



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Urges State Education Commissioner to Schedule Community Forum in Buffalo

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY November 20, 2013

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**

*State Education Commissioner canceled, then rescheduled a series of town-hall meetings across the state, but NYSED has not yet scheduled forum in Erie County.*

*Kennedy wants Commissioner to hold community forum in Buffalo to ensure area parents have the chance to learn more and ask questions about new Common Core standards.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, is urging New York State Education Commissioner John King to schedule a community forum in Buffalo to ensure local families have the opportunity to hear more and ask questions about the state’s new Common Core standards. Previously, Commissioner King canceled, then rescheduled a series of town-hall meetings across the state. King was expected to appear in Williamsville for an October 24 forum prior to the cancellations, but NYSED has not yet scheduled a new forum in Erie County.

Currently, the only forum scheduled in Western New York is planned for December 4 in Jamestown, an over hour-and-a-half drive from Buffalo. Also, according to their website, NYSED has not yet finalized a time or specific location for the Jamestown event.

“Western New York parents are disappointed and frustrated that no community forum has been scheduled in Erie County. They are eager to discuss their concerns and ask

Commissioner King questions about the state's implementation of Common Core standards," said Senator Tim Kennedy. "It's hard to believe that NYSED would expect Buffalo families to drive over an hour and a half away on a school night to participate in a forum with the chief state official tasked with ensuring the quality of our schools. I urge the State Education Department to add a community forum in Buffalo to their schedule and ensure parents, educators and community leaders in Western New York are heard when it comes to the future of schools throughout the state."

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 meeting for Erie County to give area parents the chance to raise concerns with senior education officials about local schools.

In a letter sent Friday, Kennedy urged the NYSED Commissioner to reschedule a forum in Erie County, and to hold it inside the City of Buffalo. He wrote, "It is imperative that you do not ignore the largest school district in Western New York in favor of an event that is about 70 miles – or more than an hour-and-a-half drive – away from Buffalo. Considering the high cost of travel and the large number of Buffalo families who rely on public transit, many parents will be forced to pass up their only opportunity to meet directly with you. I urge you to schedule a meeting in Buffalo and give families here the chance to attend one of your community forums."

Concern over the impact of high-stakes testing has been growing across the region and state. In October, Kennedy teamed up with Assemblyman Sean Ryan and Senator George Mazarz 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. “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 pursue real solutions to the challenges our schools face.”

You can read Senator Kennedy's letter to Commissioner King below, or [by clicking 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:**

November 15, 2013

Dr. John B. King, Jr.

Commissioner of Education

New York State Education Department

89 Washington Avenue

Albany, New York 12234

Dear Commissioner King:

I write to request that you include an event in the City of Buffalo in your Community Forum Schedule. It has been brought to my attention that, currently, the only event scheduled in Western New York is set to take place in Jamestown on December 4. I certainly appreciate you traveling to as many regions, and holding as many forums, as possible, but it is imperative that you do not ignore the largest school district in Western New York in favor of an event that is about 70 miles – or more than an hour-and-a-half drive – away from Buffalo.

Considering the high cost of travel and the large number of Buffalo families who rely on public transit, many parents will be forced to pass up their only opportunity to meet directly with you. I urge you to schedule a meeting in Buffalo and give families here the chance to attend one of your community forums.

Buffalo Public Schools are in the midst of a crisis, and parents are rightfully concerned about major changes to their children's education. While I am sure that an event held in Jamestown would inevitably draw a large contingent from the City of Buffalo, parents should not be forced to drive over an hour on a school night to hear from, and address, the senior-most education official in the state about an overhaul to their child's curriculum. I am sure that Buffalo Public Schools would be happy to host you in any location in the city, and there are plenty of large auditoriums throughout the district.

In the City of Buffalo, 80 percent of schools are rated as "Consistently Low Performing." This makes it even more important that you to come to Buffalo and explain the changes that we can expect in the coming months and years to our statewide education system. If, as we've

been told, these changes are going to improve educational outcomes, then a struggling district like Buffalo ought to have been the first stop on your Community Forum tour. Again, I hope you will find a time and date to come to Buffalo to speak to parents about the Common Core changes coming to New York State. At the very least, you must hold an event closer than 70 miles away from Buffalo.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter, and I hope to see you soon in Buffalo. If you have any questions or if I can be of assistance, please feel free to contact me in my district office at 716.826.2683.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Kennedy

New York State Senator, 63rd District