



ST Caucus 290 Norwood Avenue, Port Jefferson Station, NY 11776

December 22, 2014

Merryl H. Tisch, Chancellor
Regents Office
State Education Building
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Beth Dimino, ST Caucus Chair
290 Norwood Avenue
Port Jefferson Station NY 11776

Dear Merryl Tisch, Chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents:

We are a group of education leaders from across the state that have shared concerns with the direction of education policy in this state and how it ultimately affects our students. On December 18th, 2014, the Governor's office submitted an open letter to you that outlined questions to be discussed when developing the state's educational policy in the coming year.

The questions the Governor's office posed relied on the state's testing data being valid and reliable. Since there have been many questions regarding the validity and reliability of the data, we believe it is important that SED make public responses to the following questions so any discussion that occurs will be transparent. Experience has shown that when policy is formed without the input of all stakeholders, chaos ensues; furthermore, we have seen how disastrous policy can be when predicated upon incomplete and erroneous data. We believe this disconnect has led to the turbulence between the practitioners and the policy-makers for the last several years.

We believe improvements need to be made for the state to move beyond the current problematic foundation: SED needs to make clear that its underlying assumptions parallel the actual experiences of all students of the state of New York. Could you answer the following questions in a timely manner?

No previous cohort of students (K-12) had ever received instruction so heavily tied to the Common Core or standardized tests. Could such experimentation on our children create significant and systemic unintended negative consequences?

These consequences could be more devastating as this is not a localized experiment where local professionals can modify it as they see fit. This is a statewide experiment where local control

has been removed and subsequently, practitioners and parents feel powerless to adjust and adapt to meet the needs of their children. Given the consistent and pervasive anecdotal reports of students' increased stress reactions, school phobias and medications being prescribed for anxiety (especially in our elementary population), has SED been monitoring the emotional and physical health effects of this curriculum/testing initiative on our students? What has SED found in its research? If SED has not been monitoring for unintended negative consequences, why not?

Much of the discussion about schools, teaching and student outcomes assumes that the results on the State's ELA and Math assessments are both valid and reliable. In order for the label "College and Career Ready" to have any real meaning, the data that the state produces must parallel the experience of the actual students in the school districts upon entering the college educational system. For example, if a school sends 90% of its students to four-year schools and 80% of those students graduate in four years, yet the state assessments only put the percentages of college and career ready students at 40%, whose data is considered more valid? Has SED surveyed districts to examine this discrepancy? What has SED found in its research? If SED has not been monitoring for discrepancies, why not? Doing so would provide more accurate data about college and career readiness.

The initial study that established the State's "College and Career Readiness" benchmarks was done on students from New York City schools who were attending two-year CUNY schools. This narrowed the pool by eliminating students that went on to four-year colleges. The smaller subgroup selected makes the data very specific. It also makes it harder to extrapolate generalizations regarding all the students of our state. What steps have been taken since then to make the "college and career readiness" benchmarks a more reliable and valid measure of all our students? What has SED found in its research?

In 2013, both you and Commissioner King stressed that the low test scores were "just a baseline" and should not be overemphasized, making the exams experimental. Has new information materialized in the last year to make SED more confident that the test scores are now a more accurate reflection of the deficits in student learning as a result of teacher ineffectiveness, and not just the continued fallout that exists with the Common Core roll out? What has SED found in its research?

Last year, you followed the feedback from the Commissioner's Forums on Common Core. In fact, you attended some of the meetings. How would you try to synthesize the feedback from parents with the desires of the Governor? Would you be willing to take the questions from the Governor's office to the people of the State in another listening tour? If not, why not?

Thank you for your time and consideration in these matters. We look forward to an open dialogue which will help us all ensure that our school children are in fact being prepared for the 21st century and beyond and ultimately to improve education in the state of New York.

Sincerely,

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