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THE SENATE
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SENATOR TODD KAMINSKY
9TH SENATE DISTRICT

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER
LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
COMMITTEES:
ALCOHOLISM & DRUG ABUSE
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ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
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VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY &
MILITARY AFFAIRS

July 18, 2016

Secretary John B. King, Jr.
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary King,

I am writing to express my deep concern over your Department's recent proposal to designate public schools with five percent or more of students that opt out of testing as *"in need of improvement."*

More than 50 percent of eligible students throughout Long Island opted-out of standardized tests last year. Many parents within my Senate district have chosen to opt their child out because it is widely believed that the tests fail to effectively evaluate a student's abilities. Further, parents are registering their dissatisfaction with the way our education system has been molded around preparing students for standardized tests. While learning used to involve history, science, music and art – it has now become a formalized series of robotic drills limited to math and English. Teachers constantly describe to me the low level of enthusiasm among their peers, and parents routinely tell me of stressed-out youngsters who are no longer excited to get on the school bus. Far from being a system we are proud of, it is mind-boggling that you want to punish those who chose not to be a part of it.

As I am sure you are aware, a parent has the absolute right to opt his or her child out of a test. The opt-out movement is widely popular here and punishing those who opt-out will only widen that chasm between our citizenry and the educational bureaucracy in Washington. The current standards and testing regime were developed without proper parental and teacher input and we should be working together to find a new way forward.

In light of the foregoing reasons, I urge you to reconsider the Department's decision to discipline school districts for low test participation rates. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd Kaminsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Todd Kaminsky
Senator, 9th District

