



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS September 17, 2014

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**

Common Sense Vs. Common Core

There were a couple of magical summers when I was a kid that our family was fortunate enough to make a trip back to my parents' home in Portugal. It's a small farming community even today and there's never been very much to do there but I remember those days as being jam-packed with adventure. My cousins and I would spend countless hours playing tag and hide-and-seek in my grandfather's fields or exploring the nearby woods. Some days he'd take us with him to pick vegetables or show us how to feed the animals and it was a special thrill to help him make repairs around the farm. But the best memories were the evenings, right about twilight time. At the end of these long, hot days – after a huge dinner at which everyone ate together – my grandfather would take all his grandchildren into the watermelon patch and we'd each take turns picking one out for dessert. Then he'd instruct us in how to cut it and he'd serve the family and neighbors as we sat around and talked or played games.

Simpler times to be sure and like most adults, I am undeniably nostalgic about my youth. That's probably why I have a little vegetable garden of my own and yep, you guessed it, I let my girls pick out watermelon after dinner. I guess I'm trying to pass on a few lessons because what stands out to me most about those trips is how much was learned. We were taught

about family, and nature, and community and the value of hard work. We learned how to mend a fence, measure out feed, repair a motor, and even how to cut a watermelon. And there wasn't a book, or a number-two pencil, or a bubble sheet to be filled in anywhere.

I've been thinking a lot on this lately because it's mid-September and school is well underway. As I make my way around the district, from Port Washington to Elmont to Hicksville, the complaints are always the same: common-core is once again wreaking havoc. I already knew that from the evenings at my own kitchen table as my wife and I sit stumped in front of my children's math workbooks. We're not even sure how to help them. It's exasperating.

While proponents say common-core promotes critical thinking, I say it looks like it does anything but. I saw a copy of one work sheet that involved an imaginary child named John and a simple subtraction problem. Rather than use traditional subtraction methods it asks students to "estimate" an answer using a number line, then write a letter to John to explain how they figured it out. One mother sent it back with this wisdom at the top: "In the real world simplification is valued over complication. The process is ridiculous and would result in termination if used."

I couldn't agree more. Common Core falsely assumes that all children learn the same way. While some argue that it may be valuable in failing school districts in need of an overhaul, Long Island is not of them. In fact, we're home to some of the finest districts in the nation and our educators made that so without common core. Go figure, they used tried and true practices and specific knowledge gained from years of experience. Now, without their input, those same teachers have become drill instructors for glorified test preparation rather than educators, which was their true calling.

Just think: our children are failing, the teacher evaluation system has created conflict and anxiety without any meaningful result and there's an overemphasis on tests instead of learning. Kids are unhappy, parents are frustrated and teachers are uninspired.

Is this what we wanted? Must our children really be forced into this failed sociology experiment?

I refuse to accept that. Last year, I hosted a public forum for parents and educators at local high schools with State Education Commissioner John King and called for his resignation in light of the failed common core implementation. Then I successfully fought for measures to address many of the impacts of common core and protect our children's privacy. I even voted against reappointing members of the Board of Regents who were responsible for Common Core's disastrous rollout. Still, the Commissioner and State Education Department turn a deaf ear. So – along with you – I'll be steeling myself for the fight again this year. And there's no use putting off a difficult task. As my grandfather used to say on that little farm, "the sooner you start, the sooner you finish."

How about we try for that – a little common sense instead of common core? Our children deserve that lesson most of all.