Dear Commissioner King:

I write to encourage you to reverse your decision to cancel the previously-planned series of public forums throughout the state focusing on the new Common Core standards. I hope you will once again agree to come to Western New York and other areas throughout the state to discuss the changes being implemented to our education system statewide and to hear the concerns and comments of local parents and families as they deal with these and

other local educational issues. I believe it would be enormously beneficial for local parents to be able to discuss these issues with you in person.

I know that the problems facing our local schools, especially the Buffalo Public Schools, are not lost upon you. These are problems that you, and local families, deal with, and worry about, every single day. Many of our Buffalo Public Schools have been labeled as Persistently Low Achieving schools, including two of our high schools: East and Lafayette High Schools. While these are certainly issues that the public has brought up with both the Buffalo School Board and my office, it is also important that these concerns are brought up with you, our state's senior-most education official.

In addition to all of this, the state's continued implementation of the Common Core system has left many parents confused and concerned about their children's education. It is my hope that further input by parents and community members will help to improve and ease this transition process. The Common Core system is a drastic change from the education system that many parents are familiar with. Hearing an explanation of it from their Education Commissioner would allow them to gain a greater understanding of what their children are learning.

Again, I believe that a meeting with parents and families in Western New York would be advantageous for all parties. It will give you an even greater understanding of the problems facing local schools, and it will arm parents with the knowledge they need to make decisions about their children's education. I hope you will take this into account and reverse your decision to cancel your visit to Western New York. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me in my district office at 716.826.2683.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 63rd District