



HAUPPAUGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

495 Hoffman Lane, P.O. Box 6006
Hauppauge, New York 11788

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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October 1, 2013

Senator John Flanagan
260 Middle Country Road
Suite 102
Smithtown, NY 11787

Dear Senator Flanagan and Members of the Education Committee,

The Hauppauge Board of Education believes that the needs of the students are our first priority and our duty to advocate for them is paramount. We welcome this series of hearings and thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns and thoughts about recent education reforms implemented in New York.

First and foremost, we are greatly concerned at the rate at which these reforms are being introduced and implemented. The hurried implementation of the Common Core standards - and the forced initiation of an untried teacher evaluation system at the same time - have led to great confusion, created stress (on students, staff and parents) and made it difficult for us to have any confidence in the resultant data.

We support educational accountability in our schools and have been dedicated to finding ways to measure progress and improve instruction and learning. We were already several years into implementing a teacher evaluation system (based on the same frameworks that were ultimately suggested by the Regents) when our efforts were derailed by the requirement to conform to the state's system. Our district has worked diligently to comply with the reforms; however, we are finding that the state's new system for measuring student and teacher performance hampers our efforts to provide a broad range of learning experiences for our students.

We believe that both the quantity and length of the tests are excessive. Measuring something over and over again does not necessarily lead to improvement. It does, however, induce stress in students and teachers and narrows the curriculum as "passing the tests" becomes the main focus. Additionally, the excessive amount of testing required to conform to the state's Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) regulations takes time away from the most important activity that should be happening in our classrooms – learning.

The following is a quote from the recently formed Hauppauge Parents Advocacy Group:

"These tests are dominating what is taught in the classroom by forcing teachers to spend large amounts of time focusing on test preparation and 'teaching to the test' instead of offering the creative, innovative, and inspiring learning experiences that Hauppauge parents should expect for their children."

Two or three years ago, New York State law *prevented* school districts from considering state test scores in evaluating teachers and made it virtually impossible to remove an incompetent teacher. In the very short

time since then, the state has gone to the other extreme with a system where standards and curriculum have been significantly altered, tests need to be invented in every subject so that teachers can be graded, students are sitting for significantly more tests, and teachers worry that their students' difficulty with that new curriculum could cost them their jobs. Our feeling about this change could be summed up as: "Too much, too fast."

Meaningful change involves collaboration and planning, and is achieved slowly and deliberately over time. As New York moves forward to enhance achievement and strengthen accountability, we request that our state government and the Regents work to:

- Reexamine the state's accountability system. Develop a system that is based on multiple forms of assessment, and does not depend on a single "snapshot" of student performance. Advocate for our students by finding better ways to evaluate their learning and growth without constantly asking them to sit for tests.
- Develop procedures for collaboration with the districts across the state. Include input from school boards, administrators, teachers, students and parents and continue that open dialog while changes are being implemented.
- Protect local control by understanding that a "one-size-fits-all" solution does not work as districts across the state can vary greatly in resources, culture and challenges. Districts need to be able to set their own goals and priorities on student achievement, remediation, teacher evaluations, and student needs.
- When change is necessary, implement it in a steady, well planned manner. Allow time for feedback and adjustments as the changes are "tested in the field." Provide sufficient time for changes to happen before assessing them.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns. We look forward to working with you toward the benefit of all our children.

Sincerely,



Geri Richter
Hauppauge Board of Education
Advocacy Committee

Attachment: Resolution adopted by Hauppauge Board of Education on June 18, 2013

Resolution Adopted by the Hauppauge Board of Education on June 18, 2013:

RESOLUTION ON HIGH STAKES TESTING

WHEREAS, our nation's and New York State's future well-being relies on a high-quality public education system that prepares all students for college, careers, and citizenship and strengthens the nation's social and economic well-being by creating well-rounded, reflective critical thinkers and lifelong learners; and

WHEREAS, in order to achieve the above mentioned goals, the culture and structure of the systems in which students learn must foster engaging school experiences that promote joy in learning, depth of thought and breadth of knowledge for students; and

WHEREAS, our nation's school systems have been spending growing amounts of time, money and energy on high-stakes standardized testing, in which student performance on standardized tests is used to make major decisions affecting individual students, educators and schools; while such testing is an inadequate and often unreliable measure of both student learning and educator effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, the Hauppauge Board of Education supports educational accountability in public schools, but believes that the current over-emphasis on standardized testing has caused considerable collateral damage in our schools, including reducing instructional time, narrowing the curriculum, increasing student stress, reducing love of learning and teaching, and driving excellent teachers out of the profession; and

WHEREAS, we believe that this testing hampers educators' efforts to focus on the broad range of learning experiences that promote the innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, communication, critical thinking and deep subject-matter knowledge that will allow students to thrive in our democracy and an increasingly global society and economy; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the Hauppauge Board of Education calls on Governor Cuomo, Commissioner King, the State Legislature, and the Board of Regents to reexamine public school accountability systems in this state, including the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which do not require extensive standardized testing, more accurately reflects the broad range of student learning, and is used to support students and improve schools; and

RESOLVED, that the Hauppauge Board of Education calls on the U.S. Congress and Administration to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently known as the "No Child Left Behind Act"), reduce the testing mandates and promote multiple forms of evidence of student learning and school quality in accountability.